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TOWARDS CONSPIRACY THEORY

Revolution, Terrorism and Paranoia

From Victorian Fiction to the Modern Novel

by

ADRIAN STANISLAW FELIKS WISNICKI

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2003

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Though the rules of conspiracy theory dictate that the conspirators remain unknown even after the fact, I write these words in the belief that it is high time that I bring the "truth" to light.

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Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Chapter One: The Subject Who Tries to Know 26

Chapter Two: The Hidden Hand 95

Chapter Three: Conspiracy to Defraud and the Paranoid Subject 146

Chapter Four: The Inaccessible Authorities and the Vanishing Subject 221

Chapter Five: From Conspiracy to Conspiracy Theory 313

Afterword: *In Search of Lost Time* and its "Inversion Theory" 401

Bibliography 422

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Introduction

The present study grows out of an intense love affair with conspiracy fiction. It began when I was fourteen years old and, having acquired the complete stories of Sherlock Holmes, tore through them in the span of one summer. It continued in college when I developed a deep, if short-lived, interest in "extra-terrestrial phenomena." It came into sharp focus when one of my best friends, an eccentric Polish physicist, gave me a copy of Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (which I spent three years puzzling over and reading around in before, finally, tackling *in toto*) as a college graduation gift. Consequently, although this is a serious critical study of conspiracy fiction, readers will find two minor differences between it and most contemporary literary criticism. The first is that I tend to use the first person voice more than other critics. The habit arises not so much out of vanity but because this study, like any other literary-critical study, is ultimately about a particular critic's reading of a select body of works—however much that critic's reading is enriched by a knowledge of the relevant history, theoretical models or just "reading around." I, simply, choose not to use the veil of the third-person voice. The second difference, one that grows out of this last point but also takes me back to the first sentence above, is the emotive disposition I bring to the fictional works that I consider. Generally, the works discussed here have made it into my study because I like them, sometimes even *love* and obsess over them. The result is that I occasionally use phrases like "my favorite book" or "this remarkable passage," and at times even get excited and gush over a particular text. Such are conspiracy fiction and good literature in general, in my opinion, that one can have many favorite books and read many wonderful

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passages while still being rational, consistent and critical. Further, such gushing as I do, I hope, will inspire my readers to go out and read the works I discuss or, if read already, to reread them. Once upon a time, in just this way I was inspired by a particular (perhaps notorious) critic, to read and develop my love for literature. These caveats aside, I begin my Introduction proper.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a *conspiracy* thus: "A combination of persons for an evil or unlawful purpose; an agreement between two or more persons to do something criminal, illegal, or reprehensible (especially in relation to treason, sedition, or murder); a plot." Although the first citations of the word are from Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, the phenomenon of conspiracy is as old as (if not older than) recorded history. If we turn to ancient literature, we see that it abounds with examples of conspiracies. II Samuel, for instance, depicts the conspiracy that Absalom and Ahithophel organize to drive King David out of power. Herodotus launches his *History* with the story of Candaules' wife, her lover Gyges and their plot to kill Candaules, the ruler of Sardis, and assume his rule. Thucydides, in his account of the Peloponnesian War, devotes ample space to the accusations that Alcibiades and his friends conspired to disfigure the Athenian Hermae statues. Cicero's orations against Cataline detail the conspiracy that Cataline spearheads against the Roman people. And, of course, Suetonius (among many others) explores the most famous ancient conspiracy, that of Gaius Cassius, Marcus and Decimus Brutus to assassinate Julius Caesar. Each of these examples conforms to the OED's definition of *conspiracy*. Similarly, from Chaucer's time to our own such conspiracies have remained a consistent phenomenon. As one critic notes, "[c]ourt dockets are replete with indictments for various sorts of criminal conspiracy such as

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bribery, racketeering, price fixing, and drug trafficking. Co-conspirators, indicted and unindicted, are commonplace. The political record also contains major conspiracies"—the most famous of which include the assassinations of leaders like Tsar Alexander II and Archduke Ferdinand, and the *coup d'etats* of Napoleon III, Mussolini or Franco (Pipes 20-21). Similarly, literature abounds with conspiracies. One needs only to point to one example—the conspiracy of the Macbeths to kill King Duncan, the king of Scotland, and seize his throne—to show how commonplace and how taken for granted the concept of conspiracy is in literature.

Yet, as the title of my study suggests, I have set out to explore a distinct but related phenomenon—the conspiracy theory. In this instance the OED proves less useful: "the theory that an event or phenomenon occurs as a result of a conspiracy between interested parties; *spec.* a belief that some covert but influential agency (typically political in motivation and oppressive in intent) is responsible for an unexplained event." There are but a few differences between this definition and that for *conspiracy*. The "combination of persons" from *conspiracy* here becomes a set of "interested parties" or, more menacingly, a "covert but influential agency"; the plot narrows to politics; the conspiratorial act may be an "unexplained event" or, apparently, an on-going situation, i.e., some current or historical state of affairs. In other words, the OED defines *conspiracy theory* as a "theory" that a conspiracy is responsible for a single event or a continuing situation. Under such a guise, however, a conspiracy theory is nothing new. It represents, simply, the perspective outside the conspiracy, the stance an individual (the OED adds the title *conspiracy theorist*) will assume either after a conspiracy has successfully yet secretly carried out its plans or before such a conspiracy—if there is one

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(an individual or group might just have invented such a conspiracy out of fear)—acts. Among the former, a conspiracy theory after the fact, we might count the example already given from Thucydides. It was never proved, after all, that Alcibiades and his friends were guilty (though the suspicion did eventually contribute to the death sentence of Alcibiades' friend and mentor, Socrates). As to the latter, a conspiracy theory before the fact, we need look no further than the perennial and pernicious fear that "the Jews are behind it all." Surprisingly, however, despite the seeming antiquity of this concept, the first use of *conspiracy theory* that the OED cites dates only to 1909 and as the cluster of later-dated citations suggests, the term did not enter common parlance until the 1950s or early 1960s. Similarly, and to return to the first paragraph of this Introduction, as anyone who has read *V.*, *The Crying of Lot 49*, or *Gravity's Rainbow* knows, the type of narrative these novels offer—although it is clearly a conspiracy theory narrative (among other things)—exceeds what the OED defines as *conspiracy theory*. The "paranoid style" (to borrow a term from Richard Hofstadter) or modern-day "paranoia" (placed in scare quotes so as to distinguish it from clinical paranoia—see below) suffuses the narratives of each of these works.

Yet before I offer my definition of *conspiracy theory* (a term that I use interchangeably with the "paranoid style"), I want to look at the work of other critics on contemporary conspiracy theory. In *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From* Daniel Pipes offers what is essentially an expanded/modified version of the OED definition. *Conspiracy theory*, writes Pipes—while it has some "overlap" with the concept of *conspiracy* which refers to "an act"—is a subjective phenomenon: "the fear of a non-existent conspiracy." Alternately, conspiracies are "real"

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while conspiracy theories "exist only in the imagination." In addition, states Pipes, both conspiracies and conspiracy theories divide into two kinds, "the *petty* and the *world*": "Petty conspiracies are limited in ambition, however dangerous their consequences," while "world conspiracies aspire to global power and to disrupt the very premises of human life" (20-21). The petty conspiracy theory, thus, is "ageless" and goes back "to the earliest forms of social life, existing in all places." The world conspiracy theory, conversely, arises out of "the distinctive history of Europe," dates back "two and a half centuries, to the Enlightenment," and so, argues Pipes, is "neither an eternal feature of the human mind nor a product of this century" (22). Pipes also lists the three central elements of a world conspiracy theory: "a powerful, evil, and clandestine group that aspires to global hegemony; dupes and agents[; . . .] and a valiant but embattled" counterforce (22).

More importantly, Pipes indicates that conspiracy theories often mushroom into "conspiracism," that for the individuals that hold them, conspiracy theories frequently become a life-pursuit—that believing in one usually entails believing in others and living one's life in a correspondingly "paranoid" way. Although such a disposition often remains hidden, occasionally it does "enter the mainstream," as the cases of Lennin and Hitler demonstrate (22-25). Along the same lines, Pipes also offers a series of lists by which to identify conspiracy theories. The conspiracy theories *operate*, for example, via excessively rigorous logic, by mixing truth and fantasy, and by relying on "paranoid scholarship," i.e., "building huge edifices out of odd and unrelated elements" (30-33). Conspiracy theories have distinct *patterns*, among them inconsistencies, "overabundant learned factoids and pedantic references," and a tendency to dismiss "contradictory evidence as [itself indicating the signs] of a conspiracy" (39-42). Finally, conspiracy

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theories also rely on a basic set of *assumptions* such as "power is the goal," "benefit indicates control," and "conspiracies drive history" (42-49). In this way, Pipes attempts a very rigorous definition of conspiracy theory—one, suggests Peter Knight (more below), that begins to resemble the conspiracy theories it describes because of its intense scholarship.

In *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* Fredric Jameson offers a radically different perspective on conspiracy theory, what he calls "conspiracy as totality." "The older motif of conspiracy," writes Jameson, "knows a fresh lease on life" in the postmodern age. As a now diffuse phenomenon (the conspiracy that is everywhere), conspiracy provides a way for conceptualizing contemporary life: "a potentially infinite network, along with a plausible explanation of its invisibility; or, in other words: the collective and the epistemological" (9). Conspiracy describes the ways things are and provides an explanation of how they got to be that way. Yet to function as this "cognitive map," conspiracy must also represent an imperfect investment,

> for the most part an unconscious one, for it is only at that deeper level of our collective fantasy that we think about the social system all the time, a deeper level that also allows us to slip our political thoughts past a liberal and anti-political censorship. But this means [. . .] that the cognitive function of the of the conspiratorial plot must be able to flicker in and out, like some secondary or subliminal after-image. (9)

Conspiracy is something rarely seen directly. Rather it most often appears in the corner of one's intellectual eye, so to speak. The result is that the everyday world takes on a new and sinister disposition: "object worlds can be allegorically prepared, disposed and

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rewired in order to become the bearers of conspiracy"—they "can be made to express and to designate the absent, unrepresentable totality." Or, as Jameson also puts it, incidental objects are "transformed into [a] communications technology" which, consequently, reveals that the conspiracy is enormous—that there is an "incommensurability between an individual witness [. . . and] the collective conspiracy which must somehow be exposed and revealed through these individual efforts" (10). The conspiracy which is all around us thus becomes too big for any one person to describe, let alone understand.

To account for this new version of conspiracy, Jameson turns to Marx. Conspiracy as totality, asserts Jameson, represents a collective cultural attempt to understand the shift in property from the private to the corporate—how there can still be "private things" in a world where "almost everything [. . .] is functionally inserted into larger institutional schemes and frameworks" (11). Further, because of this insertion, closure has become "a meaningless concept," and in art and in movies the "closure-effect" can only be secured by representations of "space itself and spatiality"—i.e., by depictions of the conspiracy as touching or inhabiting everything in the landscape (31-33). What occurs as a result of these developments, therefore, is the "collectivization of the individual functions": the villain is "an omnipresent network," "everybody" is the victim, and the detective might just as well be "anyone" (34). In such a configuration "paranoia" becomes the realization (as happens in the movie *Videodrome* or in contemporary spy fiction with its dizzying network of agents and double-agents) that individuals might occupy any one of these three positions (villain, victim, detective) and easily move back and forth among them (33-34). Allegiances break down and your friend, you discover, might just be "involved"—might be the enemy.

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In *Conspiracy Culture* Peter Knight provides an account of conspiracy theory that bridges the gap between Pipes' rigorous and group-centered definition and Jameson's infinitely diffuse concept. Knight also offers an insightful critique of both critics. Jameson's account, argues Knight, although it "opens up the possibility of a materialist analysis," suffers because of its grandeur. "Conspiracy as totality" is too rigid, "too powerful," and ultimately boils down to a "repressed understanding of economies" (Knight 19-20). Pipes, conversely (Knight suggests), doesn't really account for the contemporary configuration of conspiracy theory. Pipes' argument reiterates the perspective offered in Richard Hofstadter's classic essay "The Paranoid Style in American Politics." Hofstadter, to whom I return briefly in Chapter Four, wrote against the backdrop of the 1950s and early 1960s, and his essay presents conspiracy theory as an aberration in American culture. Consequently, he (like Pipes after him) perceives the conspiracy theorist as only a "marginal, paranoid crackpot, usually located on the far right of the political spectrum, and, in the American context, in a decided minority" (Knight 24). This perspective, argues Knight, represents an outdated way of thinking. Further, as Knight also shows, Pipes' own study, in its method, echoes the conspiracy theory. In addition to the detailed enumeration of conspiracy theory traits, observes Knight, Pipes seems driven by a desire to expose and condemn the conspiracy theorists of the world. As a result, he offers no historical analysis as to *why*, since the 1960s and since Hofstadter wrote his essay, conspiracy theories have proliferated and become so popular (Knight 7-9 and 15).

In response to critics like Jameson and Pipes, Knight takes a recuperative approach, one that "considers a broad spectrum of conspiratorial representations, from

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fully elaborated theories to passing suspicions about hidden forces" (11). In the United States, Knight suggests (his study, incidentally, appeared before 9/11), conspiracy as an explanation has come to be taken for granted. Since the 1960s and, in particular, since JFK's assassination, conspiracy theory has moved from the far right to something that permeates daily life. A large portion of the American population, argues Knight, is suspicious to some extent—exhibits some level of "a world-weary paranoia": "It is always in danger of spiraling out of control, but it is also held in check by a paradoxical self-ironizing awareness of the diagnosis of paranoia," or "The rhetoric of conspiracy takes itself seriously, but at the same time casts satiric suspicion on everything, even its own pronouncements" (2). Conspiracy theory is (or was before the World Trade Center attacks[1]) simultaneously accepted and dismissed: *Of course*, there *might* have been a

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[1] Since 9/11, of course, the situation has changed drastically. The U.S. has created a "Homeland Security" department and any threat of conspiracy, especially terrorist conspiracy, is taken quite seriously. There are frequent warnings of Al Qaeda plotting "something, somewhere, some time soon" and for those implicated and "captured" by the U.S., whether rightly or not, the consequences can be devastating. Consider, for example, the not untypical case of Omar al-Faruq, "a confidant of Mr. bin Laden and one of Al Qaeda's senior operatives in Southeast Asia":

> What is known is that the questioning was prolonged, extending day and night for weeks. It is likely, experts say, that the proceedings followed a pattern, with Mr. Faruq left naked most of the time, his hands and feet bound. While international law requires prisoners to be allowed eight hours' sleep a day, interrogators do not necessarily let them sleep for eight consecutive hours.
>
> Mr. Faruq may also have been hooked up to sensors, then asked questions to which interrogators knew the answers, so they could gauge his truthfulness, officials said.
>
> The Western intelligence official described Mr. Faruq's interrogation as "not quite torture, but about as close as you can get." The official said that over a three-month period, the suspect was fed very little, while being subjected to sleep and light deprivation, prolonged isolation and room temperatures that varied from 100 degrees to 10 degrees. In the end he began to cooperate. (Don Van Natta Jr., "Questioning Terror Suspects in a Dark and Surreal World," *New York Times Online*, March 9, 2003. See also Dana Priest and Barton Gellman, "U.S. Decries Abuse but Defends Interrogations: 'Stress and Duress' Tactics Used on Terrorism Suspects Held in Overseas Facilities," *Washington Post Online*, December 26, 2002.)

To put it lightly, the irony that Knight indicates seems to have vanished completely. On the pop culture front, alternately, one gauge for the recent change in conspiracy thinking might be that the self-ironizing series *The X-Files* has come to an end and its successor on Fox is the serious-minded *24*, a show where every conspiracy plot turns out to be true and *always* bigger and more

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double conspiracy against JFK—first to assassinate him, then to cover it up. *Who knows?* Further, conspiracy theory offers an explanation, one that resolves doubts about "causality, agency, responsibility and identity," but which, notes Knight, also describes an implicit mode of operation in American politics (3-4). To support his case Knight offers a very persuasive list of terms that have become associated with conspiracy and conspiracy theory:

> JFK, RFK, MLK, Malcolm X, Marilyn Monroe, MK-ULTRA, Operation Paperclip, Phoenix, Mongoose, Majestic-12, COINTELPRO, Lee Harvey Oswald, James Earl Ray, Sirhan Sirhan, Arthur Herman Bremer, Mark David Chapman, John Hinckley Jr., LSD, MIA, CIA, FBI, NSA, Secret Service, October Surprise, Savings & Loan, Whitewater, Lockerbie, TWA flight 800, O.J., Ebola, AIDS, crack cocaine, military-industrial complex, black helicopters, gray aliens, grassy knoll, magic bullet, lone nut. (25)

Of course, writes Knight rather prophetically, not all of these terms point to actual conspiracies, but enough of them do, to the point that "we can never rest in our interpretive endeavors" (25).

Knight also underscores an interesting development that has accompanied the rise of conspiracy theory. In contemporary parlance, notes Knight, to be a conspiracy theorist is in some sense to be "paranoid," albeit not necessarily in the clinical sense of the word. In the late twentieth century, writes Knight, "paranoia" as a concept has become commodified; it is "the stuff of entertainment and philosophical reflection, part of

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far-reaching than anyone had expected. Contemporary developments, incidentally, also indicate an interesting facet of conspiracy theory—that it has the tendency to swing between two distinct poles, the serious and the ironic. For a longer discussion of this last point see Chapter Five.

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everyday American culture" (44). One needs, for example, only to think of the prevalence of *X-Files* memorabilia or remember the ever-present green (or gray) alien face to find proof of this assertion. The term "paranoia," thus, now embodies only "an empty circular description with a gloss of scientific rigor" (Knight 15). In *Paranoid Modernism* David Trotter also draws attention to this development. "Paranoia," he writes, "has become a *form* of symbolic capital: proof of a liberal conscience [. . . and] proof of literary sophistication" (326):

> The trouble with paranoia is that we think we know what it is. When we use the term "paranoid" in conversation, in biographical inquiry, or in debates about modernity and post-modernity, we understand that we are talking about a mental illness, but we do not usually feel any need to make reference to [. . .] psychiatric description [. . .] as we might, perhaps, if our argument happened to depend on the terms "schizophrenic" or "manic-depressive." These, too, of course, are partially naturalized terms. We (mostly) think we know (more or less) what they mean. But as far as the world at large is concerned, paranoia counts as psychiatry's degree zero. (16)

In contemporary culture, Trotter indicates, the term "paranoia" is used with little or no reference to clinical diagnosis. The practice, we might argue, even carries over to literary criticism. For example, in an otherwise insightful and provocative essay on paranoia, Eve Sedgwick offers the following five shorthand definitions:

> Paranoia is *anticipatory.*
>
> Paranoia is *reflexive* and *mimetic.*
>
> Paranoia is *a strong theory.*

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Paranoia is a theory of *negative affects*.

Paranoia places its faith in *exposure*. ("Paranoid" 9)

Although, as I shall attempt to demonstrate below, there is much to be learned from Sedgwick's essay, it is clear even here that the closest Sedgwick comes to dealing with paranoia as a psychiatrist might is in her reference (following the lead of psychologist Silvan Tomkins) to *affect*—which, though there is some overlap,[2] really isn't that close at all. At one point, Sedgwick even dismisses the psychiatric approach: "I myself have no wish to return to the use of 'paranoid' as a pathologizing diagnosis" ("Paranoid" 5-6).

After this initial look at the critical discussion surrounding the concept of conspiracy theory, and the relation of modern conspiracy theory to "paranoia," I now move to the focus and goals of the present study. As the reader will probably have noticed, the title of my study emphasizes at least one topic which I have hitherto ignored: Victorian fiction. The omission has been deliberate. By thus proceeding I have tried to emphasize that contemporary conspiracy criticism tends to ignore this topic. Most critics discuss conspiracy theory as a development of the latter-half of the twentieth century and the majority (with David Trotter's study of paranoia in British modernism being the main exception) center on the United States as the hotbed of this development. In addition, much of the criticism discussed above emerges out of a cultural studies context and (to my chagrin) devotes insufficient space to literary conspiracy theory narratives. More importantly, no critic I have been able to find considers the conspiracy-conspiracy theory narrative tradition (and my assertion here will be that it is a teleological tradition) and so no critic asks the following questions: How, in literature, did conspiracy narratives

[2] Sedgwick, for instance, points to the rigidity of the paranoid hermeneutic but never makes explicit the relation of this rigidity to the clinical diagnosis.

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develop into conspiracy theory narratives? When did this come about? For what reasons and, in particular, as a reflection of what historical, cultural and political trends or events did this transition happen? And why, as reflective readers, should we bother to read the narratives that manifest this conspiracy transition in the first place—or, how does the skillful depiction of conspiracy enhance the aesthetic/affective power of a given literary work so as to make it *worth* reading?

The answers to these questions (variously developed) form the substance of the present study. Although my thesis, essentially, can be summarized in four words—conspiracy becomes conspiracy theory[3]—I have pursued this thesis using an array of critical approaches, the most important of which are structuralist, historical, psychiatric and affective/aesthetic. I have chosen the mid- to late-Victorian and "long" Edwardian periods (read 1848-1914) because they seem to me, especially in regard to the British novel, to be particularly fertile in terms of the above four questions. In one respect, consequently, I have used the Victorian novel as a suggestive "case-study" which I hope will also demonstrate how the literary transition from the conspiracy narrative mode to the conspiracy *theory* narrative mode came about (or might have come about) in other literary traditions. That such a transition did happen elsewhere is one of my implicit assumptions and so in discussing twentieth-century conspiracy theory narratives, I have felt at liberty to draw on narratives other than in the British tradition.

[3] Or, alternately, the primary goal of my study is to examine the emergence of conspiracy theory as a psychological process and as a narrative mode in literature.

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As to defining conspiracy theory (in literature, as a narrative mode), I have primarily used a structuralist framework.[4] In the pantheon of conspiracy theory narratives I include Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, Kafka's *The Trial* and *The Castle*, Borges' "Tlön, Uqbar, Tertius Orbis" and "The Lottery of Babylon," Orwell's *1984*, Stanislaw Lem's *The Investigation*, Pynchon's *V.*, *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*,[5] and Don DeLillo's *Libra*. As a result, from these works I have attempted to abstract what I call, following the work of Saussure, the essential *conspiracemes* (cf. phoneme, morpheme, etc.) or units of conspiracy theory narrative. My argument is that conspiracy theory narratives (or the conspiracy theory as a narrative mode) appear on the scene early in the twentieth century because the proliferation of conspiracy narratives at the end of the nineteenth century ends in the generalization of conspiracy into conspiracy theory or—to put it coarsely—conspiracy theory narratives begin to appear when narratives in the conspiracy tradition attain a conspiraceme critical mass. Of course, as Derrida et al have shown, structuralism as a critical method has serious drawbacks (all too apparent in the reductive stance my thesis must take under the structuralist guise), but I use this approach because I have found it to be particularly useful in organizing my chapters—each of which, with the exception of the last, targets one or two conspiracemes by looking first at a few twentieth-century

---

[4] My understanding of conspiracy theory, however, is indebted to the critics I discuss above, Knight and Jameson in particular.

[5] The reader will, no doubt, have noticed that a discussion of this work is curiously absent in my earlier discussion of critical takes on conspiracy and oddly present here. The reasons for this move are two. First, Jameson's depiction of "conspiracy as totality" seems to me sufficiently Foucauldian in its approach (with the exception that Jameson positions the subject's awareness as semi-conscious, whereas Foucault argues for unconscious). Second, for reasons that will emerge in Chapter Four, I have played the devil's advocate and, contrary to most critical practice, read *Discipline and Punish* as if it were a fictional work.

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manifestations, then (the bulk of the chapter) examining nineteenth-century precedents.[6] In addition, I have tried to complicate the structuralist approach wherever possible, foregrounding—for instance—the results of my other critical modes or, as in Chapter Five, emphasizing and exploring the much richer and more complex concepts of conspiratorial irony and indeterminacy.

My second approach to these conspiracy narratives (one, admittedly, much more fertile in its interpretive possibilities) has been a historical one. In this case my assumption has been that the conspiracy narratives I consider are embedded in their historical moment and that a study of the broad social, historical and political developments surrounding the publication of any given work can prove useful in illuminating the details of that particular work. As a result, in my study I explore a number of historical developments which I list in shorthand here with the understanding (on the reader's part) that they will be explored at greater length in their respective chapters: the emergence of the British police force and the police detective (Chapter One), the so-called "disappearance of God" and the rise of science and Darwin's theories (Chapter Two), the European revolutions and counter-revolutions of 1848-49, British asylum policy and the mid-century growth of Britain's immigrant population, the Victorian press and the issue of privacy (Chapters Three and Four), and the Irish Question and the Fenians, the Anarchist/Nihilist/Socialist movements of the 1880s and beyond, the growth of the Britain's law enforcement and espionage agencies, and the turn-of-the-century threat of French and German invasion (Chapter Five). Or, from

[6] One result of the structuralist approach is that when I discuss a conspiraceme in any given chapter (and the arrangement of my chapters is roughly chronological), it will seem that I locate it in only a few works. The careful reader, however, will see that once I introduce a particular conspiraceme I return to it again and again (where relevant) in subsequent chapters, specifically in the discussion of historically subsequent conspiracy narratives.

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another vantage, Chapters One to Four (roughly) cover the key years of 1848-1861, while Chapter Five (again roughly) follows conspiracy and conspiracy narrative developments from the late 1860s to the outbreak of World War I.

Similarly, my third critical mode, the psychiatric, though used somewhat more sporadically, also serves as a foil to the rigidity and reductiveness of the structuralist approach. Rather than only treating paranoia as a "commodity" (like many contemporary critics) I also consider the condition and its manifestation in particular Victorian and modern works from a clinical angle, using the findings of modern psychiatry (which I explore in some detail) to illuminate those conspiracy and conspiracy theory narrative characters which seem to me to warrant and reward such a reading. Further, where relevant I also try to distinguish between the two forms of paranoia,[7] while also implicitly suggesting—contrary to Knight's and Trotter's assertions—that there is overlap between them and that, as a result, there can be no fast rule as to which form characterizes any given conspiracy theorist or conspiracy theory narrative.

Finally, the last critical approach I use, affect theory, necessitates a longer introduction. In two essays, one written with Adam Frank and one by herself, Eve Sedgwick explores a key malaise in modern critical practice—the prevalence and dominance of "paranoid" interpretive strategies or, as Paul Ricoeur called it, the "hermeneutics of suspicion" ("Paranoid" 4).[8] In recent decades, writes Sedgwick, after

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[7] I define the commodified form of paranoia as "a suspicious disposition that *might* be justified." In addition, to make some distinction between these two concepts, clinical and commodified paranoia, I shall refer to the latter (as, in fact, I have already been doing up to this point) by using scare quotes—"paranoia"—*except* where discussing what Eve Sedgwick calls the "paranoid hermeneutic" (see below).

[8] In the discussion that follows, for the sake of convenience I refer only to Eve Sedgwick. It should be understood, however, that whenever I discuss the essay "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins," by writing "Sedgwick" I actually mean "Sedgwick and Frank."

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Freud, after Foucault, "paranoia" has become the standard approach in literary criticism. It is "less a diagnosis than a prescription": "In a world where no one need be delusional to find evidence of systematic oppression, to theorize out of anything *but* a 'paranoid' critical stance has come to seem naïve, pious, or complaisant" ("Paranoid" 5). Because so much violence in culture and in literature has already been exposed, argues Sedgwick, critics are apt to be a priori suspicious. Such a stance (Sedgwick uses the terms "the paranoid hermeneutic" and "antibiologism" interchangeably) appears to be the only reasonable and respectful approach to take: "The antibiologism of current theory assumes [. . .] that it's the distance of any theory from a biological (or, by mistaken implication, an analog) basis, that alone can make the possibility of doing any justice 'to difference (individual, historical, and cross-cultural), to contingency, to performative force, and to the possibility of change'" ("Cybernetic" 20). Yet, although the antibiologist project gestures towards noble goals, continues Sedgwick, it may also eventually "impoverish the gene-pool of literary-critical perspectives and skills" because of its insistence on itself as the only legitimate critical method of exposition ("Paranoid" 21).

The problem derives from a number of serious limitations inherent in antibiologism. Antibiologism relies on "a single, overarching narrative" which invariably produces the "kinda subversive, kinda hegemonic" thesis—i.e., antibiologism has the tendency to discover that each work more, or less, reiterates the reigning ideology of its historical moment while also trying to subvert it ("Cybernetic" 5). Antibiologism also has a penchant "for constant invocations and detectivelike scrutinies of supposed [essential] truth claims by others" and antibiologism makes no provisions for the discussion of feelings: "Affect is treated as a unitary category, with a unitary history and unitary

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politics. There is no theoretical room for any difference between, say, being amused, being disgusted, being ashamed, and being enraged" ("Cybernetic" 16-17). So whereas affect theory offers "multiple essentialist risks of analog interpretation," a benefit in Sedgwick's reading (more below), antibiologism can resort to only a "single, *unavowedly* essentialist certainty of one or another on/off switch" ("Cybernetic" 20, emphasis added). Whatever its overt claims, antibiologism emerges as but another essentialist project, ironically of a kind with those it purports to expose. In its most reduced form it appears (as happens when Sedgwick abstracts the central argument of D.A. Miller's *The Novel and the Police*) to be grounded in circular logic: e.g., "everything can be understood as an aspect of the carceral, therefore the carceral is everywhere" ("Paranoid" 14). The initial assumption also becomes the final result. The problem with such an approach, writes Sedgwick, is that it is a priori rigid and thus, rather than emphasizing *surprise* and *discovery* as key elements of the reading process, the paranoid hermeneutic seeks only to minimize pain and avoid humiliation ("Paranoid" 15ff).

As a recuperative move, Sedgwick turns to the work of psychologist Silvan Tomkins on affect theory. Tomkins, writes Sedgwick, offers rich strategies for reading because of how he conceptualizes cognition. In his writings Tomkins defines the basic set of affects that humans experience—shame, interest, surprise, joy, anger, fear, distress and contempt—then organizes these affects in a framework that layers "digital (on/off) with analog (graduated and/or multiply differentiated) representational models" ("Cybernetic" 4-5 and 8). The result is a scheme that motions "toward the possibility of random, virtually infinite permutation" and so offers a critical mode—so Sedgwick would have it—superior to the digital paranoid hermeneutic ("Cybernetic 10-12). For example,

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whereas psychoanalysis operates on the basis of a "single bar (repression)" between the conscious and unconscious, "Tomkins' affect theory by contrast offers a wealth of sites of productive opacity" ("Cybernetic" 13). More importantly, because of its configuration, affect theory resists teleological presumptions. Instead, writes Tomkins, "any affect may have any 'object'" because "[a]ffect is self-validating with or without any further referent" (Tomkins, quoted in "Cybernetic" 17). In the same way, as a critical mode affect theory initiates a shift from "paranoid" assumptions to an anti-paranoid approach: "to read from a reparative position is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader *as new*: to a reparatively positioned reader, it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise. Because there can be terrible surprises, however, there can also be good ones" ("Paranoid" 24). Surprise and discomfiture, asserts Sedgwick, reappear as possibilities in the reading process and the paranoid hermeneutic emerges as only "*a* way, among other ways, of seeking, finding, and organizing knowledge" ("Paranoid" 9). In addition, surprise, the initial lack of fit between the new affect and a reader's previously knowledge, becomes the point at which learning occurs—where readers discover that they have been "wrong," and so can attain "a political vision of difference that might resist both [the] binary homogenization and infinitizing trivialization" that accompany antibiologism ("Cybernetic" 14-15). Through her reading of Tomkins, Sedgwick thus unveils a wonderfully complex and new way in which to read literature.

In these essays, however, Sedgwick, despite her accomplishment, fails to answer one crucial question: How do we, as critics, put affect theory into practice as a critical

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tool? My response, what might be called an *aesthetic* approach,[9] is actually rather simple and to a large extent relies on what Harold Bloom in *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* calls "foregrounding"—a process by which key elements in the work (in this study, those that I find to have a particularly memorable affect) are given special emphasis or, as Bloom writes, to foreground is "to make prominent, or draw attention to, particular features in a literary work" (737). Hence, in the pages that follow I use the verbs *emphasize*, *foreground*, and *underscore* often and make a concerted effort to examine the affect of the works that I discuss. As a result, I sometimes gush over particular narratives and passages. Yet, as affect is something sporadic and infinitely variable, my use of affect theory, my practice of foregrounding the aesthetic, likewise appears sporadic: extended in the case of particular passages (when I attempt to delineate what about the passage makes it so affective—makes it evoke such a range or intensity of feeling), absent at times for very many pages. Alternately, my study might be seen (as the fictional works I consider) as transitional between two kinds of critical modes. On one hand, I do practice a form or rigid critical reading in that I offer a thesis (conspiracy becomes conspiracy theory) and attempt to prove it. On the other hand, when I turn to *affect* it is generally only for the sake of foregrounding that affect.

Yet I should add one final caveat. Although Sedgwick does introduce a rich conceptual mode, one of its drawbacks may be that, like Jameson's reading of conspiracy, it is too rich. A critic, of course, can not speak of all the affects that an entire work

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[9] The reader should not take my use of the term *aesthetic* as referring to the Kantian *aesthetic* which relies on that "universal beauty" that stands apart from any historical context and which Kant delineates in his *Critique of Judgment*. A long line of critical argument (which I won't rehearse here, though the reader is referred to my bibliography for a selection of the most pertinent works) has thoroughly and incontrovertibly exposed the oppressive ideology that underpins any such "universal" judgment which does not foreground its contingency.

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evokes—doing so for one or two passages requires labor enough. Some kind of "artificial priority" (call it political agenda for lack of better term) must be introduced and articulated (a move contrary to what happens in Kant's discussion of the aesthetic) to delimit *what* the aesthetic approach will target or, at least, most emphasize, and to justify *why* this particular aspect is worth targeting. Such an articulation underscores that when a critic discusses *the* affect, makes value judgments as to its depiction by a given author, and so seems to motion towards "objectivity," this objectivity really rests on a set of assumptions. In pursuing my study I have relied on Martha C. Nussbaum's essay "Political Objectivity" to provide the means by which to create my assumptions. In this essay Nussbaum takes up a concept similar in construction to the Kantian aesthetic, what she calls "objectivity" or "objective truth" (884). On one hand, admits Nussbaum, such objectivity (which would entail "the complete absence of subjectivity") has been used to "express very partial human interests, of the interests of powerful groups in society" (885). On the other hand, she writes, "true" objectivity may ultimately prove impossible: we always "see the world from a particular cultural-historical perspective, and perspectives are in deep ways incommensurable" (885). Towards resolving this impasse, consequently, Nussbaum introduces a crucial middle ground—a new, "significant notion of objectivity, defined in terms of the most adequate and intersubjectively confirmed use of mental faculties—or, in ethics, in terms of that which we can *reasonably* recommend to all" (885). Nussbaum envisions a type of objectivity that depends on democratic consensus and that allows for "reasonable disagreement and respect for difference" (888). Reasonable disagreement may be an inherent feature of modern democracy, writes Nussbaum, but "reasonable people accept reasonable disagreement": "[R]easonable

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persons see that the burdens of judgment set limits on what can be reasonably justified to others, and so they endorse some form of liberty of conscience and freedom of thought" (Nussbaum and John Rawls, quoted in Nussbaum, 892). To be reasonable in the context of a democratic society is to tolerate and make space for disagreement.

From these insights, Nussbaum goes on to envision a new form of objectivity, what she calls "political objectivity." Her essay, she asserts, sets out to explore this "political objectivity," to find "the particular form the search for objectivity takes, or should take, when a pluralistic democratic society seeks to justify it basic political principals" (886). The form it should not take is any kind of absolutism. A democratic society, Nussbaum suggests, must refrain "from building [its] basic political principles around any one [. . .] contested comprehensive doctrine" be it, for example, Christianity, Islam or Atheism (887). Rather, following the work of John Rawls and Charles Larmore, Nussbaum advocates "political liberalism": "a regime, that is, that builds its principles around a partial moral conception that is 'free-standing,' not provided with any particular set of metaphysical or epistemological foundations. In that way, we can hope that it will be the object of an 'overlapping consensus' among citizens who have different comprehensive views" (887). A "free-standing" or what Nussbaum later calls the "minimal moral" conception emerges as the cornerstone of political liberalism; this conception represents the point—ideally—most distant from what might be called oppressive ideology.

Through this notion of "free-standing" conception, I want to suggest, Nussbaum also offers an intriguing means by which an argument about the aesthetic value of a literary work might be grounded. What we as critics need to decide, I believe, is *whether*

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we can have a minimum moral conception from which we might argue that a given literary work has "universal" value and, if so, *what* that minimum moral conception is—a minimum moral conception, incidentally, that will uphold the universal toleration and respect that antibiologism proffers, while attempting to avoid the attendant essentialism. I offer the following:

We live in a society with others.

Our actions (as a group or as individuals) can harm others.

Of course, I realize that such generalizations may seem trite, uselessly abstract or, perhaps, obvious, but at the same time they appear to me to be the maximum defendable (read empirical) basis for any kind of objective aesthetic judgment. This, I think, is as much of an "essential" truth as we can have; anything more risks *un*reasonable (as Nussbaum would write) absolutism. For example, I avoid even stating the common democratic belief that "all humans are equal"—not because I don't believe it, but because I don't think it can be stated as an empirical fact like the above two propositions. So to return to affect theory as a critical mode (and thus to conclude my Introduction): in discussing conspiracy narratives or moments in conspiracy narratives in terms of affect, I have generally foregrounded (i.e., most valued) those works or moments that best (in my opinion) play out the consequences which follow when an individual or group (read conspirator or conspiracy) ignore the minimum moral conception that I have formulated above. Such a move may seem logical—a conspiracy inherently relies on the idea of transgression of law or, in the case of revolutionary conspiracy, opposition to a potentially oppressive power. In the case of the present study, however, limiting my aesthetic approach like this has allowed me to branch out in my discussion of conspiracy

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narratives (into the realms of structuralist thought, history and psychiatry), while, simultaneously, zeroing-in on those aspects of conspiracy fiction that make it worth reading—that endow it with a kind of "universal" value that is not grounded in hidden and oppressive ideology but rather derives from a conception that, I believe, might be reasonably defended.

* * *

As I implied above, the organization of this study is rather straightforward. Each chapter centers on one or two conspiracemes and explores these conspiracemes in terms of a few twentieth-century examples and (its primary focus) nineteenth-century precedents. Each chapter also situates the nineteenth-century works in relation to their historical moment. Chapter One takes up the idea of the conspiracy theorist (the Subject Who Tries to Know), postulates that this figure grows out of the detective (the Subject Who Knows), and gives special attention to nineteenth-century detectives such as Poe's Dupin, Inspector Bucket of *Bleak House* and Inspector Cuff, Ezra Jennings and Mr. Murthwaite of *The Moonstone.* Chapter Two studies the Hidden Hand (a person or force that stands behind the scenes and guides events or the lives of other characters) and focuses primarily on the Hidden Hand conspiracy in *Great Expectations.* Chapter Three targets both the Conspiracy to Defraud (which usually involves two figures working to defrauding a younger woman) and the Paranoid Subject, and provides an in-depth look at *The Woman in White* which, I argue, is one of the most important Victorian conspiracy narratives because of its portrayal of the Italian secret society known as the "Brotherhood." Chapter Four also looks at two conspiracemes, the Inaccessible Authorities (usually an oppressive group that attempts to avoid direct confrontation with

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its victims/subjects) and the Vanishing Subject (a figure who somehow "disappears" in response to the oppression/surveillance of the Authorities), and includes extended discussions of Trollope's *The Warden* and Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* as well as Foucault's *Discipline and Punish.* Chapter Five, an exception to my organizational structure, presents (and problematizes) a typology of late-Victorian and Edwardian conspiracy narratives along the lines of "Revolutionary Fiction," "Early-Modernist Espionage" and "The Criminal Mastermind" (the last of which, in my reading, necessarily implies a conspiracy to carry out his plots). Finally, my Afterword looks ahead to conspiracy theory narratives and sets out a "suggestive" reading of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* and what I call its "inversion theory."

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Chapter One: The Subject Who Tries to Know

In her essay, "Who's Doing It? Fifteen Years of Work on Victorian Detective Fiction," Anne Humpherys sketches the central elements in a detective story:

> Detective fiction has what Dennis Porter calls "backward construction." It starts with the crime and continues with the observations and deductions of the detective which finally result in his reconstruction of the actions that led to and followed from the crime. That is, in the detective fiction plot, we start in the "present," and then move back into a reconstruction of the past, and come back to the present when the detective makes meaning of past events by analyzing motive, discarding false or misleading clues, ordering events, and ultimately revealing the only possible explanation of the crime. There can be at closure several reconstructions, but only one will be "true," the one that accounts for all the events in an orderly, cause-and-effect way. (259)

Though Humpherys here focuses on story chronology and plot solution, we see that the crucial element in the whole process is the detective. In the classic detective story we have a crime, a series of possible clues (not all, of course, are relevant), and we have a figure—either a police or private investigator—who steps in, sorts out the clues and provides the "true" solution, namely a theory that arranges everything in the only "correct" way.

Likewise, a conspiracy theory implies a conspiracy theorist. Among literary examples of the latter we might include Marcel, the narrator of *In Search of Lost Time*, the unnamed narrators of Borges' "The Lottery of Babylon" and "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis

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Tertius," Lieutenant Gregory of *The Investigation*, Herbert Stencil of *V.*, and Tyrone Slothrop of *Gravity's Rainbow*. Each of these individuals, like the detective, encounters a wealth of clues and proposes a theory that orders the "essential" clues. There are, however, significant differences between the conspiracy theorist and the detective. For example, the conspiracy theorist is frequently the first person to discover what may (or may not) exist—the conspiracy that has somehow evaded everyone else's notice. For the conspiracy theorist "inessential" clues do not exist. Every clue somehow "fits" (even the false leads planted by Them), and the theorist's subsequent theory tries to account for all these clues. And, as a result—usually because there are so many clues, or because the conspiracy fails to "act" and its existence and goals remain indeterminate, or because of the theorist's own delusional nature (which can be paranoid, "paranoid," or a mixture of the two—see Introduction)—the conspiracy theory falters and we get a proliferation of competing theories, none of them comprehensive and satisfactory. The final verification of the conspiracy's existence, be it through narrative developments or definitive community acknowledgment, never arrives and the conspiracy theorist, unlike the classic detective, can only achieve the status of a Subject Who Tries to Know (but can't).[1]

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[1] The classic detective, conversely, becomes the Subject Who Knows (when all is said and done) and so stands at the opposite end of the spectrum from the conspiracy theorist. Both these terms (i.e., the Subject Who Knows and the Subject Who Tries to Know) and hence my chapter's title, derive from Jacques Lacan's concept of the Subject Supposed to Know. Lacan's most extended discussion of this concept appears in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1973) during an analysis of Descartes' famous statement, "Cogito ergo sum." In making that statement, Lacan argues, Descartes' great mistake is to introduce "the concept of a certainty that holds entirely in the *I think* of cogitation" and to believe that this concept "is knowledge." More specifically, Descartes "puts the field of knowledge at the level of [a] vaster subject, the subject who is supposed to know, God" (224). Though Lacan's elocutionary style doesn't quite dazzle here, what he means is that Descartes' initial statement, "Cogito ergo sum," implies a number of corollary propositions. First, that there is a field of knowledge and certainty. Second, that God both is this field and also operates as its master. Third, that when Descartes says, "I think," he asserts his desire that the first two propositions be true, and places himself, as a subject, within this field of knowledge while *also* conceding that being in the field does not imply being all of it

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In this chapter I take up these two figures, the classic detective and conspiracy theorist, and further explore the distinction I have just made. As it turns out, separating these two figure is not as easy as it seems and in literature, I argue, the conspiracy theorist in fact develops out of the classic detective. Specifically, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century a number of literary characters emerge that might be described as transitional figures between the detective and conspiracy theorist, i.e., that are still "detectives" but that also display conspiracy theorist traits. Here I look at five of these characters—Edgar Allan Poe's Auguste Dupin, Inspector Bucket of *Bleak House*, and Inspector Cuff, Ezra Jennings and Mr. Murthwaite of *The Moonstone*—and consider how these "detectives" increasingly come to resemble the twentieth-century conspiracy theorist in terms of psychology and investigative failure.

Before turning to these nineteenth-century detectives, however, I open my discussion with a look at two relatively recent examples of the conspiracy theorist—Oedipa Maas from Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* and Nicholas Branch from Don DeLillo's *Libra*. Both of these characters provide good starting points for any discussion of the conspiracy theorist, and taken together represent two extremes the theorist may occupy, the comic and the tragic respectively. I begin with Oedipa because

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or having control of it as God does. In Descartes' mind, says Lacan, "the eternal truths [are] in God's charge" and "are eternal because God wishes them to be" (225). In other words, to Descartes, God is the Subject Who Ultimately Knows. Lacan, in turn, sees this not as a fact but as Descartes' *desire*. Therefore, from Lacan's point of view, God is only the Subject *Supposed* to Know. In an analogous way, analysis is the field of knowledge and the analyst, from the patient's perspective, is the Subject Who Knows; while from Lacan's perspective the analyst is again just the Subject Supposed to Know (225). Though Lacan's ultimate concern is the process of transference in psychoanalysis, here I only note that in employing my terms I situate the detective in a position analogous to Descartes' God or Lacan's analyst, while the conspiracy theorist parallels Descartes or the patient. Further, the detective's field of clues equals Descartes' field of knowledge. The difference, however, is that whereas, in Lacan's scheme, Descartes only *desired* that God know, at the end of the classic detective story, I want to argue, the detective actually *does* know, and this is what differentiates him from both his community and (by extension) the conspiracy theorist.

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of her enormous popularity among readers, a popularity no doubt enhanced by the fact that *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) is both Pynchon's shortest and most accessible novel. Unlike, for example, the array of mysteries, individuals and aracana that fill *Gravity's Rainbow*, *The Crying of Lot 49* has relatively few central characters, contains plenty of great comic elements (including *The Courier's Tragedy*, a hilarious parody of Jacobean revenge plays), and centers on only one conspiracy, that of The Trystero postal network. Yet these elements notwithstanding, the novel's power as a conspiracy theory narrative—I would argue—has much more to do with its heroine Oedipa Maas, the competing theories she forms about The Trystero, and how she ultimately fails to prove or disprove any of her conspiracy theories.

The Crying of Lot 49 begins as Oedipa, a California housewife, returns home one day and discovers that she has been named the executrix of the estate of her former lover, "one Pierce Inverarity, a California real estate mogul who once lost two million dollars in his spare time but still had assets numerous and tangled enough to make the job of sorting it all out more than honorary" (9). To perform this duty Oedipa travels down to the fictional San Narisco "to look into Pierce's books and records and confer with Metzger, the co-executor" (23). In San Narisco, after a brief and comic fling with Metzger, Oedipa encounters the series of clues that eventually lead her to The Trystero conspiracy. The Trystero, it turns out, is an alternate underground postal network (somehow tied to Inverarity's business interests) which appears to stretch across the United States and whose history apparently dates back to the Middle Ages:

> She knew a few things about it: it had opposed the Thurn and Taxis postal system in Europe; its symbol was a muted post horn; sometime before 1853 it had

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> appeared in America and fought the Pony Express and Wells, Fargo, either as outlaws in black, or disguised as Indians; and it survived today, in California, serving as a channel of communication for those of unorthodox sexual persuasion, inventors who believed in the reality of Maxwell's Demon, possibly her own husband, Mucho Maas [. . .] (109)

Much to Oedipa's shock, the conspiracy not only seems to have an extensive history, but it continues *still* and may even involve people like her own husband. Yet for Oedipa the real problem becomes that however actively she pursues her detective work—and pursue it she does, albeit with a number of diverting interludes—the facts never quite coalesce: "Either Trystero did exist, in its own right, or it was being presumed, perhaps fantasied by Oedipa, so hung up on and interpenetrated with [Inverarity's] estate" (109). All the clues Oedipa encounters are ambiguous and the more she searches, the more a definitive interpretation evades her, plagued as she is by an inability to decide whether The Trystero is an objective phenomenon or only her own delusion.

Nor, in the narrative, is the situation ever resolved. The novel ends just as the crying of lot 49—the auction of a series of "forged" Trystero stamps which promises to involve a mysterious and, perhaps, pivotal bidder—is about to begin. More importantly, immediately before this scene we get an extended passage (from which I give only a short excerpt) in which Pynchon highlights the intensity of Oedipa's continuing and increasing uncertainty:

> [Inverarity] might have written the testament only to harass a one-time mistress, so cynically sure of being wiped out he could throw away all hope of anything more. Bitterness could have run deep in him. She just didn't know. He might

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himself have discovered The Tristero, and encrypted that in his will, buying into just enough to be sure she'd find it. Or he might even have tried to survive death, as a paranoia; as a pure conspiracy against someone he loved. Would that breed of perversity prove at last too keen to be stunned even by death, had a plot finally been devised too elaborate for the dark Angel to hold at once, in his humorless vice-president's head, all the possibilities of? Had something slipped through and Inverarity by that much beaten death?

Yet she knew, head down, stumbling along over the cinderbed and its old sleepers, there was still that other chance. That it was all true. That Inverarity had only died, nothing else. Suppose, God, there really was a Tristero then and that she *had* come on it by accident. If San Narisco and the estate were really no different from any other town, any other estate, then by that continuity she might have found The Tristero anywhere in her Republic, through any of a hundred lightly-concealed entranceways, a hundred alienations, if only she'd looked. (178-79)

Since Oedipa has no objective way to ground her theories, anything goes and she can see The Trystero as Inverarity's invention, as his means for both persecuting her and escaping his own death, while simultaneously conceding that The Trystero may really exist independently of Inverarity and be found "anywhere in her Republic." *The Crying of Lot 49* thus exhibits the "paranoid style" and it seems almost as if the complexity of The Trystero conspiracy creates a situation where anyone who attempts to resolve it must necessarily become a Subject Who Tries to Know. More importantly, by leaving the

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conspiracy "open" in this way, the narrative thus summons an effect almost the exact inverse of that we experience at the end of a detective story.

The last point, however, is not quite true. *The Crying of Lot 49*, as indicated above, ends on a note of hope, with the auction that gives the novel its title and that (the narrative suggests) will perhaps finally clear up the mystery of The Trystero. *Libra* (1988), a novel written by Pynchon's contemporary Don DeLillo and a work that fictionally recreates the circumstances leading up to and including the JFK assassination, has a much darker ending, at least for its central detective, Nicholas Branch. The JFK assassination, of course, provides one of the most fertile sites for conspiracy theory in American culture (a phenomenon, incidentally, to which DeLillo contributes simply by writing his novel) and as Peter Knight indicates: "It is virtually impossible to mention the assassination without becoming embroiled in a debate about the existence or not of a conspiracy, the details of which are common knowledge for a surprising number of Americans" (81). Nor, adds Knight, does the situation culminate there: "it is significant that there has been no steady convergence of opinion about the case, not only between the lone gunman and conspiracy theory camps, but *within* the latter position" (91). To discuss the Kennedy assassination is necessarily to enter the conspiracy theory debate, a debate that with time has only grown more complicated. What accounts for this situation? Put simply, the sheer bulk of material that surrounds the assassination, and the array of interpretive approaches taken towards this material:

> Some examine discrepancies in the medical evidence in painstaking detail; some concentrate on the photographic evidence; some create computer simulations of the shooting; some are historical inquiries into the complex associations between

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> the intelligence agencies, Oswald, and Cuban exiles; some explore the political history of Kennedy's and Johnson's administrations against the background of the United States' entry into Vietnam; some are written by eyewitnesses and participants; some are written by people claiming to know or even to be one of the hired assassins; some offer imagined versions of a court case against Oswald; some are outright fictional treatments of conspiracies surrounding the assassination. Some claim to have discovered clues to a prime conspiracy, while others detail evidence of a subsequent cover-up; some concentrate solely on the Kennedy assassination, while others insert that event into the larger story of political assassination. (Knight 90)

As this exhausting and exhaustive catalog shows, the mass of the information inhibits any one individual from mastering it, from becoming the Subject Who Knows. Or, in centering his novel on this assassination, Don DeLillo almost guaratees a priori that his novel will operate in the "paranoid style."

This pre-existing configuration also largely (though not wholly) accounts for the predicament of the fictional Nicholas Branch, one of DeLillo's protagonists in *Libra.* Branch appears in what is perhaps the epilogue of twentieth-century conspiracy narratives and there is a corresponding fatigue that permeates his character. Yet unlike preceding conspiracy theory narratives which usually limit themselves to the "paranoid style," i.e., to a perspective outside the conspiracy, DeLillo's book gives us both: a close analysis of Oswald and the ex-CIA operatives et al with whom he conspires, *and* Nicholas Branch's vantage some twenty-five years after the event. On one hand, therefore, the power of *Libra* as a conspiracy theory narrative (unlike that of *The Crying*

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of Lot 49) stems not from the grand mystification of the conspiracy and the failure of subsequent attempts to clarify it, but from the fact that the novel allows us to watch the conspiracy as it develops and to observe the quasi-mystical coincidences that sustain it:

> "Think of two parallel lines [. . .] One is the life of Lee H. Oswald. One is the conspiracy to kill the President. What bridges the space between them? What makes a connection inevitable? There is a third line. It comes out of dreams, visions, intuitions, prayers, out of the deepest levels of the self. It's not generated by cause and effect like the other lines. It's a line that cuts across causality, cuts across time. It has no history that we can recognize or understand. But it forces a connection. It puts a man on the path of his destiny." (339)

Libra's narrative gives us conspiracy as religion, a development, incidentally, that harkens back to or revisions the origins of the "paranoid style" in the Providential aesthetic (see Chapter Two). On the other hand, in providing this perspective, DeLillo deliberately sets us at odds with Nicholas Branch, the only protagonist of *Libra* not involved in the conspiracy to assassinate JFK. Branch is a retired senior analyst of the CIA who has been "hired on contract to write the secret history of the assassination of President Kennedy" (15), and in the novel—in stark contrast to the rapidly developing conspiratorial plots—this is all that Branch ever does: he sits in his "book-filled room, the room of documents, the room of theories and dreams" (14).

In Branch, therefore, DeLillo creates a passive version of Oedipa Maas, and one without the hope of lot 49. Whereas Oedipa still has a husband, still meets and interacts with people, Branch has only the assassination files:

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> But he knows where everything is. From a stack of folders that reaches halfway up a wall, he smartly plucks the one he wants. The stacks are everywhere. The legal pads and cassette tapes are everywhere. The books fill tall shelves along three walls and cover the desk, a table and much of the floor. There is a massive file cabinet stuffed with documents so old and densely packed they may be ready to ignite spontaneously. Heat and light. There is no formal system to help him track the material in the room. He uses hand and eye, color and shape and memory, the configuration of suggestive things that link an object to its contents. He wakes up suddenly, wondering where he is. (14-15)

DeLillo's prose is never as magnificent and imaginative as here. Branch, we discover, has an almost symbiotic relationship with the documents he studies—a relationship, as it emerges, which entails devastating effects on his psychological health. He alternates between a near-manic clarity (as above) and severe disorientation:

> He is in the fifteenth year of his labor and sometimes wonders if he is becoming bodiless. He knows he is getting old. There are times when he can't concentrate on the facts at hand and has to come back again and again to the page, the line, the fine-grained detail of a particular afternoon. He wanders in and out of these afternoons, the bright hot skies that give tone and depth to narrow data. He falls asleep sometimes, slumped in the chair, a hand curled on the broadloom rug. This is the room of growing old, the fireproof room, paper everywhere. (14)

Nor does DeLillo suggest a way out. Even the one figure with whom Branch interacts, the mysterious "Curator," also contributes to Branch's turmoil: "The Curator is quick to

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respond, firm in his insistence on forwarding precisely the right document in an area of research marked by ambiguity and error, by political bias, systematic failure" (15).

All these circumstances combine to make Nicholas Branch one of DeLillo's most remarkable fictional creations—an idea reinforced when we realize that Branch appears in only twenty or so of *Libra*'s four hundred and fifty pages. There is the fact too that Branch's situation crystallizes the problems that plague any investigation, real or fictional, of the JFK assassination:

> The documents are stacked everywhere. Branch has homicide reports and autopsy diagrams. He has the results of spectrographic test on bullet fragments. He has reports by acoustical consultants and experts in blur analysis. He studies blurs himself, stooped over photos taken in Dealey Plaza by people who thought they were there to see the head of state come riding nicely by. He has a magnifier. He has detailed maps of photographers' lines of sight.
>
> The Curator sends transcripts of closed committee hearings. He sends documents released under the Freedom of Information Act, other documents withheld from ordinary investigators or heavily censored. He sends new books all the time, each with a gleaming theory, supportable, assured. (59)

Such an enumeration of evidence accompanies nearly each of Branch's appearances. And with time, as the evidence grows increasingly grotesque and surreal, Branch increasingly struggles to accommodate it:

> Documents. There is Jack Ruby's mother's dental chart, dated January 15, 1938. There is a micrograph of three strands of Lee H. Oswald's pubic hair. Elsewhere (everything in the Warren Report is elsewhere) there is a detailed description of

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> this hair. It is smooth, not knobby. The scales are medium-size. The root area is rather clear of pigment.
>
> Branch doesn't know how to approach this kind of data. He wants to believe that the hair belongs in the record. It is vital to his sense of responsible obsession that everything in his room warrants careful study. Everything belongs, everything adheres [. . .] (181-82)

As in *The Crying of Lot 49*, the evidence reaches such a minute and tangential level that there no longer seems any rational way for Branch to separate the "essential" clues from the others.

Consequently, Branch develops a sort of rigidity that David Shapiro in *Neurotic Styles* cites as central in the clinically-paranoid mindset: "Acuteness and intensity of attention, when it is rigid, becomes exceedingly narrow in its focus; and the ultimate object of the suspicious person's intense, narrowly focused, and biased search is what we commonly call a 'clue.' The clue is the confirming evidence, perhaps insignificant to anyone else, that the suspicious person seizes on while at the same time disregarding all modifying and corrective facts that may surround it" (60). Branch is rigid in just this way. He operates as if it were all evidence—any item related to any figure connected in any way with the assassination. He also has other paranoid traits. Projective thinking, Shapiro continues, "the attribution to external figures of motivations, drives, or other tensions that are repudiated and intolerable to oneself," often accompanies this rigidity (68); and again we observe such a tendency in Branch:

> Branch sits in his glove-leather chair looking at the paper hills around him. Paper is beginning to slide out of the room and across the doorway to the house proper.

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> The floor is covered with books and papers. The closet is stuffed with materials he has yet to read. He has to wedge new books into the shelves, force them in, insert them sideways, squeeze everything, keep everything. There is nothing in the room that he can disregard as irrelevant or out-of-date. It all matters on one level or another. This is the room of lonely facts. The stuff keeps coming. (378)

Branch's documents seem to come alive. The evidence, apparently of its own volition, begins to pursue Branch in the way that he has been pursuing it. The internal hunt (via projection) becomes an external persecution.

Nor, more importantly, does the persecution end there. In addition to the conspiracy against JFK, Branch begins to find evidence of another conspiracy, one that has determined the direction of his own life:

> There are worrisome omissions, occasional gaps in the record. Of course Branch understands that the Agency is a closed system. He knows they will not reveal what they've learned to other agencies, much less to the public. This is why the history he has contracted to write is a secret one, meant for the CIA's own closed collection. But why are they withholding material from him as well? There's something they aren't telling him. The Curator delays, lately, in filling certain request for information, seems to ignore other requests completely. What are they holding back? How much more is there? Branch wonders if there is some limit inherent in the yielding of information gathered in secret. They can't give it *all* away, even to one of their own, someone pledged to confidentiality (442).

In an ultimate move of identification and internalization, Branch shifts himself from the position of observer, to that of target. The CIA, Branch's own organization, has now

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apparently turned against him and, even the Curator, Branch's one link to the outside world, is complicit it the plot. Further, this conspiracy has more ominous interests than just hindering Branch's work: "He knows he can't get out. The case will haunt him to the end. Of course they've known it all along. That's why they built this room for him, the room of growing old, the room of history and dreams" (445). As in Kennedy's case, this new conspiracy against Branch wants nothing less than the detective's ultimate annihilation.

In contrast to the proliferation of documents and growth of Branch's paranoia, DeLillo positions the progress—or, more accurately, stasis—of Branch's actual research. Unlike Oedipa (who at least forms provisional theories), Branch has stalled at the planning stage: "He sits under a lap robe and worries. The truth is he hasn't written all that much. He has extensive and overlapping notes—notes in three-foot drifts, all these years of notes. But of actual finished prose, there is precious little. It is impossible to stop assembling data. The stuff keeps coming. There are theories to evaluate, lives to ponder and mourn" (59). Here we see one of DeLillo's most audacious and original moves in creating Branch: we have a conspiracy theorist without a major conspiracy theory. Instead of detailing such a theory, then, the narrative increasingly draws our attention to Branch's hopelessness and deterioration:

> The sadness has fixed him to a chair, staring. He feels the soul of empty places, finds himself returning again and again to the pictures of the second-floor lunchroom in the Texas School Book Depository. Rooms, garages, streets were emptied out for the making of official pictures. Empty forever now, stuck in some picture limbo. He feels the souls of those who were there and left. He feels

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> sadness in objects, in warehouse cartons and blood-soaked clothes. He breathes in loneliness. He feels the dead in his room. (183)

It is hard to characterize the profound affect of such a passage. Against the lists of evidence and stacks of documents, DeLillo sets these stark and poignant descriptions of Branch's inner life. The frenzy that marks Oedipa's behavior at the close of Pynchon's novel, here gives way to a fatigue and emptiness that surely touches one of the representational limits in conspiracy theory fiction. In addition, we see that in DeLillo's narrative, as I argued in the Introduction in regard to conspiracy theory narratives generally, there arises an entangling of clinical paranoia and the "paranoid style."

So given these two powerful literary depictions of the conspiracy theorist, Oedipa Maas and Nicholas Branch, what conclusions can we draw? What qualities, for example, unite these two seemingly disparate figures? We can, of course, make a number of provisional connections. For example, from these two figures we see that conspiracy theorists emerge both in response to the complex evidence they confront and because of their own psychological predispositions. Further, as Branch's case also shows, the conspiracy theorist need not have formed any actual theories, but rather can exist "on the cusp" of their creation. Finally, an obsessive level of determination marks the conspiracy theorist: the more staggering the project, the more mobilized the theorist becomes. Conversely, it may also be useful to return to how David Shapiro characterizes the paranoid trait of rigidity, a trait Shapiro himself calls "the most fundamental one" (56). Rigidity, Shapiro tells us, is in fact an umbrella term which actually covers a number of behavioral traits. On one hand, rigid paranoids are exceptional people in that they have an intense and acute ability to observe. Nothing escapes their attention which is "extremely

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keen and often penetrating." On the other hand, these same paranoids are incapable of any other mode of existence; they know only how to search and, more specifically, how to orient their search according to their individual fixation (58ff). By extension, therefore, conspiracy theorists will find a conspiracy wherever they look. Such an approach severely restricts the paranoid's cognitive capabilities:

> the paranoid person searches intensely for confirmation of his anticipations [. . . and] those same rigid anticipations of what he will find allow him to feel entitled to discredit and disregard apparent contradiction. Between these two attitudes, he is bound to "find" what he is looking for. In this process, intellectual capacity, keenness, and acuteness of attention become not guarantees of realistic judgment, but, on the contrary, instruments of bias. (60)

The paranoid necessarily makes everything "fit." This tendency, in turn, stems from a deeper psychological source. Everything must fit because paranoids cannot tolerate uncertainty and they dread anything new, anything that might surprise them. As a result, they "are also conspicuously hypersensitive and hyperalert" (61) and so constantly seeking a constantly evasive closure. Given these tendencies, therefore, we can develop a refined understanding of Branch and Oedipa. Shapiro's characterization of paranoia rigidity fits well both with the stance Oedipa increasingly comes to assume at the close of *The Crying of Lot 49*, and with the tendencies Branch displays in all of his appearances in *Libra*. Both figures search intensely and their conspiracy theories attempt to cover the many diverse and disparate clues. Further, we can even argue that when Oedipa and Branch turn their respective conspiracies into self-persecuting phenomena, the paranoid fear of surprise motivates them. It is better to anticipate the conspiracy and be wrong than

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to catch it only when it is too late. Finally, we should also note that in the cases of Oedipa and Branch, at least, the paranoia seems to go both ways—it arises out of the "paranoid" circumstances of the case but also because of a predisposition for clinical paranoia that Oedipa and Branch also both seem to have.

To continue my discussion I now turn to the nineteenth century and specifically to the first literary detective, Edgar Allan Poe's creation, the Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin. Dupin appears in three of Poe's stories, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), "The Mystery of Marie Rôget" (1842/45), and "The Purloined Letter" (1845), but here I shall limit myself to one, "The Mystery of Marie Rôget." I choose this story because in it Dupin's situation curiously resembles Nicholas Branch's predicament in *Libra*. Both men confront a seemingly contradictory array of clues, and both men act as "armchair" detectives, tackling the crime at a remove (i.e., never leaving their quarters) via newspaper accounts and other such materials. On the other hand, there is also a major difference between the two investigations. Whereas Branch's detective efforts ultimately lead to failure and to Branch's own psychological breakdown, Dupin via his ratiocination achieves a thorough and resounding success.

"The Mystery of Marie Rôget," though set in Paris and fictional, finds its basis in a real murder, that of Mary Cecilia Rogers of New York, a situation Poe clarifies in one of his footnotes: "Herein, under pretence of relating the fate of a Parisian *grisette*, the author has followed, in minute detail, the essential, while merely paralleling the inessential, facts of the real murder of Mary Rogers. Thus all argument upon the fiction is applicable to the truth; and the investigation of the truth was the object" (27). I proceed with the fictional story. When Dupin first encounters the case, it is known only that Marie

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Rôget has been murdered because her corpse (which Poe describes in rather graphic and minute detail) has been found floating in the Seine. On the morning of her disappearance—a Sunday, four days before the discovery of the corpse—Marie had left her home, ostensibly to spend the day with an aunt, or so she told her lover, St. Eustache, who was to retrieve her in the evening. That evening, however, it rained; Marie's mother made an enigmatic remark, that she would "never see Marie again"; St. Eustache failed to keep the appointment; and the next morning it emerged that Marie had never made it to her aunt's house. In addition, after Dupin takes the case, a few more details come to light. The owner of an inn divulges that a man accompanied by a girl resembling Marie stayed at the inn and then left; that a gang of ruffians appeared in the area around the same time; and that some time after "the screams of a female" were heard in the vicinity. Finally, a group of children discovers the apparent spot of Marie's assault, a thicket near the Seine.

The problem lies in how to interpret this information, a problem Dupin tackles in a very specific manner. First, as mentioned, in conducting his investigation he never leaves his quarters. Instead, Inspector G— of the police department first solicits Dupin's help because the crime has baffled the police and the public: "As time passed and no discovery ensued, a thousand contradictory rumors were circulated, and journalists busied themselves in *suggestions*. Among these, the one which attracted the most notice, was the idea that Marie Roget still lived—that the corpse found in the Seine was that of some other unfortunate" (33). Dupin encounters a situation analogous to that of Nicholas Branch. The mass of contradictory facts inspires a series of inadequate theories, and it becomes Dupin's job to, first, refute these theories and, second, propose his own alternate and "correct" theory. As to the other theories, they can be summed up thus: *L'Etoile*

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argues that the corpse discovered is not Marie's, that she is still alive; or (later) that if Marie is dead, then M. Beauvais, the friend who found and identified the corpse, is the murderer. *Le Commerciel* blames the ruffian gang. *Le Soleil* affirms that the spot in the thicket was in fact the crime scene. In other words, though the situation is admittedly not as complex or of the same quality as that that Branch encounters, it is of the same kind. Obscure and baffling circumstances surround the certainty of the crime.

Dupin begins his investigation with a related concession. He admits the simplicity of the crime itself: "'This is an *ordinary*, although an atrocious, instance of crime. There is nothing peculiarly *outré* about it. You will observe that, for this reason, the mystery has been considered easy, when for this reason, it should have been considered difficult of solution'" (37). What we have is nothing more original than a murder. The investigative confusion stems from the method used, from the fact that the public has tackled the problem only in a general way:

> "For the court, guided itself by the general principles of evidence—the recognized and *booked* principles—is averse from swerving at particular instances. And this steadfast adherence to principle, with rigorous disregard of the conflicting exception, is a sure mode of attaining the *maximum* of attainable truth, in any long sequence of time. The practice, *en masse*, is therefore philosophical; but it is not the less certain that it engenders vast individual error." (44-45)

The public has single-mindedly pursued a theory, Dupin argues, without adapting this theory to the specific circumstances. To avoid this approach Dupin confines himself only to the most basic facts: "'For our own purpose, therefore, if not for the purpose of justice, it is indispensable that our first step should be the determination of the identity of the

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corpse with the Marie Roget who is missing'" (38). Such a matter-of-fact style allows Dupin to avoid the confusion that has plagued the newspapers—each of which he now systematically refutes. Through these refutations, which become quite minute and which make the story somewhat heavy going, Poe attempts to create a new kind of literary effect. In contrast to the newspapers' sensationalism, Dupin's ratiocination produces results—or so Poe's narrative suggests—that are remarkably clear and logically indisputable. Dupin, for example, effortlessly deduces that M. Beauvais is not the guilty party (45) and that the crime scene has been tampered with (53). In turn, these individual points steadily converge towards Dupin's final and comprehensive theory.

Such a description, however, misses one significant element of Dupin's method. After refuting the newspaper accounts, Dupin raises a series of questions the newspapers have missed (47). To answer these questions, he next draws attention to the importance of "collateral evidence":

> "The history of human knowledge has so uninterruptedly shown that to collateral, or incidental, or accidental events we are indebted for the most numerous and valuable discoveries, that it has at length become necessary, in prospective view of improvement, to make not only large, but the largest, allowances for inventions that shall arise by chance, and quite out of the range of ordinary expectation. It is no longer philosophical to base upon what has been a vision of what is to be. *Accident* is admitted as a portion of the substructure. We make chance a matter of absolute calculation. We subject the unlooked for and unimagined to the mathematical *formulae* of the schools." (48)

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The passage gives us a fascinating glimpse into Dupin's methods, and provides a wonderful point at which to distinguish the detective from the conspiracy theorist. In one stroke Dupin both opens up the narrow "facts" of the crime to the sphere of the seemingly irrelevant (this too is what the conspiracy theorist does) *and* simultaneously again restricts this new range by asserting that he can separate the seemingly irrelevant from the actually irrelevant (the stage, of course, at which the conspiracy theorist, usually because of rigidity, stalls).

What follows, then, is Dupin's tour-de-force act of selecting and organizing the "collateral" details. As a response to *L'Etoile* et al, Dupin presents his own series of newspaper articles (48-50), returns to an earlier incident in Marie's life (i.e., a previous disappearance) hitherto overlooked by everyone else, and enumerates the essential facts—that Marie had planned a second elopement (the previous disappearance was the first) (50), that she took a series of steps to further this plan (51), that her murderer was an individual not a gang (56), and that this murderer moved Marie's corpse to the river by a special contrivance (57). These facts, in turn, lead to Dupin's theory: that the murder or accident happened in the thicket or, surprisingly, at the inn; that the criminal was Marie's other lover—not St. Eustache, but a swarthy seaman; and, finally, that this man has not come forward for the reward because he acted alone and fears being discovered (59-60). In addition, Dupin even makes a prophecy—that a rudderless boat found the day after the crime will lead to the murderer: "'Now *where* is that rudderless boat? Let it be one of our first purposes to discover. With the first glimpse we obtain of it, the dawn of our success shall begin. This boat shall guide us, with a rapidity which will surprise even ourselves, to him who employed it in the midnight of the fatal Sabbath. Corroboration will rise upon

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corroboration, and the murderer will be traced'" (61). Nothing, it seems, escapes Dupin. His knowledge extends in all directions and his sleuthing leads to the criminal's arrest: "We feel it advisable only to state, in brief, that the result desired was brought to pass" (61). By the end of the story, therefore, Poe positions Dupin as the perfect Subject Who Knows, one—we might say—with almost God-like omniscience.

Yet before leaving Dupin, I want to make one last observation. As mentioned, he takes up the case of Marie Rôget at the behest of the police. Dupin, however, is not a police detective. Upholding the law, at least in "The Mystery of Marie Rôget," is never mentioned as one of Dupin's motivations. Instead, he accepts the case because it allows him to use his powers of ratiocination and because of the money involved, the fact that Inspector G— makes him "a direct and certainly liberal proposition" (31). In fact, since Dupin solves a case in which the police have failed, he even emerges as a figure superior to that institution. When we turn to the Victorian novel, therefore, it is interesting that Dupin's most immediate and obvious successors should be police detectives—namely, Inspector Bucket of *Bleak House* and Inspector Cuff of *The Moonstone*. How do we account for this development? To answer this question I begin with a look at the history of the British police. Such a discussion, I believe, will be useful both in understanding the historical context out of which these two detectives (who will be among my primary subjects for the rest of the chapter) emerge, and because I return to the institution of the police again in Chapter Five.

As Phillip Thurmond Smith shows, before the nineteenth century British law enforcement was seen as a community responsibility. The structure generally in place relied on four types of officers—the parish constable, the nightwatchman, the parish

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beadle (who also had administrative functions) and, above these, the unpaid justice of the peace, "whose responsibility was to maintain law and order and to mobilize the forces at his disposal against disorder." These "forces" included the army, the militia, and the volunteers (Smith 19). Unfortunately, as policing at this point was a parish matter, the effectiveness of these forces depended on the zeal, sobriety and competence of the individual (20). So, adds Clive Emsley, because such forces were not always successful and because citizens themselves frequently offered rewards for the apprehension of offenders, a class of professional thief-takers arose to supplement the parish system. These thief-takers, the most famous of whom was Jonathan Wild (to whom I return briefly in Chapter Five), however, often grew corrupt and Wild, for example, "became a major receiver and controller of criminal gangs" (Emsley 18).

Eventually, the famous Bow-Street Runners succeeded the thief-takers. The Bow-Street Runners were the creation of Henry Fielding, the Bow-Street magistrate who in 1749 establish this first organized group of detectives (Smith 21). Like the thief-takers, the Bow-Street runners, writes Philip Collins, generally operated via rewards and private fees, and their work occasionally "included the arrangement of compromises whereby stolen cash or goods were restored to their owners without prosecutions being entered—but this occurred, as a Parliamentary Committee of 1823 found, with the Magistrates' sanction and generally at the owners request" (Collins 199). In addition, given the nature of the system, it was almost inevitable that the Bow-Street Runners would use paid informers and occasionally collaborate with the thieves. Often there was no other way to receive stolen property (Collins 202). In fact, the success of the Bow-Street Runners frequently depended on their familiarity with the criminal underground (Smith 63). With

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time, however, the reputation of the Bow-Street Runners suffered, as did the reputation of the parish law enforcement system. We see hints of this already in Shakespeare's comic portrayals of Constables Dogberry and Verges (*Much Ado About Nothing*), while in an article on "Law Enforcement," Betty Richardson shows that by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a series of bloody incidents emphatically brought the old system's drawbacks to the fore. These incidents included the Gordon Riots of 1780, the anti-Corn Law demonstrations and the Peterloo Massacre of 1819 (Richardson 436). Further, the Industrial Revolution spurred the rise in crime and violence because the Revolution transformed the nature of British society—it spurred urbanization and population growth, and so created circumstances like urban overcrowding, urban squalor and unemployment (Smith 16).

As a response to these circumstances, over the 1820s Robert Peel, the British Home Secretary, introduced a number of law enforcement bills, culminating in the Metropolitan Police Act of 1829. This Act for the first time established an extensive and paid police force which was under the control of two commissioners, Charles Rowan and Richard Mayne, who were directly responsible to Peel. The Act itself, and many of its important innovations such as police uniforms and the method of organizing and disciplining the force, derived from policing practices in Ireland where the police had already been successful in controlling civil disorder. In addition, the central control of the British commissioners, Rowan and Mayne, ensured a number of benefits, including an impersonal and bureaucratic police force that operated across parish boundaries and that could escape the intervention of local partisan politics. The Act also empowered the commissioners to choose and train their police officers, and to decide how financial

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resources would be allocated (Smith 23ff / Emsley 24). Rowan and Mayne generally drew their officers from the lower social groups and usually from populations outside London in order to ensure freedom from any local patronage or bias. Each police officer had to meet strict qualifications, and all police posts (with the exception of the commissioners) were filled according to merit, i.e., based on the officers' length of tenure, record of activity, intelligence and good conduct. (Collins 219 and Smith 25ff). Finally, although police officers had a range of duties, including pounding the beat, riot control and acting as light troopers in case of an invasion, their primary work consisted of crime prevention and, to a lesser extent, detection. They pursued this crime prevention primarily by enforcing "decorum"—specifically, controlling the street communities of the poor, restraining drunken behavior, and by containing "rough" areas and "border" communities. Such work, however, resulted in resistance to the police presence among the lower classes and even certain sectors of the middle-class. (Smith 23ff and Emsley 52ff).

Surprisingly, the Detective Department, the most famous extension of the police force, initially did not fare as well as the regular police force had and also encountered public resistance. The Department, which arose in 1842 and (like the Bow-Street Runners) was descended from the thief-takers, consisted of two inspectors and eight sergeants (including Jonathan Whicher and Frederick Field, the real-life models for Inspector Cuff and Inspector Bucket respectively), who were free of jurisdictional restraints and so could investigate crimes anywhere in the country. The detectives' primary duties consisted of theft prevention and criminal surveillance, but as Carolyn Dever argues, the detectives also worked to buttress the country against infiltration by

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spies. Yet the detectives' duties and methods—whatever their benefit to Victorian society—also resulted in various hardships for the detectives themselves. The detectives worked long hours in isolation and had few opportunities for promotion. In addition, as mentioned, they encountered resistance from the public. Whereas the regular police force wore uniforms and so had a visible and reassuring presence, the detectives operated "undercover." Consequently, for these and similar reasons, public opinion asserted that detectives gave the government too much power. This, in turn, led to fears that Britain too would soon be plagued by something like the notorious French spy network (Smith 62ff and Dever 287ff).

Such then was the situation of the Detective Department in about 1850 when Charles Dickens launched his series of detective and police stories in *Household Words*. These articles, which Dickens collaborated on with his co-editor W.H. Wills and which appeared from 1850 to 1853, were notable for their extremely laudatory depictions of the police and detective forces. As Elizabeth Dale Samet notes, Dickens worked hard to garner support for the Detective Department and his articles "helped to demystify the role of the Metropolitan Police, and to accentuate their salutary influence, by demonstrating that crime was being elevated to an art in the rapidly changing city" (133). Dickens, it seems, admired the police force because it was a democratic institution and because, according to Ian Ousby, it provided a welcome respite from a past which Dickens saw "as a saga of Tory muddle and cruelty" (Ousby 88ff). In fact, Dickens' adoration was so intense and his *Household Words* articles so unabashed in their praise that his friends accused him of overestimation, and at least one contemporary critic, Philip Collins, has charged him with "boyish hero-worship" (206).

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To my argument, however, what Dickens believed does not matter as much as what he actually wrote in *Household Words* and how he transformed this material in creating Inspector Bucket—Auguste Dupin's first Victorian successor and a figure that brings us one step closer to the conspiracy theorist. Dickens, first of all, admired the Detective Department because he saw it as a vast improvement over the old Bow-Street Runners, a group he had assailed in *Oliver Twist* and which he also mentions in *Household Words*:

> We are not by any means devout believers in the old Bow Street Police. To say the truth, we think there was a vast amount of humbug about those worthies. Apart from many of them being men of very indifferent character, and far too much in the habit of consorting with thieves and the like, they never lost a public occasion of jobbing and trading in mystery and making the most of themselves. Continually puffed besides by incompetent magistrates anxious to conceal their own deficiencies, and hand-in-glove with the penny-a-liners of that time, they became a sort of superstition. Although as a Preventive Police they were utterly ineffective, and as a Detective Police were very loose and uncertain in their operations, they remain with some people a superstition to the present day. ("The Detective Police," 34)

I return briefly to the Bow-Street Runners in the next chapter. Here I want only to note that Dickens cites the Runners for a number of faults, including the interactions with criminals and their lack of humility. In contrast to the Runners, the Detective Department, argues Dickens, has a number of admirable strengths: "On the other hand, the Detective Force organized since the establishment of the existing Police, is so well chosen and

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trained, proceeds so systematically and quietly, does its business in such a workmanlike manner, and is always so calmly and steadily engaged in the service of the public, that the public really do not know enough of it, to know a tithe of its usefulness" ("The Detective Police," 34). Dickens commends the professionalism of the detectives, and his articles arise from a desire to bring this quality of the detectives to public notice. He underlines the detectives' observational skills: "Every man of them, in a glance, immediately takes an inventory of the furniture and an accurate sketch of the editorial presence. The Editor feels that any gentleman in company could take him up, if need should be, without the smallest hesitation, twenty years hence" ("The Detective Police," 36). He emphasizes their intelligence:

> They are, one and all, respectable-looking men; of perfectly good deportment and unusual intelligence; with nothing lounging or slinking in their manners; with an air of keen observation and quick perception when addressed; and generally presenting in their faces, traces more or less marked of habitually leading lives of strong mental excitement. They have all good eyes; and they all can, and they all do, look full at whomsoever they speak to. ("The Detective Police," 37).

And in tales like "On Duty with Inspector Field" or "Three Detective Anecdotes," Dickens gives strong examples of the detectives' competence and powers in police work:

> Yet Inspector Field stands in this den, the Sultan of the place. Every thief here cowers before him, like a schoolboy before his schoolmaster. All watch him, all answer when addressed, all laugh at his jokes, all seek to propitiate him. This cellar company alone, to say nothing of the crowd surrounding the entrance from the street above, and making the steps shine with eyes is strong enough to murder

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> us all, and willing enough to do it; but, let Inspector Field have a mind to pick out one thief here, and take him; let him produce that ghostly truncheon from his pocket, and say, with his business-air, 'My lad, I want you!' and all Rats' Castle shall be stricken with paralysis, and not a finger move against him, as he fits the handcuffs on! ("On Duty with Inspector Field," 121-22)

Like Poe with Dupin at the conclusion of "The Mystery of Marie Roget," Dickens positions Inspector Field as not only the perfect Subject Who Knows, but also as one extremely capable of acting on his knowledge.

Yet, admittedly, Dickens does seem to have turned off his critical apparatus in composing these sketches. The tales display signs, as Ian Ousby has argued, of being "impressionistic and unstatistical in the extreme" (Ousby 86). This, however, is not the case with Dickens' great fictional detective, Inspector Bucket. Bucket, as I noted, derives directly from a real life detective, Inspector Frederick Field, the central figure of "On Duty with Inspector Field." Dickens used this sketch not only obtain some of Bucket's behavioral qualities, but also to create Tom's-All-Alone, the famous working-class slum in *Bleak House* (1852-53). Although, as Julian Symons writes in *Bloody Murder*, Bucket "engages in no spectacular feats of detection, [he] is shown as a shrewd and sympathetic man" (47), in terms of my argument these are exactly the qualities that make him an important character. Unlike Dupin who—however successful he may be—has few, if any, endearing human traits and so emerges as little more than "a brain on a stick," with Bucket Dickens engineers a new and complex type of detective. Specifically, this originality stems from Dickens' portrayal of the toll that detective work has taken on Bucket's emotional and private life, and because Bucket fails in his most important

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commission—that of tracking down and saving Lady Dedlock before her death. In fact, these qualities are so distinct that Bucket has already occasioned a fair amount of critical debate, including strong readings by both Ian Ousby and D.A. Miller.

In *The Bloodhounds of Heaven*, Ian Ousby argues that in contrast to the *Household Words* articles, "Dickens' fiction [i.e., *Bleak House*] reveals an intelligence and subtlety for which neither [Dickens'] journalism nor his private life fully prepares the reader" (90). Further, adds Ousby, Bucket embodies "lower middle-class respectability" (98), yet because of his detective abilities, "he also exudes an aura of mysterious power which at times hints at the supernatural" (99). The power of Bucket's character stems from the fact that Dickens gives us a balanced and critically-developed figure. Bucket has the mystical, inhuman Subject Who Knows qualities of Dupin, but these qualities are tempered and grounded by Bucket's visibly-low social status and the humanizing detail of Bucket having a wife. Yet, Ousby continues, the detective is crucial to the plot of *Bleak House* because his detection uncovers "[t]he mysterious family connections, so long obscured and rendered so destructive by their obscurity" (110), and because he resolves a number of the novel's important mystery plots: "arresting Hortense for Tulkinghorn's murder, revealing the truth about Lady Dedlock's past to her husband, dealing with the attempt by Smallweed and his associates to blackmail Sir Leicester, searching for Lady Dedlock after her flight from home, and finally, forcing Smallweed to hand over to Jarndyce the missing will in the Chancery suit" (105). Yet, conversely, Ousby also emphasizes that Bucket becomes a benevolent force only with time and that "in his early appearances his detection tends to be harmful" (101). Finally, there are limits to Bucket's power for another important reason: "The ending of Jarndyce versus Jarndyce is the

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culmination of an inevitable and destined pattern which is beyond the control of the human actors in the drama" (Ousby 107). Dickens, Ousby concludes, has Bucket fail in order that he, Dickens, may pursue a larger ideological goal—having *Bleak House* demonstrate that Providence controls all human relations.

In *The Novel and the Police*, D.A. Miller, like Ousby, sees the presence of the police and of Bucket specifically as an ideological cipher in the narrative of *Bleak House*, one that acts as a foil to the Chancery lawsuit. Chancery, argues Miller, represents an endless and anonymous lawsuit, one that raises a profound despair as to its ever being resolved. The figure of Bucket (a policeman) provides a simple, and so contrasting, representation of order and power—one that is comprehensible and reassuring (69 and 73). Further, continues Miller, the relation between these two narrative components, Chancery and the police, works as an analogue to the enormous novel itself whose narrative, on one hand, sprawls for pages and pages, but which, on the other hand, ultimately appears to move towards closure (89ff). In other words, we see that these two tendencies—endless, anonymous sprawl and contained, recognizable representation—mark the two structural extremes of *Bleak House*. Yet because the novel contains both, it really cannot endorse either. Rather, the novel deliberately entangles the two tendencies in order to promote "the family":

> Envisioning the family now as a firm counterweight to social institutions, now as a docile function of them, here as the insuperable refuge from the carceral, there as the insufferable replica of it, the novel poses the question of the family, which it thereby designates as the object of struggle. Rather as Esther takes up this question as the necessity of founding and keeping Bleak House, so the novel

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> extends the questions to its readers, both as a principle of hope and exhortation, as it were, to work at home. (105)

The novel, argues Miller, presents two extremes—one desirable (the Police), one not (Chancery). The home, in order that it avoid the intervention of the police, must be maintained with a police-like discipline, i.e., have the police built into it. Otherwise, if home verges towards disorder, towards a Chancery-like state, then the police, an external force, will have to intervene, will have to enter the home—something, of course, that the reader doesn't want. This then is the ideology that underlies *Bleak House* and, consequently, Miller's reading parallels Ousby's. Both men position Bucket as an ideological cipher, now working for a Providential ideology (Ousby), now for a carceral (Miller).

I, however, want to avoid such a reading, first, by placing Bucket in the progression from detective to conspiracy theorist, and, second, by foregrounding Bucket's psychological tendencies—a move I hope will restore Bucket to the position of human being (however fictional), a trait Ousby and Miller neglect. I begin by returning to two figures I've already discussed, August Dupin and Nicholas Branch. These two men occupy opposite ends of the detective/conspiracy theorist spectrum. Although the men have much in common, what distinguishes them most is, on one hand, Dupin's inhuman detachment and God-like omniscience, and, on the other hand, Nicholas Branch's increasing mental deterioration and investigative failure. Where does Bucket stand in relation to these two men? Bucket, as I mentioned earlier, is the Victorian fictional successor to Dupin, yet we see marked differences between their respective creations. Dupin is passive and works wholly from his quarters; Bucket vigorously pursues his

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criminals and, when the occasion demands (the arrest of Hortense, for example), he acts. Dupin succeeds and so initiates the criminal's arrest; Bucket produces mixed results—important resolutions, one spectacular failure. Finally, Dupin is a private investigator, and, as we saw in "The Mystery of Marie Rôget," motivated by financial interests; Bucket, though he receives pay from Tulkinghorn and Sir Leicester, is a public official, a professional member of Peel's Metropolitan Police. Or, to be more accurate, Bucket pursues both his own interests (financial gain) and those of the law; when these coincide and involve helping a sympathetic figure (e.g., Esther), we can read Bucket, as does Ousby, as a benevolent character.

In considering Bucket, David Shapiro's work on paranoia again proves useful. As we saw, Shapiro cites rigidity (bias, loss of reality, projection, hypersensitivity, etc.) as the fundamental characteristic of paranoia. Does Bucket exhibit such rigidity? On one hand, not really. Bucket seems to have a good, even pragmatic, grasp of reality:

> "Whenever a person says to you that they are as innocent as can be in all concerning money, look well after your own money, for they are dead certain to collar it if they can. Whenever a person proclaims to you 'In worldly matters I'm a child,' you consider that that person is only a-crying off from being held accountable and that you have got that person's number, and it's Number One. Now, I am not a poetical man myself, except in a vocal way when it goes round a company, but I'm a practical one, and that's my experience. So's this rule. Fast and loose in one thing, fast and loose in everything. I never knew it fail." (779)

Bucket's rules-of-thumb are reasonable, have been tried by "experience," and so he comfortably proffers them to other characters. In trapping Hortense too, Bucket displays

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a razor-sharp intuition: "'By the living Lord it flashed upon me, as I sat opposite to her at the table and saw her with a knife in her hand, that she had done it!'" (742); while his intelligence leads him to discover the importance of Lady Dedlock: "'What I have got to say is about her ladyship. She is the pivot it all turns on" (729). In fact, Bucket is the person that first assembles all the pieces of the *Bleak House* puzzle and, in a long exposition, presents them to Sir Leicester (730-31). What we have, therefore, is a figure who at times produces results as spectacular and final as Dupin's in "The Mystery of Marie Rôget."

Yet Bucket also has his limitations. These limitations, for example, emerge in Bucket's final exchange with Hortense. Hortense tempers what, it turns out, is Bucket's greatest success in the novel. Even as he attempts to whisk her away after the arrest, Hortense turns the tables and enumerates his failures, namely his inability to save some of the novel's central characters—Mr. Tulkinghorn, Lady Dedlock and Sir Leicester (746). Further, Bucket seems somewhat of a mercenary: money occasionally determines the direction of his efforts. As a result, he appears benevolent when he works in Esther's interest, or malevolent when Tulkinghorn is his employer. Bucket thus appears to lack a firm moral center. Finally, there is the fact, as many critics have noted, that Bucket has a barren marriage and that his work, however suitable he may be for it, has also taken its physical toll: "Refreshed by sleep, Mr. Bucket rises betimes in the morning and prepares for a field-day. Smartened up by the aid of a clean shirt and a wet hairbrush, with which instrument, on occasions of ceremony, he lubricates such thin locks as remain to him after his life of severe study, Mr. Bucket lays in a breakfast of two mutton chops as a foundation to work upon, together with tea, eggs, toast, and marmalade on a

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corresponding scale" (726-27). Here Dickens himself undercuts the initial mood of renewal by simultaneously drawing attention to Bucket's physical deterioration, even if only in this minor way.

On the other hand, in addition to this random assortment of traits—some to his credit, some not—Bucket also exhibits some characteristics which together create a particular psychological alignment. For example, Bucket seems to have a lot of energy: "Time and place cannot bind Mr. Bucket. Like man in the abstract, he is here to-day and gone to-morrow—but very unlike man indeed, he is here again the next day. This evening he will be casually looking into the iron extinguishers at the door of Sir Leicester Dedlock's house in town; and to-morrow morning he will be walking on the leads at Chesney Wold [. . .]" (716). In pursuing his duties, Bucket displays an extraordinary level of agility and persistence. Such qualities, in turn, benefit his investigations:

> All this time, kept fresh by a certain enjoyment of the work in which he was engaged, he was up and down at every house we came to, addressing people whom he had never beheld before as old acquaintances, running in to warm himself at every fire he saw, talking and drinking and shaking hands at every bar and tap, friendly with every waggoner, wheelwright, blacksmith, and toll- taker, yet never seeming to lose time, and always mounting to the box again with his watchful, steady face and his business-like "Get on, my lad!" (784)

Bucket's efforts never seem to flag and, however much he may "socialize," he can direct and control his behavior to the purpose at hand. Further, the acquaintances Bucket makes through this work repeatedly prove invaluable:

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> "I know so much about so many characters, high and low, that a piece of information more or less don't signify a straw. I don't suppose there's a move on the board that would surprise ME, and as to this or that move having taken place, why my knowing it is no odds at all, any possible move whatever (provided it's in a wrong direction) being a probable move according to my experience. Therefore, what I say to you, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, is, don't you go and let yourself be put out of the way because of my knowing anything of your family affairs." (729)

Whereas Poe characterizes Dupin most through the ability to ratiocinate (of which "The Mystery of Marie Rôget" is one extended example) and through the powerful access to knowledge such ratiocination allows, Dickens intensifies this characteristic in Bucket. The detective, Dickens shows, can be dramatic—startling. Bucket's mind moves quickly, the answers are *already* at hand, and what had been laborious and minute analysis in Dupin, becomes with Bucket stunning moments of self-assertion and revelation.

Simultaneously, however energetic he may be, Bucket derives little genuine pleasure from his social activities and his behavior often appears mannered. For example, Bucket walks in a very unusual way: "As they walk along, Mr. Snagsby observes, as a novelty, that however quick their pace may be, his companion still seems in some undefinable manner to lurk and lounge; also, that whenever he is going to turn to the right or left, he pretends to have a fixed purpose in his mind of going straight ahead, and wheels off, sharply, at the very last moment" (320). Of course, Dickens may employ such nuances for the sake of drama, yet Bucket's behavior does assume a highly controlled form. More substantially, even in his most visibly happy moments—the evening at the

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Bagnets in Chapter Forty-Nine, for example—Bucket acts in a very distinct, i.e., threatening and sinister, way: "At length Mr. George rises to depart. At the same moment Mr. Bucket, with the secret sympathy of friendship, also rises. He dotes upon the children to the last and remembers the commission he has undertaken for an absent friend" (680). Although Bucket seems to enjoy himself, flirting with Mrs. Bagnet and playing with the Bagnet children, we see from this passage that Bucket always keeps "a tender eye upon" Mr. George (680). In short, Bucket's vigilance never relaxes and his real interest, it emerges, lies in arresting Mr. George. In *Neurotic Styles*, David Shapiro cites such behavior, this constant "mobilization," as characteristic of the paranoid:

> It is not only that such specific physical behavior as gesture, expression, body movement, and the like, is so remarkably directed and intentional. The directedness of this behavior is only part of a larger directedness, namely, of activity as a whole. I mean by this that whatever the paranoid person does has an aim, a purpose. He does not say what he says just because it strikes him or because he feels like it. He never does anything whimsically, impulsively, for its immediate appeal, or for its own sake. What he says and does is designed, intended, purposeful. (76)

In this aspect of his behavior Bucket perfectly fits Shapiro's description. Both his individual gestures and his activities as a whole (and hence, by implication, those of many fictional detectives who will succeed him) exhibit the same purposefulness as those of the paranoid subject.

But how far beyond this individual characteristic does the correlation extend? As Dickens repeatedly notes, Bucket also has acute powers of observation: "He is a sharp-

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eyed man—a quick keen man—and he takes in everybody's look at him, all at once, individually and collectively, in a manner that stamps him a remarkable man" (677). Bucket, like the real detectives in the *Household Words* articles, needs only a glance to assess the people in his surroundings. Such glances often define his behavior: "Quiet among the undertakers and the equipages and the calves of so many legs all steeped in grief, Mr. Bucket sits concealed in one of the inconsolable carriages and at his ease surveys the crowd through the lattice blinds. He has a keen eye for a crowd—as for what not?—and looking here and there, now from this side of the carriage, now from the other, now up at the house windows, now along the people's heads, nothing escapes him" (717). Bucket, Dickens emphasizes, does not just limit his gaze to people. The detective's ability here, at Mr. Tulkinghorn's funeral, becomes so astute that "nothing escapes him." Or, consider the following passage:

> Clattering over the stones at a dangerous pace, yet thoughtfully bringing his keen eyes to bear on every slinking creature whom he passes in the midnight streets, and even on the lights in upper windows where people are going or gone to bed, and on all the turnings that he rattles by, and alike on the heavy sky, and on the earth where the snow lies thin—for something may present itself to assist him, anywhere—he dashes to his destination at such a speed that when he stops the horse half smothers him in a cloud of steam. (768)

With an intensity that dramatically mirrors the intense pursuit of Lady Dedlock, Bucket sends his roving eye over London. Yet this eye lights upon an odd array of places. Bucket looks to many expected objects—the people, for example, he and Esther pass, the London streets, the snow the carriage drives over—but also to a few unusual spots: the "upper

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windows" and, more significantly, "the heavy sky." Again, I don't want to deny the drama of the moment, the fact that such a close and literal reading of this passage may be off the mark, but still Bucket here exhibits a tendency to look a little too much, to be hypersensitive in the way Shapiro cites as characteristic of the paranoid. Nor, I must stress, is this a unique moment among Bucket's appearances:

> There he mounts a high tower in his mind and looks out far and wide. Many solitary figures he perceives creeping through the streets; many solitary figures out on heaths, and roads, and lying under haystacks. But the figure that he seeks is not among them. Other solitaries he perceives, in nooks of bridges, looking over; and in shadowed places down by the river's level; and a dark, dark, shapeless object drifting with the tide, more solitary than all, clings with a drowning hold on his attention. (770)

As Bucket continues his pursuit of Lady Dedlock, we get one of the most lyrical and striking passages in all of *Bleak House*. Dickens pushes the boundaries of his creative powers in an attempt to foreground the ardor of Bucket's pursuit, so that what in Dupin had been a kind of academic omniscience, becomes in Bucket a breath-taking panoptic search. Bucket's vision, we discover, meticulously hunts everywhere possible, from the heaths and roads, to the river and the objects therein. Yet what I find surprising about this passage is not what Bucket sees, but what he doesn't. Dickens' great irony emerges in that here, at Bucket's most astounding moment of perception, the detective looks not outward but instead "mounts a high tower *in his mind.*" What he observes, therefore, is as much reality as it is his own fantasy or projection—but a projection of such intensity that he mistakes it for objective reality.

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This projection, this loss of reality, is the same quality that I noted in both Oedipa Mass and Nicholas Branch, both of whom showed strong signs of clinical paranoia. Yet to say that Bucket is paranoid in this way, and to equate him with Branch and Oedipa, would be to reduce an otherwise complex, dramatic and original character. Admittedly, Bucket does display a number of traits which resemble paranoid rigidity—including the suspicious way in which he searches his surroundings, his hyperalertness, his mobilization (i.e., the fact that he always seems at work even in his most social moments) and his penchant for projection—and these traits do contribute to the originality of his character, but it might be better to say that Bucket has paranoid *tendencies*. Further, this is only one aspect of his character. What makes him most human, most authentic, are his failings—which Hortense underlines, which Bucket himself (however implicitly) comes to acknowledge, and which best emerge in his pursuit of Lady Dedlock. On one hand, the pursuit is unique in the pages of *Bleak House* as it provides the only instance of Bucket actually engaged in serious detective work. We see the untiring way in which Bucket operates, his search for clues and his follow-up of any leads. On the other hand, as the pursuit continues and the expected results elude Bucket's grasp, his assurance dramatically flags:

> As we advanced, I began to feel misgivings that my companion lost confidence. He was the same as before with all the roadside people, but he looked graver when he sat by himself on the box. I saw his finger uneasily going across and across his mouth during the whole of one long weary stage. I overheard that he began to ask the drivers of coaches and other vehicles coming towards us what passengers they had seen in other coaches and vehicles that were in advance. Their replies did not

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> encourage him. He always gave me a reassuring beck of his finger and lift of his eyelid as he got upon the box again, but he seemed perplexed now when he said, "Get on, my lad!" (784-85)

Further, as he loses the self-assurance, he turns to Esther for reinforcement: "'My dear,' he answered, 'I know, I know, and would I put you wrong, do you think? Inspector Bucket. Now you know me, don't you?'" (788). As the pursuit falters, we encounter a series of such surprising questions. However inflated Bucket's estimation of his own abilities might have been, his sense of self now unravels and he has to reevaluate himself and his abilities. In addition, this turn also gains much of its intensity because it precedes the most climactic moment in the novel, the death of Lady Dedlock.

In the end, therefore, Bucket emerges as one of Dickens' great creations—a compelling successor to the detective tradition begun by Dupin, but also a rich and complex figure in his own right, one with very human failings who tries to be the Subject Who Knows but doesn't quite make it. Bucket, of course, does find Lady Dedlock, but because he and Esther arrive too late to prevent Lady Dedlock's death his knowledge ultimately appears as somewhat lacking. Or, we could say, because of his paranoid tendencies Bucket brings us one step closer to the conspiracy theorist. In terms of my larger argument, however, both Dupin and Bucket lack one crucial component. Neither of these men ever confronts a genuine conspiracy. To conclude my discussion here I turn to Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* (1868) and, specifically, to three of the detectives there—Inspector Cuff, Ezra Jennings and Mr. Murthwaite. *The Moonstone*, though technically not the first detective novel—that honor goes to Charles Felix's *The Notting Hill Mystery* (1865)—is an immensely rich novel and, in British literary history, a very original one.

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Excepting epistolary novels, Dickens' *Bleak House*, and Collins' own *The Woman in White* (to which I return in Chapter Three), *The Moonstone* is one of the first British novels to use multiple narrators. However, this narrative structure notwithstanding, the novel owes much of its power as a conspiracy narrative to the highly imaginative characters Collins creates between its pages, among them Cuff and Jennings.

Equally important in contributing to the novel's power is the plot itself. Like Collins' characters, *The Moonstone*'s plot is an endless display of literary invention. Collins shows an amazing creative dexterity in taking the simple crime of theft, and surrounding it with a complex and interweaving series of details and secondary mysteries. His skill also emerges in his ability to organize and control this plot, to arouse and sustain our desire for an enigmatic object that remains absent through nearly the entire novel. Or, as Patrick Brantlinger writes, *The Moonstone* is "a big novel with a hole in the middle, tunnel vision, represented symbolically by the obsessive object named in its title: only find the Moonstone and all questions are answered" (22). Though Brantlinger's characterization is not quite right—the Moonstone is never recovered (by Rachel et al.) after its theft by Godfrey Ablewhite, yet the novel's questions are resolved—the answers, to which Brantlinger points, fill the plot's "hole" as well as, if not better than, the Moonstone itself could. I should also stress that to say the novel turns on Ablewhite's theft is also not quite accurate. Over the span of the novel, the Moonstone is in fact stolen three times—first by John Herncastle; next by the team (?) of Franklin Blake and Godfrey Ablewhite; and last by the Indian "conspiracy."

To continue my argument, I start with the second theft and its repercussions. Although like Dupin's crime, this theft is only a single, simple act (arguably composed of

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two parts—Blake's and Ablewhite's theft, and Ablewhite's delivery of the stone to Septimus Luker, the gem-dealer), it arises from complex circumstances, much like the crimes Auguste Dupin and Nicholas Branch confront. Like these latter crimes, it also creates a series of questions, "[an] infernal network of mysteries and uncertainties" (129). For example, in the first period, "The Loss of the Diamond," the theft spurs the following three questions:

1. Who stole the Moonstone?
2. What does Rachel Verinder know about the theft?
3. How do we account for Rosanna Spearman's behavior?

In the early portions of the second period, "The Discovery of the Truth," two new questions emerge:

4. Is the Moonstone in London and with Septimus Luker?
5. And, if so, who brought it there?

Finally, after Blake and Betteredge read Rosanna Spearman's letter, and after Rachel reveals her knowledge of the fateful night—two answers which had promised to clear up the mystery of the theft, but don't—we get a sixth question:

6. How do we explain Franklin Blake's strange actions?

In other words, an ostensibly simple event, the theft of a diamond, leads to a complicated set of mysteries—so complicated that Collins can only resolve them with what seems an outrageous solution, namely that Blake acted while only semi-conscious and under the influence of opium.

Nor do the difficulties end with the six primary questions. In addition to these mysteries Collins also loads the plot with a series of related but minor mysteries, many of

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them occasioned by the novel's multiple narrator structure. To cite just a few examples: there is the question of why the Indians, who appear early in Betteredge's narrative, fail to return to the Verinder house until Rachel's birthday—a question about which Betteredge speculates at some length: "Whether the jugglers heard, in the town, of Mr. Franklin having been seen at the bank, and drew their conclusions accordingly; or whether the boy really did see the Diamond where the Diamond was now lodged (which I, for one, flatly disbelieve); or whether, after all, it was a mere effect of chance, this at any rate is the plain truth—not the ghost of an Indian came near the house again, through the weeks that passed before Miss Rachel's birthday" (83). There arise various questions concerning Cuff's moral character—whether he can be trusted or not. For example, in one of the novel's most famous passages, each of the servants offers a different interpretation of the great detective:

> The cook was the first to enter the Court of Justice, otherwise my room. She remained but a short time. Report, on coming out: "Sergeant Cuff is depressed in his spirits; but Sergeant Cuff is a perfect gentleman." My lady's own maid followed. Remained much longer. Report, on coming out: "If Sergeant Cuff doesn't believe a respectable woman, he might keep his opinion to himself, at any rate!" Penelope went next. Remained only a moment or two. Report, on coming out: "Sergeant Cuff is much to be pitied. He must have been crossed in love, father, when he was a young man." The first housemaid followed Penelope. Remained, like my lady's maid, a long time. Report, on coming out: "I didn't enter her ladyship's service, Mr. Betteredge, to be doubted to my face by a low police-

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officer!" Rosanna Spearman went next. Remained longer than any of them. No report on coming out—dead silence, and lips as pale as ashes[, etc.] (153)

In the same way, confusion—at least momentarily—surrounds the death of Rosanna Spearman. Cuff, for instance, sees it as a "fatal accident" (196), while Betteredge labels it "a death of her own seeking" (197). Finally, beyond these mysteries which in context seem relevant to the plot, *The Moonstone* also contains apparently-tangential mysteries—the most obvious being the question of why Ablewhite and Rachel break off their engagement, a break which superficially appears to have nothing to do with the diamond's theft.

So without an answer to the question, Who stole the Moonstone?, we get a dizzying array of succeeding questions, and these questions in turn spur an equal number of theories. In fact, to answer just the primary six questions, the various characters propose a staggering number of solutions:

First Period

1. (Betteredge/Blake): the Indians stole the Moonstone (117)
2. (Seegrave): someone in the house stole the Moonstone (120), specifically
3. (Seegrave): Penelope (125)
4. (Blake): Rosanna stole the Moonstone (125)
5. (Seegrave): there was a conspiracy between the thief (Penelope) and the Indians (129)
6. (Cuff): the Moonstone has only been "lost" (140)

7a. (Cuff): Rosanna stole the Moonstone as an instrument (158) for

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7b. (Cuff): Rachel (173), in other words

7c. (Cuff): there was a conspiracy between Rachel and Rosanna (180) because

7d. (Cuff): Rachel needed the Moonstone in order to pay off her debts (206-207)

Second Period

8a. ("strangers"): there is a connection between the theft and the attacks on Ablewhite and Luker

(244, 248-50)

8b. ("scandal"): Ablewhite stole the Moonstone and pawned it with Luker (252)

8c. (Bruff): Ablewhite stole the Moonstone (261)

9a. (Clack): Blake stole the Moonstone (264)

9b. (Blake): Blake stole the Moonstone when drunk (381)

9c. (Bruff): Rosanna set up Blake (384-85)

9d. (Rachel): Blake stole the Moonstone in order to pay off his debts (400) and

9e. (Rachel): Blake pawned the Moonstone (402)

10a. (Bruff): Someone took the Moonstone to Luker (266)

10b. (Bruff): Whoever pawned the Moonstone is the thief (266)

11. (Ezra Jennings): Blake took the Moonstone, but it is still in the house (444)

To say the least, these theories do not form a steady progression towards the truth. Instead we get about eleven distinct theories, none of them compatible, to explain who took the diamond and where it is. Among these theories are even a few proto-"conspiracy theories"—theories that propose a conspiracy, but that are not foregrounded or accompanied by the "paranoid style" and so remain simply theories. Finally, for all the

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above theories, none hits the full truth. The truth, in fact, does not emerge until after the death of Ablewhite, when *Luker* comes forward to confirm that Blake semi-consciously gave the diamond to Ablewhite, and that the latter and Luker subsequently formed a conspiracy:

> Your cousin [Ablewhite] went to the door, and came back again. How was he to be sure that the conversation of that evening would be kept strictly secret between his friend and himself?
>
> Mr. Luker didn't profess to know how. If Mr. Godfrey had accepted his terms, Mr. Godfrey would have made him an *accomplice*, and might have counted on his silence as on a certainty. (512, emphasis added)

Luker reveals the fact that he first suggested the conspiracy and Ablewhite accepted. Or, to be more precise, in *The Moonstone*, the discovery of the truth depends on one of the actual conspirators coming forward with the key information.

Therefore, the fact that the truth emerges via Luker's confession demonstrates that *The Moonstone* does not even have a true Subject Who Knows to resolve its central mystery, a point that has already occasioned a fair amount of critical commentary. Ian Ousby, for example, argues that *The Moonstone*'s "detectives act not in succession but as a progressively expanding group out of whose combined activities the truth finally emerges. Each of them contributes something to the solution, but none of them is wholly right" (126). Yet Ousby somewhat misses the mark: he neglects the confessions of Luker and Rachel and, as my table shows, each detective does not contribute to the solution—some propose theories that are wrong or misleading. Anthea Trodd in *Domestic Crime in the Victorian Novel* is a little more accurate, arguing that the crime "is solved by the

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personal confession of Rachel to her lover [Blake], and by the detective work of the various gentleman amateurs" (27). Yet Trodd too is off the mark: Cuff is not an amateur, but a professional police detective; and Trodd also misses Luker's confession. Patrick Brantlinger, surprisingly, argues that there is only one "chief detective," Franklin Blake (Brantlinger 22); while D.A. Miller takes the other extreme and points to the entire community of the Verinder household, that the investigation is, in fact, already inscribed in the community's daily practices (Miller 48). Further, Miller adds, the investigation follows a masterplan that no one governs, that in an uncanny way the investigation transcends individual actors while simultaneously *not* pointing to Providence (42ff)

Which of these critical readings is most persuasive? Instead of answering, I propose a different series of questions—Why is it so important that we locate a site for the agency of investigation? What is at stake in indicating the Subject Who Knows as such? Or, most importantly, if we can find a number of Subjects Who Know, what does that prove? On one hand, as I mentioned above, none of the eleven theories hits the full truth—a fact Franklin Blake encounters *in medias res*:

> Every question that I could put had been answered. Every detail that I could desire to know had been placed before me. I had even reverted to the idea of sleep-walking, and the idea of intoxication; and, again, the worthlessness of the one theory and the other had been proved—on the authority, this time, of the witness who had seen me. What was to be said next? what was to be done next? There rose the horrible fact of the Theft—the one visible, tangible object that confronted me, in the midst of the impenetrable darkness which enveloped all besides! Not a glimpse of light to guide me, when I had possessed myself of Rosanna Spearman's

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> secret at the Shivering Sand. And not a glimpse of light now, when I had appealed to Rachel herself, and had heard the hateful story of the night from her own lips. (398)

Like Dupin and Nicholas Branch, Blake sees the simple fact of the crime itself against the murky and complex circumstances that surround it. In fact, the theories themselves becomes an impediment:

> To speak seriously, it is perhaps possible that my German training was in some degree responsible for the labyrinth of useless speculations in which I now involved myself. For the greater part of the night, I sat smoking, and building up theories, one more profoundly improbable than another. When I did get to sleep, my waking fancies pursued me in dreams. I rose the next morning, with Objective-Subjective and Subjective-Objective inextricably entangled together in my mind; and I began the day which was to witness my next effort at practical action of some kind, by doubting whether I had any sort of right (on purely philosophical grounds) to consider any sort of thing (the Diamond included) as existing at all. (408)

We encounter one of the great but overlooked moments in *The Moonstone*. As Blake delves into the mystery, the theories multiply at such a dizzying rate that by the end of the passage he reaches an existential crisis. As happens to Oedipa Maas and Nicholas Branch, Blake folds before the theoretical onslaught and begins to question his understanding of reality. Uncertainty as to the theories creates doubt as to the very existence of the Moonstone. Of course, Blake is being somewhat facetious and his

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psychological circumstances are not exactly those of Oedipa or Branch, but we see that his thought do follow, if only nominally, a parallel line of development.

On the other hand, against these human efforts the narrative offers the guiding hand of Providence, the fact that only time and fate can out the novel's mysteries. In fact, in the Victorian detective story, Ousby argues, Providence must predominate over any human detective:

> The detectives are not, after all, protagonists but are merely among the more interesting secondary characters, and their complete success might make them predominate unduly over the book's closing pages. As it is, their ultimate failure usually functions as a convenient device for removing them from the action, leaving the hero and heroine to occupy the center of interest at the end. There is also a deeper reason for this insistence on the detective's failure, a reason that partly explains the novelists' reluctance to make him more than an interesting supernumerary. It derives from the writers' almost obsessive reliance on the abstractions of Providence and Destiny to dictate the progress of their plots and bring the action to neat and satisfactory conclusions in which mystery is dispelled, the good rewarded, and the bad punished. (115)

The detective fails, says Ousby, so that the hero and heroine can come to the fore and so that poetic justice can be served. As a result, adds Winifred Hughes, the detective will necessarily have no "access to absolute truth" (163).

I discuss the notion of poetic justice in the next chapter. For now, and returning to the three questions I posed in the penultimate paragraph, it suffices to note that *The Moonstone* can accommodate both kinds of readings—those that give primacy to

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Providence and those that foreground individual detectives. So the novel, I want to suggest, even at this early stage in the history of the detective story, is *already* a transitional text between detective fiction and conspiracy theory—or, when we read *The Moonstone* we are witnessing the birth of conspiracy theory. The concept of a Providence Who Knows and of detectives Who Might Also Know exists alongside the fact that all of the novel's detectives, private and professional, ultimately become Subjects Who Try to Know (but can't). We have seen that this transition applies in the realm of detectives, but it also appears on the criminal end. Since Blake is acting under the influence of opium when he steals the Moonstone, his collaboration with Ablewhite cannot be labeled as much more than "an unconscious collaboration," but between Ablewhite and Luker we have a real conspiracy—consciously and deliberately pursued. Finally and further highlighting the transitional nature of *The Moonstone*, the novel includes not only this last conspiracy and a couple of proto-conspiracy theories (see above), but also another conspiracy—that of the Indians.

Yet before tackling this final conspiracy I want to consider two of the novel's detectives, specifically Inspector Cuff and Ezra Jennings. Initially, the narrative positions Inspector Cuff—more than any other character—as the Subject Who Will Know. This positioning begins with Cuff's first appearance when the narrative foregrounds his perspicacity: "His eyes, of a steely light grey, had a very disconcerting trick, when they encountered your eyes, of looking as if they expected something more from you than you were aware of yourself" (133); and is reinforced when Cuff notices the paint smear, a detail everyone else has overlooked (136). There is the fact too, as some members of the novel's Victorian audience would have known, that Collins based Cuff on the real-life

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detective Jonathan Whicher, who himself had solved the famous Road Murder using a type of clue much akin to Cuff's paint clue (see Ousby 123). However, Collins complicates the original positioning. In *The Moonstone*, Inspector Cuff, as a member of the Detective Department, encounters the same kind of public resistance that his real-life counterparts did. He embodies the "uneasy transition from private employee to public servant" and so his presence represents a traumatic intrusion into the Verinder household (Trodd 19 and Miller 37ff). As a result, Cuff's investigation hits a number of obstacles—obstacles which Dupin, for example, never encounters. Cuff unsettles the servants (140). Lady Verinder at first refuses to meet with him (143). Rachel doesn't allow Cuff to search her wardrobe and, later, leaves the house against his request (148 and 191). And, Cuff is even accused of Rosanna's suicide (199).

More importantly, his own behavior undermines his quest. For example, at a crucial moment, rather than pursuing the specific facts of the case (as Dupin does), Cuff falls back on a preconceived theory: "'My own experience explains Miss Verinder's otherwise incomprehensible conduct. It associates her with those other young ladies that I know of. It tells me she has debts she daren't acknowledge, that must be paid. And it sets me asking myself, whether the loss of the Diamond may not mean—that the Diamond must be secretly pledged to pay them. That is the conclusion which my experience draws from plain facts'" (207). Cuff sees Rachel not as an individual, but as a stock figure in a pattern and so only provides a "'coarse' interpretation" (Trodd 27). Or, as Ian Ousby argues, whereas Ezra Jennings uses "scientific rationalism," Cuff can only fall back on "elementary logic and police procedure" (Ousby 126). Cuff, in fact, becomes so fixated

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on his theory that we see him developing the same kind of rigidity that had marked Inspector Bucket in *Bleak House*:

> He thereupon passed the whole of Rosanna's proceedings under review. You are already as well acquainted with those proceedings as I am; and you will understand how unanswerably this part of his report fixed the guilt of being concerned in the disappearance of the Moonstone on the memory of the poor dead girl. Even my mistress was daunted by what he said now. She made him no answer when he had done. It didn't seem to matter to the Sergeant whether he was answered or not. On he went (devil take him!), just as steady as ever. (210-11)

Cuff has his theory, believes in its validity, and readily dismisses any contradictions or objections. As a result, his investigation fails and the best he can propose is that there was a conspiracy between Rosanna and Rachel. Yet to his credit, however rigid Cuff may seem, by the end of the novel he can easily and humbly admit his mistake in a way much more overt that Bucket's admissions: "'I own that I made a mess of it. Not the first mess, Mr. Blake, which has distinguished my professional career! It's only in books that the officers of the detective force are superior to the weakness of making a mistake'" (491). Further, Cuff's failure gains a new significance when we realize that it forms the only difference between his case and that of his real-life counterpart Jonathan Whicher (Ousby 123), i.e., it is a component of Cuff's character deliberately engineered by Collins. Finally and most importantly to my argument, Cuff's failure aligns him with Inspector Bucket, and gives Cuff (along with his humorous predilection for roses) the human qualities, I would argue, that Dupin lacks.

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In contrast to Cuff and his failure, Collins sets the mysterious Ezra Jennings, one of *The Moonstone's* more successful detectives. Though Jennings does not solve the riddle of the second theft, he does provide an important piece of the solution: he demonstrates that Franklin Blake took the diamond while on opium. Yet how Jennings demonstrates this constitutes of one the most remarkable and, perhaps, zany moments in Victorian literature. Taking the delirious ramblings of Mr. Candy, a doctor with whom Blake quarreled on the night of the theft, Jennings deciphers these ramblings, and so reveals that Candy gave the unsuspecting Blake a dose of laudanum. From this feat—already a spectacular accomplishment as it involves a form of cryptography and proves Jennings' theory that "the loss of the faculty of speaking connectedly, [does not imply] of necessity the loss of the faculty of thinking connectedly as well" (423)—Jennings next uses his knowledge of Victorian medicine to devise an equally fantastic experiment:

> "If the same consequences follow, which followed last June," said Ezra Jennings—"if you suffer once more [from quitting tobacco] as you suffered then, from sleepless nights, we shall have gained our first step. We shall have put you back again into something assimilating to your nervous condition on the birthday night. If we can next revive, or nearly revive, the domestic circumstances which surrounded you; and if we can occupy your mind again with the various questions concerning the Diamond which formerly agitated it, we shall have replaced you, as nearly as possible in the same position, physically and morally, in which the opium found you last year. In that case we may fairly hope that a repetition of the dose will lead, in a greater or lesser degree, to a repetition of the result. There is my proposal, expressed in a few hasty words." (439)

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Jennings decides to recreate the theft—to once more have Blake quit tobacco, to duplicate the circumstances leading up to the fateful night, and on that night (exactly one year after the event) to give Blake opium again. Yet this time there will be witnesses, including Jennings and Inspector Cuff, to see where Blake puts the "mock" Moonstone after taking it. Surprisingly, although the general experiment fails—Blake passes out in the middle of it—Jennings succeeds on two counts. He proves that Blake took the diamond while on opium and that Blake performed this act while unconscious of doing it. Through this experiment, therefore, Jennings makes one of the more memorable stabs at becoming the novel's Subject Who Knows and resolves what had been a baffling mystery.

As interesting as this experiment is, it is made the more memorable by Ezra Jennings himself, a figure who exhibits a rich and deeply imagined interiority, one that substantially exceeds that of detectives like Bucket and Cuff and that foreshadows the psychological depths seen in the conspiracy theorist. In fact, as many critics have noted, Jennings is a remarkable creation, a figure almost too profound for the novel. In Jennings, Collins shows that detectives can be individuals in their own right and so have lives and emotions in excess of their investigative duties. For example, we first learn of Jennings through a comment Gabriel Betteredge makes in his own narrative: "[Mr. Candy's] assistant—a certain Mr. Ezra Jennings—was at our disposal, to be sure. But nobody knew much about him in our parts. He had been engaged by Mr. Candy under rather peculiar circumstances; and, right or wrong, we none of us liked him or trusted him" (187). From the start Jennings emerges both as a figure of mystery and of general dislike. Nor, in Betteredge's case, does this dislike ever recede: "Speaking as a man, I consider you to be

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a person whose head is full of maggots, and I take up testimony against your experiment as a delusion and a snare" (456). Something in Jennings' character and in his experiment spurs an incredible level of antipathy from the usually-amiable Betteredge. Franklin Blake, who enters into closer relations with Jennings than anyone else in the novel, sees the stranger in a more discriminate way:

> It was impossible to dispute Betteredge's assertion that the appearance of Ezra Jennings, speaking from a popular point of view, was against him. His gipsy-complexion, his fleshless cheeks, his gaunt facial bones, his dreamy eyes, his extraordinary parti-coloured hair, the puzzling contradiction between his face and figure which made him look old and young both together—were all more or less calculated to produce an unfavorable impression of him on a stranger's mind. And yet—feeling this as I certainly did—it is not to be denied that Ezra Jennings made some inscrutable appeal to my sympathies, which I found it impossible to resist. (417).

Though he acknowledges the grounds for Betteredge's feelings (which, it appears, rest on simple prejudice), Blake himself responds to Jennings with sympathy and interest. Part of this interest stems from the inherent grace that mark's Jennings' demeanor: "The little he had said, thus far, had been sufficient to convince me that I was speaking to a gentleman. He had what I may describe as the unsought self-possession, which is a sure sign of good breeding, not in England only, but everywhere else in the civilised world" (419). In Jennings, in contrast to the superficial qualities marked by everyone else, Blake discerns the universal marks of a gentleman.

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Yet Blake's relationship with Jennings take on an interesting dimension. A mysterious, mutual "attraction" draws the men to one another. This attraction appears from the time that Blake first meets Jennings:

> The door opened, and there entered to us, quietly, the most remarkable-looking man that I had ever seen. Judging him by his figure and his movements, he was still young. Judging him by his face, and comparing him with Betteredge, he looked the elder of the two. His complexion was of a gipsy darkness; his fleshless cheeks had fallen into deep hollows, over which the bone projected like a pent-house. His nose presented the fine shape and modelling so often found among the ancient people of the East, so seldom visible among the newer races of the West. His forehead rose high and straight from the brow. His marks and wrinkles were innumerable. From this strange face, eyes, stranger still, of the softest brown—eyes dreamy and mournful, and deeply sunk in their orbits—looked out at you, and (in my case, at least) took your attention captive at their will. Add to this a quantity of thick closely-curling hair, which, by some freak of Nature, had lost its colour in the most startlingly partial and capricious manner. Over the top of his head it was still of the deep black which was its natural colour. Round the sides of his head—without the slightest gradation of grey to break the force of the extraordinary contrast—it had turned completely white. The line between the two colours preserved no sort of regularity. At one place, the white hair ran up into the black; at another, the black hair ran down into the white. I looked at the man with a curiosity which, I am ashamed to say, I found it quite impossible to control. His soft brown eyes looked back at me gently; and he met my involuntary rudeness in

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> staring at him, with an apology which I was conscious that I had not deserved. (370-71).

In one of the most sensuous and "sensational" passages in *The Moonstone*, Blake enumerates the qualities that distinguish Jennings' face, skin and hair, and in this way reveals his near-mystical fascination with the doctor's assistant. Just as powerful, however, is the last sentence: "His soft brown eyes looked back at me gently; and he met my involuntary rudeness in staring at him, with an apology which I was conscious that I had not deserved." To Blake's invasive stare, Jennings responds with a tremendous show of dignity, a dignity that humbles Blake himself. Later the narrative further develops the fascination between the men, now emphasizing Jennings' perspective:

> What is the secret of the attraction that there is for me in this man [Blake]? Does it only mean that I feel the contrast between the frankly kind manner in which he has allowed me to become acquainted with him, and the merciless dislike and distrust with which I am met by other people? Or is there really something in him which answers to the yearning that I have a for a little human sympathy—the yearning, which has survived the solitude and persecution of many years; which seems to grow keener and keener as the time comes nearer and nearer when I shall endure and feel no more? How useless to ask these questions! Mr. Blake has given me a new interest in life. Let that be enough, without seeking to know what the new interest is. (448)

Jennings exhibits the same intensity of attraction to Blake that Blake does to him. Of course, the emotions in this passage (and the one above) might seem suspiciously like "homosocial desire" but, I would argue, that is the easy way out. On one hand, Jennings

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himself offers an alternate interpretation. Blake, suggests Jennings, provides a respite from the dislike Jennings usually encounters, and he answers Jennings' yearning for "a little human sympathy," a yearning no doubt boosted by Jennings' approaching death. On the other hand, the men's mutual attraction may derive from the parallel circumstances of the their lives—circumstances which, because of the men's intelligence and awareness, Blake and Jennings intuit before being able to articulate. For example, both men have "outsider" status—Jennings most obviously because of his appearance, Blake because of having spent his formative years abroad; and both men stand falsely accused, Blake of the diamond's theft, Jennings because of "the vile slander" which stains him and has followed him across England (428ff).

Yet whatever the case, in the pages of *The Moonstone*, because of this friendship and because of his experiment, Jennings emerges as a unique and charismatic figure. Augmenting these qualities, there too is his integrity—the deeply thoughtful way in which he hesitates to show Mr. Candy ramblings to Blake: "'Put yourself in my position for a moment,' said Ezra Jennings. 'Would you disclose to another person what had dropped unconsciously from the lips of your suffering patient and your helpless friend, without first knowing that there was a necessity to justify you in opening your lips?'" (424-25). Before he acts, Jennings seeks to justify his act morally. Further, his mysterious past also distinguishes him: "I was born, and partly brought up, in one of our colonies. My father was an Englishman; but my mother—We are straying away from our subject, Mr. Blake; and it is my fault" (420). Jennings, unlike anyone else in *The Moonstone*, has mixed origins and, as his deliberate omission here shows, he feels deep shame because of these origins. Nor do his sufferings end there: "'I have mentioned an accusation which has

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rested on me for years. There are circumstances in connexion with it that tell against me. I cannot bring myself to acknowledge what the accusation is. And I am incapable, perfectly incapable, of proving my innocence. I can only assert my innocence. I assert it, sir, on my oath, as a Christian. It is useless to appeal to my honour as a man'" (428). As had been the case with his parentage, Jennings also cannot bring himself to name the "accusation" under which he rests and, instead, stoically endures it however detrimental it may be to his life and aspirations. Finally, in addition to his origins and the tragedy of his past, there is also the fact that Jennings is dying from an incurable disease and, consequently, has become addicted to opium in an attempt to alleviate his pain:

> *June 16th*.—Rose late, after a dreadful night; the vengeance of yesterday's opium, pursuing me through a series of frightful dreams. At one time, I was whirling through empty space with the phantoms of the dead, friends and enemies together. At another, the one beloved face which I shall never see again, rose at my bedside, hideously phosphorescent in the black darkness and glared and grinned at me. A slight return of the old pain, at the usual time in the early morning, was welcome as a change. It dispelled the visions—and it was bearable because it did that. (447)

Once more, now via Jennings' journal entries, the narrative gives us a powerful look into the assistant's inner life. With striking brevity and eloquence, Collins underscores Jennings' sufferings through a phantasmagoric image that links opium addiction with past tribulations and with the demons of Jennings' subconsciousness. With Jennings, therefore, we witness a new type of detective, one that has an *affectively* rich inner life which exceeds his detective duties.

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I now return to the second conspiracy in *The Moonstone*, that of the Indians. Unlike the Ablewhite-Luker conspiracy, the Indian conspiracy is unique in the novel in that it is the only major conspiracy that the narrative labels as such. Although I discuss this type of conspiracy (alternately called invasion-scare or reverse colonization) at length in Chapter Five, here I would like at least to glance at it both because of its interesting structure and because of the detective that tackles it, Mr. Murthwaite. The Indian conspiracy involves at least three Indian "guardian priests"—and their predecessors—who follow and attempt to recover the diamond because of a religious imperative: "The deity [Vishnu] breathed the breath of his divinity on the Diamond in the forehead of the god. And the Brahmins knelt and hid their faces in their robes. The deity commanded that the Moonstone should be watched, from that time forth, by three priests in turn, night and day, to the end of the generations of men. And the Brahmins heard, and bowed before his will" (34). Consequently, these Indians trail the Moonstone when the Sultan of Seringapatam steals it in the eighteenth century and we again see them preparing to recover the diamond through most of *The Moonstone*. Yet as critics have shown, in the narrative this Indian conspiracy serves a second function. In his essay, "*The Moonstone*, the Victorian Novel, and Imperialist Panic," Ian Duncan outlines the ideological work the Indians perform. In *The Moonstone*, argues Duncan, the Indians underscore British fears and xenophobia: "India [. . .] bears 'the irresistible positivity' of an alien force that breaks in and out of the domestic order, effortlessly eluding a circumscribed agency of detection," and, as such a force, India "exceeds and outlasts British dominion and knowledge" (302). Further, because of the ability the Indians display in resisting colonization and domestication, they inspire a form of imperialist

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panic on Britain's part. What had been a total and secure British identity is now undermined (303ff). The Indians are a people that cannot be known, that are Other, and who because of this quality not only threaten Britain's sense of self, but—as the conspiracy best shows—penetrate her borders at will. Or, from the perspective of *The Moonstone*'s characters, the Indian conspiracy (its structure, its nuances, its purpose) presents a problem which requires a Subject Who Knows to resolve it.

Here I want to build on Duncan's reading by examining the specific way in which the Indian threat emerges in *The Moonstone*. To begin we should note first that in the first period of the novel, the three major questions raised after the Moonstone's theft (see above) are not the only important questions the narrative presents. The appearance of the Indians precedes the appearance of the Moonstone at the Verinder house, and their appearance creates its own series of questions. For example, ostensibly the Indians visit the house as performers (49). Yet immediately after this visit, Penelope stirs suspicions by recounting what she surreptitiously saw—namely, a bizarre ceremony in which the little white boy accompanying the Indians went into a trance. From observing this trance, Penelope discovers that the Indians are after Franklin Blake or, more specifically, after the diamond in his possession (50-51). Of course, prepared by the material in the prologue, the reader too might reach such a conclusion. Gabriel Betteredge, however, dismisses this interpretation at once. The ceremony, says Betteredge, is just a performer's trick (51). As in much of the novel, a questionable event again occasions a series of explanations and, nominally at least, we end with two irreconcilable views, neither quite achieving closure.

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Franklin Blake's arrival, which occurs just after this incident, continues the debate. Blake, not unexpectedly, confirms Penelope's suspicions: "To my great surprise, Mr. Franklin, like Penelope, took the thing seriously. How seriously, you will understand, when I tell you that, in his opinion, 'It' meant the Moonstone" (52). Further, Blake recounts some questionable events that occurred after he obtained the Moonstone: "'I suspect, Betteredge, that I have been followed and watched in London, for the last three or four days; and I have traveled by the morning instead of the afternoon train, because I wanted to give a certain dark-looking stranger the slip'" (60-61). In addition, from here Blake makes an almost instantaneous connection, one with which Betteredge agrees: "'It's just possible, Betteredge, that my stranger and your three jugglers may turn out to be pieces of the same puzzle'" (61). Both men now not only affirm Penelope's theory, but also connect the Indian jugglers with the men following Blake. In other words, we see a "conspiracy theory" in the making. Further, after giving Betteredge a glimpse of the Moonstone, albeit in a "sealed paper parcel," Blake has Betteredge recount the story of John Herncastle, the perpetrator of the Moonstone's first theft in the novel. This story is important in that it shows, first, that Herncastle did in fact steal the diamond and keep it afterwards, second, that as a result he was summarily ostracized from the Verinder family, including a memorable rebuff at one of Rachel Verinder's birthday parties (64-65) and, third, that while still alive, Herncastle took elaborate precautions to ensure that, if his life was taken by violence, the diamond would be cut up and sold, i.e., have its integrity obliterated (70-71).

These facts occasion the next set of *The Moonstone*'s theories. The questions, specifically, turn on why Herncastle acted as he did on two particular points. The first of

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these regards his treatment of the diamond—that he threatened to cut it up if his own person were harmed. On one hand, there is the view Blake's father takes that Herncastle, a known drug-user, acted as he did because of opium-induced fancies (69). Blake, however, disagrees: It was a "'plot,'" he says, "'organised among the Indians who originally owned the jewel, [. . .] a plot with some old Hindoo superstition at the bottom of it'" (72). Though a modern reader may recoil at Blake's language, the gist of his statement is that Herncastle acted from fear of a conspiracy. The second questionable point regards Herncastle's will, the fact that he bequests the Moonstone to Rachel but "subject to this condition, that her mother, the said Julia Verinder, shall be living at the time" (74). Herncastle makes the bequest depend on Lady Verinder. This bequest then also raises competing interpretations, succinctly expressed by Blake: "'In bringing the Moonstone to my aunt's house, am I serving his vengeance blindfold, or am I vindicating him in the character of a penitent and Christian man?'" (75). Either the bequest tokens Herncastle's forgiveness or it is a means (via the curse that possibly follows the Moonstone) for Herncastle to exact his revenge. Consequently, soon after Blake's arrival the narrative creates a climate of suspicion, and presents its first important set of questions, here posed by Blake himself: "'Question the first: Was the Colonel's Diamond the object of a conspiracy in India? Question the second: Has the conspiracy followed the Colonel's Diamond to England? Question the third: Did the Colonel know the conspiracy followed the Diamond; and has he purposely left a legacy of trouble and danger to his sister, through the innocent medium of his sister's child?'" (66). Further, this aura of mystery is intensified when Betteredge catches someone casing the house (81), by the

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appearance of the Moonstone itself, and by the return of the Indians during Rachel's birthday party (106).

It is at this point, therefore, with suspicion at its height yet with the diamond still in Rachel's possession, that Mr. Murthwaite, the "famous traveler," appears on the scene. Although it is hard to deny Ian Ousby's charge that the appearance of Mr. Murthwaite "smacks of structural contrivance" (Ousby 125), I shall here consider Mr. Murthwaite in depth (something few critics have done) because of his importance in the detective to conspiracy theorist progression that I have been examining. With the return of the Indians at Rachel's party, Murthwaite becomes more than an incidental character. First of all, he confronts the Indians and successfully uncovers their charade:

> If he had pricked them with a bayonet, I doubt if the Indians could have started and turned on him with a more tigerish quickness than they did, on hearing the first words that passed his lips. The next moment they were bowing and salaaming to him in their most polite and snaky way. After a few words in the unknown tongue had passed on either side, Mr. Murthwaite withdrew as quietly as he had approached. The chief Indian, who acted as interpreter, thereupon wheeled about again towards the gentlefolks. I noticed that the fellow's coffee-coloured face had turned grey since Mr. Murthwaite had spoken to him. He bowed to my lady, and informed her that the exhibition was over. (106)

Murthwaite penetrates the Indians' disguise and understands their behavior in a way no one up to this point has been able to. Next, he reinforces what Blake and Betteredge have already suspected:

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> "Unless, after long experience, I am utterly mistaken, those men are high-caste Brahmins. I charged them with being disguised, and you saw how it told on them, clever as the Hindoo people are in concealing their feelings. There is a mystery about their conduct that I can't explain. They have doubly sacrificed their caste—first, in crossing the sea; secondly, in disguising themselves as jugglers. In the land they live in that is a tremendous sacrifice to make. There must be some very serious motive at the bottom of it, and some justification of no ordinary kind to plead for them, in recovery of their caste, when they return to their own country." (107)

Blake and Betteredge are right to worry, says Murthwaite, and he provides an informed set of reasons for his conclusion. In addition, he confirms that the Indians are after the Moonstone, and reveals that the conspiracy depends on the Moonstone remaining intact (108ff). Finally, like Dupin at the end of "The Mystery of Marie Rôget," Murthwaite even makes a prediction as to the future: "'The Indians won't risk coming back tonight [. . .] The direct way is hardly ever the way they take to anything—let alone a matter like this, in which the slightest mistake might be fatal to their reaching their end' (109). In direct contrast to the three questions Blake poses, Murthwaite provides a relatively staggering amount of information and, as a result, his answers create an effect of stability, of closure, one that markedly differs from the confusion that permeates most of the novel, but one similar to that Dupin creates at the end of Poe's story. Via a combination of observation and knowledge, Murthwaite swiftly becomes the Subject Who Knows on the point of the Indian conspiracy. Finally, the novel's structure reinforces the effect of closure because Murthwaite's answers resolve the initial mysteries surrounding the

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Indians and so clear the stage for the new mysteries that follow the Moonstone's theft—the incident that happens soon after Murthwaite's departure.

Yet these answers do not exhaust Murthwaite's role in the novel, and the great traveler returns later in the narrative for a discussion with Bruff, the lawyer. Here Murthwaite restates the information in the novel's Prologue (namely that a conspiracy exists to protect and recover the Moonstone), then follows with a lengthy exposition on the Indian conspiracy that adds a wealth of new information. For example, Murthwaite exhibits the transcript of a letter written by a fourth Indian who previously worked for Mr. Luker but who, it turns out, was also a immediate member of the current Indian conspiracy (334-35). He explains how Luker eluded the conspirators' machinations (336-37). He dismisses the clairvoyance of the Indians' little boy: "'We have nothing whatever to do with clairvoyance, or with mesmerism, or with anything else that is hard of belief to a practical man, in the inquiry that we are now pursuing. My object in following the Indian plot, step by step, is to trace results back, by *rational* means, to natural causes'" (332-33, emphasis added)—a move worth noticing as it aligns Murthwaite's methods with those of Dupin. Further and again like Dupin, Murthwaite also makes another prediction: "'In a year from the time when the Moonstone was pledged, the Indians will be on the watch for their third chance'" (337). And, finally, Murthwaite even incidentally points to Ablewhite as the Moonstone's thief (336). Beyond these informative comments, however, Murthwaite also delves into the structure of the Indian conspiracy, showing how it extends beyond the three Indians and their accomplice:

> "These present men of ours have succeeded to the men who were here before them. If they had only done that, the matter would not have been worth inquiring

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> into. But they have done more. They have succeeded to the organisation which their predecessors established in this country. Don't start! The organisation is a very trumpery affair, according to our ideas, I have no doubt. I should reckon it up as including the command of money; the services, when needed, of that shady sort of Englishman, who lives in the byways of foreign life in London; and, lastly, the secret sympathy of such few men of their own country, and (formerly, at least) of their own religion, as happen to be employed in ministering to some of the multitudinous wants of this great city. Nothing very formidable, as you see! But worth notice at starting, because we may find occasion to refer to this modest little Indian organisation as we go on." (330-31)

It is an incredible revelation and, in my opinion, one of the novel's high points for any conspiracy theory obsessed reader. From a fixed and imaginable entity, the conspiracy grows (in Murthwaite's version) to an "organisation"—one of indeterminate size, that has the "command of money," the "sympathy" of various Indian men living in London and, most disturbingly, even the help of certain "shady" Englishmen. In other words, though Murthwaite may lack the paranoid tendencies of a figure like Inspector Bucket or the failings and interiority of Inspector Cuff or Ezra Jennings—components necessary for most conspiracy theorists—here Murthwaite unveils what begins to sound suspiciously like a modern conspiracy theory, a theory (I might add) that gains much of its persuasive power in that Murthwaite repeatedly tries to downplay it even as he details its shocking extent.

As Bucket and Jennings, so does Mr. Murthwaite exhibit qualities that qualify him as a transitional figure between the detective and the conspiracy theorist. Although

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Winifred Hughes, like Ian Duncan (see above), argues that, "The prologue and epilogue, set in the wilds of India and infused with the spirit of Hindu religion, confirm the existence of realities beyond the reach of the detective, the appropriate emissary of modern rationality and legal sanctions" (164), I believe that such a statement does not quite cover the case of Mr. Murthwaite. Murthwaite differs in quality and in kind from all the other detectives in *The Moonstone* because of his knowledge of India and because through this knowledge, he comes closer than any other character in the novel in equaling Dupin—in becoming the Subject Who Knows. Yet, as Murthwaite's conspiracy theory shows, to Know in this case is also not to know. At a certain point, if the conspiracy is vast enough (as the Indian one apparently is), even the best detective must fall back on using such phrases as "such few men of their own country" and "shady sort of Englishman." Murthwaite's "organisation" reaches the extent of such conspiracies as those that Oedipa Maas and Nicholas Branch encounter—conspiracies so complex that no single individual can comprehend them, so confused that to tackle them is necessarily to become a conspiracy theorist. Yet, I should note in closing, though Murthwaite provides us with the theory and Bucket and Jennings with examples of human failure and interiority, we are still dealing with various and diverse individuals. We are yet some distance from having an actual conspiracy theorist and, consequently, I return to this figure later in my study.

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Chapter Two: The Hidden Hand

In this chapter I focus on the conspiraceme that I have named the "Hidden Hand." By Hidden Hand, I mean a person or people that guide the life of another unsuspecting person. Among the most memorable literary examples of individuals or groups acting as the Hidden Hand are Professor Moriarty, the arch-foe of Sherlock Holmes, Sunday in his role as a policeman in *The Man Who Was Thursday*, the "invert conspiracy" in *In Search of Lost Time*, and O'Brien in *1984.* As I will show this conspiraceme has a close relation to the old notion of the Providential Hand (as a force that arranges and controls reality) and in transitional Victorian conspiracy narratives like *Great Expectations* the trope of the Hidden Hand even comes to replace the Providential Hand. To examine this conspiraceme, to consider how it contributes to the aesthetic power of a given work, and to see how it prefigures its counterpart in twentieth-century conspiracy theory narratives, in this chapter I will look at four nineteenth-century novels—Sir Walter Scott's *Waverly*, Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, and Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* and *Great Expectations*, the last being the central focus of this chapter.

I begin my discussion, however, with a glance at Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973). At the center of *Gravity's Rainbow* stands, perhaps, the most audacious and comic conspiracy plot in literary history. The year is 1944 and the Germans are shelling London with V-2 rockets. No one knows where the next rocket will fall, but one thing is certain: if you *hear* the rocket, you're safe. The new V-2s are supersonic—they hit first, the sound comes a moment after. The only way to know if the rocket is coming towards you is when you feel it striking the top of your head. Thus London is obsessed

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with the V-2s. Among the people in London tracking the rockets and investigating their aftermath is Tyrone Slothrop, an American lieutenant. Yet Slothrop also has another, more interesting side to his character. As he wanders through London he sleeps with a lot of women, so many that he uses a map to keep track—one star per woman plus a date. More importantly, Slothrop isn't the only one interested in this map. Early in *Gravity's Rainbow*, "The White Visitation," a shadowy organization that's been watching Slothrop for some time, obtains a photo of the map. As it emerges, there's a peculiar correlation between Slothrop's map and the one that Roger Mexico, another of *Gravity's Rainbow*'s central characters, has created:

> The stars fall in a Poisson distribution, just like the rocket strikes on Roger Mexico's map of the Robot Blitz.
>
> But, well, it's a bit more than the distribution. The two patterns also happen to be identical. They match up square for square. The slides that Teddy Bloat's been taking of Slothrop's map have been projected onto Roger's, and the two images, girl-stars and rocket-strike circles, demonstrated to coincide. (85-86)

The correlation is exact, too exact to be a coincidence, and this suggests that Slothrop knows beforehand where the rockets will fall.

How he knows is what makes the plot so audacious. As Slothrop discovers that he's under the surveillance of "The White Visitation" and as he begins to explore both this group and his own history, he turns up some disturbing information. It turns out that as an infant he was brought into contact with a Dr. Laszlo Jamf, one-time student of Pavlov and, in 1920, visiting researcher at Harvard. Apparently, Broderick Slothrop, Tyrone's father, made a deal with Jamf and Harvard by which the funds for Tyrone's

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education were secured in return for allowing a series of experiments on him as an infant. Jamf conditioned Slothrop in a manner analogous to Pavlov's dogs:

> Unconditioned stimulus = stroking penis with antiseptic cotton swab.
>
> Unconditioned response = hardon.
>
> Conditioned stimulus = x
>
> Conditioned response = hardon whenever x is present, stroking is no longer necessary, all you need is that x. (84)

But the conditioning isn't, it turns out, the source of Slothrop's current (i.e., 1944) problem. After the experiment, we learn, Jamf made a major mistake. He didn't de-condition Slotrhop properly:

> "Not only must we speak of partial or of complete extinction of a conditioned reflex, but we must also realize that extinction can proceed *beyond* the point of reducing a reflex to zero. We cannot therefore judge the degree of extinction *only* by the magnitude of the reflex or its absence, since there can still be *a silent extinction beyond the zero.*" (84-85)

Slothrop is still conditioned, albeit in this bizarre, negative way. "X," the mystery stimulus, turns out to be an enigmatic polymer plastic known as Impolex G and, apparently, it now functions as part of the V-2 rockets.[1] Hence Slothrop's hardons. Hence the interest of "The White Visitation": "the stimulus, somehow, *must* be the rocket, some precursor wraith" (86).

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[1] Impolex G seems to based on the real compound Teflon, which Pynchon wrote about while working in Boeing's Aero-Space Division as a staff writer on the *Bomarc Service News*. For Pynchon's Boeing article see "'Teflon' in Depth," *Bomarc Service News* 31 (Feb 1962) 3-4, 13.

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There's more at stake, however, than just knowing where the rockets will fall. As Leo Bersani writes in "Pynchon, Paranoia, and Literature": "The Pavlovian Laszlo Jamf's conditioning of baby Tyrone's hard-ons [...] has to be seen in the light of Jamf's complex business deals between the two World Wars, business deals involving supercartels that were themselves perhaps involved in efforts to ruin the mark as part of a strategy to get Germany out of paying its war debts" (101). The conditioning of Slothrop with Impolex G emerges as an important part of complex historical events. Understanding how and why Slothrop's hardons occur, discovering what the wraith to which he responds is, has equally momentous implications: "But if it's in the air, right here, right now, then the rockets follow from it, 100% of the time. No exceptions. When we find it, we'll have shown again the stone determinacy of everything, of every soul. There will be precious little room for any hope at all. You can see how important a discovery like that would be" (*GR* 86). As the narrator here suggests, the problem seems to be the last problem of science, the last barrier on the road to proving that there exists no Providential Hand guiding creation.

Yet, as it turns out, because this problem is tied into a complex historical situation, it cannot *de facto* be resolved with a simple answer. There are also further impediments. For example, Laszlo Jamf, a figure who might have provided some kind of answer or insight into the Impolex G mystery, is dead, while Slothrop himself has only a fragmentary recollection of the key events from his childhood:

> He is also getting a hardon, for no immediate reason. And there's that *smell* again, a smell from before his conscious memory begins, a soft and chemical smell, threatening, haunting, not a smell to be found out in the world—*it is the breath of*

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> *the Forbidden Wing* . . . essence of all the still figures waiting for him inside, daring him to enter and find a secret he cannot survive.
>
> Once something was done to him, in a room, while he lay helpless. . . . (285)

There is also the fact, as Leo Bersani suggests, that the conspiracy is too big, too complex in its final configuration: "Just keeping track of all the plots—and their incredible interconnectedness—is a near impossibility. The most important facts about the rocket, and the technology that made it impossible [sic], are either shrouded in impenetrable secrecy or simply ignored" (Bersani 107). Consequently, as in the case of *The Crying of Lot* and *Libra* (see Chapter One), any individual, including Slothrop himself, who attempts to resolve the questions that permeate the novel must necessarily become a Subject Who Tries to Know. Slothrop, however, differs from Nicholas Branch and Oedipa Maas in that he can be sure of one thing: "*everything is connected*, everything in Creation" (703, emphasis in original). In *Gravity's Rainbow*, "paranoia" or the "paranoid style" (Slothrop shows few traces of being clinically paranoid) thus becomes an empowering condition—not a psychologically devastating one—because it allows at least some level of certainty. In the novel, of course, the issue is never whether there is a Hidden Hand (Providential or not) behind Slothrop's life—that seems to be a given. Rather, Pynchon's narrative centers on the *extent* of power that this Hidden Hand wields and, as a result, on the *strategy necessary to escape* this power (for this latter point see Chapter Four). Leo Bersani, however, makes another interesting connection: "Information control is the contemporary version of God's eternal knowledge of each individual's ultimate damnation or salvation, and both theology and computer technology

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naturally produce paranoid fears about how we are hooked into the System, about the connections it has in store for us" (103). In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Bersani implies, the issue of "information control," of the conspiracy, takes precedence over the question of Providential design. Or, alternately, in Pynchon's narrative the conspiraceme of the Hidden Hand replaces the traditional trope of the Providential Hand as the force that ultimately guides reality and, by extension, the lives of individuals like Slothrop.

This is an important point, so to explore this transformation (or at least suggest one path that it might have taken), I now turn back to a few, key nineteenth-century conspiracy narratives. I begin a pre-Victorian work, though one that like *Gravity's Rainbow* explores the trope of the Hidden Hand—Sir Walter Scott's too-often neglected *Waverly: or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since* (1814). *Waverly*, a historical romance, follows the career of its eponymous hero as he becomes embroiled in the Jacobite rebellion (lead by Prince Charles Edward) against King George in 1745. Though the work is full of fantastic passages that rival anything in the high Romantic poets, my focus here will be Waverly's interactions with Donald Bean Lean, a Scottish Highland intriguer. Early in the novel, while on leave from the British army, Waverly journeys to the Highlands to stay with family friends, the Baron of Bradwardine and his daughter Rose (who later becomes Waverly's love interest). While visiting the Baron, Waverly returns from a walk one morning to discover that the Baron's cows have been stolen by one Fergus Mac-Ivor Vich Ian Vohr, a Highland robber. Mac-Ivor, it turns out, has been blackmailing the Baron for some time and only recently has the Baron stopped the payments—hence the theft. As the Baron begins to negotiate for the return of his animals, Waverly grows interested in the proceedings and journeys to the Highland cave of Donald Bean Lean, the associate of

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Mac-Ivor. Here Lean entertains Waverly, gets him drunk and, as we later discover, steals an important signet from Waverly while the latter is sleeping.

This theft has immense consequences in Waverly's life. More importantly, Lean, acting in the capacity of a Hidden Hand, plays a significant role in determining these consequences. As mentioned, Lean is an intriguer and from the start Scott emphasizes Lean's equivocal nature:

> He was thin in person and low in stature, with light sandy-coloured hair, and small pale features, from which he derived his agnomen of *Bean*, or white; and although his form was light, well-proportioned, and active, he appeared, on the whole, rather a diminutive and insignificant figure. [. . .] The robber received Captain Waverly with a profusion of French politeness and Scottish hospitality, seemed perfectly to know his name and connections, and to be particularly acquainted with his uncle's political principles. (141)

Physically Lean appears inconsequential, but intellectually he has access to a significant amount of information, a fact especially impressive given the period and Lean's secluded dwelling. Later, Scott further develops these characteristics:

> This man Bean Lean is renowned through the country as a sort of Robin Hood, and the stories which are told of his address and his enterprise are the common tales of the winter fireside. He certainly possesses talents beyond the rude sphere in which he moves; and being neither destitute of ambition nor encumbered with scruples, he will probably attempt by every means to distinguish himself. (259)

Lean now appears as a near legendary figure, and we see the scope and drive of his ambitions. Though the parallel is only partial, Scott thus positions Lean as a kind of

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criminal mastermind (see Chapter Five). Given Lean's disposition, his theft of Waverly's signet occasions little surprise.

Waverly, however, a figure whom the narrative in its opening pages depicts as somewhat of an effete dreamer, learns of Lean's work only much later and, at first, only indirectly. Word that something has gone awry first reaches Waverly while he is still visiting the Highlands. In a letter Rose reveals that soldiers from Waverly's regiment have been to the Bradwardine residence with warrants for the arrest of the Baron, a Jacobite sympathizer, and of Waverly himself—a fact that surprises Waverly as he has thus far had no interest in politics. Waverly's arrest soon afterwards leads to some clarification. Through a Major Melville, Waverly learns of the circumstantial evidence that links him directly to the Jacobite cause. New events, however, delay further disclosure. As Waverly is being transported during his confinement, a band of Highlanders kidnaps him. While in this second captivity, Waverly grows ill, is attended by various people (including Alice, the daughter of Lean), and, once he recuperates, Waverly meets Prince Charles and for a time joins the Jacobite cause.

Though these events seem to add little to my argument, I have dwelt on them at length in order to emphasize the role of Donald Bean Lean in Waverly's life. Like the consequences of Jamf's experiments on Slothrop, all the events described in the previous paragraph follow directly from Lean's theft of the signet. Once they have obtained the signet, Lean and his associates conspire (using Waverly's name) to incite his army regiment to join the rebellion. This plot leads to the warrant for Waverly, his subsequent arrest, etc. Thus, although the novels differ radically on many fronts, in the narrative of *Waverly* we see at least one overarching similarity to *Gravity's Rainbow*: a primary

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(conspiratorial) act occasions a host later narrative developments. Yet even on this point, admittedly, the plots ultimately diverge. Whereas Pynchon leaves his facts indeterminate and thus provides the grounds for Slothrop's "paranoia," Scott eventually resolves all the novel's mysteries and even reveals why he created them in the first place: "These circumstances will serve to explain such points of our narrative as, according to the custom of story tellers, we deemed it fit to leave unexplained for the purposes of exciting the reader's curiosity" (450). Scott, perhaps in a somewhat heavy-handed fashion, admits that he has just used a trick of the craft. By providing a resolution, however, his narrative ultimately produces the kind of closure that will later mark the early detective story (see Chapter One)

What makes *Waverly* important to my argument, however, is how Scott complicates Donald Bean Lean's Hidden Hand conspiracy. As mentioned, after Waverly's first arrest a group of Highlanders abducts him and it is while in their captivity that he grows ill. Yet what the narrative withholds until much later is that these Highlanders are also Lean's associates (and so the appearance of Alice) and that Rose too acts as one of Waverly's attendants during his convalescence. Lean, as it emerges, kidnaps Waverly for a complicated array of reasons, but one of them is especially intriguing: "[Rose] proposed to Donald Bean the rescue of the prisoner. [. . .] He had the art, however, pleading all the while duty and discipline, to hold off, until poor Rose, in the extremity of her distress, offered to bribe him to the enterprise with some valuable jewels which had been her mother's" (446). Rose Bradwardine, albeit in this tangential way, also has a hand in Waverly's fate. As a result, by her presence she shifts Lean's conspiracy from a sinister

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one, to one guided by a more benevolent aim. I shall return to the idea of the benevolent conspiracy below in my discussion of *Great Expectations*.

From this initial look at the Hidden Hand, I now turn to the trope of the Providential Hand, a trope much more popular in early- to mid-nineteenth century literature. In his critical work, *The Providential Aesthetic in Victorian Fiction*, Thomas Vargish defines the Providential aesthetic as a "characteristic of literary works in which the assumption of providential design and intention at work in the fictional world is a major premise or concern," and goes on to list two of its most salient elements: *coincidence*—the fortuitous juxtaposition of two or more events (Pip and Estella, for example, meeting at Satis House in the revised ending of *Great Expectations*); and *inconsequent actualization*—"the fulfillment or realization of a desire or fear by causal sequences which the characters do not initiate or control" (i.e., the fact that Estella and Pip are reunited at all at the novel's end). These elements, according to Vargish, together constitute the Providential decorum (6ff). In the mid-Victorian period, Vargish continues, a novel in the Providential tradition will exhibit certain important features, among them the use of *cumulative particulars*, i.e., a series of events which at the end of the novel appear to have developed according to a Providential design, and the incorporation of *poetic justice*, where, again at the end of the novel, all the characters are rewarded or punished according to their merits. In addition, the end of the novel also reveals the "correct way" of proceeding, and the heroes or heroines learn where they went off track and, as a result, why they suffered. Of course, to a modern reader the focus on Providential design often leads to plots that seem unrealistic or forced but, Vargish argues, many Victorian readers readily accepted such plots (16ff).

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In fact, according to Vargish, the Providential aesthetic created a certain kind of reader both inside and outside the novel. As he tell us, "If there is virtue in design, in formal arrangement, then believers in providence will wish to see everywhere, even in their fiction, the fullest possible design, the roundest plot—complete with foreshadowings, parallels, and analogies—compatible with the representation of that particularization or individuation of circumstances, characters, and events that qualify as reality" (20). The reader reads the novel, (which is just like reality), searches for Providence and finds it everywhere. The characters, in turn, behave in the same way: "Successful characters in providential fiction are those who develop a providential habit of mind: one that seeks patterns in apparently random circumstances and concatenations of events, that judges by consequences, that above all remains alert to the possibilities of interpretation" (36-37). These characters too search for Providence incessantly. In other words, we might argue, both readers and characters are prone to a kind of projective rigidity, different in kind but not quality from the psychological outlook David Shapiro defines as characteristic of paranoid rigidity: "the paranoid person searches intensely for confirmation of his anticipations. [... T]hose same rigid anticipations of what he will find allow him to feel entitled to discredit and disregard apparent contradiction. Between these two attitudes, he is bound to 'find' what he is looking for" ("Paranoid Style" 60). I shall return to the concept of paranoid projection later in the chapter.

Alongside this emphasis on (and even in contradiction to the belief in) Providential design, adds Vargish, the novels of the late 1840s and 1850s also reflect another Victorian cultural phenomenon—the waning of faith in Providence. Of course, this waning is a complex development and one which resists cursory treatment, yet we

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can make one important point in regards to the subject. The demise of the belief in Providence originated in a number of broad cultural trends, but certainly among the most important of these in the Victorian period was the rise of science—especially as culminating in Darwin. As George Levine writes, in the Victorian period "science was most forcefully extending its authority in the realm of knowledge and even beyond, into religion and morals" and the great contribution of Darwin's theory was that it "thrust the human into nature and time, and subjected it to the same dispassionate and material investigations hitherto reserved for rocks and stars" (1-2). Darwin's theory was also revolutionary, adds Gillian Beer, because although it took up the "*old* problems" of "chance, environment, death, [and] survival," Darwin moved away from the "leaps" of the chain of being "with its hierarchical ordering of rungs" and "towards the ecological image of the 'inextricable web of affinities.'" Man, in other words, was decentered in favor of the complex network of nature (Beer 22-23). The fictional response to this development, Vargish argues, appears (for instance) in the novels of Charles Dickens and Charlotte Brontë which show a gradual shift "in religious thought and practice from transcendence to immanence, from general design to immediate participation," while the Providentially didactic element of these novelists becomes "more an intimation that divine intention can be found only beyond the immediately obscure or perverse circumstances." In addition, the concept of poetic justice diminishes and Providence no longer reveals itself, but must instead be sought out, having become available only "through certain revelatory glimpses, epiphanies, of immanence" (Vargish 22ff). *Villette* and *Great Expectations*, for example, both depict characters who suffer immensely, but who in the end are only questionably rewarded—or not at all; and *Villette*, Vargish

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concludes, in fact offers a "radical indictment not only of the [providential] convention itself but of the very thought and modes of perception it permits" (29).

Vargish, however, only considers the overall pattern of *Villette* (1853) and how the pattern emerges via the novel's ending. Here, to explore further the relation of the Providential Hand to the Hidden Hand and to conspiracy theory more generally, I shall instead narrow my focus to the early part of *Villette*, especially chapters five to seven. In these three chapters the concepts of "Providence" and "Fate" appear often (and, surprisingly, almost always in analogous roles) and we discover that a Hidden Hand guides Lucy Snow's life in a way similar to those of Slothrop and Waverly. The difference here is that the Hidden Hand is also the Providential Hand—which I still call "hidden" because, although Lucy knows or seems to suspect the Hand's influence, its logic and method of operation remain obscure. As a result of this Providential control, Lucy makes decisions and carries them out in ways that might otherwise seem bizarre—rather than deliberating, for example, where to go or what to do next, she often throws caution to the wind and proceeds as if by impulse, an impulse that she later characterizes as Providential.

Early in *Villette* this Providential impulse takes a number of guises. When Miss Marchmont, the elder woman whom Lucy has been attending, passes away, Lucy decides to journey to London. Except for the fact of the journey Lucy seems to have given little thought to how she'll proceed after arriving. Before departing she consults with an old friend, Mrs. Barrett, and during this visit Mrs. Leigh, for whom Mrs. Barrett works as a housekeeper, returns home with a child and a foreign nurse. Mrs. Barrett tells Lucy that "'there are many Englishwomen in foreign families as well placed as she [i.e., the foreign

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woman],'" while Lucy responds in an interesting way: "I stored up this piece of casual information, as careful housewives store seemingly worthless shreds and fragments for which their prescient minds anticipate a possible use some day" (105). Though Lucy never says so, this "casual information" guides her in traveling to Labassecour. In itself the information does seem random, but consider the following passage:

> Breakfast over, I must again move—in what direction? "Go to Villette," said an inward voice; prompted doubtless by the recollection of this slight sentence uttered carelessly and at random by Miss Fanshawe, as she bid me goodbye:
>
> "I wish you would come to Madame Beck's; she has some *marmots* whom you might look after: she wants an English *gouvernante*, or was wanting one two months ago." (121)

At this point Lucy is already in Labassecour and now information "uttered carelessly and at random" floats up into her consciousness and again determines her course of action. The recollection now, however, is personified as an imperative "inward voice." Chance seems to have gained a didactic element. Again, when a short time later Lucy's trunk disappears and she turns to an Englishman who seems to appear magically beside her, even the reader may suspect that the man's presence has a hidden meaning.

In fact, none of the above elements depend on chance at all. Miss Fanshawe—Ginerva Fanshawe—turns out to be the goddaughter of Mr. Home, the father of Lucy's childhood companion, Polly; while the Englishman is no less than John Bretton, Lucy's other childhood companion. Nothing is random; all seems to have been arranged by Providence. Yet to see the Providential Hand in Lucy's narrative, it is not even necessary to tease out the novel's implications as I have done here. For example, when during the

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sea voyage Ginerva asks Lucy where she is bound, Lucy replies, "'Where Fate may lead me'" (116). And again, when Lucy arrives at Madame Beck's (after having been directed there by John Bretton) this same "Fate" reappears:

> No inn was this. A brass plate embellished the great *portecochère*: 'Pensionnat de Demoiselles' was the inscription; and beneath, a name, "'Madame Beck."
>
> I started. About a hundred thoughts volleyed through my mind in a moment. Yet I planned nothing, and considered nothing: I had not time. Providence said, "Stop here; this is *your* inn." Fate took me in her Strong hand; mastered my will; directed my actions: I rang the door bell. (126)

Here again Lucy describes her actions as guided by Fate (now accompanied by Providence) and, more importantly, the imperative "inner voice," which might have seemed Lucy's own, now returns as the Providential voice. There seems to be no doubt that the Providential Hand controls Lucy's life—or so she would have us believe. Because she is an unreliable narrator (as I shall discuss in depth in Chapter Four), her statements, of course, cannot always be taken at face value.

Yet, as Vargish indicates, in terms of the Providential aesthetic, *Villette* functions as a transitional work: Lucy does not attain poetic justice at the end of the novel. The divine is withdrawn and the novel derives a lot of its psychological power from the fact that the Providential pattern is withheld, or that it works by the reverse logic also seen in the Book of Job—the greater the suffering the more it redeems the one who suffers (Vargish 57 and 84ff). Just before Miss Marchmont's death Lucy herself validates such a reading:

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> But another decree was written. It seemed I must be stimulated into action. I must be goaded, driven, stung, forced to energy. My little morsel of human affection, which I prized as if it were a solid pearl, must melt in my fingers and slip thence like a dissolving hailstone. My small adopted duty must be snatched from my easily contented conscience. I had wanted to compromise with Fate: to escape occasional great agonies by submitting to a whole life of privation and small pains. Fate would not so be pacified; nor would Providence sanction this shrinking sloth and cowardly indolence. (97)

Fate, which earlier in the novel had seemed to work in the service of Providence, now appears instead as one of Lucy's adversaries.

The early portions of *Villette*, however, also hint at this tension between Providence and Fate or, to use slightly different terms, between the belief in a Providential hand and in the possibility that this Providential hand might not exist. Though often Lucy moves by the Providential impulse, we also see moments where her faith seems to vacillate:

> I kept up well till I had partaken of some refreshment, warmed myself by a fire, and was fairly shut into my room; but, as I sat down by the bed and rested my head and arms on the pillow, a terrible oppression overcame me. All at once my position rose on me like a ghost. Anomalous; desolate, almost blank of hope, it stood. What was I doing here alone in great London? What should I do on the morrow? What prospects had I in life? What friends had I on earth? Whence did I come? Whither should I go? What should I do? (107)

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Lucy's confidence vanishes and we see her overwhelmed by despair. Nor, considered against other novels from this period, is this a unique configuration. In *The Victorian Multiplot Novel*, Peter K. Garrett discusses a similar vacillation that occurs in the narrative of *Bleak House* (1852-53) via the characters of Esther Summerson and Harold Skimpole. Esther, for example, represents the Providential turn of mind: "Her ability to repudiate her sense of an inherited curse depends on her faith in an objective moral order, a benevolent providence directing human affairs" (Garrett 66). No matter what troubles assail her, including disfigurement, Esther retains her faith in Providence, and her marriage to Alan Woodhouse confirms her belief. Skimpole emerges as Esther's foil: he discovers the Providential Hand as easily as she, but finds it in radically different places, seeing—for example—slaves as a poetic enhancement of the landscape. As a result, argues Garrett, these diverse interpretations "offer glimpses of a different hidden truth, more disturbing than a sinister mechanism: the absence of any intrinsic meaning" (68). As in the last chapter, where I examined *The Moonstone* and its competing theories, so in *Bleak House* there is a similar, if somewhat less complex, proliferation of theories. Or, like *Villette*, *Bleak House* challenges the existence of Providence and both novels can only present a vacuum in its place—as Lucy Snow's suffering best testifies.

But if Providence is in doubt or if it has vanished altogether, what—I must ask—fills the subsequent vacuum? In terms of *Villette*, my answer will appear in Chapter Four. Now, however, I turn my argument to the central concern of this chapter, Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1860-61). As Peter Garrett writes, in *Great Expectations* we see an intensification of the Providential crisis that had appeared in *Bleak House*: "Esther manages to assert a positive meaning through her faith in a benign providence,

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but Pip must reinterpret his life without such an aid" (87). Pip never speaks of Providence and the narrative of his life constantly denies him such a belief.

In the essay "Repetition, Repression, and Return: The Plotting of *Great Expectations*," Peter Brooks indicates the unique status of the first page or so of *Great Expectations*: "With Pip, Dickens begins as it were with a life that is for the moment precedent to plot, and indeed necessarily in search of plot" (115). This situation lasts but a short time because within moments of Pip's reading the tombstones of his parents and siblings, and identifying himself as a discrete entity in the world of the marshes, Magwitch the convict steps in, and figuratively and actually grabs hold of Pip—becoming at the same time Pip's substitute father, a replacement Magwitch himself later asserts: "I'm your second father" (337). Such a reading certainly provides one method for seeing Pip's relationship with Magwitch. I, however, want to suggest that Pip himself also identifies with Magwitch.

Before I pursue this point, I must indicate one of Pip's fundamental psychological tendencies: he projects—a fact noted by numerous other critics (see, e.g., Daniel F. Tritter or Julian Moynahan). This point emerges most clearly between his original assessment of Herbert Pocket and the later revision. When Pip first moves to London, he tells us the following about Herbert:

> I had never seen any one then, and I have never seen any one since, who more strongly expressed to me, in every look and tone, a natural incapacity to do anything secret and mean. There was something wonderfully hopeful about his general air, and something that at the same time whispered to me he would never be very successful or rich. I don't know how this was. I became imbued with the

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> notion on that first occasion before we sat down to dinner, but I cannot define by what means. (201)

It is a strong pronouncement, one that haunts Pip's perception of Herbert through most of the novel. Yet, near the novel's end, Pip makes a surprising turn around:

> We were not in a grand way of business, but we had a good name, and worked for our profits, and did very well. We owed so much to Herbert's ever cheerful industry and readiness, that I often wondered how I had conceived that old idea of his inaptitude, until I was one day enlightened by the reflection, that perhaps the inaptitude had never been in him at all, but had been in me. (489)

Pip himself comes to see his projective tendency on this point, but understanding the general pattern in his behavior is crucial to grasping his relationship with Magwitch.

In the opening chapters of *Great Expectations*, Magwitch, in order to ensure his survival, uses Pip. As an escaped convict Magwitch is on the run and Pip provides him with such necessities as food, drink and a file to remove the prison iron. How Magwitch controls Pip deserves some attention. On one hand, Magwitch handles Pip roughly and physically: "After each question he tilted me over a little more, so as to give me a greater sense of helplessness and danger" (37). Magwitch asserts his literal control of Pip's life. On the other hand, he controls Pip psychologically by demanding Pip's silence: "'You do it, and you never dare to say a word or dare to make a sign concerning your having seen such a person as me, or any person sumever, and you shall be let to live. You fail, or you go from my words in any partickler, no matter how small it is, and your heart and your liver shall be tore out, roasted and ate,'" and moments later adds, "'you remember what

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you've undertook" (38). But more importantly and (as it turns out) quite ironically, Magwitch also creates a kind of specter to haunt Pip and remind him of the agreement:

> "Now, I ain't alone, as you may think I am. There's a young man hid with me, in comparison with which young man I am a Angel. That young man hears the words I speak. That young man has a secret way pecooliar to himself, of getting at a boy, and at his heart, and at his liver. It is in wain for a boy to attempt to hide himself from that young man. A boy may lock his door, may be warm in bed, may tuck himself up, may draw the clothes over his head, may think himself comfortable and safe, but that young man will softly creep and creep his way to him and tear him open. I am a keeping that young man from harming of you at the present moment, with great difficulty. I find it wery hard to hold that young man off of your inside." (38)

Though the reader, of course, will discount Magwitch's final assertion as nothing more than a further attempt to frighten Pip, Magwitch's words here are revealing and ironic in that by the end of this speech he shifts himself from someone wanting to harm Pip to someone who is "protecting" him.

Or, Magwitch asserts that he is protecting Pip in a way akin to how he demands—he enjoins—that Pip protect him. Let us return to Pip's initial description of Magwitch:

> A fearful man, all in coarse grey, with a great iron on his leg. A man with no hat, and with broken shoes, and with an old rag tied round his head. A man who had been soaked in water, and smothered in mud, and lamed by stones, and cut by flints, and stung by nettles, and torn by briars; who limped, and shivered, and

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> glared and growled; and whose teeth chattered in his head as he seized me by the chin. (36)

Magwitch bears the marks of the life that he has led, and Pip's description here is both perceptive and deeply moving. Instead of cowering at the appearance of the stranger, Pip can see into the humanity of Magwitch, as the opening phrase, "a fearful man," especially indicates. This phrase may be read as "a man inspiring fear," yet better fits the context as "a man full of fear." And so the case is. When Pip returns the next day with the necessary items, we learn the extent of Magwitch's fear:

> "When a man's alone on these flats, with a light head and a light stomach, perishing of cold and want, he hears nothin' all night, but guns firing, and voices calling. Hears? He sees the soldiers, with their red coats lighted up by the torches carried afore, closing in round him. Hears his number called, hears himself challenged, hears the rattle of the muskets, hears the orders 'Make ready! Present! Cover him steady, men!' and is laid hands on – and there's nothin'! Why, if I see one pursuing party last night – coming up in order, Damn 'em, with their tramp, tramp – I see a hundred. And as to firing! Why, I see the mist shake with the cannon, arter it was broad day[. . . .]" (51-52)

As mentioned, Magwitch is on the run and, as here, he vividly describes his fear and apprehension, but because he's a man on the run and because his physical state has been so severely reduced, his fear—though justified—also has an element of exaggeration, of paranoid projection.

As a result of these interactions with Magwitch, we notice a change in Pip's behavior. This change appears when Pip first leaves Magwitch and the marshes: "I

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looked all round for the horrible young man, and could see no signs of him. But, now I was frightened again, and ran home without stopping" (39). Magwitch's specter haunts Pip, creating a new kind of terror. In the same way, while Pip is at home, the thought of Magwitch constantly recurs: "It was Christmas Eve, and I had to stir the pudding for next day, with a copper-stick, from seven to eight by the Dutch clock. I tried it with the load upon my leg (and that made me think afresh of the man with the load on his leg), and found the tendency of exercise to bring the bread-and-butter out at my ankle, quite unmanageable" (45). Pip not only identifies physically with Magwitch, but the bread-and-butter Pip has stolen works as a metaphoric substitute for Magwitch's iron. Finally, upon Pip's journey back to Magwitch, we see this change fully intensified:

> The mist was heavier yet when I got out upon the marshes, so that instead of my running at everything, everything seemed to run at me. This was very disagreeable to a guilty mind. The gates and dykes and banks came bursting at me through the mist, as if they cried as plainly as could be, "A boy with Somebody-else's port pie! Stop him!" The cattle came upon me with like suddenness, staring out of their eyes, and steaming out of their nostrils, "Holloa, young thief!" One black ox, with a white cravat on—who even had to my awakened conscience something of a clerical air—fixed me so obstinately with his eyes, and moved his blunt head round in such an accusatory manner as I moved round, that I blubbered out to him, "I couldn't help it, sir! It wasn't for myself I took it!" Upon which he put down his head, blew a cloud of smoke out of his nose, and vanished with a kick-up of his hind-legs and a flourish of his tail. (48)

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When Pip reaches the marshes, he experiences a moment of acute mental anguish and imprints his surroundings accordingly—they assume a visionary quality. The appearance of Magwitch has changed Pip's life, but also amplified Pip's projective tendency to the point where Pip himself starts to exhibit some paranoid tendencies.

To better grasp this intensification, it is necessary that we now consider Pip's home environment. Though she might usually be known as Mrs. Joe Gargery, Georgiana M'ria, Pip's sister, runs a distinct household. Peter K. Garrett describes *Great Expectations* as "a story of victimization" and, among other reasons, cites "the sense of guilt and unworthiness continually imposed on [Pip] by Mrs. Joe" (86), yet I believe Georgiana brings a much more complex element to the narrative of *Great Expectations*. An important part of her psychology and, of course, the most visible is her tendency towards physical abuse:

> My sister, Mrs. Joe Gargery, was more than twenty years older than I, and had established a great reputation with herself and the neighbours because she had brought me up "by hand." Having at that time to find out for myself what the expression meant, and knowing her to have a hard and heavy hand, and to be much in the habit of laying it upon her husband as well as upon me, I supposed that Joe Gargery and I were both brought up by hand. (39)

This is the first mention of Georgiana and Joe in the novel, and we can immediately note a number of interesting points. There is the physical control/abuse, as expressed by the phrase "by hand," but there is also the fact that the narrative here aligns Pip with Joe and that both seem to suffer equally. This situation emerges vividly a few pages later when Georgiana confronts Pip with Tickler, the stick she uses to beat him:

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> My sister, Mrs Joe, throwing the door wide open, and finding an obstruction behind it, immediately divined the cause, and applied Tickler to its further investigation. She concluded by throwing me—I often served as a connubial missile—at Joe, who, glad to get hold of me on any terms, passed me on into the chimney and quietly fenced me up there with his great leg. (41)

We see the extent of Georgiana's violence and we see Joe's efforts to protect Pip. Or, let us note, Joe and Georgiana behave separately towards Pip in ways that, in Magwitch's case, are combined—though, obviously, Magwitch's initial offer to protect Pip is an offer only a young child like Pip might take seriously.

Peter Brooks characterizes Pip's home environment in somewhat different terms. According to Brooks, in this part of the book there are two plots. There is the "official" and censoring "[n]aterally wicious/ bringing up by hand" plot, and this plot stands over the "repressed" plot, "[c]ommunion with the convict/ criminal deviance" (117). Or, from another angle, there is the domestic plot, the one involving Georgiana, and there is the criminal plot, the one involving Magwitch. It seems to me, however, that this reading misses some of the narrative's nuances such as, for example, the Joe plus Georgiana equals Magwitch configuration. Further, as already mentioned, Magwitch also controls Pip as if "by hand," and, as we'll see, Pip's *and Joe's* communion with Magwitch is not exactly repressed.

A better way to engage this problem—the radical difference in Pip's relationships with Joe, Georgiana and Magwitch—is to consider Georgiana's method for raising Pip. Georgiana, in short, maintains a domestic environment of espionage[2] and she uses

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[2] In the mid-Victorian sense of the word, namely an incessant scrutinizing of Pip and all his activities. I deal with this concept (in this sense) again in my discussion of *Villette* in Chapter

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physical threats and acts as a supplement to this method: "'Where have you been, you young monkey?' said Mrs Joe, stamping her foot. 'Tell me directly what you've been doing to wear me away with fret and fright and worrit, or I'd have you out of that corner if you was fifty Pips, and he was five hundred Gargerys'" (41). Pip, it seems, can't move within the house without his sister observing and questioning him. In addition, she constantly reinforces his guilt: "[She] entered on a fearful catalogue of all the illnesses I had been guilty of, and all the acts of sleeplessness I had committed, and all the high places I had tumbled from, and all the low places I had tumbled into, and all the injuries I had done myself, and all the times she had wished me in my grave, and I had contumaciously refused to go there" (54). Pip is both treated as a convict and made to feel like one.

Yet for all this, the irony is that Pip still manages to evade his sister's gaze, to operate somehow outside the range of his sister's espionage—partially with Joe's help, but also on his own. To demonstrate how this issue fits into my argument I now turn to *Great Expectations'* conspiracies. The word *conspiracy* appears twice in the narrative of *Great Expectations*. In the second instance Herbert Pocket uses it in describing Miss Havisham's past: "'It has been supposed that the man to whom she gave her misplaced confidence, acted throughout in concert with her half-brother; that it was a conspiracy between them; and that they shared the profits'" (205-06). I discuss this type of conspiracy, what I call the "Conspiracy to Defraud" in the next chapter. Before taking up the first instance, I want briefly to glance again at Pip's relationship with Joe. As mentioned, Joe often acts as Pip's shield from Georgiana's violence, though Georgiana

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Four, and in its more complex permutations during my survey of late-Victorian espionage fiction in Chapter Five.

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also rules Joe "by hand" as much as she does Pip. Joe, however, conceives his situation in another way. He admits to Pip, "'Your sister is given to government'" (79), but when Pip asks him why he doesn't rebel, Joe first describes Georgiana as a "master-mind," and then adds:

> "And I an't a master-mind, [. . . a]nd last of all, Pip—and this I want to say very serious to you, old chap—I see so much in my poor mother, of a woman drudging and slaving and breaking her honest hart and never getting no peace in her mortal days, that I'm dead afeerd of going wrong in the way of not doing what's right by a woman, and I'd fur rather of the two go wrong the t'other way, and be a little ill-conwenienced myself. I wish it was only me that got put out, Pip; I wish there warn't no Tickler for you, old chap; I wish I could take it all on myself; but this is the up-and-down-and-straight on it, Pip, and I hope you'll overlook shortcomings." (79-80)

As always, Joe is quite eloquent, but the affective power of his words stems from how they reveal his incredible gift of observation and imagination. Like Pip with Magwitch, so Joe can pierce the façade of what seems a tyrannical person and see the humanity that lies beneath. But as this speech also shows, he—again like Pip—is able to think and act outside Georgiana's scrutiny and tolerates her behavior not out of necessity or fear, but by reflective choice.

So Joe's situation resembles Pip's even more than appears at first. Pip, like the reader, discovers this only by degrees, and each stage of his discovery evokes a strong emotional response. After the above exchange, Pip tells us that he "dated a new admiration of Joe from that night" (80), but earlier he uses words more telling. While

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discussing his resolution to steal bread for Magwitch, Pip drops an interesting comment: "In our [Pip's and Joe's] already-mentioned *freemasonry* as fellow-sufferers, and in his good-natured companionship with me, it was our evening habit to compare the way we bit through out slices, by silently holding them up to each other's admiration now and then" (42, italics added). Pip perceives his relationship with Joe as of a Masonic character. If we turn to chapter five of *Great Expectations*, which depicts the arrest of Magwitch and Compeyson, we see the larger implications of this comment. The chapter describes a crucial point in Pip's relationship with Magwitch, as it is here, after Magwitch's arrest, that Pip secretly signals his innocence to the convict—a signal that Magwitch correctly interprets and which, first, compels him to accuse himself of having stolen the food and file from Pip's house and, second, of course, eventually leads to Pip's expectations.

This interaction, however, also cements Pip's perception of himself as an ally of Magwitch, a feeling that soon comes to haunt Pip's consciousness. When later in the novel the third, unnamed convict appears to present Pip with the two one-pound notes from Magwitch, Pip responds in many ways, among them with a night of troubled sleep: "I had sadly broken sleep when I got to bed, through thinking of the strange man [the third convict] taking aim at me with his invisible gun, and of the guiltily coarse and common thing it was, to be on secret terms of *conspiracy* with convicts—a feature in my low career that I had previously forgotten" (107-08, italics added). This is the first use of the word *conspiracy* in *Great Expectations*, and we see now that this concept, in Pip's mind, defines his relationship with Magwitch. We should note, however, that although Magwitch is an escaped convict and although Pip steals from his sister and Joe, Pip's act,

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when seen through its final result—and this is exactly how Magwitch perceives it—is an act of benevolence.

Peter Brooks, in discussing the scene of Magwitch's arrest, focuses on another moment in the chapter. After Pip signals to Magwitch, Joe (argues Brooks) makes "an overt statement of community with the outlaw" (118). What does this statement entail? Let us glance at the passage that Brooks cites: "'We don't know what you have done, but we wouldn't have you starved to death for it, poor miserable fellow-creatur.—Would us, Pip?'" (71). The comment is from Joe, and through it he exhibits the same sympathy and understanding towards Magwitch that he displays towards Georgiana, and that Pip has also already shown towards the convict. In addition, Joe's closing question also reveals that he believes or expects Pip to share his sentiment. If there is a conspiracy—and Pip's use of the words *conspiracy* and *freemasonry* suggest that he at least sometimes conceptualizes in this way—then it includes Pip, Magwitch *and* Joe. However, it is also a conspiracy that exists outside of the range of Georgiana's espionage, and that is based on the understanding of the pain of others and on the performance of benevolent acts.

Yet at this point we must define this conspiracy as a local phenomenon as it involves only a few people and seems confined to the range of the marshes. The status of Magwitch also undercuts the tidy reading that I have proposed, especially as the reader knows that Magwitch's first promise to protect Pip is really duplicitous and self-serving. To see how thoroughly Dickens weaves this "conspiracy" into the narrative of *Great Expectations* and how this conspiracy contributes to the novel's aesthetic power, we must look at Pip's life beyond the marshes.

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Pip's discovery of his expectations, of course, initiates one of the greatest changes in his life. It leads to his moving to London, to his living the life of a gentleman, to his preparation (or so Pip believes) for marriage with Estella, to—in short—the realization of his snobbish aspirations. But the expectations also entail a darker element. Pip experiences a tremendous amount of guilt for leaving, for betraying, Joe. Further, he encounters pangs of remorse for the life-not-lived:

> When I woke up in the night [. . .] I used to think, with a weariness on my spirits, that I should have been happier and better if I had never seen Miss Havisham's face, and had risen to manhood content to be partners with Joe in the honest old forge. Many a time of an evening, when I sat alone looking at the fire, I thought, after all, there was no fire like the forge fire and the kitchen fire at home. (291-92)

Finally, not knowing the identity of his benefactor also troubles Pip: "I may still say that on the constancy of one person (naming no person) all my expectations depend. And at the best, how indefinite and unsatisfactory, only to know so vaguely what they are!" (269). Pip suffers from the precariousness of his situation, one no doubt exacerbated by the fact that his benefactor acts in the role of a Hidden Hand or, as Edwin M. Eigner and other might say, a Benevolent Agent. Eigner describes this latter personage as "the supernatural figure from the pantomime, who touches the characters with her magic wand near the beginning of the evening to change their natures and bring on the harlequinade and who appears again toward the end to effect the Grand Transformation, the return to paradise" (*Pantomime* 47). The presence of the Benevolent Agent, continues Eigner, is rare in fiction and distinguishes Dickens' art from the realism of Trollope et al because

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the Benevolent Agent operates via "pious fraud"—a deception used "to benefit the character being deceived" and the reader by

> teaching both characters and audiences that they are better than they think they are. [. . .] by convincing us through magical sleight of hand that the life stories we have come to credit are both false and self-destructive, thus clearing a carnivalesque space for nobler conceptions of ourselves and the world and preparing a stage for the Clown, who may ultimately redeem us. (*Pantomime* 57 and 67-68)

The Benevolent Agent, it emerges, has Christian affinities and Dickens uses the figure to inculcate Christian morality in his readers and characters, and to cure their "skepticism" (Eigner, "Pious Fraud" 17-18). Thus, the figure of the Benevolent Agent points to—but, I would add, does not equal—the Providential Hand. I, however, will forego Eigner's designation because he discusses the Dickens canon primarily at the general level—*David Copperfield* and *Our Mutual Friend* being the only exceptions—and because his argument thus does not quite apply to *Great Expectations*. Magwitch problematizes the concept of the Benevolent Agent (and hence my preference for the term "Hidden Hand"), while the case of Pip's benevolence to Herbert Pocket reveals that in *Great Expectations* Dickens does not always seek to expose "the magical sleight of hand" to other characters. In addition, my argument ultimately targets the *network* that Dickens creates in his novel, a network that because it consists of many and because it seeks to remain hidden (again, at least to the other characters in the book) hampers easy correlation with the concept of the Benevolent Agent.

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But the first quotation in the paragraph above also emphasizes that Pip's expectations intensify another aspect of his psychology. Repeatedly throughout his London period, Pip projects Miss Havisham into the role of his benefactor. This, of course, is one of Pip's deepest desires and even at the end of chapter seventeen, the one that precedes Jaggers' announcement of Pip's expectations, Pip's projective tendency towards Miss Havisham is already apparent. As Pip compares his life at home to that at Satis House, his wits scatter and he adds, "Scattered wits take a long time picking up; and often, before I had got them well together, they would be dispersed in all directions by one stray thought, that perhaps after all Miss Havisham was going to make my fortune when my time was out" (160). While after the discovery, Pip, of course, seizes every opportunity of equating his benefactor and Miss Havisham, and does so with an intensity akin to rigidity—though, I admit, Jaggers' hands-off approach and immoveable silence as to the expectations as well as Miss Havisham's deliberate obfuscation also contribute to Pip's behavior.

Jaggers also plays another role during Pip's London period, not so much via any particular acts, but more in the kind of presence he embodies. As a lawyer, Jaggers wields a great amount of power, and in Pip's eyes has "an air of authority not to be disputed, and [. . .] a manner expressive of knowing something secret about every one of us that would effectually do for each individual if he chose to disclose it" (163). Almost from the start Pip is attuned to Jaggers' authority and his almost preternatural knowledge, the fact that Jaggers "'has the reputation of being more in the secrets of that dismal place [Newgate prison] than any man in London'" (289). Or, as Wemmick later tells Pip: "'Always seems to me [. . .] as if he had set a mantrap and was watching it. Suddenly—click—you're

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caught!'" (221). Jaggers, according to these observations, exists—or at least gives the impression of existing—in a state of perpetual readiness to catch even the most minor of transgressions. This disposition nowhere emerges more clearly than in the one time in *Great Expectations* that we see Jaggers actually in court:

> [M]y guardian had a woman under examination or cross-examination—I don't know which—and was striking her, and the bench, and everybody present, with awe. If anybody, of whatsoever degree, said a word that he didn't approve of, he instantly required to have it "taken down." If anybody wouldn't make an admission, he said, "I'll have it out of you!" and if anybody made an admission, he said, "Now I have got you!" The magistrates shivered under a single bite of his finger. Thieves and thieftakers hung in dread rapture on his words, and shrank when a hair of his eyebrows turned in their direction. Which side he was on, I couldn't make out, for he seemed to me to be grinding the whole place in a mill; I only know that when I stole out on tiptoe, he was not on the side of the bench; for, he was making the legs of the old gentleman who presided, quite convulsive under the table, by his denunciations of his conduct as the representative of British law and justice in that chair that day. (225)

In this remarkable passage, we not only glimpse Jaggers fiercely at work, but we also see the apparently unrivaled extent of his power—criminals and magistrates shudder equally before him. He acts as a proponent of the law, yet somehow towers over it. From such passages it also emerges that Jaggers, as a figure of authority and as a repository of secrets, plays in *Great Expectations* a role analogous to that of Inspector Bucket or Mr.

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Tulkinghorn in *Bleak House*. However, in Pip's life Jaggers also becomes an acute reprise of the espionage hitherto embodied in Georgiana, Pip's sister.

But as Georgiana's espionage is to Pip, so Jaggers too has his foil—a figure that seems to evade his observational capability. Though Dickens fills *Great Expectations* with an array of striking characters, none perhaps is as surprising and original as Wemmick. As Pip shows us, Wemmick exists with a split personality. On one hand, at the office where he works as Jaggers' clerk, Wemmick always assumes a professional attitude and his characteristically stern "post-office mouth." On the other hand, at home in the "Castle" with Ms. Skiffins and his Aged Parent, Wemmick reveals a radically different persona, one that is congenial and, as Pip discovers, deeply humanitarian. What I find so engaging about Wemmick, however, is not the distinctness of these two personalities, but rather how strange, how inventive and how thoroughly imaginative the manner in which Dickens depicts Wemmick's home life:

> The interval between that time and supper, Wemmick devoted to showing me his collection of curiosities. They were mostly of a felonious character; comprising the pen with which a celebrated forgery had been committed, a distinguished razor or two, some locks of hair, and several manuscript confessions written under condemnation—upon which Mr Wemmick set particular value as being, to use his own words, "every one of 'em Lies, sir." These were agreeably dispersed among small specimens of china and glass, various neat trifles made by the proprietor of the museum, and some tobacco-stoppers carved by the Aged. They were all displayed in that chamber of the Castle into which I had been first inducted, and which served, not only as the general sitting-room but as the kitchen too, if I

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> might judge from a saucepan on the hob, and a brazen bijou over the fireplace designed for the suspension of a roasting-jack. (231-32)

Between descriptions of dinner preparations, Pip discusses the curious array of objects that Wemmick keeps in his house, objects especially memorable in that they derive directly from Wemmick's occupation. But whereas Jaggers always seems obsessed with ridding himself of the traces from work, pointedly washing his hand, for example, with scented-soap (232-33), Wemmick fetishizes these criminal elements in a way unknown to Jaggers. Or, I believe, Wemmick becomes an emblematic figure in Pip's narrative and to Pip himself in that by segmenting his life into distinct halves, he (as Pip had with his sister) evades official observation, but (unlike Pip) he also constructs a self that seems coherent and *guilt-free*.

Conversely, Pip's interactions with Magwitch, as Peter Brooks points out at length, continually haunt Pip's consciousness. These interactions constitute a irrepressible facet of Pip's psyche that returns and returns, to the point that Pip's ostensible progress becomes undermined. Further, this return of the repressed has substantial interior consequences: "Repetition as return becomes a reproduction and reenactment of infantile experience: not simply a recall of the primal moment, but a reliving of its pain and terror, suggesting the impossibility of escape from the originating scenarios of childhood, the condemnations forever to replay them" (Brooks 126). Not only the events, but the feelings themselves become an irreducible psychological element that Brooks' "official plot" cannot master. Moreover, we should also notice the variety of forms this irreducible material takes. At times the material appears in subtle form as whenever Pip thinks of the marshes: "My comfort was, that it happened a long time ago, and that he [Magwitch] had

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doubtless been transported a long way off, and that he was dead to me, and might be veritably dead into the bargain" (173). At times the material takes more tangible shape as, for example, Pip's interactions with his sister after she has been attacked—attacked presumably by the prison iron which Pip helped Magwitch remove (see, e.g., 185). And, of course, there is that third convict who appears with the two one-pound notes and the file which he surreptitiously shows to Pip: "I was haunted by the file too. A dread possessed me that when I least expected it, the file would reappear. [. . .] and in my sleep I saw the file coming at me out of a door, without seeing who held it, and I screamed myself awake" (108). Pip's dream here vividly demonstrates the powerful and continually raw state of his feelings in relation to Magwitch.

In other words, midway through the novel we realize there is a second Hidden Hand in Pip's life, this one diabolical, that stands alongside the benevolent one that Pip projects onto Miss Havisham, and Pip gradually comes to realize its existence: "the novel will recount the gradual precipitation of a sense of plot around him, the creation of portents of direction and intention" (Brooks 117). The irony, of course, comes in that both hands, the benevolent and the diabolical, turn out to be one and the same, Magwitch. The greater irony is that Magwitch perceives himself as acting wholly out of benevolence (and thus equaling Eigner's Benevolent Agent), extending his membership now to subject in the previously-mentioned conspiracy, where before he had functioned only as object, as the beneficiary of benevolent acts. Hence, from this difference, we get one of *Great Expectations*' central plots—Pip's discovery and reconciliation with the fact that Magwitch is the actual Hidden Hand in his life. And on another level and to return to the question I posed above, though there is a sort of Providential design in the shape that

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Great Expectations takes—that Magwitch turns out to be Estella's father, that he favors the young Pip because of the child's resemblance to Estella, and that Magwitch's associate Compeyson emerges as the man who defrauded Miss Havisham—this design is eclipsed, replaced, negated even by the plot of Magwitch's Hidden Hand, the story of how Pip accepts his alternate and unexpected fate, namely that his "great expectations" are tainted and that he is not destined to marry Estella.

This statement, however, does not fully respond to the question I have posed. The conspiracy here remains local—Joe, Pip, Magwitch. To refine my answer, therefore, and to take my argument into its final phase, I now turn to one of *Great Expectations*' great climaxes, the return of Magwitch. Peter Garrett justly argues that Pip, like Esther Summerson in *Bleak House*, does not seek out his secret, but that instead "the secret past pursues and overtakes him, forcing him to redefine his conception of himself and his history" (85). Brooks, conversely, hinting at a Providential design, asserts that "[t]he scene of Magwitch's return operates for Pip as a painful forcing through of layers of repression [. . .] compelling Pip to recognize that what he calls 'that chance encounter of long ago' is no chance, and cannot be assigned to the buried past but must be repeated, reenacted, worked through in the present" (128). But what neither of these critics asks is, Why Magwitch? What about his psychology or specific configuration as a character—besides the superficial status of "convict"—might so repel the characters in the world of *Great Expectations*? To respond, let us consider Magwitch as he appears to Pip some sixteen years after their initial encounter:

> Moving the lamp as the man moved, I made out that he was substantially dressed, but roughly; like a voyager by sea. That he had long iron-grey hair. That his age

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> was about sixty. That he was a muscular man, strong on his legs, and that he was browned and hardened by exposure to weather. As he ascended the last stair or two, and the light of my lamp included us both, I saw, with a stupid kind of amazement, that he was holding out both his hands to me. (332)

As is clear, when Magwitch returns he has changed substantially. Instead of a "fearful man," we encounter a man who embodies power, virility. Yet this impression is undercut by the "long iron-grey hair" and the fact that he is "holding out his hands" to Pip in a gesture of affection. Or, as I want to argue, through Magwitch's appearance here (and in his subsequent appearances when both Pip and Herbert observe that Magwitch appears "softened," or when Pip refers to holding Magwitch's hand continually during the final imprisonment) Dickens creates a wholly new affect, one that disrupts gender categories—not via what might be called homosocial bonding, but rather via the possibility of an emotive identification and understanding, irrespective of gender, between two human beings who suffer, a "freemasonry [of] fellow-sufferers." That Pip as a character contributes to this affect (as seen in the two parenthetical examples above) signals a shift in his psychology—the emergence and growth of a mature and reflective temperament.

But before he attains this new stance, Pip again revisits some of his old fears regarding Magwitch. During the first night that Magwitch spends at Pip's rooms, after Pip considers the portents foreshadowing Magwitch's arrival, he adds:

> Crowding up with these reflections came the reflection that I had seen him with my childish eyes to be a desperately violent man; that I had heard that other convict reiterate that he had tried to murder him; that I had seen him down in the ditch tearing and fighting like a wild beast. Out of such remembrances I brought

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> into the light of fire, a half-formed terror that it might not be safe to be shut up there with him in the dead of the wild solitary night. This dilated until it filled the room, and impelled me to take a candle and go in and look at my dreadful burden. (341)

Initially Pip remembers—and rightly so, perhaps out of pure shock—only the violent aspects of Magwitch's original behavior. His once imaginative understanding of Magwitch is no longer apparent.

This terror grows the next morning when Pip, while descending his stairs, trips over the sleeping Orlick. Even before he learns that Orlick has followed Magwitch on the previous night, even before he discovers that it is Orlick (a fact that comes much later), Pip already experiences a certain amount of anxiety: "It troubled me that there should have been a lurker on the stairs, on that night of all nights in the year [. . .]" (343). This anxiety grows when Pip later learns that Compeyson has stalked him to Mr. Wopsle's performance:

> I cannot exaggerate the enhanced disquiet into which this conversation threw me, or the special and peculiar terror I felt at Compeyson's having been behind me "like a ghost." For, if he had ever been out of my thoughts for a few moments together since the hiding had begun, it was in those very moments when he was closest to me; and to think that I should be so unconscious and off my guard after all my care, was as if I had shut an avenue of a hundred doors to keep him out, and then had found him at my elbow. I could not doubt either that he was there, because I was there, and that however slight an appearance of danger there might be about us, danger was always near and active. (399)

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In other words, contrary to how it might appear initially, Pip's troubles stem not only from his attempts to repress Magwitch and his subsequent reappearance, but also from the fact that Magwitch (in the same way as Pip) is haunted by past associations, and that by harboring Magwitch, Pip assumes the burden of confronting *Magwitch's* return of the repressed.

So Magwitch is double-trouble and as such, even physically, he necessarily resists any form of assimilation. After Magwitch's return any attempt Pip makes, for example, to disguise him ends only in failure:

> Next day the clothes I had ordered, all came home, and he put them on. Whatever he put on, became him less (it dismally seemed to me) than what he had worn before. To my thinking, there was something in him that made it hopeless to attempt to disguise him. The more I dressed him and the better I dressed him, the more he looked like the slouching fugitive on the marshes. This effect on my anxious fancy was partly referable, no doubt, to his old face and manner growing more familiar to me; but I believe too that he dragged one of his legs as if there were still a weight of iron on it, and that from head to foot there was Convict in the very grain of the man
>
> The influences of his solitary hut-life were upon him besides, and gave him a savage air that no dress could tame; added to these, were the influences of his subsequent branded life among men, and, crowning all, his consciousness that he was dodging and hiding now. In all his ways of sitting and standing, and eating and drinking—of brooding about, in a high-shouldered reluctant style—of taking out his great horn-handled jack-knife and wiping it on his legs and cutting his

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> food—of lifting light glasses and cups to his lips, as if they were clumsy pannikins—of chopping a wedge off his bread, and soaking up with it the last fragments of gravy round and round his plate, as if to make the most of an allowance, and then drying his finger-ends on it, and then swallowing it—in these ways and a thousand other small nameless instances arising every minute in the day, there was Prisoner, Felon, Bondsman, plain as plain could be. (352-53)

The passage is powerful and deserves a close look because how it summons an affect of discomfort and because of how it underscores Magwitch's singularity and irreducibility. He represents the figure least likely to become a respectable and well-adjusted figure of society in the world of *Great Expectations* and so we see him in trouble, see him suffering, almost whenever he appears in the novel.

Conversely, the above passage also illustrates Pip's own meticulous scrutiny of Magwitch, and how this scrutiny is colored and intensified, perhaps, by Pip's projective tendency or what he calls his "anxious fancy." Finally, we also see Pip's now feverish efforts to continue in his old, assimilative frame of mind. Or, as he tells us, there appears a direct relation between Magwitch's affection and his own abhorrence: "The imaginary student pursued by the misshapen creature he had impiously made, was not more wretched than I, pursued by the creature who had made me, and recoiling from him with a stronger repulsion, the more he admired me and the fonder he was of me" (354). In this striking moment of comparison, Pip equates his relationship with Magwitch to that of Dr. Frankenstein and his monster. Yet it is useful to observe, especially in the context of the entire novel, how far this comparison does not take us—*Great Expectations* does not end in a chase to the death between Pip and Magwitch. Instead, almost from the moment of

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Magwitch's return, we see Pip developing a new and more mature understanding: "Miss Havisham's intentions towards me, all a mere dream; Estella not designed for me; I only suffered in Satis House as a convenience, a sting for the greedy relations, a model with a mechanical heart to practise on when no other practice was at hand; those were the first smarts I had" (341). Pip gains a clarity he had lacked before, or experienced only in flashes. He sees the true situation he has been cast into, and learns that "[b]oth Magwitch and Miss Havisham are in the business of cosmic accounting, book keeping for Providence, and in making up what they see as the deficit due them they commit the sin of appropriating and twisting other lives" (Vargish 152). By seeing how he himself has been manipulated, he can now peer behind his idealized projections onto the real Miss Havisham.

Yet in discovering the solution to his own mystery, Pip also inadvertently earns his detective badge (so to speak) and so begins to investigate the hidden configuration determining Estella's life. In this capacity he neatly prefigures the situation of a character like Sherlock Holmes. For example, as mentioned in the last chapter, though Dickens deeply admired the Metropolitan Police, he had only contempt for their predecessors, the Bow-Street Runners. Consequently, his mode of depicting them in *Great Expectations* arouses little surprise:

> The Constables, and the Bow Street men from London—for, this happened in the days of the extinct red-waistcoated police—were about the house for a week or two, and did pretty much what I have heard and read of like authorities doing in other such cases. They took up several obviously wrong people, and they ran their heads very hard against wrong ideas, and persisted in trying to fit the

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> circumstances to the ideas, instead of trying to extract ideas from the circumstances[, etc.] (149)

In investigating the attack on Pip's sister, the Bow-Street Runners act with their usual incompetence, but through their presence in the novel they (like Lestrade and his men to Holmes) provide a memorable foil to Pip's later investigations. In addition, when Orlick later traps Pip at the marshes, we see the way in which Orlick characterizes their relationship:

> "I tell you it was your doing—I tell you it was done through you [. . .] I come upon her from behind, as I come upon you to-night. *I* giv' it her! I left her for dead, and if there had been a limekiln as nigh her as there is now nigh you, she shouldn't have come to life again. But it warn't Old Orlick as did it; it was you. You was favoured, and he was bullied and beat. Old Orlick bullied and beat, eh? Now you pays for it. You done it; now you pays for it." (437)

In describing the attack on Georgiana, Orlick constantly conflates himself with Pip, blurring in his own mind the identity of the two men, but also positioning himself as Pip's dark double or alter ego—a point Julian Moynahan also notes. Orlick, argues Moynahan, "acts [. . .] as Pip's punitive instrument or weapon" in that Orlick plays out many of Pip's repressed desires, such as attacking Georgiana and Pumblechook (84ff).

Pip also resembles Holmes, or, for that matter, any of the successful detectives that I considered in the last chapter, in that Pip too becomes the Subject Who Knows. Out of all the characters in *Great Expectations* he is the one who finally untangles the web that links Estella to her parents, Magwitch and Molly, Jaggers' housekeeper. It is an untangling, according to Garrett, that is typical of many of Dickens' mystery plots which

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"serve different purposes at different points in Dickens' career, [but which] always exert the strong imaginative appeal of a narrative movement directed toward the discovery of secrets, the revelation of a hidden coherence" (52). Yet this untangling also stands out (as I mentioned earlier) in that it reveals a coherence that does not point to a hidden Providence at work. Neither Pip nor Estella attain poetic justice. As Pip himself asserts, his discovery seems to have no benefit at all besides serving to console the dying Magwitch (420). Or, as Brooks argues, the end of *Great Expectations* actually shows the "breakdown" of all its plots: in *Great Expectations* the divine master plot is "radically unknowable," and "we are condemned to the reading of erroneous plots [. . .] in the knowledge that what we discover will always be that there was nothing to be discovered" (135ff). Reading *Great Expectations*, says Brooks, is ultimately a nihilistic project.

I fiercely disagree with such an argument, and in concluding I turn to what I consider to be the most pivotal and aesthetically powerful moment in *Great Expectations*—chapter fifty-one, Pip's confrontation with Jaggers and Wemmick in the Little Britain law office. This chapter turns on four central events. The first of these is Pip's declaring that Miss Havisham has donated nine-hundred pounds towards Herbert Pocket's business venture. To Jaggers and Wemmick it is an astonishing event, but more so in that there has been no corollary gift to Pip:

> "I am sorry, Pip," said [Jaggers], as I put the cheque in my pocket, when he had signed it, "that we do nothing for *you*."
>
> "Miss Havisham was good enough to ask me," I returned, "whether she could do nothing for me, and I told her No."

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> "Everybody should know his own business," said Mr Jaggers. And I saw Wemmick's lips form the words "portable property."
>
> "I should *not* have told her No, if I had been you," said Mr Jaggers; "but every man ought to know his own business best." (421)

Pip, as the reader already knows, has refused any gift from Miss Havisham in the same way that he foreswore his expectations once he discovered they depended on Magwitch. We might argue that, in the latter case, since Pip had become a "gentleman" when he made the discovery, his foreswearing had more to do with his not wanting to be tainted by dirty money. But in Miss Havisham's case this argument doesn't hold and, perhaps, it is faulty altogether. What seems more persuasive is that at the appearance of Magwitch, Pip realizes his true lack of autonomy and his refusal of the money (which is repeated to Miss Havisham) is geared towards achieving autonomy. So in making this first announcement to Jaggers, Pip attempts to position himself on equal, if not superior (since Jaggers takes such an interest in money) footing.

The chapter's next important event, Pip's declaration that he knows Estella's parentage, bears out this last point. As Pip tells Jaggers, he not only knows Estella's mother but also her father: "A certain stop that Mr Jaggers came to in his manner—he was too self-possessed to change his manner, but he could not help its being brought to an indefinably attentive stop—assured me that he did not know who her father was" (422). It is an extraordinary moment. In London, in the world of *Great Expectations*, Jaggers' office and especially Jaggers himself represent the point of greatest panopticism and knowledge. Yet, through his detective work Pip has discovered a fact unknown to Jaggers, unknown even to Magwitch himself: "'And on what evidence, Pip,' asked Mr.

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Jaggers, very coolly, as he paused with his handkerchief half way to his nose, 'does Provis make this claim?' / 'He does not make it,' said I, 'and has never made it, and has no knowledge or belief that his daughter is in existence'" (422). In revealing this fact now and in such a dramatic way, Pip trumps Jaggers for the second time in the chapter. And, as it emerges, Pip further demands that Jaggers recognize what has happened, that he make a full disclosure just as Pip has:

> But I could not submit to be thrown off in that way, and I made a passionate, almost an indignant, appeal to him to be more frank and manly with me. I reminded him of the false hopes into which I had lapsed, the length of time they had lasted, and the discovery I had made: and I hinted at the danger that weighed upon my spirits. I represented myself as being surely worthy of some little confidence from him, in return for the confidence I had just now imparted. I said that I did not blame him, or suspect him, or mistrust him, but I wanted assurance of the truth from him. (423)

Pip's confidence here, his demand that Jaggers be "manly," creates an unprecedented moment in *Great Expectations*, more so as we the readers are aware of the "official" status of the office, of the fact—which Wemmick's hints throughout the book also suggest—that such "truth" is never discussed here. Pip, in other words, attempts to turn Jaggers' observational powers upside-down.

Yet at this point Jaggers still refuses to budge, and so Pip turns to Wemmick and we have the third great event of the chapter—Pip outs Wemmick: "Wemmick, I know you to be a man with a gentle heart. I have seen your pleasant home, and your old father, and all the innocent cheerful playful ways with which you refresh your business life. And

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I entreat you to say a word for me to Mr Jaggers, and to represent to him that, all circumstances considered, he ought to be more open with me!" (423). The act has its desired result, surprise all around: "I have never seen two men look more oddly at one another than Mr Jaggers and Wemmick did after this apostrophe. At first, a misgiving crossed me that Wemmick would be instantly dismissed from his employment; but, it melted as I saw Mr Jaggers relax into something like a smile, and Wemmick become bolder" (423-24). Surprise on Jaggers' part, surprise on Wemmick's part, and, perhaps, surprise on the reader's part. The nature of what had seemed a tense confrontation suddenly changes. From antagonism we move to a congenial atmosphere. The subsequent exchange, I think, is worth quoting in full:

> "What's all this?" said Mr Jaggers. "You with an old father, and you with pleasant and playful ways?"
>
> "Well!" returned Wemmick. "If I don't bring 'em here, what does it matter?"
>
> "Pip," said Mr Jaggers, laying his hand upon my arm, and smiling openly, "this man must be the most cunning impostor in all London."
>
> "Not a bit of it," returned Wemmick, growing bolder and bolder. "I think you're another."
>
> Again they exchanged their former odd looks, each apparently still distrustful that the other was taking him in.
>
> "*You* with a pleasant home?" said Mr Jaggers.
>
> "Since it don't interfere with business," returned Wemmick, "let it be so. Now, I look at you, sir, I shouldn't wonder if you might be planning and

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> contriving to have a pleasant home of your own, one of these days, when you're tired of all this work." (424)

As Pip seconds earlier, so now Wemmick makes a memorable self-assertion. Yet in doing so he trumps even Pip. Jaggers, argues Wemmick, aspires to the same kind of private life that Wemmick himself has. Jaggers, the icon of espionage and of the power of knowledge, Wemmick shows, is as human as the rest of us.

But, so what? What are the implications of such a revelation? The answer arrives in the chapter's final important event, the presentation of Jaggers' hypothetical "case." This case, of course, adds the final element to the solution of Estella's mysterious past. On one hand, Jaggers rails against Victorian social circumstances through the use of a hypothetical "legal adviser," by the fact that this adviser,

> "lived in an atmosphere of evil, and that all he saw of children, was, their being generated in great numbers for certain destruction. Put the case that he often saw children solemnly tried at a criminal bar, where they were held up to be seen; put the case that he habitually knew of their being imprisoned, whipped, transported, neglected, cast out, qualified in all ways for the hangman, and growing up to be hanged." (424)

On the other hand, this figure gets a unique opportunity: "Put the case, Pip, that here was one pretty little child out of the heap, who could be saved; whom the father believed dead, and dared make no stir about; as to whom, over the mother, the legal adviser had [some] power" (425). Jaggers, by controlling the violent nature of Molly, was able to act as the benevolent Hidden Hand in Estella's life. Of course, to the modern sensibility the patriarchal oppression in both these acts is self-evident and, further, Pip's own

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relationship with Magwitch underscores the dangers of operating via the Hidden Hand—yet we should impose neither our sensibility nor even Pip's (as both are anachronistic) on Jaggers' original benevolent act. At the historical moment when Jaggers acts, he acts against what he sees as an oppressive social system and to the best of his ability (given his circumstances) in the interest of Estella's freedom as a human being. The tremendous implications of this act (nor its consequences) cannot be overstated and, in Pip's case, it is only when he comes to understand Magwitch in a similar vein that he, Pip, attains full autonomy and reflective distance on his life.

Yet Jaggers' hypothetical case also emphasizes the depth of his private life. We, the readers (as does Pip himself), finally see Jaggers from a mature perspective—not from the initial, infantile and projective stance of reverent awe that has guided the descriptions of Jaggers up to this point. Simultaneously, however, Jaggers' case also locks a larger pattern in *Great Expectations* into place. The world of *Great Expectations*, whatever may be said in places like the Little Britain law offices, actually operates by and is structured as an organization of Hidden Hands: Jaggers and Estella, Magwitch and Pip, Pip/Miss Havisham and Herbert Pocket (more on the last pairing in a moment). Further, Jaggers emphasizes, it is a system which must remain secret:

> "For whose sake would you reveal the secret? For the father's? I think he would not be much the better for the mother. For the mother's? I think if she had done such a deed she would be safer where she was. For the daughter's? I think it would hardly serve her, to establish her parentage for the information of her husband, and to drag her back to disgrace, after an escape of twenty years, pretty secure to last for life. But, add the case that you had loved her, Pip, and had made

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> her the subject of those 'poor dreams' which have, at one time or another, been in the heads of more men than you think likely, then I tell you that you had better—and would much sooner when you had thought well of it—chop off that bandaged left hand of yours with your bandaged right hand, and then pass the chopper on to Wemmick there, to cut that off, too." (426)

Jaggers' case ends with what may be the most affective passage in all of *Great Expectations*. On one hand, he reveals his deep love for Estella and concern for her well being, and places himself within a larger pattern of people guided by "poor dreams," a phrase Pip first used to describe himself (423). On the other hand, and this is the point from which I believe that the passage's power truly derives, throughout his speech Jaggers never once stops speaking in the second person, in describing his hypothetical "legal adviser." We experience the intensity of his emotions even as we realize that we are glimpsing the limits of his expressive capability. Yet the moment that follows this speech is just as astonishing: "I looked at Wemmick, whose face was very grave. He gravely touched his lips with his forefinger. I did the same. Mr Jaggers did the same. 'Now, Wemmick,' said the latter then, resuming his usual manner, 'what item was it you were at, when Mr Pip came in?'" (426). The three men make a pact of silence and the glimpse into Jaggers ends just as quickly as it began. But something new has been revealed. What had seemed a local conspiracy (i.e., confined to the "freemasonry" of Pip and Joe, and to the world of the marshes) emerges as a far-ranging and class-disregarding conspiracy. And it is this conspiracy *of Hidden Hands* that replaces the poetic justice missing in *Great Expectations*, that has stepped into the vacuum left by the disappearance of the Providential Hand.

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But, I wish to stress, Pip occupies a curious position in relation to this conspiracy. First of all, he has been its object through the benefit of Magwitch's expectations. This experience has taught Pip what life without autonomy entails, and by the end of the novel (or even before he learns Magwitch's identity) he understands too well the constraints of his own situation to want to situate someone else in a similar way. But, second, his putting his finger to his lips in the passage above only ratifies what he has already done in secret—i.e., played his part in the conspiracy, first involuntarily with Magwitch, then decisively as the Hidden Hand responsible for Herbert's success. Further, in the capacity of Hidden Hand, he has also enlisted the aid of Miss Havisham who, as a result, becomes a second Hidden Hand in Herbert's life. But what makes Pip's act different from those of Jaggers and Magwitch? How does Pip's experience as the object of a Hidden Hand influence his behavior as a subject? On one hand, after Magwitch's appearance he learns a kind of mature objectivity and can forgive Miss Havisham, and come to terms with Estella (372ff). Further, he also learns to understand the worth of what Magwitch has done, and to see how Magwitch's act resembles or, more accurately, doesn't resemble Pip's own behavior:

> We had a doleful parting, and when I took my place by Magwitch's side, I felt that that was my place henceforth while he lived.
>
> For now, my repugnance to him had all melted away, and in the hunted wounded shackled creature who held my hand in his, I only saw a man who had meant to be my benefactor, and who had felt affectionately, gratefully, and generously, towards me with great constancy through a series of years. I only saw in him a much better man than I had been to Joe. (456-57)

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By understanding Magwitch, Pip comes to understand himself and how he has truly behaved towards Joe. On the other hand, Pip acts for Herbert in the same secretive way that Jaggers (unlike Magwitch for Pip) has acted for Estella, but Pip by placing Herbert in a financially secure and independent position also goes beyond Jaggers in giving Herbert the freedom that Estella (as Miss Havisham's ward) or Pip himself (being dependant on his "mysterious" benefactor) never had. In other words, because of his experiences Pip learns how to become a Hidden Hand that can obviate its own intervention and thus bestow true freedom.

This, then, is how the conspiracy of Hidden Hands functions at its best in *Great Expectations*—as a force that works by benevolent acts, that recognizes the value of human autonomy, and that can give this autonomy to its beneficiary. It tries to work in a way akin to how the Providential Hand once worked and, though we are still a long way from Pynchon, in terms of the Hidden Hand conspiraceme we now have analogous situations—Pynchon's sinister conspiracy being separated from Dickens' only in terms of final aim. That the benevolent Hidden Hand conspiracy is an essential component of *Great Expectations* and that it contributes in a profound way to the novel's aesthetic power emerges when we realize how pervasive, in fact, Hidden Hands are in the narrative. Yet in the world of *Great Expectations*, the concept of the benevolent, Hidden Hand conspiracy is still a buried or nascent entity and, as this chapter testifies, it is hard work both to bring the conspiracy to light and to understand the full implications of its presence. Therefore, to explore this type of conspiracy further, I shall return to it again in the next chapter during my discussion of *The Woman in White* and again (and at greater length) in my look at "Revolutionary Conspiracies" in Chapter Five.

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Chapter Three: Conspiracy to Defraud and the Paranoid Subject

In this chapter I begin with the classic style of conspiracy and focus on one of its most popular nineteenth century configurations—what I call the "Conspiracy to Defraud." On the surface the Conspiracy to Defraud is a simple phenomenon and in the narratives I consider its key elements vary little over the nineteenth century. A young and sympathetic woman comes or is about to come into a fortune and two men (or a man and a woman), one of whom courts the young woman, conspire to defraud her of her fortune. Sometimes these men work alone. Sometimes they use faceless henchmen. The level of the men's success depends on the narrative in which this conspiraceme appears. That said, in this chapter I shall not be concerned with the permutations of the conspiraceme itself, but rather with the psychological and emotional responses that the Conspiracy to Defraud elicits from its victims, from its conspirators and (in one special case) from the reader. Further, although I will look at this Conspiracy to Defraud in four nineteenth century novels—Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*, and Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady*—I shall concentrate almost exclusively on *The Woman in White*.

The Woman in White provides one of the most sustained and intense portrayals of the Conspiracy to Defraud in Victorian literature, both because of the minute and comprehensive way in which Collins depicts the conspiracy and because of the quality of the paranoia or "paranoia" that most of the major characters exhibit. As a result, the novel is a unique and pivotal work in terms of my larger argument because it foreshadows the

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"paranoid style" as a narrative mode. Collins' work contains no less than three distinct conspiracies, two of the classic kind (Fosco and Glyde against Laura, Glyde and Mrs. Catherick against Anne Catherick) and one that brings the novel's narrative structure incredibly close to conspiracy theory (the "Brotherhood"). Through the depiction of these conspiracies (especially the last one), and because he deliberately situates them within a distinct historical moment, Collins creates a new kind of conspiracy narrative, one which implicates its readers in validating and reinforcing its claims, and so one which transforms each of its readers into a conspiracy theorist.

The earliest version of the Conspiracy to Defraud which I will discuss appears in Jane Austen's final novel *Persuasion* (1815-16). Unlike Austen's other novels, a profound melancholy pervades the narrative of *Persuasion*, one that is not dispelled by the final marriage of the novel's heroine, Anne Elliot, to Frederick Wentworth. As many critics have noted, this melancholy or "somberness" derives from the fact that Austen chooses to extend the suffering of her two central characters beyond a reasonable limit. The delay before marriage is not one year, as in the case of Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*, but eight years—eight years in which Anne and Wentworth are able to meditate on the mistake they made in not marrying when the opportunity first arose. Yet although Anne's relationship with Wentworth is the novel's central focus and, as such, sets the mood for most of the narrative, it is not the only source of *Persuasion*'s melancholy. Part of the melancholy derives from Anne's relationship to her father and sister Elizabeth, both of whom are concerned primarily with titles and fortunes, and part—I want to suggest—derives from Anne's relationship with her other suitor, William Walter Elliot, the "heir presumptive" of the Elliot family. Ten years before the novel's

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opening Elliot had been the suitor of Elizabeth, then mysteriously broke off the courtship, and he returns now in the second half of *Persuasion*, this time to pursue Anne: "They ascended and passed him; and as they passed, Anne's face caught his eye, and he looked at her with a degree of earnest admiration, which she could not be insensible of" (101).

Yet Elliot's advances do not get very far and he never poses a serious threat to Anne's relationship with Wentworth. Mrs. Smith neé Hamilton averts any possible danger to Anne. Mrs. Smith, an old friend whom Anne encounters at Bath, has previously known Elliot and, in one of the novel's more dramatic moments, shares her knowledge with Anne:

> "Hear the truth, therefore, now, while you are unprejudiced. Mr. Elliot is a man without heart or conscience; a designing, wary, cold-blooded being, who thinks only of himself; whom for his own interest or ease, would be guilty of any cruelty, or any treachery, that could be perpetrated without risk of his general character. He has no feeling for others. Those whom he has been the chief cause of leading into ruin, he can neglect and desert without the smallest compunction. He is totally beyond the reach of any sentiment of justice or compassion. Oh! he is black at heart, hollow and black!" (187)

Mrs. Smith exposes Elliot's treachery and his heartlessness. She also describes a number of his schemes. For example, he shunned Elizabeth because he wanted "'to make his fortune, and by a rather quicker process than the law. He was determined to make it by marriage. He was determined, at least, not to mar it by an imprudent marriage'" as he would have done in marrying Elizabeth (189). He has returned now because he fears the machinations of the adventuress Mrs. Clay towards Anne's father. He "cannot bear the

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idea of not being Sir William," i.e., of not having the baronetcy; and he pursues Anne only out of his desire for this title (194-95). Further, Mrs. Smith indicates that Elliot has even placed a spy with Anne's family: "'Colonel Wallis had his eye upon your father enough to be sensible of [Mrs. Clay's advances], though he did not then visit in Camden Place; but his regard for Mr. Elliot gave him an interest in watching all that was going on there, and when Mr. Elliot came to Bath [. . .] Colonel Wallis made him acquainted with the appearance of things, and the reports beginning to prevail'" (194). The two men conspire against Anne and her family and this conspiracy, it emerges later, even includes Mrs. Wallis, the Colonel's wife.

As important as these revelations are, they have an equally significant effect on Anne. To Mrs. Smith's disclosures, Anne responds with little surprise:

> "Yes," said Anne, "you tell me nothing which does not accord with what I have known, or could imagine. There is always something offensive in the details of cunning. The manoeuvres of selfishness and duplicity must ever be revolting, but I have heard nothing which really surprises me. I know those who would be shocked by such a representation of Mr. Elliot, who would have difficulty in believing it; but I have never been satisfied. I have always wanted some other motive for his conduct than appeared." (195)

Anne shows that she has suspected Elliot all along and that Mrs. Smith has just confirmed the suspicions. Yet Austen also hints that the revelations do compel Anne to reconsider the influence of her friend Lady Russell, the figure who had originally persuaded (hence the novel's title) Anne not to marry Wentworth: "Anne could just acknowledge within herself such a possibility of having been induced to marry [Elliot], as made her shudder at

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the idea of the misery which must have followed. It was just possible that she might have been persuaded by Lady Russell! And under such a supposition, which would have been most miserable, when time had disclosed all, too late?" (199). Anne exhibits a slight fear that she might have still married Elliot despite her instincts and because of Lady Russell's persuasion. Or in the larger terms of the novel, we can see that the moment provides an important stage in Anne's intellectual and emotional development, and points, ultimately, to her impeding marriage with Wentworth. After the conversation with Mrs. Smith, Anne never again considers Elliot with anything but distrust: "His attentive deference to her father, contrasted with his former language, was odious; and when she thought of his cruel conduct towards Mrs. Smith, she could hardly bear the sight of his present smiles and mildness, or the sound of his artificial good sentiments" (201). Anne has learned a painful lesson, one that contributes—if only subtly—to the novel's final, somber mood.

In the next work I want to consider, Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1860-61), the central focus of my last chapter, the Conspiracy to Defraud creates much more devastating and pronounced effects. In fact, the effects are so visible, especially in the case of the conspiracy's victim, Miss Havisham, that the conspiracy itself appears only as a relatively inconsequential plot element:

> She was dressed in rich materials—satins, and lace, and silks—all of white. Her shoes were white. And she had a long while veil dependent from her hair, and she had bridal flowers in her hair, but her hair was white. Some bright jewels sparkled on her neck and on her hands, and some other jewels lay sparkling on the table. Dresses, less splendid than the dress she wore, and half-packed trunks, were scattered about. She had not quite finished dressing, for she had but one shoe

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> on—the other was on the table near her hand—her veil was but half arranged, her watch and chain were not put on, and some lace for her bosom lay with those trinkets, and with her handkerchief, and gloves, and some flowers, and a prayer-book, all confusedly heaped about the looking-glass.
>
> It was not in the first few moments that I saw all these things, though I saw more of them in the first moments than might be supposed. But, I saw that everything within my view which ought to be white, had been white long ago, and had lost its lustre, and was faded and yellow. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes. I saw that the dress had been put upon the rounded figure of a young woman, and that the figure upon which it now hung loose, had shrunk to skin and bone. Once, I had been taken to see some ghastly waxwork at the Fair, representing I know not what impossible personage lying in state. Once, I had been taken to one of our old marsh churches to see a skeleton in the ashes of a rich dress, that had been dug out of a vault under the church pavement. Now, waxwork and skeleton seemed to have dark eyes that moved and looked at me. I should have cried out, if I could. (87)

Though, as we saw, the novel is full of rich passages, few are as powerful as this one, Pip's first encounter with Miss Havisham. Questions of how and why readily give way to Miss Havisham's appearance itself. She seems at once strange, ghostly and repulsive. Pip's maturity, however, comes when he learns how to see beyond Miss Havisham's immediate appearance: "To see her with her white hair and her worn face kneeling at my feet, gave me a shock through all my frame. I entreated her to rise, and got my arms

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about her to help her up; but she only pressed that hand of mine which was nearest to her grasp, and hung her head over it and wept" (410). By the close of the novel Pip discovers that however shocking her appearance, however obsessive and manipulative her behavior, both of these aspects serve only to conceal the sensitivity of Miss Havisham's heart, a heart that has been catastrophically wounded yet, as emerges here, still continues to feel and to grieve.

Miss Havisham, I want to suggest, represents one of the most extreme versions of the Conspiracy to Defraud victim. As such, it is important to examine the circumstances that lead to her condition. In the narrative of *Great Expectations* these circumstances emerge in two stages. We learn the first details of Miss Havisham's past from Pip's friend Herbert Pocket. Herbert tells us of Miss Havisham's half-brother Arthur: "'As the son grew a young man, he turned out riotous, extravagant, undutiful—altogether bad. At last his father disinherited him; but he softened when he was dying, and left him well off, though not nearly so well off as Miss Havisham'" (203-04); and of the suitor who appeared soon after the death of Miss Havisham's father: "There is no doubt that she perfectly idolized him. He practised on her affection in that systematic way, that he got great sums of money from her, and he induced her to buy her brother out of a share in the brewery (which had been weakly left him by his father) at an immense price, on the plea that when he was her husband he must hold and manage it all" (204-05). Further, Herbert also provides the first explanation of why Miss Havisham looks the way she does:

> "To return to the man and make an end of him. The marriage day was fixed, the wedding dresses were bought, the wedding tour was planned out, the wedding

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> guests were invited. The day came, but not the bridegroom. He wrote her a letter—"
>
> "Which she received," I struck in, "when she was dressing for her marriage? At twenty minutes to nine?"
>
> "At the hour and minute," said Herbert, nodding, "at which she afterwards stopped all the clocks. What was in it, further than that it most heartlessly broke the marriage off, I can't tell you, because I don't know. When she recovered from a bad illness that she had, she laid the whole place waste, as you have seen it, and she has never since looked upon the light of day." (205)

The suitor, it will turn out, is Compeyson, the criminal responsible for imprisoning Magwitch. Further, we learn that in defrauding Miss Havisham, Compeyson did not work alone: "It has been supposed that the man to whom she gave her misplaced confidence, acted throughout in concert with her half-brother; that it was a conspiracy between them; and that they shared the profits" (205-06). The word *conspiracy*, as I mentioned in the last chapter, appears twice in the narrative of *Great Expectations*. Here, in the second instance, Herbert reveals there was a conspiracy against Miss Havisham, that her own half-brother conspired with Compeyson against her.

Whatever knowledge of the conspiracy Herbert lacks, Magwitch supplies later in the novel. As he narrates the story of his life, Magwitch describes how he met Compeyson and what kind of criminal Compeyson was: "'Compeyson's business was the swindling, handwriting forging, stolen bank-note passing, and such-like. All sorts of traps as Compeyson could set with his head, and keep his own legs out of and get the profits from and let another man in for, was Compeyson's business. He'd no more heart than a

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iron file, he was as cold as death, and he had the head of the Devil afore mentioned'" (362). Magwitch outlines Compeyson's various criminal practices, shows that Compeyson was a criminal mastermind of sorts and, in mentioning that Compeyson has "no more heart than an iron file," Magwitch even echoes Mrs. Smith's description of Elliot in *Persuasion.* In addition, Magwitch also emphasizes how Compeyson manipulated him: "'I'll simply say to you, dear boy, and Pip's comrade, that that man got me into such nets as made me his black slave. I was always in debt to him, always under his thumb, always a working, always a getting into danger. He was younger than me, but he'd got craft, and he'd got learning, and he overmatched me five hundred times told and no mercy'" (364); and how, once the two men were arrested, Compeyson swayed the trial in his own favor: "'And when the verdict come, warn't it Compeyson as was recommended to mercy on account of good character and bad company, and giving up all the information he could agen me, and warn't it me as got never a word but Guilty?'" etc. (365). At Compeyson's hands Magwitch, who had seemed such a terrifying figure in the novel's opening chapters, appears as much a victim as Miss Havisham.

Magwitch's disclosures regarding Compeyson also have another interesting component. Though Magwitch himself doesn't know Miss Havisham, he too discusses the conspiracy against her: "'There was another in with Compeyson, as was called Arthur—not as being so chrisen'd, but as a surname. He was in a Decline, and was a shadow to look at. Him and Compeyson had been in a bad thing with a rich lady some years afore, and they'd made a pot of money by it'" (362). In addition, Magwitch's account of the conspiracy differs from Herbert's in that Magwitch not only goes into depth regarding Compeyson, but also in relation to Arthur Havisham, the co-conspirator:

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> "Compeyson's wife and me took him up to bed agen, and he raved most dreadful. 'Why look at her!' he cries out. 'She's a shaking the shroud at me! Don't you see her? Look at her eyes! Ain't it awful to see her so mad?' Next, he cries, 'She'll put it on me, and then I'm done for! Take it away from her, take it away!' And then he catched hold of us, and kep on a talking to her, and answering of her, till I half believed I see her myself." (363)

Arthur's heart is not like an "iron file" and his part in the conspiracy comes to haunt his conscience in a powerful way. He becomes delusional, paranoid even, and visions of Miss Havisham persecute him in the same way that Banquo's ghost does Macbeth. This paranoia, Magwitch indicates, eventually contributes to Arthur's psychological breakdown and his death:

> "He rested pretty quiet till it might want a few minutes of five, and then he starts up with a scream, and screams out, 'Here she is! She's got the shroud again. She's unfolding it. She's coming out of the corner. She's coming to the bed. Hold me, both on you—one of each side—don't let her touch me with it. Hah! she missed me that time. Don't let her throw it over my shoulders. Don't let her lift me up to get it round me. She's lifting me up. Keep me down!' Then he lifted himself up hard, and was dead." (364)

Like Wilkie Collins before him (see below), so Dickens too depicts not only the consequences of the Conspiracy to Defraud as regards the victims, but also the consequences to the conspirators themselves. He gives us conspirators who are not just one-dimensional villains, but actual human beings who act and who suffer because of their actions.

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Another illuminating but now late-Victorian example of the Conspiracy to Defraud appears in Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881 and 1908).[1] Here the conspiracy takes Isabel Archer, the heroine of the novel, as its target and is especially powerful in that it involves Isabel's close friend Madame Merle and Merle's erstwhile lover Gilbert Osmond, and also in that Isabel does not even begin to suspect that there has been a conspiracy until long after her marriage. Or, rather, for the first three years of marriage Isabel resists such a belief:

> Madame Merle might have made Gilbert Osmond's marriage, but she certainly had not made Isabel Archer's. That was the work of—Isabel scarcely knew what: of nature, providence, fortune, of the eternal mystery of things. It was true her aunt's complaint had been not so much of Madame Merle's activity as of her duplicity: she had brought about the strange event and then she had denied her guilt. Such guilt would not have been great, to Isabel's mind; she couldn't make a crime of Madame Merle's having been the producing cause of the most important friendship she had ever formed. (II:158)

Contrary to her aunt's suggestion, which she has considered at length, Isabel refuses to ascribe any malicious intent to Madame Merle, and instead falls back on the type of Providential reading that I discussed in the last chapter and which by 1878 (the time of the novel's latter half) was certainly becoming *passé* as a literary trope. Further, when problems in her marriage emerge, when Osmond's rigidity and superficiality cause Isabel to feel trapped in "the observance of a magnificent form" (II: 356), she places the blame on herself: "A girl in love was doubtless not a free agent; but the sole source of her

[1] N.B. I use the 1908 version of this novel throughout my discussion.

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mistake had been within herself. There had been no plot, no snare; she had looked and considered and chosen" (II:160). Isabel either denies or can't yet see the Hidden Hand that has really guided her life, and so persists in believing herself to have been a free agent in her decision to marry Osmond.

Yet with time this outlook begins to disintegrate. The process is both gradual and sudden, and—I would argue—much of the James' aesthetic skill in developing the Conspiracy to Defraud emerges in the fact that he sets us, the readers, in almost the same position of understanding as Isabel herself. For example, when Isabel catches a crucial and meaningful glance between Merle and Osmond, she is as much at a loss to interpret it as we are:

> The impression had, in strictness, nothing unprecedented; but she felt it as something new, and the soundlessness of her step gave [Isabel] time to take in the scene before she interrupted it. Madame Merle was there in her bonnet, and Gilbert Osmond was talking to her; for a minute they were unaware she had come in. Isabel had often seen that before, certainly; but what she had not seen, or at least had not noticed, was that their colloquy had for the moment converted itself into a sort of familiar silence, from which she instantly perceived that her entrance would startle them. (II:164)

Though Isabel clearly detects something, at this point in the narrative she and James' readers have no way of discovering what that something is. That the moment is significant emerges in that Isabel constantly returns to it: "More clearly than ever before Isabel heard a cold, mocking voice proceed from she knew not where, in the dim void that surrounded her, and declare that this bright, strong, definite, worldly woman

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[Madame Merle], this incarnation of the practical, the personal, the immediate, was a powerful agent in her destiny" (II:322). An intangible element in Madame Merle's behavior haunts Isabel, and here there is a reprise, though now in diabolical form, of the Providential voice in *Villette* which I discussed in the last chapter. More importantly, that Isabel harbors suspicions about Madame Merle and that these suspicions link Merle with Osmond, sets Isabel in the position of a conspiracy theorist (though not of the "paranoid" sort)—one who, like Nicholas Branch in *Libra*, operates on the cusp of a conspiracy theory—and so by default also situates the reader in this position.

I do not, however, wish to push this last point too far. Isabel is correct in her surmise and the first concrete supporting evidence appears soon after Lord Warburton, Isabel's former suitor, drops his new pursuit of Pansy, Osmond's daughter. Madame Merle urges Isabel to urge Warburton to resume the courtship, but it is the manner in which Merle urges that initiates Isabel's epiphany: "Isabel sat there looking up at her, without rising; her face was almost a prayer to be enlightened. But the light of this woman's eyes seemed only a darkness. "Oh misery!" she murmured at last; and she fell back, covering her face with her hands. It had come over her like a high-surging wave that Mrs. Touchett was right. Madame Merle had married her" (II:327). It is a painful and deeply disillusioning moment; Isabel reacts accordingly. By the end of the same day on which she makes her discovery, Isabel also arrives at the truth—at least partially—about Osmond and Merle's relationship to him:

> [Madame Merle] had found her profit not in the gross device of borrowing money, but in the more refined idea of introducing one of her intimates to the young woman's fresh and ingenuous fortune. [. . .] She found herself confronted

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> in this manner with the conviction that the man in the world whom she had supposed to be the least sordid had married her, like a vulgar adventurer, for her money (II:330)

Obtaining her fortune, Isabel realizes, lies at the root both of Merle's introducing Isabel to Osmond, and of their subsequent marriage. All that remains is for Isabel to discover, as she will from Osmond's sister, the Countess Gemini, that Pansy is Merle's daughter, and that Pansy's welfare is the guiding cause of Merle's actions (see II:368ff)

As in Austen's novel, just as significant as Isabel's discovery is the way that she reacts to her new found knowledge. She sympathizes with and even pities Madame Merle: "It is a singular, but a characteristic, fact that before Isabel returned from her silent drive she had broken its silence by the soft exclamation: 'Poor, poor Madame Merle!'" (II:331). In a moment of sheer imaginative insight Isabel intuits the true state of Madame Merle's relations with Osmond, namely that whatever her manipulations of Isabel, by now Merle must surely be disdained by Osmond. And so it is. James' narrator tells us that Isabel's assessment would "have been justified," and the conversation between Merle and Osmond that follows Isabel's exclamation confirms the narrator's opinion: "'I don't believe at all that [the soul is] an immortal principle. I believe it can perfectly be destroyed. That's what has happened to mine, which was a very good one to start with; and it's you I have to thank for it. You're *very* bad,' she added with gravity in her emphasis" (II:334). As had been the case with Arthur Havisham because of his involvement with Compeyson, so with Madame Merle: James gives us the figure of a conspirator who suffers, and who comes to regret her part in the conspiracy, a point reinforced by the events following Merle's conversation with Osmond: "After he had left

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her she went, the first thing, and lifted from the mantel-shelf the attenuated coffee-cup in which he had mentioned the existence of a crack; but she looked at it rather abstractedly. 'Have I been so vile all for nothing?' she vaguely wailed" (II: 338). If anything, Madame Merle's agony even surpasses what Isabel had imagined.

Still Isabel's compassion puts her in a unique position, at least in terms of the Conspiracy to Defraud narratives that I have so far considered. On one hand, Isabel can now step back from the conspiracy and see it in its complexity: "Now that she was in the secret, now that she knew something that so much concerned her and the eclipse of which had made life resemble an attempt to play whist with an imperfect pack of cards, the truth of things, their mutual relations, their meaning, and for the most part their horror, rose before her with a kind of architectural vastness" (390-91). Everything falls into place and Isabel attains a perspective similar to that of the Subject Who Knows. On the other hand, in what is perhaps the most aesthetically satisfying moment in the entire novel, Isabel outs the conspiracy and confronts Madame Merle:

> [Madame Merle] had not proceeded far before Isabel noted a sudden break in her voice, a lapse in her continuity, which was in itself a complete drama. This subtle modulation marked a momentous discovery—the perception of an entirely new attitude on the part of her listener. Madame Merle had guessed in the space of an instant that everything was at end between them, and in the space of another instant she had guessed the reason why. [. . .] What remained was the cleverest woman in the world standing there within a few feet of her and knowing as little what to think as the meanest. Isabel's only revenge was to be silent still—to leave Madame Merle in this unprecedented situation. (II:378-79)

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Rather than allowing the situation to crush her (as it had Miss Havisham in Dickens' novel), Isabel faces it with resolution and is ultimately able to triumph over her conspirators, both here and in her later, final decision to return to Osmond despite what he has done.

From this introductory discussion of the Conspiracy to Defraud, I now move to Wilkie Collins' masterpiece and one of my own favorite novels, *The Woman in White* (1859-60). Sadly, in the last fifteen years or so the novel has not fared well with critics. Though with *The Woman in White* Collins almost single-handedly initiated the sensation genre and though, as some have written, *The Woman in White* is among the most readable of Victorian novels, more recently critics have chosen to deconstruct the novel and concentrate only on its ideological shortcomings. D.A. Miller and Tamar Heller offer two readings of this sort. Miller, for example, argues that the novel justifies the incarceration of women and the repression of female sensations; that it validates the psychological devastation of Laura Fairlie, Marian Halcombe and Anne Catherick at the hands of Count Fosco and Sir Percival Glyde; and, in a typical passage, adds that *The Woman in White* also "needs to supplement its misogynistic plot with a misanthropic one, in which it will detail the frightening, even calamitous consequences of unmediated relations between men" (186). For Miller, it seems, Collins' novel condemns anything but the father-to-son-mediated-through-mother bonds of the nuclear family. Tamar Heller writes in a similar vein. She assails the novel for its depiction of Walter Hartright, "a drawing master of impoverished gentility who gradually rises in social status to become secularly established in his profession and, finally, even a member of the landed gentry," but who does so to the detriment of the women in the novel, as best seen in the novel's ending

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which "is devoted to redefining gender and class distinctions that [Anne Catherick] disrupts in its attempt to instate a domestic ideology where the professional man prospers in the marketplace by distinguishing himself from women, who in turn are relegated to the private sphere where they safeguard and reproduce the fruits of men's labor" (111-12). These are serious charges—so serious that I, in perusing Miller's and Heller's essays, find myself wondering why I or any reader should bother reading the novel at all. As a result, in my discussion here I hope to confront this issue while also exploring the various conspiracies in the novel—conspiracies, as I mentioned earlier, which distinguish Collins' novel as one of the most important in the literary progression from conspiracy to conspiracy theory.

I begin with the novel's central male protagonist and the figure most responsible for shaping the text of *The Woman in White* from a series of separate narratives, Walter Hartright. D.A. Miller has argued that the "nervous state" affects almost every important character in the novel, but Miller also asserts that this "feminine malady" moves from character to character, extending "throughout the thick ramifications of plot to excite sympathetic vibrations in Laura and Marian, and in Sir Percival and even Fosco as well" (149 and 153). This may or may not be true, even if we concede that the "nervous state" is a monolithic and "feminine" phenomenon, but I want to begin by noting that each of the major characters has noticeably different psychological dispositions. Hartright, for example, like Inspector Bucket of *Bleak House* and Pip in *Great Expectations* (see Chapters One and Two, respectively) has a tendency to project. Though I shall not discuss the full implications of this tendency until the end of this chapter, the tendency is already visible in Hartright's first encounter with Marian where his visions of "the rare

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beauty of her form and [. . .] the unaffected grace of her attitude" startlingly give way to her actual appearance: "She left the window—and I said to myself, The lady is dark. She moved forward a few steps—and I said to myself, The lady is young. She approached nearer—and I said to myself (with a sense of surprise which words fail me to express), The lady is ugly!" (58). Similarly, his visions are again projected but now sustained in the case of Laura, Marian's half-sister:

> [. . .] there dawns upon me brightly, from the dark greenish-brown background of the summer-house, a light, youthful figure, clothed in a simple muslin dress, the pattern of it formed by broad alternate stripes of delicate blue and white. A scarf of the same material sits crisply and closely round her shoulders, and a little straw hat of the natural colour, plainly and sparingly trimmed with ribbon to match the gown, covers her head, and throws its soft pearly shadow over the upper part of her face. Her hair is of so faint and pale a brown —not flaxen, and yet almost as light; not golden, and yet almost as glossy—that it nearly melts, here and there, into the shadow of the hat. It is plainly parted and drawn back over her ears, and the line of it ripples naturally as it crosses her forehead. The eyebrows are rather darker than the hair; and the eyes are of that soft, limpid, turquoise blue, so often sung by the poets, so seldom seen in real life. Lovely eyes in colour, lovely eyes in form—large and tender and quietly thoughtful—but beautiful above all things in the clear truthfulness of look that dwells in their inmost depths, and shines through all their changes of expression with the light of a purer and a better world. (74-75)

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There is undeniable beauty in the writing here and, I would argue, it may be among Collins' best moments in the novel, but we should also note that what Hartright sees, like any young star-struck lover might, has much more to do with superficial characteristics augmented by his own fancy, rather than with who Laura actually is. It is a point Hartright himself concedes when he urges the reader to "[t]ake her as the visionary nursling of your own fancy" (76).

But in meeting new figures Hartright does not always project. For example, in his first encounter with Anne Catherick, although Hartright is justifiably startled by her appearance, especially after her critically-celebrated first touch, he still manages to stay relatively level-headed in observing and assessing her: "There was nothing wild, nothing immodest in her manner: it was quiet and self-controlled, a little melancholy and a little touched by suspicion; not exactly the manner of a lady, and, at the same time, not the manner of a woman in the humblest rank of life" (48). Unlike his first sight of Laura, here Hartright's description is simple and without imaginative affectation. Even when he tells us that he becomes "staggered [. . .] with astonishment" at Anne's mentioning Limmeridge House, his narrative still continues in the cool and detached manner that it had maintained before. Further, Anne's own manner of proceeding underlines Hartright's relative calm. She, for example, replies defensively when Hartright mentions being startled by her appearance: "'You don't suspect me of doing anything wrong, do you? I have done nothing wrong. I have met with an accident—I am very unfortunate in being here alone so late. Why do you suspect me of doing wrong?' / She spoke with unnecessary earnestness and agitation, and shrank back from me several paces" (48); and at even vague allusions to Glyde, she immediately becomes quite agitated: "She spoke

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loudly and almost fiercely, raised her clenched hand in the air, and shook it passionately" (51). In Anne's first encounter with Hartright, Anne seems to be the one who projects (until we learn her history and discover that she has just escaped from an asylum), while Hartright keeps a clear head.

Hartright's meeting with Anne shows us that his projective tendency is just a tendency, not a fixed character trait. In the early portions of the novel this tendency appears only at crucial emotional moments that involve Laura, Hartright's love interest. There is Hartright's first glimpse of Laura, but there is also the period after Marian tells Hartright that Laura is already engaged to Glyde. Like any person that discovers their love is for naught, Hartright searches for a way to subvert the engagement. Not coincidentally, Anne Catherick appears at the key moment. Her letter is delivered just before Marian's announcement and in the speech that follows the announcement Marian refers to Anne directly. Hartright, on cue, responds appropriately: "Again the chance reference to the woman in white! Was there no possibility of speaking of Miss Fairlie and of me without raising the memory of Anne Catherick, and setting her between us like a fatality that it was hopeless to avoid?" (97). The passage pulls two ways. Hartright seems to cast Anne as an obstacle, while simultaneously linking her (albeit in a mystical, *fatal*istic way) to his relations with Laura. Yet the implications of this link are as yet suppressed. Immediately after, Marian leaves and Hartright launches into a short meditation—memories of leaving home lead to the memory of his first encounter with Anne: "Anne Catherick again! Even the memory of the farewell evening with my mother and my sister could not return to me now unconnected with that other memory of the moonlight walk back to London. What did it mean? Were that woman and I to meet once

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more? It was possible, at the least" (99). Hartright responds with the same surprise that he showed after Marian's reference. The difference is that this time there has been no external stimulus. Despite Hartright's wording, the allusion to Anne now is volitional—even if unconsciously volitional. She recurs because Hartright *wants* her to recur, not because immediate events have prompted him. The same might be said of the last "coincidence": "Hampshire! Anne Catherick's native place. Again, and yet again, the woman in white. There *was* a fatality in it" (100). This time there is the external stimulus—Hartright has just been questioning Marian about Laura's fiancé, and Marian has replied that Glyde is from Hampshire—but Hartright deliberately begins the discussion and so, we might argue, also bears some responsibility for eliciting the *fatal* reference.

In the succeeding chapter Hartright brings this concept of fatality to the fore. He begins to explore the implications of the allusions to Anne:

> There were hundreds of baronets in England, and dozens of landowners in Hampshire. Judging by the ordinary rules of evidence, I had not the shadow of a reason, thus far, for connecting Sir Percival Glyde with the suspicious words of inquiry that had been spoken to me by the woman in white. And yet, I did connect him with them. Was it because he had now become associated in my mind with Miss Fairlie, Miss Fairlie being, in her turn, associated with Anne Catherick, since the night when I had discovered the ominous likeness between them? Had the events of the morning so unnerved me already that I was at the mercy of any delusion which common chances and common coincidences might suggest to my imagination? Impossible to say. I could only feel that what had passed between

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> Miss Halcombe and myself, on our way from the summer-house, had affected me very strangely. The foreboding of some undiscoverable danger lying hid from us all in the darkness of the future was strong on me. The doubt whether I was not linked already to a chain of events which even my approaching departure from Cumberland would be powerless to snap asunder—the doubt whether we any of us saw the end as the end would really be—gathered more and more darkly over my mind. Poignant as it was, the sense of suffering caused by the miserable end of my brief, presumptuous love seemed to be blunted and deadened by the still stronger sense of something obscurely impending, something invisibly threatening, that Time was holding over our heads. (101)

I quote this great passage at length because it clearly outlines Hartright's mental disposition. Though paranoia might as yet be too strong a pronouncement, Hartright's behavior certainly mimics paranoid behavior. There is no reason to believe that the series of allusions to Anne signifies "some undiscoverable danger lying hid," and yet this is what Hartright does believe. Like some of the figures I discussed in Chapter One (e.g., Oedipa Maas, Nicholas Branch), Hartright reveals his own persecution complex.[2] More interestingly, he himself admits that his fears might just be a projection, that it is "[i]mpossible to say" whether the connections he has made are reality or just his own "delusion." In addition, after reading what he and Marian suspect (correctly) to be Anne's letter, Hartright again emphasizes his metal tottering: "It seemed almost like a monomania to be tracing back everything strange that happened, everything unexpected

[2] David Trotter, in a somewhat cursory reading of *The Woman in White*, makes a similar point. In Trotter's reading, however, Hartright's paranoia (a *culturally*-determined diagnosis) operates as a beneficent, mobilizing force or as a sign of social "aspiration": "the delusion into which it plunges the hero brings about a social ascent which would otherwise have been barely imaginable" (85).

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that was said, always to the same hidden source and the same sinister influence" (105). As we will see later, this moment and the previous one quoted involve a complex network of ideas, but for now it is sufficient to note that here Hartright's again seems paranoid, and that through this possible paranoia he attains an almost authorial or Providential level of omniscience. What impedes him from full omniscience is that he (once more like the paranoid) has an implicit bias, an overriding *idée fixe*:

> I began to think—it is hard to confess this, but I must suppress nothing from beginning to end of the terrible story that I now stand committed to reveal—I began to think, with a hateful eagerness of hope, of the vague charges against Sir Percival Glyde which the anonymous letter contained. What if those wild accusations rested on a foundation of truth? What if their truth could be proved before the fatal words of consent were spoken, and the marriage-settlement was drawn? (106)

It is a revealing connection. For Hartright, what is at stake in linking Laura with Anne, and Anne with the letter, is that he believes that these associations may somehow prevent Laura's marriage. "Fatality" now seems an obvious and simple cover for Hartright's desire.

I shall return to Hartright and the question of his paranoia later. Now I move from his narrative to those of Gilmore (the Fairlie family lawyer) and Marian and, specifically, to the psychological dispositions of these two characters as developed in their respective narratives. Gilmore himself provides a wonderful foil to Hartright in that at first Gilmore exhibits no suspicious, let alone paranoid, tendencies: "'Things of this sort happen constantly in my experience. Anonymous letters—unfortunate woman—sad state of

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society. I don't deny that there are peculiar complications in this case; but the case itself is, most unhappily, common—common'" (142). Gilmore's reassurances to Hartright are exactly as Gilmore describes them—of "the practical view" (142). Marian, by contrast, is at once more perceptive than either Gilmore or Hartright, and much less prone than Hartright to imaginative flights of fancy. Even in detective work, which for Hartright immediately leads to monumental ramifications, Marian remains clear-headed, ascribing her inquisitiveness to a common trait of her gender: "This is a matter of curiosity; and you have got a woman for your ally. Under such conditions success is certain, sooner or later" (74). Whether we agree with Marian's stereotype or not, we can still observe the offhand manner in which Marian conceives the art of detection and, by extension, whatever results it might produce.

Gilmore's narrative is useful, from my point of view, in that it allows us to watch the incremental and rather surprising manner in which his and Marian's suspicions develop. These suspicions first emerge with the arrival of Glyde. As Gilmore had promised Hartright, Glyde quickly resolves the allegations of Anne's letter and provides "every explanation which can be expected." His behavior is perfect—perhaps even too perfect:

> His meeting with Miss Halcombe was delightfully hearty and unaffected, and his reception of me, upon my being presented to him, was so easy and pleasant that we got on together like old friends. Miss Fairlie was not with us when he arrived, but she entered the room about ten minutes afterwards. Sir Percival rose and paid his compliments with perfect grace. His evident concern on seeing the change for the worse in the young lady's looks was expressed with a mixture of tenderness

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> and respect, with an unassuming delicacy of tone, voice, and manner, which did equal credit to his good breeding and his good sense. (153)

There seems to be no point on which to assail Glyde, at least in Gilmore's estimation. And yet Marian responds in a peculiar way, "with a certain hesitation of manner, however, which the circumstances did not seem to me to warrant" (155). The same holds for the family's Italian greyhound: "The little beast, cowardly and cross-grained, as pet-dogs usually are, looked up at him sharply, shrank away from his outstretched hand, whined, shivered, and hid itself under a sofa" (156). Further, Marian's uneasiness persists even after Glyde leaves the room: "'I almost wish Walter Hartright had stayed here long enough to be present at the explanation, and to hear the proposal to me to write this note,'" Marian says, though soon after she dismisses her qualms as stemming from her just being "over-anxious about Laura" (158-59). More surprisingly, however, the episode ends not with the resolution of Marian's doubts, but with the hitherto "satisfied" Gilmore now also becoming suspicious, telling us that "my long experience made me attach an importance to her hesitation under the circumstances here detailed, which I should certainly not have felt in the case of another woman. I could see no cause for any uneasiness or any doubt, but she had made me a little uneasy, and a little doubtful, nevertheless" (159). Marian's suspicions, we discover, have passed to Gilmore.

As the narrative proceeds, Marian's suspicions continue to grow. When the letter from Mrs. Catherick arrives, Marian enters her next stage of doubt: "'I suppose we have really and truly done all we can?' she said, turning and twisting Mrs. Catherick's letter in her hand. / 'If we are friends of Sir Percival's, who know him and trust him, we have done all, and more than all, that is necessary,' I [Mr. Gilmore] answered, a little annoyed by

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this return of her hesitation. 'But if we are enemies who suspect him—' / 'That alternative is not even to be thought of,' she interposed" (161). Though Marian quickly denies the implications of her question, her doubt has been voiced and, moments later, there is a reprise: "'I accuse nobody, and I suspect nothing,' she broke out abruptly. 'But I cannot and will not accept the responsibility of persuading Laura to this marriage'" (161). An new intensity underlies her suspicions. Indirectly, she even levels an actual charge against Glyde:

> "Consult your own knowledge of Laura, Mr. Gilmore. If I tell her to reflect on the circumstances of her engagement, I at once appeal to two of the strongest feelings in her nature—to her love for her father's memory, and to her strict regard for truth. You know that she never broke a promise in her life—you know that she entered on this engagement at the beginning of her father's fatal illness, and that he spoke hopefully and happily of her marriage to Sir Percival Glyde on his deathbed."
>
> I own that I was a little shocked at this view of the case.
>
> "Surely," I said, "you don't mean to infer that when Sir Percival spoke to you yesterday he speculated on such a result as you have just mentioned?" (162)

Again, though immediately afterward Marian denies her implication—that Glyde has manipulated Laura—the fear has again been voiced. And, as in the previous episode, the suspicion passes to Gilmore, albeit taking a new direction: "I returned to the perusal of the newspaper, strongly suspecting that Miss Halcombe and Miss Fairlie had a secret between them which they were keeping from Sir Percival, and keeping from me" (163). Gilmore assumes that Laura and Marian are conspiring, and Laura's subsequent request

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that the marriage be delayed serves to confirm Gilmore's theory. As a result, Gilmore vacillates and now begins to side with Glyde—a position Gilmore again abandons after his final interview with Laura: "I had entered the room, feeling that Sir Percival Glyde had fair reason to complain of the manner in which she was treating him. I left it, secretly hoping that matters might end in her taking him at his word and claiming her release" (168). The sincere form of Laura's behavior once more brings Gilmore over to her side, a stance that Gilmore now maintains to the end of his narrative.

In Gilmore we see a psychological process that resembles that that we have already observed in Hartright. Gilmore alternates between suspicious and non-suspicious hypotheses and, like Hartright, settles on the former. Yet there are two significant differences in the behavior of the men. Gilmore makes no grandiose references to coincidence, fatality, etc. Instead, his suspicions lead to a simple reassessment of Glide's moral character. In addition, the *growth* of Gilmore's suspicions is not wholly self-motivated (or, at least, is much more dependant on external circumstances than the growth of Hartright's suspicions) and, unlike Hartright, Gilmore is not a priori biased by any overriding desire. Although he strives to ensure Laura's welfare, Gilmore begins his narrative without any prejudice against—in support of even—the impeding marriage. His suspicions develop primarily because of Marian's intervention. What is the significance of this observation? Though neither Gilmore nor Marian here exhibit paranoid tendencies (unlike Hartright) and so might best be described as "suspicious," a psychiatric approach does provide useful insight into their relationship. Marian and Gilmore, we might say, enact a low-key version of what clinical psychiatrists call *folie à deux*. Norman A. Cameron describes the situation thus: "The typical setup is that of a dominant delusional

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person who induces a parallel delusional development in a dependant one. If the two are separated, the dependant one recovers quickly, but not the dominant one. A majority [of the dominant figures] exhibit persecutory paranoid delusions" (686). In other words, a *folie à deux* occurs when a truly paranoid figure induces a temporary *pseudo*-paranoia in another person, a condition (incidentally) that vanishes in the second person when the first person is removed. Again, though I hesitate to push the diagnosis too far—it seems, in fact, to be more applicable to Hartright's initial relations with Marian—and though I shall return to this condition later, let us note that there is at least some affinity between what Cameron describes and the psychological interplay between Marian and Gilmore, Marian serving as the dominant (though only suspicious—not paranoid) figure.

How does Marian become suspicious in the first place? As I just implied, we can trace the roots of Marian's suspicion to her interactions with Hartright. Marian, of course, finds the references to Anne in Mrs. Fairlie's letters, but some of Hartright's suspicion also passes to Marian via the *folie à deux* process, now with Hartright serving as the dominant character: "I don't know why," Marian tells Hartright when he connects the "ghaist" in the churchyard to Anne Catherick, "but there is something in this suspicion of yours that seems to startle and unnerve me" (113). The same holds for the first of Marian's narratives. There the exacerbating cause of her doubts again appears to be Hartright, now because of his letter:

> He declares that he saw the faces of the two strange men who followed him about the streets of London, watching him among the crowd which gathered at Liverpool to see the expedition embark, and he positively asserts that he heard the name of Anne Catherick pronounced behind him as he got into the boat. His own

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> words are, "These events have a meaning, these events must lead to a result. The mystery of Anne Catherick is *not* cleared up yet. She may never cross my path again, but if ever she crosses yours, make better use of the opportunity, Miss Halcombe, than I made of it. I speak on strong conviction—I entreat you to remember what I say." (205)

Hartright asserts that he is being shadowed (he is, as it turns out), and he revisits his fixation on Anne Catherick. Now Marian also seizes on this fixation and tell us that her own "memory is only too ready to dwell on [it]" (206). This is exactly what happens:

> Is it Laura's reluctance to become his wife that has set me against him? Have Hartright's perfectly intelligible prejudices infected me without my suspecting their influence? Does that letter of Anne Catherick's still leave a lurking distrust in my mind, in spite of Sir Percival's explanation, and of the proof in my possession of the truth of it? I cannot account for the state of my own feelings; the one thing I am certain of is, that it is my duty—doubly my duty now—not to wrong Sir Percival by unjustly distrusting him. If it has got to be a habit with me always to write of him in the same unfavourable manner, I must and will break myself of this unworthy tendency, even though the effort should force me to close the pages of my journal till the marriage is over! (208)

Marian, because of Hartright, now also links Anne with Glyde. And, like Hartright earlier, now she too displays an inability to arrive at an objective conclusion. She too begins to wonder whether she is projecting.

To resolve the issue Marian responds with a form of reality-testing. First, she acknowledges her prejudice and confirms that she "cannot account" for it. Then, she tries

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alter her feelings towards Glyde, and asserts that she will break herself of her "unworthy tendency." Yet, to fear Glyde is a stance that succeeding events will confirm as justified, and so when Marian tries to direct her affection, her attempt—which would technically qualify as projection—fails. The best Marian can do is continue to alternate between two extremes, i.e., her acknowledged doubt and a self-imposed cure. For example, soon after the last passage quoted above, Marian writes in her journal:

> If I were asked, at this moment, to say plainly what defects I have discovered in Sir Percival, I could only point out two. One, his incessant restlessness and excitability—which may be caused, naturally enough, by unusual energy of character. The other, his short, sharp, ill-tempered manner of speaking to the servants—which may be only a bad habit after all. No, I cannot dispute it, and I will not dispute it—Sir Percival is a very handsome and a very agreeable man. There! I have written it down at last, and I am glad it's over. (210-11)

By separating out the traits of Glyde that make her uneasy, Marian tries to position herself as the Subject Who Knows and so to attain the same sort of closure that a detective like Auguste Dupin might achieve. It doesn't work. Though she ends her journal entry for December 19, 1849 declaring that she hardly recognizes herself as "Sir Percival's warmest friend," her entry for December 20 (which immediately follows) dramatically emphasizes the turn of Marian's feelings: "I hate Sir Percival! I flatly deny his good looks. I consider him to be eminently ill-tempered and disagreeable, and totally wanting in kindness and good feeling" (213). Here in her first narrative Marian comes to resemble a conspiracy theorist in that her suspicions cannot be ultimately and decisively confirmed, and, in fact, the necessary resolution will not come until six months later,

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when Laura and Glyde return from their honeymoon: "My sole motive for distrusting his honesty sprang from the change which I had observed in his language and his manners at Blackwater Park, a change which convinced me that he had been acting a part throughout the whole period of his probation at Limmeridge House" (374). Only via the benefits of time and distance is Marian able to find closure for the suspicions which had earlier haunted her.

Yet what I wish to stress regarding Marian's vacillation in her first narrative is the trajectory that this vacillation ultimately follows. Marian, like Gilmore, makes no allusions to fatality and, after Hartright's letter, her suspicions develop and are suppressed via her own volition, i.e., without Hartright's intervention and with the only stimulus being her own observations on Glyde's behavior to Laura. Further, although Marian opens her narrative in a suspicious frame of mind (rightly so, of course), most of her succeeding efforts are directed towards crushing this suspicion—exactly the opposite of what Hartright does once Anne Catherick induces his doubts. Or, we might argue, Marian attempts a kind of reality-testing that is out of Hartright's reach because of his projective tendency. Clinical psychiatry also lends some insight into her behavior. In describing the early phases of paranoia Norman A. Cameron writes that "[i]n most psychotic paranoid developments there is a prodromal phase in which interest is withdrawn from real interpersonal events. Preoccupation ensues and partial ego regression. But even while preoccupied and still regressing in some respects, the patient begins making his first step toward a reconstruction ('restitution'), towards regaining contact with his social environment, but now on a *delusional basis*" (683, emphasis in original). How does Cameron's observation apply to Marian? Marian reconstructs her reality twice. In the first

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instance, primarily because of Hartright's influence she develops suspicious tendencies—she starts to distrust Glyde. This reconstruction is valid and accurate because, of course, Glyde is guilty of deception. Consequently, when Marian attempts a second reconstruction (i.e., tries to see Glyde as benevolent), this attempt must necessarily proceed on a delusional basis. The endeavor, of course, fails. Marian's skill in reality-testing is too well developed to yield to any favorable images she might project onto Glyde. So, unlike Hartright who exhibits projective tendencies, who has a persecution complex, and who even shows traces of grandiosity in his allusions to fatality, Marian is not paranoid, at least not clinically so.

Or, to take a step back from this rather detailed discussion, it emerges that, contrary to D.A. Miller's assertion, the "nervous state" does not necessarily originate only in women in the early portions of *The Woman in White*. At times the state is present in Hartright or Anne Catherick; at times it appears in Marian and Gilmore. There is some evidence that it passes from character to character via the *folie à deux* process, but even my use of this latter term shows that "nervous state" is a misnomer. What we have really is simple suspicion or a paranoid tendency—but a tendency that, depending on the psychological disposition of the individual at hand (here I have only Hartright in mind), can develop into paranoia. The paranoia, in other words, depends on the circumstances but it also depends on who is present to experience the circumstances. What makes *The Woman in White* such a wonderful novel is the imaginative and extremely thorough way in which Collins depicts this situation in the First Epoch: he gives us an array of distinct and rich characters, all suddenly caught up in the same plot, and he allows us to observe

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the way, especially on the incremental scale, in which these characters interact with and influence one another. The best, however, is yet to come.

In Marian's second narrative, the plot of *The Woman in White* fundamentally and irreversibly changes. Wilkie Collins introduces one of the great creations in literature and certainly, as I shall argue, a pivotal figure on the literary conspiracy scene—Count Isidor, Ottavio, Baldassare Fosco (as he pseudonymically styles himself). Fosco's appearance is key in many ways, but among the most important is that he forces us to rethink our understanding of the first third of the novel. What had seemed a straightforward attempt on Glyde's part to defraud Laura, now becomes a Conspiracy to Defraud. And, as we learn at the end of *The Woman in White*, resolution comes to mean not only exposing Glyde but also defeating Fosco. But as we will also see, a true resolution of the Fosco phenomenon is beyond the means of any of the novel's main protagonists and necessitates the introduction of a second, now radically-configured conspiracy, that of the "Brotherhood."

Fosco is an immense Falstaffian figure, both literally and imaginatively, and like the characters in the novel, any reader of *The Woman in White* must work to understand him. On one hand, a number of interpretations precede Fosco's arrival. Mr. Fairlie, for example, Laura's and Marian's uncle, tells us he hates Fosco "simply and solely because he [is] a foreigner" (172). For Glyde, Marian asserts, Fosco represents his "most intimate friend" (213), while Marian herself—reacting to Laura's first impression of Fosco—reveals that she (Marian) is "in some danger of doubting and distrusting that illustrious foreigner" (225). Yet none of these comments prepare the reader for the appearance of Fosco himself in Marian's journal entry for June 15, 1850. Fosco, we discover, is a man

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that is "immensely fat" and whose face "is a most remarkable likeness, on a large scale, of the great Napoleon." But Fosco's face, Marian also affirms, is also distinguished by its features, especially the eyes: "They are the most unfathomable grey eyes I ever saw, and they have at times a cold, clear, beautiful, irresistible glitter in them which forces me to look at him, and yet causes me sensations, when I do look, which I would rather not feel" (241). Fosco's eyes are at once beautiful, magnetic and disconcertingly panoptic in a way that recalls Inspector Bucket's glances in *Bleak House* and that foreshadows Big Brother's gaze in *1984*. There too is Fosco's mastery of English, the fact that "it is almost impossible to detect, by his accent that he is not a countryman of our own" (241). There is his "fondness for animals" best glimpsed via the white mice that crawl incessantly over his body throughout the novel. There is his eloquence, the fact that he "can talk, when anything happens to rouse him, with a daring independence of thought, a knowledge of books in every language, and an experience of society in half the capitals of Europe" (243), his fondness for fine clothes (244), and, finally, his near preternatural control of others: "He can manage me [Marian] as he manages his wife and Laura, as he managed the bloodhound in the stable-yard, as he manages Sir Percival himself, every hour in the day" (245). In fact, this list of qualities only opens the catalog as Collins incessantly creates new turns in Fosco's personality.

Even the usually perceptive and perspicacious Marian struggles to keep up with Fosco. Or as she tells us herself:

> He seems to have established over me the same sort of ascendancy which he has evidently gained over Sir Percival. Free, and even rude, as he may occasionally be in his manner towards his fat friend, Sir Percival is nevertheless afraid, as I can

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> plainly see, of giving any serious offence to the Count. I wonder whether I am afraid too? I certainly never saw a man, in all my experience, whom I should be so sorry to have for an enemy. Is this because I like him, or because I am afraid of him? Chi sa?—as Count Fosco might say in his own language. Who knows? (246)

Despite the fact that Fosco is Glyde's friend, who now appears as a simple villain beside the immensely complex Fosco, and despite the fact that Fosco keeps his wife in line with "a private rod," Marian—like *The Woman in White*'s great early critic Margaret Oliphant—finds that she can't resist "the charm of his good nature, his wit, his foibles, his personal individuality" (Oliphant 566).

To endear Fosco to his readers there is also his great oration on crime. It is an important oration, writes Peter Thoms, in that Fosco's "attacks on convention, are often very acute [. . . and assist] our perception of how tightly the sisters cling to a 'copy-book morality' [. . .] and how reluctant they are to pursue their own notions of what is right" (67). The oration begins with Fosco assailing society's policing practices, arguing that the "'machinery it has set up for the detection of crime is miserably ineffective'" (255). He then characterizes crimes as "'[a] trial of skill between the police on one side, and the individual on the other. When the criminal is a brutal, ignorant fool, the police in nine cases out of ten win. When the criminal is a resolute, educated, highly-intelligent man, the police in nine cases out of ten lose'" (256). Like Dickens' *Great Expectations* (see Chapter Two), Fosco overturns the notion of poetic justice and substitutes what Marian calls a "glib cynicism," but what is more accurately a type of moral relativistic nihilism:

> "I am a citizen of the world, and I have met, in my time, with so many different sorts of virtue, that I am puzzled, in my old age, to say which is the right sort and

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> which is the wrong. Here, in England, there is one virtue. And there, in China, there is another virtue. And John Englishman says my virtue is the genuine virtue. And John Chinaman says my virtue is the genuine virtue. And I say Yes to one, or No to the other, and am just as much bewildered about it in the case of John with the top-boots as I am in the case of John with the pigtail" (257).

Though Fosco's characterizations are, I admit, a tad pre-modern, his point is clear. On one hand, he assails the shortcomings of the English justice system: "Which gets on best, do you think, of two poor starving dressmakers—the woman who resists temptation and is honest, or the woman who falls under temptation and steals? You all know that the stealing is the making of that second woman's fortune—it advertises her from length to breadth of good-humoured, charitable England—and she is relieved, as the breaker of a commandment, when she would have been left to starve, as the keeper of it" (258). On the other hand, he sets himself in direct opposition to the hypocrisy of British society: "I say what other people only think, and when all the rest of the world is in a conspiracy to accept the mask for the true face, mine is the rash hand that tears off the plump pasteboard, and shows the bare bones beneath" (259). This is the first use of the word *conspiracy* in the novel and, fittingly, it comes at the end of what might be called Fosco's "conspiracy theory"—a characterization I hesitate to use as yet, though Fosco's theory does somewhat suggest the "paranoid style."

In terms of Marian what makes Fosco's arrival important is that now she and he begin what increasingly comes to resemble an intricate *folie à deux*. This *folie à deux* develops out of the fact that both Marian and Fosco are observant and imaginative, and because each figure wants to avoid being trumped by the other—Fosco because he is

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scheming and conspiring, Marian because her and Laura's freedom are at stake. Not surprisingly, both Norman A. Cameron and W.W. Meissner link such a competitive state to paranoia. For example, Cameron notes that "[c]lose competitive situations [. . .] stimulate an oversensitive person to hostile counter aggression" (682), while Meissner adds that, "[c]ompetition is particularly threatening [to the paranoid], since it implies a desperate combat with the projected infantile superego figure, so that the paranoid individual must resort to a delusional form of magic control in which the behavior, thoughts and wishes of others are secretly directed and controlled. Any independence of others, however benign and apparently innocuous, becomes a threat to the paranoid" (100-01). These insights, as I will show, provide an excellent means for understanding Fosco's relations with Marian, especially when we come to see that he is the "paranoid" and so dominant figure, and that he (as had Hartright earlier) elicits Marian's suspicions via the *folie à deux* process, in that he refuses to be outdone by her. For what happens in Marian's second narrative is that Fosco and she play a cat and mouse game, Fosco (and Madame Fosco and Glyde) going to increasing lengths to trap Marian and Laura, and Marian (sometimes with Laura's aid) responding with equally intense efforts to evade entrapment.

To defend against Fosco, Marian initiates a series of counterplots. For instance, after Glyde fails to get Laura's signature on the mysterious document, Marian decides to write to Mr. Gilmore's partner, Mr. Kyrle, for advice. The problem turns on safely and secretly receiving the reply-bearing messenger, a problem which Marian solves by stratagem: "the wisest plan for you [Laura] to adopt is to be out in the grounds all the morning with your book or your work, and not to appear at the house till the messenger

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has had time to arrive with the letter. I will wait here for him all the morning, to guard against any misadventures or mistakes" (275). Fosco, however, observes Marian at the post-bag, uses his wife to decoy her, and meanwhile surreptitiously reads the letter. Or, almost surreptitiously for Marian catches him just as he puts a letter (really *the* letter) back in the post-bag. Marian can't be sure that the letter is hers, but the situation still troubles her:

> Women, as everybody knows, constantly act on impulses which they cannot explain even to themselves, and I can only suppose that one of those impulses was the hidden cause of my unaccountable conduct on this occasion.
>
> Whatever influence animated me, I found cause to congratulate myself on having obeyed it as soon as I prepared to seal the letter in my own room. I had originally closed the envelope in the usual way by moistening the adhesive point and pressing it on the paper beneath, and when I now tried it with my finger, after a lapse of full three-quarters of an hour, the envelope opened on the instant, without sticking or tearing. Perhaps I had fastened it insufficiently? Perhaps there might have been some defect in the adhesive gum?
>
> Or, perhaps—No! it is quite revolting enough to feel that third conjecture stirring in my mind. I would rather not see it confronting me in plain black and white. (277)

Though she refuses to acknowledge it consciously, we see that Marian has made the correct inference: Fosco has read her letter and so subverted her first counterplot. A similar situation occurs when Marian receives Kyrle's reply. She goes out to meet the messenger (and so again to avoid Fosco's surveillance), but Fosco via a tip from his wife

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discovers Marian's plan and appears just as she is giving her reply to the messenger: "Exactly at the moment when I was speaking those words, holding the letter open in my hand, Count Fosco turned the corner of the lane from the high-road, and stood before me as if he had sprung up out of the earth" (292). Marian's second counterplot also fails. And so on it goes throughout the rest of her narrative, Marian (and her readers) all the time becoming more and more suspicious of Fosco and his machinations.

With time Marian even begins to exhibit paranoid tendencies and, surprisingly, ones that closely resemble those we saw in Hartright. These tendencies first appear in Marian's prophetic dream, the one in which Hartright tells her that he is "the instrument of a Design that is yet unseen" and is on the metaphorical road that leads "to the unknown Retribution and the inevitable End" (296). Equally, the tendencies also appear via Marian's own anxieties which emerge after Laura recounts her meeting with Anne Catherick: "I felt the ominous future coming close, chilling me with an unutterable awe, forcing on me the conviction of an unseen design in the long series of complications which had now fastened round us. I thought of Hartright—as I saw him in the body when he said farewell; as I saw him in the spirit in my dream—and I too began to doubt now whether we were not advancing blindfold to an appointed and an inevitable end" (305). Between the above two passages, apparently, Marian internalizes Hartright's mode of thinking and, in the second excerpt, her language almost identically mirrors his as he uses it in the dream. I say almost because there is one difference: whereas in Hartright's use *Design*, *Retribution* and *End* are capitalized, this is not the case when Marian uses these words. What is the significance of this change? As critics such as Peter Thoms have noted, there are in fact two "designs" in *The Woman in White*. The narrative contains the

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benevolent "Design," the one that includes Providence, Hartright, Marian et al; and also a malevolent "design," i.e., the Conspiracy to Defraud. Between these two passages, therefore, Marian underscores this distinction—a distinction that becomes more pronounced as the narrative proceeds. Collins, like Dickens' in *Great Expectations*, employs the trope of the Hidden Hand. But whereas in Dickens, as we saw in Chapter Two, the Hidden Hand had replaced the Providential hand and been aligned with Pip's benevolent conspiracy, in Collins' novel (which precedes Dickens' by a year) the Providential hand is still set in opposition to the malevolent Hidden Hand of the conspiracy.

Whatever the case, Marian's paranoia—as I have been trying to suggest—is not a real component of her personality. Rather it emerges because Collins sets her as the submissive figure in two distinct *folies à deux.* There is the one with Hartright, emphasized in the paragraph above, but there is also the one with Fosco and, to a lesser extent, with Glyde. To see Fosco's paranoia (which is closer, I admit, to the commodified type) we need look no further than the moment in which Marian succeeds in delivering her two letters to Fanny, Laura's former maid. It is a situation that presents Fosco with an exceptional challenge. Fanny places the letters in what seems the safest place possible: "Fanny put the letters into the bosom of her dress. 'There they shall stop, miss,' she said, 'till I have done what you tell me' (333). Of course, because of Madame Fosco even this spot cannot withstand Fosco's spying, but when he first learns of Marian's move Fosco becomes noticeably agitated: "However this might be, he was unquestionably troubled by some secret annoyance or anxiety, which, with all his powers of deception, he was not able entirely to conceal. Through the whole of dinner he was almost as silent as Sir

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Percival himself, and he, every now and then, looked at his wife with an expression of furtive uneasiness which was quite new in my experience of him" (334). For once the usually controlled Fosco drops his mask. The moment is key, in fact, in that it allows us to see that Fosco is wearing a mask, that—for example—when he becomes the "Man of Sentiment" it might all be just a performance. It is a performance too (though I don't want to push the point too far) that in its comprehensiveness and skill resembles that of Inspector Bucket during his evening at the Bagnets which, in Chapter One, I cited as one of Bucket's paranoid tendencies.

Glyde's paranoid (i.e., clinically paranoid) tendencies, conversely, are in some ways more pronounced than Fosco's. Glyde, of course, from a very young age has had to harbor his "Secret"—the fact that he was born out of wedlock, a detail he refuses to share even with Fosco and the exposure of which, Marian intuits, Glyde deeply fears: "The prospect of exposure may bring him to terms when nothing else will," discovers Marian (323). This "Secret," I suggest, has become somewhat of an *idée fixe* in Glyde's mind and, at key moments in the narrative, emerges in a curious way:

> "You [Laura] can't deceive me," he said, "you know more than you choose to tell. I'll have your secret out of you, and I'll have it out of that sister of yours as well. There shall be no more plotting and whispering between you. Neither you nor she shall see each other again till you have confessed the truth. I'll have you watched morning, noon, and night, till you confess the truth." He was deaf to everything I could say. He took me straight upstairs into my own room. Fanny was sitting there, doing some work for me, and he instantly ordered her out. "I'll take good care *you're* not mixed up in the conspiracy," he said. "You shall leave this house

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to-day. If your mistress wants a maid, she shall have one of my choosing.' He pushed me into the room, and locked the door on me" (322).

Glyde provides the novel's second appearance of the word *conspiracy* when he accuses Laura, Marian and Fanny of plotting together against him; and he tries to break up the conspiracy by dismissing Fanny and by isolating Laura. Laura, however, is not so much conspiring as simply trying to protect herself. *Glyde* is the one who has a secret and who has been conspiring all along—now with Fosco, earlier in his life (see below) with Mrs. Catherick to alter the registry at Old Wellingham and to put Anne in an asylum. As a result, this moment demonstrates both his projective tendency and his persecution complex. It also points to Glyde's competitive paranoia, a disposition similar to that I noted in Fosco. Glyde too does not want to be outdone.

Marian's *folie à deux* with Fosco (and Glyde) reaches its climax when she crawls onto the verandah of Blackwater Park to eavesdrop on the two conspirators. Certainly the scene is among the most important and exciting in the novel, and in it Marian proves herself the equal, if not the superior, of Fosco in intelligence and plotting. Through this act, writes Ann Gaylin, Marian "assumes a position of power similar to the invulnerable place of the reader or an omniscient narrator." By writing about her experience Marian also "transforms private knowledge into a form which can easily be circulated, reproduced, and transmitted to others who can frustrate the criminals' plots" (316). Though the final shape of the conspiracy's scheme is still inchoate at this stage, Marian acquires the most crucial facts—that both Fosco and Glyde need money, that Fosco fears Marian's counterplots ("With that woman for my enemy, I, with all my brains and experience—I, Fosco, cunning as the devil himself, as you have told me a hundred

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times—I walk, in your English phrase, upon egg-shells!" [346]), that Fosco wants control of the conspiracy and asks Glyde "to give up all direction in the business from tonight" (347), that Fosco and Glyde have secrets from each other (e.g., Fosco's method for reading Fanny's letters, Glyde's "Secret"), and that Fosco would not hesitate to kill Laura if money could be made by it. In short, Marian's and, by extension, her readers' fears are confirmed and we acquire indubitable proof that a malevolent conspiracy exists. Further, as Marian herself tells us, the conspirators' conversation endows her and Laura "not only with our justification for leaving the house, but with our weapons of defence against [Fosco and Glyde] as well" (357). Whereas Hartright's narrative achieved only suspicion and an ominous foreboding at its close, Marian concludes with tangible and useful results.

It is now that Collins presents the most shocking and "sensational" moment in the novel. Marian's discoveries prove useless. Just when she "obtains knowledge of male oppression," so Tamar Heller argues, "Marian is deprived of the opportunity to use it" (136). She falls violently ill, Fosco finds her journal and invades it by writing his "POSTSCRIPT BY A SINCERE FRIEND," a short statement in which he declares his admiration for Marian and her ingenuity, consoles her on the "inevitable failure" of her counterplots, and then asserts that his "plan of conduct" has been confirmed (*WW* 359). It is a spectacular literary moment, one celebrated by many critics. *The Woman in White*'s readers, who believed that they had privately been reading Marian's journal, discover that Fosco has beat them to it, has been watching them—so to speak—over their shoulders. Marian, who moments earlier seemed invulnerable, has been finally and decisively trumped by Fosco. Or, as D.A. Miller would have it, the monolithic "nervous state"

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(which had been traveling from Anne Catherick to Hartright, Marian, Laura, Glyde and Fosco) now reaches us, the readers, and we discover that we "can never be paranoid enough" (164). Further, adds Miller, Fosco's postscript becomes a "point of transition" in the novel between "on one side, a passive, paranoid, homosexual feminization; on the other, an active, corroborative, heterosexual masculine protest" (164-65). Miller's reading, however, wildly misses the mark. To reduce a diverse set of characters, all of them—as we've already seen—marked by distinct psychological dispositions to simply "passive, paranoid, homosexual feminization" (a characterization, incidentally, which relies not on gender but simply on exhibiting the "nervous state") significantly misreads Collins' novel. Marian, for example, is far from passive, especially in her decision to perch on the verandah; her behavior little resembles the authentic paranoia of Hartright, Fosco and Glyde; and, as almost every recent critic of *The Woman in White* has noted, Marian becomes an intriguing character exactly because she resists traditional gender categories. Further, as I will show later, in its final pages the narrative of *The Woman in White* derives in originality from the fact that some of its key assertions are *not* corroborated, and certainly not in the way that Marian's suspicions are by the Fosco-Glyde conversation she overhears.

Miller's argument, that Fosco's postscript exacerbates the reader's paranoia by demonstrating that the reader "can never be paranoid enough," also needs scrutiny. Undeniably, the postscript evokes an emotion akin to paranoid fear from its ideal reader. The narrative itself, however, inhibits this emotion from becoming actual, clinical paranoia. In Marian's second narrative any paranoid-like fears she (and so her readers) may have center on two fronts—that Fosco and Glyde may be conspiring and that Fosco,

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contrary to the mixed feelings he elicits from others, is in fact a threatening figure. The Fosco-Glyde conversation resolves the first issue, Fosco's postscript the second (at least for the reader—Marian is unconscious at this point). In other words, in Fosco's postscript, as even the word *postscript* implies, the reader's paranoid-like fears are brought to their highest pitch and, at the same time, resolved and transformed. We may fear for Marian's and Laura's safety; we may experience horror at the fact that they are now in Fosco's power and he has confirmed his "plan of conduct," but we no longer feel paranoid as to whether there is a conspiracy or if it is malicious. Fosco's postscript ends our suspicions by confirming them, by showing that they are valid even in their most extreme form.

Yet Marian's removal, i.e., that of the detective who has successfully guided us up to now, does change the nature of the novel—at least until Hartright's return. In the narratives of Frederick Fairlie, Eliza Michelson, Hester Pinhorn et al there is the loss of the near-Shakespearean immediacy that pervades Marian's journal and Fosco's postscript. From following the acts of a Subject Who Comes to Know (Marian) and the succeeding Subject Who Decidedly Knows (Fosco), the novel now casts us, its readers, into the position of Subjects Who Try to Know (but can't quite), i.e., we resemble the conspiracy theorist at a number of points, except for the fact that we are not paranoid. For example, Frederick Fairlie's perspective on the conspiracy seems quite detached when compared with the immediacy of Marian's perspective as narrated in her journal. On one hand, Fairlie is not suspicious when he should be: "It was so very uncharacteristic of such a robust person as dear Marian to be ill, that I could only suppose she had met with an accident. A horse, or a false step on the stairs, or something of that sort" (372). He fails to inquire any further than this as to why Marian is ill. On the other hand, any suspicion he

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does exhibit seems misplaced or guided only by his egotism, as when he fears catching Marian's virus from Fosco: "Accept his assurances! I never was farther from accepting anything in my life. I would not have believed him on his oath. He was too yellow to be believed. He looked like a walking-West-Indian-epidemic. He was big enough to carry typhus by the ton, and to dye the very carpet he walked on with scarlet fever" (373). Fairlie's narrative is so excruciating, i.e., so powerful in its literary affect, exactly because of the above disjunctions. Thanks to Marian and Fosco we know more than Fairlie does, but because at this point we depend on Fairlie's narrative our moral outrage towards Fosco is intensified both because he can act so deceptively and because our now ignorance as to his specific plans only serves to reinforce the fact that the plans are malicious. In a similar way, Eliza Michelson's narrative, which follows Fairlie's, also intensifies the reader's outrage. She not only fails, like Fairlie, to understand the implications of Fosco's and Glyde's maneuvers, but she even tries to exonerate Fosco—even after learning of his guilt: "My persuasion of the Count's innocence remains, however, quite unshaken. If he assisted Sir Percival in sending me to Torquay, he assisted under a delusion, for which, as a foreigner and a stranger, he was not to blame" (419). Like Marian initially, Eliza also seems to have fallen under Fosco's spell. Yet Eliza's affection, rather than spurring her to investigate Fosco (as Marian's had), only impedes her understanding and so creates an even greater sense of distance between her and us than there had been between us and Fairlie.

These two narratives, however, and the affects Collins creates therein serve only to pave the way for the narrative of Hester Pinhorn, Fosco's cook. Hester's narrative, which chronicles the death of Anne Catherick, provides the single most moving and

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tragic moment, arguably, in the entire narrative of Collins' novel. It is a moment too that in its emotional impact receives little foreshadowing. The only hint that Collins gives us occurs on the night of Glyde's departure from Blackwater Park:

> [The gardener] declared that his master was quite out of his senses—not through the excitement of drink, as I had supposed, but through a kind of panic or frenzy of mind, for which it was impossible to account. He had found Sir Percival walking backwards and forwards by himself in the hall, swearing, with every appearance of the most violent passion, that he would not stop another minute alone in such a dungeon as his own house, and that he would take the first stage of his journey immediately in the middle of the night. The gardener, on approaching him, had been hunted out, with oaths and threats, to get the horse and chaise ready instantly. In a quarter of an hour Sir Percival had joined him in the yard, had jumped into the chaise, and, lashing the horse into a gallop, had driven himself away, with his face as pale as ashes in the moonlight. (417)

In Glyde, as we saw earlier in Arthur Havisham and Madame Merle, we get a conspirator who suffers from guilt. Admittedly, Glyde suffers and has suffered in part because of his "Secret," but the violence and obvious paranoia in his psychological breakdown here alerts us to the fact that some tremendous narrative event is impending. In her narrative, Hester Pinhorn describes it simply: "We both ran up, and there we saw the lady laid on the sofa, with her face ghastly white, and her hands fast clenched, and her head drawn down to one side. She had been taken with a sudden fright, my mistress said, and master he told us she was in a fit of convulsions" (421). It is hard to characterize the profound affect and impact of this passage, especially in its context, and of the other glimpses of

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Anne that succeed it. On one hand, some of the power derives from the fact that Hester is the narrator. We do not "know" her as we knew Frederick Fairlie, Laura's and Marian's uncle, and as we knew Eliza Michelson, who at least had been mentioned in Marian's journal. Nor can Hester "know" the principal characters of *The Woman in White*, i.e., comprehend the significance of the events she narrates. Hester is just a "cook in the service of Count Fosco," hired in a moment of exigency. On the other hand, the power of the narrative here centers in the writing itself. *The Woman in White* is an enormous novel and one full of "sensational" passages for which it has been celebrated since its publication, but these moments, the death of Anne Catherick, are *not* sensational. Instead, Collins' language becomes uncharacteristically terse and matter-of-fact. Yet I, for one, can never read these passages without feeling a profound grief. Even though Fosco is not directly responsible for Anne's death (as we learn later in the novel) and though signs of Anne's "heart-disease" appeared already during her stay at Todd's Corner, Fosco still seems responsible and, as he tells us himself, would have been had not the heart-disease already existed: "If Anne Catherick had not died when she did, what should I have done? I should, in that case, have assisted worn-out Nature in finding permanent repose. I should have opened the doors of the Prison of Life, and have extended to the captive (incurably afflicted in mind and body both) a happy release" (632). Fosco's grandiloquence here, in the "confession" he writes for Hartright, justifies the horror and the sadness we feel at the moment of Anne's death. Collins' Conspiracy to Defraud is so set on its goal that it little hesitates in removing any human obstacles.

Ignoring moments such as Anne Catherick's death, many critics have been ready to dismiss Wilkie Collins as just a sensation writer and second-rate when compared with

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Dickens. Patrick Bratlinger, for example, has argued that Collins' novels shy away from social agitation. "But rather than striking forthright blows in favor of divorce law reform and greater sexual freedom," writes Bratlinger, "sensation novels usually tend merely to exploit public interest in these issues." As a result, adds Bratlinger, Collins' novels "can no longer make any very credible or consistent claim to be able to unlock the higher mysteries of life, nature, society, God" (19). Given *The Woman in White*, however, I find it hard to accept such an argument. Collins emerges as a strong and profound writer here in that he is willing to consider his conspiracy at great length and play out its consequences imaginatively. We have already seen this in the cases of Glyde's breakdown and of Anne's death, but we might also cite other moments. There is Hartright's grief when he learns of Laura's supposed death: "I had done all man could to rise after the shock, and accept my life resignedly—to let my great sorrow come in tenderness to my heart, and not in despair. It was useless and hopeless. No tears soothed my aching eyes, no relief came to me from my sister's sympathy or my mother's love" (428). There is Marian as she appears after her illness: "Changed, changed as if years had passed over it! The eyes large and wild, and looking at me with a strange terror in them. The face worn and wasted piteously. Pain and fear and grief written on her as with a brand" (430-31). And there, of course, is the devastation Laura experiences because of her internment in the asylum, a devastation visible in her appearance: "The sorrow and suffering which I had once blamed myself for associating even by a passing thought with the future of Laura Fairlie, *had* set their profaning marks on the youth and beauty of her face; and the fatal resemblance which I had once seen and shuddered at seeing, in idea only, was now a real and living resemblance which asserted itself before my own eyes"

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(454-55). This devastation further recurs in the enfeeblement of Laura's mind: "At the slightest reference to that time she changed and trembled still, her words became confused, her memory wandered and lost itself as helplessly as ever. Here, and here only, the traces of the past lay deep—too deep to be effaced" (576). And the devastation appears even in Laura's subconscious: "One night (barely two weeks after our marriage), when I was watching her at rest, I saw the tears come slowly through her closed eyelids, I heard the faint murmuring words escape her which told me that her spirit was back again on the fatal journey from Blackwater Park" (583). If anything, Collins stirs in us a sense of the ineffable in human nature as we are forced to reconcile Fosco's tremendous charisma with the sorrow and authentic human suffering that he causes here.

The Third Epoch of The Woman in White might also be called the "Counter-Force"—to borrow a phrase from Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. What had resembled a "conspiracy theory" in the first two epochs of the novel, here finds its resolution in that the Fosco-Glyde conspiracy is now documented and publicly revealed—or, as Winifred Hughes writes, *The Woman in White* becomes "the novel in which everything is hinted at beforehand and [. . .] in which everything is found out afterward" (138-39). Yet Hughes, I believe, is somewhat off the mark: not quite "everything" is found out in the Third Epoch, though a lot is. For instance, in the Third Epoch Hartright and Marian finally learn to distinguish between the two "designs" (one capitalized, one not) that have been guiding their lives: "From thousands on thousands of miles away—through forest and wilderness, where companions stronger than I had fallen by my side, through peril of death thrice renewed, and thrice escaped, the Hand that leads men on the dark road to the future had led me to meet that time" (435, see also 451). The

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Hidden Hand, so central to my discussion in Chapter Two, now decidedly appears in Hartright's life and replaces what had hitherto been "some undiscoverable danger." Hartright and Marian, as Peter Thoms writes, become the ideal Providential readers. They are able to rewrite Fosco's false narrative into a literal and moral truth, and by doing so they realize their own selfhoods while simultaneously uniting with the Providential plan: "Caught within the patterns of providence, within what initially seems a bewildering concatenation of incidents, the protagonists learn to move in harmony with the divine will, and to become creative participants in forming a meaningful story" (Thoms 76-77). Therefore, "fateful" incidents such as meeting Anne Catherick, the death of Sir Percival Glyde (which Hartright ascribes to "the Visitation of God" [541]) or saving Professor Pesca from drowning, take on a new significance. Each becomes a step on the road to the new, benevolent "End"—though, it is important to stress, the narrative of *The Woman in White* also undercuts such a tidy reading and allows what Winifred Hughes calls an "ironic counterpoint" to its Providential vision. Hartright succeeds, Hughes asserts, because he discovers how to use "chance and accident, skillfully turned against his enemies" (142). He learns how to act, not necessarily in concert with Providence, but in imitation of Fosco.

But if such an ironic reading is possible, what makes it important? Why does Hartright, the figure who most controls the configuration of *The Woman in White*'s narrative, allow the counterpoint to remain in the text? This move, I want to suggest, is actually part of a larger pattern, a fact Jenny Bourne Taylor also notes: "Hartright's method of presenting the evidence," Bourne asserts, "involves *all kinds* of omissions and distortions" (126, emphasis added). The Third Epoch, in one sense, is the narrative of

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how the narrative of The *Woman in White* was assembled. The epoch begins by summarizing Marian's investigations after she recovered from her illness—how she watched Fosco, made inquiries about Mrs. Rubelle and, finally, how she rescued Laura from the asylum—but the Third Epoch also begins by recounting how Hartright received the fruits of Marian's investigations. Hartright intuits the general rubric of the conspiracy, the fact that money was its determining cause, and that the danger to him, Marian and Laura is still as great as it was before (451-52). In short, Hartright attains the vantage that the novel's readers had once they began reading Fosco's postscript. In addition, the Fosco-Glyde conspiracy now begins to be labeled as a "conspiracy." Before the Third Epoch the word *conspiracy* appears only on two occasions in the narrative (both discussed above), but when Hartright resumes his narrative in the Third Epoch the frequency and the use of *conspiracy* both dramatically change. The word is now only applied to the Fosco-Glyde conspiracy and the word itself appears more than thirty times before the end of the novel. Hartright, it seems, develops a mania for outing the conspiracy.

Yet to out the conspiracy decisively is not a simple process. Not only must Hartright produce a narrative of the conspiracy, but he must produce the *perfect* narrative. The trouble stems from the fact that although Laura remembers some of the circumstances surrounding her journey to London, she does not remember all of them and has, in fact, created a false memory of visiting Mrs. Vesey, her old governess:

> "Her mind in this instance, and, as I feared, in other instances besides, confusedly presented to her something which she had only intended to do in the false light of something which she had really done. The unconscious contradiction of herself was easy to account for in this way—but it was likely to lead to serious results. It

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> was a stumble on the threshold at starting—it was a flaw in the evidence which told *fatally* against us." (457, emphasis added)

Hartright's word-choice is not a mistake. The other "design" (that of the conspiracy) still haunts his mind, even if only in this implicit form. Hartright's subsequent visit to Mr. Kyrle exacerbates the situation: "He put the questions—sharp, suspicious, unbelieving questions, which clearly showed me, as they proceeded, that he thought I was the victim of a *delusion*, and that he might even have doubted, but for my introduction to him by Miss Halcombe, whether I was not attempting the perpetration of a *cunningly-designed fraud*" (461, emphasis added). Again the word-choice is significant, now doubly so. Though I don't wish to exaggerate the point, Kyrle clearly treats Hartright as if the accusation against Fosco and Glyde should actually be leveled against Hartright himself. Or, as an alternative, Kyrle suggests that Hartright might even suffer from a delusion, i.e., that Hartright might be projecting. As a result, Kyrle inadvertently casts Hartright into the position of a conspiracy theorist. Further, Kyrle also enumerates the specific holes in Hartright's case as it currently stands:

> Does Miss Halcombe assert her supposed sister's identity to the owner of the Asylum, and take legal means for rescuing her? No, she secretly bribes a nurse to let her escape. When the patient has been released in this doubtful manner, and is taken to Mr. Fairlie, does he recognise her? Is he staggered for one instant in his belief of his niece's death? No. Do the servants recognise her? No. Is she kept in the neighbourhood to assert her own identity, and to stand the test of further proceedings? No, she is privately taken to London. In the meantime you have recognised her also, but you are not a relative—you are not even an old friend of

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> the family. The servants contradict you, and Mr. Fairlie contradicts Miss Halcombe, and the supposed Lady Glyde contradicts herself. She declares she passed the night in London at a certain house. Your own evidence shows that she has never been near that house, and your own admission is that her condition of mind prevents you from producing her anywhere to submit to investigation, and to speak for herself. (462-63).

In contradistinction to the one "unconscious contradiction" that Hartright cites earlier, Kyrle presents several. For Hartright, it is an epiphanic moment: "It was the first time the story of Laura and the story of Marian had been presented to me from a stranger's point of view—the first time the terrible obstacles that lay across our path had been made to show themselves in their true character" (463). Hartright learns exactly how and why he appears like a conspiracy theorist, and why the narrative he produces will have to be perfect. On one hand, the experience galvanizes him: he decides that he will have to force a confession from the conspirators. Further, he discovers an important aspect of how this is to be done: "You [Kyrle] have shown me that the legal remedy lies, in every sense of the word, beyond our means. We cannot produce the law proof, and we are not rich enough to pay the law expenses" (466). Hartright realizes that he will have to operate outside the law, that, as I indicated above, he will have to imitate Fosco who "snaps his big fingers at the laws and conventions of society" (568). On the other hand, the interview with Kyrle becomes a trauma point in itself. During the inquest into Glyde's death, for example, Hartright abstains from disclosing the conspiracy because, he tells us, "I could not have intelligibly stated my opinion—my unsupported opinion—without disclosing the whole story of the conspiracy, and producing beyond a doubt the same

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unsatisfactory effect on the mind of the coroner and the jury, which I had already produced on the mind of Mr. Kyrle" (543).

It is at this point, after Hartright's interview with Kyrle, that the fundamental character of *The Woman in White*'s narrative changes yet again. But unlike the previous change, when Glyde's fraud became the Fosco-Glyde Conspiracy to Defraud, the change matters because through it Collins distinguishes *The Woman in White* from all other mid-Victorian conspiracy narratives. As Hartright begins his investigations in the Third Epoch, what had been a narrative of conspiracy with a strong emphasis on paranoia (and sensation) slowly begins to shift to a modern conspiracy theory narrative. Hints of this impeding shift have appeared already in the First Epoch when Glyde used "two strange men" to trail Hartright (205), and in the Second Epoch when Fosco introduced the decidedly "foreign" Mrs. Rubelle to nurse Marian and when he brought the two men to examine Laura during her fateful visit to London (see 446-47). In the Third Epoch, however, as is also the case with the use of the word *conspiracy*, the pace in the emergence of these new individuals picks up significantly. As Hartright instigates two new *folies à deux*, first with Glyde, then with Fosco—in both cases Hartright now being the one who trumps the others, locating (for instance) the register copy at Knowlesbury or using the letter to Pesca to procure the cooperation of Fosco—more and more of these secondary conspirators appear. There are the two men who trail Hartright after he leaves Kyrle's office (467). There is the "lawyer's clerk" who appears at Blackwater Park and again at Mrs. Catherick's house (472 and 512). There is the "stout muscular man" that accompanies the lawyer's clerk and the other conspirator at Old Wellingham (515ff). There are the three men who attack Hartright as he returns to Old Wellingham (531ff).

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And there is even Glyde's "servant out of livery" who appears just before Glyde's death (534). In other words, the narrative presents an astounding number of new conspirators, however insignificant they may ultimately be. The further Hartright tries to circumscribe and document the conspiracy, the more amorphous and far-reaching it becomes.

Nor does the indeterminacy emerge just in the size of the conspiracy. Hartright is a shrewd detective and as such it is he who first realizes the deception surrounding Glyde's "Secret," i.e., that the mysteries involving Anne Catherick's father and Mrs. Catherick's meetings with Glyde are, in fact, two separate mysteries. The second of these concerns me here: "I had long before associated Sir Percival's Secret with the concealment of a serious crime which Mrs. Catherick knew of, but I had gone no further than this. Now the woman's paroxysm of terror associated the crime, either directly or indirectly, with the vestry, and convinced me that she had been more than the mere witness of it—she was also the accomplice, beyond a doubt" (514). Not only does Hartright discover a second conspiracy in Glyde's life, but also that Glyde worked this conspiracy via blackmail: "He made me his accomplice," declares Mrs. Catherick, "He owned this coolly, and he ended by telling me, for the first time, what the frightful punishment really was for his offence [forging the registry], and for any one who helped him to commit it" (553). Further, Hartright makes a similar discovery about Fosco—that Fosco too is involved in another conspiracy. Unlike Laura, who had earlier accused Fosco of simply being a domestic "Spy" (318), Hartright realizes that Fosco is a real spy—of the malevolent and international kind:

> Laura had applied the word to him at hazard, in natural anger at his proceedings towards herself. I applied it to him with the deliberate conviction that his vocation

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> in life was the vocation of a spy. On this assumption, the reason for his extraordinary stay in England so long after the objects of the conspiracy had been gained, became, to my mind, quite intelligible.
>
> The year of which I am now writing was the year of the famous Crystal Palace Exhibition in Hyde Park. Foreigners in unusually large numbers had arrived already, and were still arriving in England. Men were among us by hundreds whom the ceaseless distrustfulness of their governments had followed privately, by means of appointed agents, to our shores. My surmises did not for a moment class a man of the Count's abilities and social position with the ordinary rank and file of foreign spies. I suspected him of holding a position of authority, of being entrusted by the government which he secretly served with the organisation and management of agents specially employed in this country, both men and women, and I believed Mrs. Rubelle, who had been so opportunely found to act as nurse at Blackwater Park, to be, in all probability, one of the number. (584-85)

We get yet another remarkable moment in what now begins to seem like an inexhaustible conspiracy narrative. Not only is Fosco a spy, Hartright asserts, but he is a mastermind, a figure of "authority" who controls "the organisation and management of agents." The description, as we will see in Chapter Five, foreshadows the configuration in a number of "revolutionary conspiracy" narratives, among them *The Princess Casamassima* and *Under Western Eyes*. But there is more to Hartright's insight. Fosco, we learn, is also a *counter-revolutionary* placed in England to watch the men who "were among us by the hundreds" in 1851, "the year of the famous Crystal Palace Exhibition in Hyde Park." As

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Hartright had hinted in revealing that *The Woman in White* was written under "feigned names" (563), so now decidedly the events of the novel step out of fiction and into actual British history. There exists a real conspiracy, Hartright tells his audience, it operates "among us," and Fosco is guiding the effort to stop it. By introducing this "Brotherhood" (more below), Hartright fundamentally reconfigures his text. He opens a new conspiracy theory even as he is documenting and attempting to resolve the Conspiracy to Defraud. To resolve the Fosco-Glyde conspiracy, Hartright learns, also means to demonstrate Fosco's involvement with the Brotherhood—to show that the former conspiracy, which now appears as but an offshoot of the latter, is *irresolvable* exactly because of this entanglement, is irresolvable in a way that suggests the "paranoid style." The configuration of the conspiracy a priori determines that any detective can only become a Subject Who Tries to Know. Alternately, to Know in terms of the Brotherhood is to realize that one Cannot Know.

Critics, however, have taken a variety of approaches in discussing the Brotherhood. Jenny Bourne Taylor agrees with my reading of Hartright, that he "*projects* meaning into figures and events in the light of his own preconceived expectations," and, adds Taylor, "Hartright's 'commonsense' notion of normality is created paradoxically out of doubt, uncertainty, and insecurity" (112, emphasis in original). Hartright, we might argue in extending Taylor, presents the story of the Conspiracy to Defraud (and hence the Brotherhood) as a resolved story because, in fact, he knows (or doesn't want to know) that it isn't. Patrick Brantlinger, as already mentioned, reads *The Woman in White*'s mysteries as ultimately solvable (unlike those in Dickens' novels) and so not really profound: "Guilt is displaced onto others, which is to say onto scapegoat characters

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whom we are quite glad to see punished, and the good characters with whom we most strongly identify 'come out clean' and are rewarded with happy endings" (21). The novel, says Brantlinger, concludes with a tidy display of poetic justice and "the shadowy Italian politics that destroy [Fosco] at the end of the novel are only a deus ex machina to bring on his just deserts. Collins is not interested in saying anything about secret societies [. . .]" (20-21). Ann Gaylin, conversely, sees a more complicated narrative mechanism at work. There is no poetic justice in the novel, Gaylin asserts, and Collins' work only "reveals a collusion of male narrative forces to limit female narrators and characters," and, as a result, Hartright becomes the novel's "most hidden menace" (306-07). But, adds Gaylin, the novel's appeal stems from what it fails to resolve: Marian, Fosco and the Brotherhood (327)—a configuration Tamar Heller also cites while claiming that the Brotherhood's presence simultaneously underscores Anne Catherick's importance as a figure of dissenting gender, class, and Christian politics (see Heller 122 and 139ff). D.A. Miller, arguing that the novel condemns all homosocial bonds except father and son, asserts that the narrative tolerates the Brotherhood for only two reasons—because it is a product of political adolescence and because, as Pesca best shows, membership is only to be regretted and so necessarily entails pathos (187ff). Finally, Ronald R. Thomas sees the Brotherhood as a symbol of larger Victorian societal patterns. That the Brotherhood appears in conjunction with "the economic spectacle of the Crystal Palace" is to show that "if the British industrial revolution succeeded where the European political revolutions failed, it did so not by replacing the dictatorship of the aristocracy with the dictatorship of the proletariat but by investing a new kind of authority in a new class of 'professionals'" (Thomas 485).

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Though not necessarily disagreeing with some of these readings (especially Gaylin's), I want to take a more direct approach and consider the Brotherhood as what it is—a conspiracy that follows almost directly on the heels of the European revolutions of 1848. To understand what kind of conspiracy it is, it also helps to contrast the Brotherhood with the novel's other major conspiracy, the Conspiracy to Defraud. As I mentioned in opening this chapter, the Conspiracy to Defraud offers an example of the classic style of conspiracy. As such we can compare it to another conspiracy of the ancient world—that denounced by Cicero in his famous orations against Cataline. Though I can discuss Cataline's conspiracy only briefly, even the opening lines of Cicero's first oration present my central point:

> How long, Cataline, will you play upon our patience? How long will you continue your effort to deceive us? To what lengths will your unmitigated insolence carry you? Does not the night-long guard set on the Palatine and all through the city disturb you? Or the alarm of the populace and assembling of all honorable men of rank, the forced meeting of the Senate in this fortified place, and the looks upon our faces? Do you not see that your plots are detected and your conspiracy foiled already by our universal knowledge of it? Who, think you, is not aware of what you did last night, and the night before, where you were, with whom you talked, and what plans you made?
>
> Oh, the depravity of these times! (103)

The power of Cicero's speech lies in that it is a direct accusation. For Cicero, to reveal the conspiracy and outline its plot (as his oration will go on to do) is enough to destroy it. The conspiracy qua conspiracy must necessarily bow before the light of day and before

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the law. In documenting the Conspiracy to Defraud, Walter Hartright operates via the same mentality as Cicero. To confront the conspiracy, Hartright gives us the narrative of *The Woman in White* and, inside the narrative, he tells his story of writing the "plain narrative of the conspiracy" which he reads to the occupants of Limmeridge House (637-38). In addition, there are the actual words with which Hartright confronts Fosco: "You are guilty of an infamous conspiracy!" (609). Though Hartright tells Kyrle that he (Hartright) will have to work outside the law, the law and simple exposure is what Hartright—like Cicero—ultimately resorts to. This fact, therefore, in part also accounts for the frequency of the word *conspiracy* in the Third Epoch. Hartright chants the word repeatedly so as to better persuade his audience.

Yet to consider the larger implications of this word and why Hartright comes to repeat it so often, it is necessary that I now turn to the history of 1848, both in European terms and, more specifically, in terms of Italy and England. Further, what follows may be seen as an introductory discussion that will also prove useful to my survey of "Revolutionary Conspiracies" in Chapter Five. In their essay, "The European Revolution of 1848," Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Dieter Langewiesche provide an excellent introduction to this period. The revolutions of 1848, write Haupt and Langewiesche, the "springtime of the peoples," involved more countries than any other European revolution and were unique because of this geographic extent, because the revolutions attempted to revise the mistakes of 1789, and because the revolutions spurred extensive societal communication across the borders of sovereign states. The revolutions were also important because of their goals—to democratize the political order, to ensure national self-determination and to search for an answer to the social question (Haupt 2-3). One of

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the major problems the revolutions confronted was what kind of government to support—a republic (which might lead to a second Reign of Terror) or a parliamentary monarchy. As it turned out, except for France where the throne collapsed, most of the revolutionary groups were forced to compromise with the existing hereditary dynasties. These compromises included restricting the aristocrats so that larger portions of the populace could participate in politics, and changing or liberalizing existing constitutions while expanding the electorate (Haupt 3-5). The result was that the revolutions extended political freedom and accelerated the politicization of society. Parties in the modern sense arose and these set up permanent organizations, developed publicly advocated programs, nominated election candidates and even included extra-parliamentary organizations. Further, the entire process was eased through the use of the press and newspapers which helped establish networks of communication (Haupt 6-7).

Another major goal of the 1848 revolutions was the building of nation states or, at least, achieving national autonomy. This was true of the German confederation, of the Danubian Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia and, significantly, of the "100 cities" of Italy. Yet for Italy to achieve autonomy it had first to liberate Lombardy and Venetia from Austrian rule—a desire to which the Hapsburg emperor, his military leaders, his court and even the leaders of the Austrian and Hungarian revolutions were all opposed (Haupt 9-11). In her essay, "Approaching Europe in the Name of Nation," Simonetta Soldani further outlines the situation. The Italian revolution, writes Soldani, differed from other 1848 revolutions because of its long duration, lasting from the election of Pope Pius IX in July 1846 to the fall of the Roman Republic in August 1849—a date incidentally that almost exactly coincides with the opening pages of *The Woman in White* which are

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set on "the last day of July" in 1849. Yet, however long the Italian revolution's duration and although its discourse, like that of other European revolutions centered on "Nation, Freedom and Social Progress" via the granting of civil liberties and constitutional and parliamentary reform, the Italian revolution's central goal remained liberation from Hapsburg rule. Specifically, the desire for liberation often took the form of hostile demonstrations or mass movements such as assemblies, protests, uprisings, the creation of volunteer corps, military action and even—as the narrative of *The Woman in White* also suggests—secret societies. Further, in addition to mass movements, the Italian revolution included direct confrontations with the sovereigns of the "100 cities" and with their world of aristocratic privileges. The target, Soldani writes, was "the 'enemy within, who serves the foreigner'" (60). Given this situation, Fosco emerges in a new light, especially when we remember the words Madame Fosco uses to memorialize him: "'His life was one long assertion of the rights of the aristocracy and the sacred principles of Order, and he died a martyr to his cause'" (*WW* 644). Fosco, it appears, was just the kind of figure the Italian revolution opposed, concerned, Soldani adds, as it was with the *popolo lavoratore*, i.e., the working people, "an expression that typically included all who were not professionals or living off private income, on whom would be bestowed the economic and civil dignity decreed by the triumph of capitalism" (61).

Although I can't go much further into the Italian revolution, the presence of the Brotherhood in *The Woman in White* raises one further question that should be addressed: Why is an Italian secret society, so powerful that Fosco has been sent abroad to watch it, in England in the first place? Soldani furnishes part of the answer. As she notes, Italy stood in the forefront of Europe's 1848 revolutions because of its active nature. The

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"pressure from below," from the intermediate social classes kept the revolution churning and demonstrated that independence, freedom and social renewal would have to be pursued simultaneously. Yet despite this, Soldani adds, these goals become an assertion of principal without concrete consequences—an impasse Carlo Alberto, the King of Sardinia, confirmed when he declared that "Italia farà da sé" ("Italy will do it alone"). On one hand, asserts Soldani, Alberto's statement was a warning to Italy that it should stay away from the Republican practices of France. It was also an attempt to encourage the national forces of Italy to pursue active renewal and to try to maintain national solidarity. On the other hand, Alberto's comment stressed Italy's voluntary isolation from its European context and placed "a special emphasis on the particular nature and resources of the 'Italian case.'" But, as Soldani concludes, "[t]he war would reveal such a path to be a dead end, highlighting the futility of a 'separatist' conception of Italian politics and making even the warmest supporters of the national revolution aware of the need to intertwine a constant dialogue with every country and people participating in the revolution, without any provincial idolatry, but also without isolationist tendencies" (69-71). To succeed, especially after the fall of the Roman Republic, the Italian revolution would have to work in collaboration with other revolutionary groups throughout Europe. Or, to return to my question, the Brotherhood—we might argue—operates in England (and so in the narrative of *The Woman in White*) as a representative of the Italian revolution and as such is in the country in order to open a dialogue with England's revolutionary groups. But if so, we might also ask, who are these groups and where in the narrative of *The Woman in White* can we find them?

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Admittedly, both of these latter questions are somewhat difficult to answer. What made England distinct from most other European countries in 1848 was that England had no revolution—at least not a major one. The group that came closest to launching one, the Chartists, failed in its endeavor. In *Revolutionary Britannia*, Edward Royle carefully follows this history of the Chartists. The Chartists, writes Royle, were a peaceful pressure group which had begun to agitate in the mid-1830s and continued to do so throughout the 1840s. Their program of reform turned on six major points: 1. Universal suffrage, 2. No property qualifications, 3. Annual parliaments, 4. Equal representation, 5. Payment of its members and 6. Vote by ballot. In other words, continues Royle, the group wanted to extend the 1832 Reform Act to "working men" and, not surprisingly, many of the group's goals foreshadowed the demands of the 1848 revolutionary groups, including those in Italy. The difference was that the Chartists became determined, especially as early on more radical protest attempts failed, to proceed strictly by constitutional means (92ff). Or, writes John Belchem in "The Waterloo of Peace and Order," the Chartists displayed a scrupulous concern for legitimacy. They employed language that tried to rise above economic, ethnic and party divisions, and they promoted their complaints via respectable and extra-legal parliamentary agitation. This agitation took the form of "domestic politics" such as ticketing, direct mailings, door to door canvassing and articles in the press. There was also an attempt to spread Chartism via such venues as schools, chapels, cooperative stores, burial clubs and temperance societies (244-49).

What the group lacked, continues Belchem, and what British authorities (having learned from past experiences) wanted to ensure that the Chartists continued to lack, was a galvanizing event, a point (such as Peterloo had been) around which the group could

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rally. The closest the Chartists came was a large demonstration at Kennington Common on April 10, 1848 which, unfortunately, was met by an equally large force of constables, and which demonstration, after taking its Petition to the House of Commons, dispersed peacefully. As a result, especially because of this last event, the group soon lost its political sway and by the mid-1850s had ceased to be a viable political force (249-50). In other words, though during the period of *The Woman in White*'s narrative a Chartist-Italian dialogue might have be possible, Collins (writing his novel in 1859-60), like his audience, would have had the benefit of historical hindsight and so would probably not have seen any lingering threat to Britain from the Chartists.

However, adds Belchem, Chartism also collapsed because it failed to unite with England's other revolutionary group, the country's internal "other," the Irish. Although in the 1840s and early 1850s the Irish revolutionary movement was still a nascent force on the British political scene, the Irish did have a number of strengths the Chartists lacked. Among these were an emphasis on insurgency and on Republican separatism—components, we might note, akin to those of the Italian revolution. What weakened the Irish Confederates was their lack of an articulated program or strategy and, as yet, little popular following. Ireland had suffered considerably during the Great Famine of 1847 and, as a result, the country as yet lacked the will for insurgency. What support the Confederates did have, for example, from Irish-Americans was carefully monitored and curtailed by the British via such tactics as spying and surveillance (Belchem 242-45). But more significantly, especially in terms of my argument, the Irish movement—unlike Chartism—did not die out in the 1850s and by 1859 had begun to attract the notice of the British public including, we may presume, Collins and his audience. If anything, the Irish

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movement continued to gain momentum over the 1850s, and by the end of the decade the famous Fenians would emerge both in Ireland and America—to be followed within ten years by the Home Rule League and the rise of Charles Stewart Parnell (all of which I return to in Chapter Five). The Irish, consequently, though never mentioned in the narrative of *The Woman in White*, appear at least in the novel's historical "margins," i.e., in the political climate surrounding the book's publication, and so—to return once more to my question—might provide the *raison d'etre* for the Brotherhood's presence in England.

Of course, the above ranges into the realm of speculation but even if we dismiss my argument, one point still links the Irish Confederates and Collins' Brotherhood. Whether in real life or in fiction, against the historical period of the early 1850s both groups can be seen as presenting a *continuing* conspiratorial threat in Britain. To recognize the significance of this point, it is important that I now turn my discussion back to the Brotherhood itself. Though the narrative of Collins' novel alludes to Italian politics (and hence the Brotherhood) in the early descriptions of Fosco and Pesca, it is not till the end of the novel that the topic comes to the fore:

> A slim, light-haired man standing by us, whom I had not noticed before—a man with a scar on his left cheek—looked attentively at Pesca as I helped him up, and then looked still more attentively, following the direction of Pesca's eyes, at the Count. Our conversation might have reached his ears, and might, as it struck me, have roused his curiosity.
>
> Meanwhile, Pesca fixed his eyes earnestly on the broad, full, smiling face turned a little upward, exactly opposite to him.

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"No," he said, "I have never set my two eyes on that big fat man before in all my life."

As he spoke the Count looked downwards towards the boxes behind us on the pit tier.

The eyes of the two Italians met.

The instant before I had been perfectly satisfied, from his own reiterated assertion, that Pesca did not know the Count. The instant afterwards I was equally certain that the Count knew Pesca!

Knew him, and—more surprising still—*feared* him as well! There was no mistaking the change that passed over the villain's face. The leaden hue that altered his yellow complexion in a moment, the sudden rigidity of all his features, the furtive scrutiny of his cold grey eyes, the motionless stillness of him from head to foot told their own tale. A mortal dread had mastered him body and soul—and his own recognition of Pesca was the cause of it!

The slim man with the scar on his cheek was still close by us. He had apparently drawn his inference from the effect produced on the Count by the sight of Pesca as I had drawn mine. He was a mild, gentlemanlike man, looking like a foreigner, and his interest in our proceedings was not expressed in anything approaching to an offensive manner. (590-91)

Here, as in the passages that describe Anne Catherick's death, we have another great display of Collin's narrative economy. On one hand, the passage demonstrates that Hartright is in part ultimately responsible for Fosco's death, a fact Hartright himself will later note (642-43). On the other hand, we get an amazing series of recognitions or failed

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recognitions, all of which are crucial. Pesca doesn't recognize Fosco; Fosco recognizes Pesca; the man with the scar recognizes Pesca, and because of Pesca recognizes Fosco; and, though Hartright notices the man with the scar, Hartright, Pesca and Fosco all fail to recognize that the man is an Italian conspirator from the Brotherhood. Yet these recognitions and misrecognitions pass in a moment and what the passage really draws attention to is Fosco's reaction: he becomes afraid, afraid in a way that he has never been before in the novel—and all from seeing Pesca. From a figure of terror, especially if we remember Anne Catherick's death, Fosco turns into a *terrified* man. His life is not his own, he knows it, and this knowledge—we might argue—underlies his "paranoia."

Yet more important, at least in terms of this chapter, is the Brotherhood itself. One of the great pleasures of reading *The Woman in White*, I would suggest, lies in observing how the novel's characters discuss this "organisation" while feigning not to. Fosco himself while revealing all about the Conspiracy to Defraud, keeps uncharacteristically silent concerning his role as an international spy and concerning the Brotherhood itself. He tell us only that he arrived in England on "a delicate political mission from abroad," and adds that "[c]uriosity may stop here to ask for some explanation of those functions on my part. I entirely sympathise with the request. I also regret that diplomatic reserve forbids me to comply with it" (618-19). Even Fosco, we discover, has his limits. In a related way, Pesca too stresses that the Brotherhood is so organized as to inhibit a full account of its members—even to those already in the conspiracy:

> But the laws of the Brotherhood are the laws of no other political society on the face of the earth. The members are not known to one another. There is a president

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> in Italy; there are presidents abroad. Each of these has his secretary. The presidents and the secretaries know the members, but the members, among themselves, are all strangers, until their chiefs see fit, in the political necessity of the time, or in the private necessity of the society, to make them known to each other. (596-97).

And even Hartright, who claims to be giving a full account of the Conspiracy to Defraud, makes the most obvious omission in the entire narrative of *The Woman in White* when he comes to discuss the Brotherhood: "It is only right to mention here, that I repeat Pesca's statement to me with the careful suppressions and alterations which the serious nature of the subject and my own sense of duty to my friend demand. My first and last concealments from the reader are those which caution renders absolutely necessary in this portion of the narrative" (594, footnote). Even the society's name is a false one: "The society to which he belonged will be sufficiently individualised for the purpose of these pages, if I call it 'The Brotherhood,' on the few occasions when any reference to the subject will be needed in this place" (595). Consequently, as all these passages show, *The Woman in White*'s characters insist on the fact that they will tell us nothing of substance about the Brotherhood, and that whatever slips out will necessarily be marred by distortion—a point further reinforced by the fact that Pesca apparently makes all of his revelations in Italian (see 594).

And yet, despite these obstacles, we still learn a fair amount about the Brotherhood from Pesca—just enough, I offer—and more impressively in that most of Pesca's revelations (which I shall briefly sketch here) come in the span of only four or

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five of the novel's pages. For example, Pesca tells us why he is in England and the consequences that might follow his disclosure:

> "When I came to this country, I came by the direction of my chief. I was over-zealous in my younger time—I ran the risk of compromising myself and others. For those reasons I was ordered to emigrate to England and to wait. I emigrated—I have waited—I wait still. To-morrow I may be called away—ten years hence I may be called away. It is all one to me—I am here, I support myself by teaching, and I wait. I violate no oath (you shall hear why presently) in making my confidence complete by telling you the name of the society to which I belong. All I do is to put my life in your hands. If what I say to you now is ever known by others to have passed my lips, as certainly as we two sit here, I am a dead man." (594-95)

In addition, Pesca argues that though (to an Englishman) the society's goal might seem "anarchy and revolution," its object really is "'the object of other political societies of the same sort—the destruction of tyranny and the assertion of the rights of the people,'" and shows us to what lengths the society will go to assert these rights: "'The principles of the Brotherhood are two. So long as a man's life is useful, or even harmless only, he has the right to enjoy it. But, if his life inflicts injury on the well-being of his fellow-men, from that moment he forfeits the right, and it is not only no crime, but a positive merit, to deprive him of it'" (595). Further, we also learn that to betray the Brotherhood is to "'die by the principles of the Brotherhood—die by the hand of a stranger'"; that Pesca joined the group when very young and that he still regrets his membership: "'I, in my younger time, under provocation so dreadful that I will not tell you of it, entered the Brotherhood

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by an impulse, as I might have killed myself by an impulse. I must remain in it now—it has got me, whatever I may think of it in my better circumstances and my cooler manhood, to my dying day'"; and that all of the Brotherhood members can be identified by a special mark, one that Pesca dramatically shows to Hartright: "He raised his bare arm, and showed me, high on the upper part of it and in the inner side, a brand deeply burnt in the flesh and stained of a bright blood-red colour. I abstain from describing the device which the brand represented. It will be sufficient to say that it was circular in form, and so small that it would have been completely covered by a shilling coin" (595-97). In addition, Pesca also makes a rather impassioned defense of the Brotherhood:

> "It is not for me to say in what frightful circumstances of oppression and suffering this society took its rise. It is not for you to say—you Englishmen, who have conquered your freedom so long ago, that you have conveniently forgotten what blood you shed, and what extremities you proceeded to in the conquering—it is not for you to say how far the worst of all exasperations may, or may not, carry the maddened men of an enslaved nation. The iron that has entered into our souls has gone too deep for you to find it. Leave the refugee alone!" (595-96)

Finally, Pesca even reveals the extent of the Brotherhood's power—that a man who betrays the Brotherhood is a dead man: "No *human laws can protect him*" (598, emphasis in original). The secret society of the Brotherhood operates beyond the law—like Fosco had claimed to and as Hartright was forced to in pursuing justice for Laura.

What is the significance of such a revelation? Or, more to the point, what makes the Brotherhood, the details of which I have briefly sketched above, such an important innovation in the development of conspiracy narratives? As we see, though the society is

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individualized via figures like Pesca, Fosco and, to a lesser extent, the man with the scar, it works primarily as a "force," one whose perimeter is ill-defined. Yet it is a force that, as we also saw, finds its basis in the real historical events of 1848. Consequently, it is a force whose existence and presence in England, in real life, *the reader* must concede—even if half-ironically or in the "paranoid" way that Peter Knight characterizes as emblematic of contemporary American "conspiracy culture" (see Introduction). When Collins via the novel via Walter Hartright via Pesca tells us that the Brotherhood's goals are those "of other political societies of the same sort," Collins takes for granted that we, his readers of 1859-60, are willing a priori to admit that such societies exist, even in England—an concession, further, that nineteenth-century European and British history, because of 1848 and because of the Chartists and Irish Confederates, compels. Yet Collins attempts to push this concession even more:

> The deadly certainty with which the vengeance of foreign political societies can hunt down a traitor to the cause, hide himself where he may, had been too often exemplified, even in my superficial experience, to allow of any doubt. Considering the subject only as a reader of newspapers, cases recurred to my memory, both in London and in Paris, of foreigners found stabbed in the streets, whose assassins could never be traced—of bodies and parts of bodies thrown into the Thames and the Seine, by hands that could never be discovered—of deaths by secret violence which could only be accounted for in one way. (601)

Using what he has learned from Pesca, Hartright now extends the work of the Brotherhood (and other such societies) to an array of *real*, and what had hitherto seemed *random* and *inconsequential* murders. As a result, we might argue, Hartright exhibits

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what clinical psychologists call *overinclusion*—a behavior that links Hartright with the conspiracy theorists I discussed in Chapter One, but which also returns us to Hartright's paranoia and suggests that in describing the Brotherhood, Hartright—the Paranoid Subject—might also be creating a "paranoid pseudo-community":

> *The paranoid pseudo-community is an imaginary organization; but it includes some real persons with real functions, as well as persons whom the patient misidentifies, and some wholly imagined persons who serve to complete and justify the complex imaginary community of conspirators.* All these real, misidentified, and imagined persons seem united for the express purpose of acting aggressively toward the paranoid, who is the focus of everything. (Cameron 683, emphasis in original)

Cameron's description—except for the last point, the paranoid's centrality in relation to the pseudo-community—fits Hartright rather well. For all intents and purposes, I want to suggest, because Hartright has structured his narrative in this way, deliberately leaving the question of the Brotherhood unresolved, he might as well be paranoid. Alternately, it is at this point that his narrative (if it hadn't already been before) becomes a "paranoid" narrative. This point matters when we come to Collins' Victorian audience. In reading *The Woman in White*, Collins' audience might raise a number of questions regarding the Brotherhood, namely: Doesn't Hartright, in telling Pesca's tale, make himself Pesca's accomplice in betraying the Brotherhood's code of silence? Is Hartright's assertion, that secret societies operate beyond the law but only kill those who have betrayed the societies, an accurate statement? Can we really prove that the murders Hartright ascribes to secret societies weren't done so in actual fact? A-and (as the narrator of *Gravity's*

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Rainbow might say) how do we know, really, that there aren't malevolent secret societies lurking at least in some part of England? The questions take a revealing turn. What happens to us in reading Collins' novel is exactly what happens, I shall argue in the Afterword, in Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* when we encounter Proust's "invert" conspiracy—Hartright's subjectivity, like that of Proust's narrator "Marcel," begins to compete with our own as the one more grounded in "truth." As a result, I suggest, Hartright's paranoia begins to infect *us* and we begin our own *folie à deux* with him. In fact, if we take the questions far enough—*Might not one of the secret societies in England target me?*—we even begin to exhibit the paranoid centrality that is missing in Hartright's own psychological constitution. What distinguishes the Brotherhood, therefore, as a literary conspiracy (and makes it so significant a creation) is that Hartright's discussion and exposure of the Brotherhood necessarily implicates the reader. Or, more precisely, to expose the Brotherhood (or a similar secret society) is not to stop it—as happens in the case of the Conspiracy to Defraud—but only to render it all the more terrifying.

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Chapter Four: The Inaccessible Authorities and the Vanishing Subject

In Canto Twenty-Six of the *Inferno* Virgil and Dante come upon the Greek heroes Diomedes and Ulysses who are condemned to wander as one scorching flame because of the frauds they committed together while alive. Out of the flame Ulysses narrates the story of his death—how having reached the Pillars of Hercules and spurred his men to further adventure, he sailed his final voyage:

> [A]nd having turned our stern toward morning, we
> made wings out of our oars in a wild flight
> and always gained upon our left-hand side.
> At night I now could see the other pole
> and all its stars; the star of ours had fallen
> and never rose above the plain of the ocean.
> Five times the light beneath the moon had been
> rekindled, and, as many times, was spent,
> since that hard passage faced our attempt,
> when there before us rose a mountain, dark
> because of distance, and it seemed to me
> the highest mountain I had ever seen.
> And we were glad, but this soon turned to sorrow,
> for out of that new land a whirlwind rose
> and hammered at our ship, against her bow.

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Three times it turned her round with all the waters;

and at the fourth, it lifted up the stern

so that our prow plunged deep, as pleased an Other,

until the sea again closed—over us." (26.124-42)

It is a story of intense pathos, an extraordinary end for an extraordinary individual. Ulysses' desire for knowledge and experience, the cause of all his adventures in the *Odyssey*, also leads to his death. Yet although Ulysses believes that the whirlwind that destroyed his ship "pleased an Other [*com' altrui piacque*]," it is not clear whether in Ulysses' conception this Other is the Christian God (as Dante would have it) or whether Ulysses suspects the Other to be the Greek god Poseidon finally exacting revenge for the slaughter of his immortal oxen. Ulysses' ignorance derives in part from failure to understand the meaning of his final vision: "a mountain, dark [*bruna*] / because of distance, and it seemed to me / the highest mountain I had ever seen." The mountain, as the pilgrim Dante learns later, is Purgatory, the earthly antechamber to the heavenly glories of Paradise, and Ulysses' brief glimpse is the closest any of the figures in the *Inferno* comes to seeing God or even the path leading to God. Yet in a moment of astonishing literary invention, Dante denies this knowledge to Ulysses. At best the knowledge registers only as a brief and enigmatic (to Ulysses) burst of joy, "And we were glad [*Noi ci allegrammo*]," which immediately and in a Keatsian manner turns to "sorrow [*pianto*]."

I open with this passage from Dante because it offers a resonant prototype for the conspiraceme I take up in this chapter and call the "Inaccessible Authorities." By Inaccessible Authorities, I mean those figures or forces in power who somehow manage

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to stay inaccessible—often to the point that their very existence is doubted—from those whose lives they control. It is a trope that, since it has often been used to represent God, permeates literature. In the early nineteenth century it appears memorably in Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Mont Blanc":

> Power dwells apart in its tranquility,
> Remote, serene, and inaccessible:
> And *this*, the naked countenance of earth,
> On which I gaze, even these primeval mountains
> Teach the adverting mind. The glaciers creep
> Like snakes that watch their prey, from their far fountains,
> Slow rolling on; there, many a precipice
> Frost and the Sun in scorn of mortal power
> Have piled: dome, pyramid, and pinnacle,
> A city of death, distinct with many a tower
> And wall impregnable of beaming ice.
> Yet not a city, but a flood of ruin
> Is there, that from the boundaries of the sky
> Rolls its perpetual stream. (ll.96-109)
>
> * * *
>
> Mont Blanc yet gleams on high:—the power is there,
> The still and solemn power of many sights,
> And many sounds, and much of life and death. (ll.127-29)

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To Shelley the inaccessible Mont Blanc is the site of power—if power exists at all. Yet Shelley sees not a purely natural mountain, but one whose configuration also suggests human civilization: "dome, pyramid, and pinnacle, / A city of death, distinct with many a tower / And wall impregnable of beaming ice." Though nature predominates, nature and man commingle in Shelley's vision.

In a handful of mid-Victorian works, this mingling is intensified and inverted—the figure of God (be it Christian or Pagan) becomes entangled with or represented/replaced by variations of human-based conspiracies or conspiratorial-like bureaucracies. Alternately, the trope of the Inaccessible Authorities, a phenomenon that earlier had still been something that could be located and mapped geographically (a mountain or the numbered heavens in Dante's *Paradiso*) and so had a center (God, the King, Nature), in select Victorian works begins to appear in another version, one whose boundaries and center are more ill-defined—the "secret junta" in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, the counter-revolutionary authorities whose interests Count Fosco represents in *The Woman in White*, and (in a satirical version) the *Jupiter* newspaper in Anthony Trollope's *The Warden*. Each of these representations, I shall argue, is thus transitional in that the Inaccessible Authorities here still bear affinity with the older version of the trope, but also foreshadow the conspiraceme as it appears in twentieth-century conspiracy theory narratives such as Franz Kafka's *The Castle* and Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*.[1] In addition, the depiction of the Inaccessible Authorities in the first two

[1] Obviously, I do not necessarily believe that these two works operate in the same narrative register. Kafka's work, of course, offers a fictional narrative while Foucault presents a critical/theoretical revisionist history. Yet by discussing *Discipline and Punish* here *as if* it were a fictional work, I am merely drawing attention to/building on the "pervasiveness of 'theory' in general during the past 20 years or so within academic discourse and the consequent cross-fertilization between [. . .] fiction and 'theory' of all sorts, including conspiracy theory" (Gerhard

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mentioned Victorian novels, *Villette* and *The Woman in White*, has further important ramifications. First, the conspiracies that replace God in these Victorian works begin to exhibit international ties—i.e., we glimpse the emergence of espionage (in the early-modernist sense—see Chapter Five) as a narrative mode in British literature; and, second, the change in the Authorities also leads to a change in the subject(s) these Authorities confront and try to control. What emerges is what I shall call the "Vanishing Subject," best seen—so critics would have it—in Brontë's Lucy Snowe, but more fully developed in figures such as K., the protagonist of *The Castle*, Slothrop of *Gravity's Rainbow*, and Foucault's disciplinary subjects.

To look ahead to conspiracy theory I open my discussion with Franz Kafka's final unfinished novel *The Castle* (1922) which presents the story of K. and his ill-fated attempts to access the mysterious structure known as the Castle. Although Kafka's novel does not bill itself as a conspiracy theory narrative and although the word "conspiracy" [*Verschwörung*] never appears in the novel, I have chosen this work because it bears many of the characteristics of a conspiracy theory narrative and because, though incomplete, the novel still offers a complex and highly nuanced work which incorporates

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Joseph, private letter to the author). Nor, in fact, is such a move—discussing a modern novelist and modern critic in the same breath, as if their projects were somehow analogous—really that idiosyncratic. In "Other than Postmodern?—Foucault, Pynchon, Hybridity, Ethics," for example, Frank Palmeri makes a sustained (and, in my opinion, rather successful) attempt to analogize Pynchon and Foucault in just this way, asserting that both writers operate in "a mode of thought and representation that may stand apart from postmodernism [. . .] that can be distinguished from that of their earlier works—seen here as instances of high postmodernism." This mode, which Palmeri calls "other than postmodern," apparently succeeds the "paranoid style" as a narrative mode (see my Introduction): "What is other than postmodern moves away from the representation of extreme paranoia, toward a vision of local ethico-political possibilities and a greater acceptance of hybrids that combine human and machine or human and animal traits." Yet the point, to reiterate, is that although Palmeri recognizes the difference in Pynchon's and Foucault's projects, Palmeri also implies that the difference may be relatively negligible when contrasted to the intellectual material that unifies the work of these two writers. Therefore, in my discussion of Foucault below I am only, if somewhat devilishly, following in the footsteps of critics like Palmeri.

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a wonderful version of the Inaccessible Authorities. *The Castle* takes its title from the actual Castle [*Schloß*] that looms over the village at which K., the surveyor, arrives at the beginning of the novel. The Castle's owner, Kafka tells us, is one Count Westwest, a cypher-like figure, who never appears in the narrative and is mentioned only once by name in the entire novel. The Castle itself is also an enigmatic and elusive entity. The narrative shows or alludes to the geographical placement of the Castle (i.e., the Castle as a structure in space and observed from its exterior) only a handful of times. The first of these references comes in the novel's opening paragraph:

> It was late in the evening when K. arrived. The village lay under deep snow. There was no sign of the Castle hill, fog and darkness surrounded it, not even the faintest gleam of light suggested the large Castle. K. stood a long time on the wooden bridge that leads from the main road to the village, gazing upward into the seeming emptiness. (1)

This is a curious passage as it represents the only time K. appears outside the village and here, though K. already seems to know of the Castle's existence, he sees not the physical entity itself but only the "seeming emptiness [*scheinbare Leere*]" which fills the Castle's place. The first actual view of the Castle comes on the next morning:

> On the whole the Castle, as it appeared from this distance, corresponded to K.'s expectations. It was neither an old knight's fortress nor a magnificent new edifice, but a large complex, made up of a few two-story buildings and many lower, tightly packed ones; had one not known that this was a castle, one could have taken it for a small town. K. saw only one tower, whether it belonged to a dwelling or a church was impossible to tell. Swarms of crows circled it.

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> Keeping his eyes fixed upon the Castle, K. went ahead, nothing else mattered to him. But as he came closer he was disappointed in the Castle, it was only a rather miserable little town, pieced together from village houses, distinctive only because everything was perhaps built of stone, but the paint had long since flaked off, and the stone seemed to be crumbling. [. . .] The tower up here—it was the only one in sight—the tower of a residence, as now became evident, possibly of the main Castle, was a monotonous round building, in part mercifully hidden by ivy, with little windows that glinted in the sun—there was something crazy about this—and ending in a kind of terrace, whose battlements, uncertain, irregular, brittle, as if drawn by the anxious or careless hand of a child, zigzagged into the blue sky. It was as if some melancholy resident, who by rights ought to have kept himself locked up in the most out-of-the-way room in the house, had broken through the roof and stood up in order to show himself to the world. (8).

This is the most extended look K. ever gets of the Castle's exterior and a number of elements in the passage stand out. The narrative indicates that the Castle both meets K.'s expectations and disappoints them—its appearance does not deliver on what K. desires. In its positioning and aura the Castle resembles Dante's Mount of Purgatory, but in its structure as a set of "village houses [. . .] built of stone [*Stein*]" the Castle echoes Shelley's "Mont Blanc" though, of course, without the corresponding majesty. In fact, the narrative undercuts any hints of the Castle's power and instead draws attention to the crow-circled tower [*Turm*], an irregular structure that suggests a "melancholy resident [*trübseliger Hausbewohner*]," but which in its singularity recalls the tower in Robert Browning's "'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came'" ("The round squat turret, blind as

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the fool's heart / Built of brown stone, without a counterpart / In the whole world" [ll.182-84]), suggesting that the Castle also functions as the goal of a failed Grail-like quest. The second and only other glimpse of the Castle tells us little more, though it is still a fascinating passage if only because of the tantalizing way the Castle fades even as K. tries to scrutinize it: "the longer he looked, the less he could make out, and the deeper everything sank into twilight [*sank alles in Dämmerung*]" (99). Yet despite K.'s failure, the Castle itself still maintains a steady and haunting (if ultimately indifferent) gaze upon K.—that is, if it maintains one at all. K., as his inability to see "the slightest sign [*geringste Zeichen*] of life up there" and thus to "tolerate the stillness [*die Stille nicht dulden*]" underscores (98), is plagued by an ontological doubt similar to that Shelley expresses at the end of "Mont Blanc": "And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea, / If to the human mind's imaginings / Silence and solitude were vacancy?" (ll.142-44). The Castle becomes inaccessible because it seems as much K.'s projection as an actual place.

Beside being scopically inaccessible, the Castle also seems to be physically so, at least to an outsider like K.. Streets that promise to lead to the Castle never do: "The street he had taken, the main street in the village, did not lead to the Castle hill, it only went close by, then veered off as if on purpose [*wie absichtlich*], and though it didn't lead any farther from the Castle, it didn't get any closer either" (10). Streets that do lead to the Castle are deserted: "'Who are you waiting for?' 'For a sleigh to take me,' said K. 'No sleighs come along here,' said the man, 'no traffic [*kein Verkehr*] comes through here.' 'But this is the road that leads to the Castle,' objected K. 'Even so, even so,' the man said rather implacably, 'no traffic comes through here'" (14). And, finally, K. later learns that

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all streets leading to the Castle are in fact used only according to an esoteric system, that though "[t]here are several approaches to the Castle," they are not used consistently: "'At times this one is fashionable [*in Mode*] and most drive there, at others that one and everyone rushes in that direction. The rules [*Regeln*] according to which these changes take place are still unknown [*herausgefunden*]'" (217). For the villagers simply understanding the rules that govern road use seems so difficult that the concept of using this system to advantages falls by the wayside.

Nor can the Castle be reached by telephone. Though other figures occasionally seem to call the Castle, most notably Schwarzer, the man who awakens K. on his first night in the village, K.'s attempts produce only puzzling results. A mysterious and hypnotic humming, like "the humming [*Summen*] of countless childlike voices—but it wasn't humming either, it was singing [*Gesang*], the singing of the most distant, of the most utterly distant, voices [*allerfernster Stimmen*]," greets K.'s first effort to telephone the Castle (20). Later, when K. does get through and reaches on official named Oswald, the conversation is plagued by misunderstanding: Oswald first doesn't seem to know who K. is, then he does, more confusion follows and the exchange ends thus: "'Who am I then?' K. asked as calmly as before. And after a pause, the same voice, which had the same speech defect but sounded like a different, deeper, more imposing [*tiefere achtungswertere*] voice, said: 'You're the old assistant'" (20-21). Through such simple yet ominous—why, for example, does the speaker's voice change?—and ultimately irresolvable confusion, Kafka further emphasizes the Castle's inaccessibility. In time the narrative reveals the futility of any attempt to call the Castle: "'There is no separate [*bestimmte*] telephone connection to the Castle and no switchboard to forward our calls;

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when anyone here calls the Castle, all the telephones in the lowest-level departments ring, or all would ring if the ringing mechanism on nearly all of them were not, and I know this for certain, disconnected [*abgestellt*] '" (72). In both these two instances, the use of the streets and of the telephone, K.'s ardor in attempting to reach the Castle produces not results, but instead uncovers only the seemingly absurd logic by which the Castle and its officials operate.

Because of these circumstances the Castle, as a physical structure, remains inaccessible throughout the novel and K.'s efforts finally prove useless (at least in the narrative as Kafka left it). So not surprisingly, the novel and the Castle itself have inspired an array of critical interpretations. Richard J. Arneson divides the novel's critics into three camps. There are those who see the novel as a "religious parable" and the point is "that K. sins by insisting on rational explanation." There are those that argue that "the theme is the death of God" and the characters are "seen as living out various unsatisfactory solutions to the problem of religious faith." And there are those critics for whom the novel "asserts the claims of moral autonomy and ethical rationality against the ominous ideal of submitting to an inscrutable divine will for man" (99-101). Arneson himself writes that any interpretation of *The Castle* may "be undercut by the nagging doubt that the Castle literally does not exist at all [. . .] apart from the villagers' imaginings" (113), while Erich Heller adds that the Castle is only "the highest realm K. is capable of perceiving," and that it is "something that bars his way into a purer realm" (99-102). Finally, Ronald Gray takes what may be the most comprehensive view, describing some features of the Castle as "impossible to reconcile with any Christian conception of God," while asserting that some Christian "overtones" can be "unmistakably heard"—that

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often "nothing definite can be predicted of the Castle," but that at times it does seem "benevolent" (56ff).

To me, however, such attempts seem destined to fail. Any effort to penetrate the Castle or its "meaning" only risks repeating K.'s doomed efforts. A more useful approach, I believe, begins with a closer look at K. himself and at his motives for coming to the village in the first place. K., much as his presence may permeate the novel, is a shadowy figure, one whose motives remain mysterious. For example, although K. claims to be a land surveyor, "K. shows no sign of ever having had any smattering of knowledge of surveying, never shows any wish to survey, or any hint of what surveying might be done" (Gray 59). Similarly, K. himself offers a number of explanations for his ongoing efforts. Sometimes K. claims that he has lost his freedom and asserts that "what I want from the Castle is not charity, but my rights [*mein Recht*]" (74). At times his purpose becomes more general and he argues that "my only wish is to settle my affairs [*meine Angelegenheiten . . . in Ordnung zu bringen*] with the authorities" (170). But more often K. seems to have a rather different objective in mind: "he had not come here in order to lead a life in honor and peace" (153). In desire and in act K. emerges as a demagogue. The narrative even hints that the villagers had been anticipating K.'s arrival for some time: "during the conversation it had occurred to K. that Brunswick, no matter how dangerous and evil a person he was in other respects, couldn't really be his adversary, for he was after all, at least according to the council chairman's report, the leader of the faction that had, even if merely on political grounds, demanded the summoning of the surveyor" (148). There is also the enigmatic passage early in the novel that positions K. as part of some larger rebellion. The Castle's anticipation of K.'s arrival shows that "the

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Castle had all necessary information about him, had assessed the opposing forces [*Kräfteverhältnisse*], and was taking up the struggle [*Kampf*] with a smile" (5). K., the narrative suggests, might be part of a benevolent conspiracy, that of the "opposing forces" whoever they may be. That Kafka, owing probably to his not finishing the novel, left such hints undeveloped places the narrative at the level of conspiracy theory (if only in theory) and positions K. as a Vanishing Subject, i.e., one whose characteristics fail to coalesce into a coherent and *visible* whole (more below).

Yet these ambiguous relations to power form only one side of K.'s character. For most of the novel K. appears at a disadvantage when confronting the Castle, its officials and even the villagers. Early in the novel, for instance, Gardena, the landlady of the inn where K. first stays, underscores K.'s ignorance of village affairs: "you're dreadfully ignorant [*unwissend*] about the situation here, one's head buzzes from listening to you and from comparing your opinions and ideas with the real situation" (55). Gardena also cites K.'s insignificance when compared to the Castle officials, that K. matters little because, "'You're not from the Castle, you're not from the village, you are nothing'" (48). The villagers thus perceive K. as weak and treat him as a nuisance. In a similar vein, K. himself at times feels as if he "was lost [*er verirre sich*] or had wandered farther into foreign lands than any human being before him, so foreign that even the air hadn't a single component of the air in his homeland and where one would inevitably suffocate from the foreignness but where the meaningless enticements were such that one had no alternative but to go on and get even more lost" (41). He also starts to suspect that the struggle against the Castle exceeds his own capabilities, that though "he, K., was fighting for something vitally close [*lebendigst Nahes*], for himself, and what's more of his own

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free will," the struggle, ultimately, is about greater "forces [*Kräfte*], which he knew nothing of, but could believe in because of the measures adopted by the authorities" (57-58). Although here, in contradiction to the passage I quoted above, K. seems ignorant of the forces on whose behalf he's fighting, the passage still indicates K.'s predicament: K. fights for something vital to his existence against (or, perhaps, for) authorities that are inaccessibly distant and crushingly indifferent. In terms of affect, K. engages our sympathy because like Miss Havisham or Isabel Archer (see Chapter Three) he becomes the victim of a larger and unstoppable conspiracy, that of the Castle officials.

Kafka further foregrounds K.'s situation during K.'s interview with the council chairman. This interview proves important to the development of the novel in that it gives K. his first extended glimpse into the workings of the Castle's bureaucracy—that "ridiculous tangle [*lächerliche Gewirre*] that may under certain circumstances determine a person's life," as K. describes it (63). Up to this point in the novel, part of the mystery surrounding K. concerns whether he has arrived in the village of his own accord or because he was summoned by the Castle—an issue the chairman confronts. On one hand, says the chairman, the village has no need of a surveyor: "'The boundaries of our small holdings have been marked out, everything has been duly registered, the properties themselves rarely change hands, and whatever small boundary disputes arise, we settle ourselves. So why should we have any need for a surveyor?'" (59). On the other hand, in what will become a typical passage later in the novel in terms of length and detail, the chairman describes how a surveyor might have inadvertently been summoned—the amazingly complicated and outrageously funny path such a summons might follow from

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conception to realization (see 92ff). Such a sublime "tangle" thus perfectly underscores the nature of the Castle's bureaucracy.

Nor does the problem end there. When K. asks after control agencies that might prevent such errors, the chairman only ridicules the question: "'Only a total stranger could ask such a question. Are there control agencies [*Kontrollbehörden*]? There are only control agencies. Of course they aren't meant to find errors [*Fehler*], in the vulgar sense of that term, since no errors occur, and even if an error does occur, as in your case, who can finally say that it is an error?'" (65). Yet for all this bureaucracy, for all the twists and turns and revisions any request must go through, the Castle ultimately resolves whatever problems do arise by a surprising and radically different procedure: "'When a matter has been deliberated on at great length, it can happen, even before the deliberations have ended, that suddenly, like lightning, in some unforeseeable place, which cannot be located later on, a directive [*Erledigung*] is issued that usually justly, but nonetheless arbitrarily, brings the matter to a close'" (68). Though really only a teaser, this passage still gives us an amazing peek into the inner workings of the Castle. The irony lies in that no matter how much information K. receives as to how the Castle operates, he never comes closer to learning why. The Castle authorities become inaccessible, paradoxically, because there is too much information about them and because, as is the case with the Kennedy assassination in *Libra* (see Chapter One), it is hard to be objective about all the Castle material and so distinguish what is relevant given K.'s desire to understand the workings of the Castle, not simply to catalogue them as the villagers do. The villagers, in fact, exacerbate K.'s predicament (and so intensify the Castle's inaccessibility) in that

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most of them take an obsessive interest in the unreflective recording of the Castle's activities.

Another aspect of *The Castle* that reinforces the inaccessible stance of the authorities is the trajectory that K.'s quest ultimately takes. As the novel progresses, Count Westwest quickly disappears from the narrative and K.'s focus shifts from figure to figure, each of whom at first promises to offer access to the Castle but in the end emerges as less significant that the preceding figure. Among such people (to give a sample) we may count Schwarzer, Barnabas, Frieda, Hans, Olga, Amalia and Pepi. Here, conversely, I shall consider one of the exceptions to this rule, namely Klamm, the enigmatic Castle official. As almost everyone in the village agrees, Klamm is a person of tremendous power and since Klamm himself contacts K. (by letter) soon after K.'s arrival, it is probable that Klamm is the official directly responsible for K.'s case. At one point K. even gets a glimpse of Klamm. Klamm's appearance, however, is remarkable for how undistinguished it seems. He is simply a "medium-sized, fat, ponderous gentleman," somewhat aged, with a thick black mustache and a prince-nez; apparently he likes "Virginia" cigars. Nor does Klamm seem to be doing anything out of the ordinary. Klamm, Frieda soon adds, is only sleeping (37). Surprisingly, although this glimpse comes early in the novel and seems to be a harbinger of more, this is the closest that K. ever comes to Klamm. And yet, when Garden the landlady hears of this incident, she treats K.'s glimpse as if it were monumental: "'But tell me, how could you bear [*ertragen*] the sight of Klamm?'" (49). The landlady also reveals that even Frieda, Klamm's erstwhile mistress and a person regarded in the narrative as rather successful in accessing Klamm, has not fared much better than K.:

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> "You expect Klamm to speak to you, but he doesn't even speak to people from the village, has never spoken to anyone from the village. It certainly was a great distinction [*Auszeichnung*] for Frieda, a distinction that I, too, shall be proud of until the end of my days, that he would at least call her name and she could speak to him whenever she wished and was allowed to use the peephole, and yet he never spoke to her." (49)

To have the opportunity to speak *at* Klamm and to have him call one's name is apparently as good as it gets. Yet even on this front K. ultimately fails.

Before leaving The Castle, I want to take a brief look at the novel's ending as we have it. As critics have noted, K. undergoes an unexpected change at the end of the narrative. From rebellion, he shifts to a position of deference towards the Castle authorities surprisingly similar to that of the other villagers. Ronald Gray writes that K. undergoes a "remarkable" transformation: "He is now more generous, not vindictive or jealous at all, more willing to believe in other people's superiority to himself, and in the ineptitude of his approach to the Castle, than he was at the beginning[. . . .] The game of attack and counter-attack is over, and in these circumstances K. emerges a different man" (78-79). What has happened to K.? As Kafka left the novel unfinished, we will never know for certain. But we can notice a facet of K.'s behavior that recurs throughout the narrative. Though K.'s ostensible purpose is entering the Castle, over time K. surrenders himself to the life of the village. Alternately, along with rebellion against the Castle, K. also pursues the conflicting course of integration into the village, a fact he himself indicates: "I shall marry [Frieda] and join the community" (198). It is a move so bizarre, especially given K.'s initial ardor in pursuing Klamm, that even Frieda censures K.'s

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consider here, Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975). What makes *Discipline and Punish* such a powerful conspiracy *theory* narrative is that superficially it does not purport to be one. Two-thirds of the way through the work, at the end of the famous section on "Panopticism," Foucault raises a tantalizing question which he just as quickly retracts: "What Great Observer [*Grand Surveillant*] will produce the methodology of examination [*méthodologie de l'examen*] for the human sciences? Unless, of course, such a thing is not possible" (226). Both question and answer are loaded. As it is obvious to Foucault's readers by this point in the narrative, the "methodology of examination" is none other than *Discipline and Punish*, which traces the rise of the "disciplinary régime" from seventeenth-century punitive measures to the present-day panoptic carceral state, and so the "Great Observer," the figure who finally trumps Panopticism by identifying it as such (and, as the phrase "*Grand Surveillant*" suggests, by its own method), becomes Michel Foucault himself. Through his text Foucault offers a new and revelatory version of history and his immense influence over readers during the last twenty-five years—especially among literary theorists—testifies to the effectiveness and persuasiveness of his vision. In the ultimate act of *folie à deux* (see Chapter Three) Foucault has taught a whole generation of literary critics to become suspicious, paranoid even, and to search monomaniacally for the Panoptic gaze as they read.

In my discussion of *Discipline and Punish* I hope to break with this critical tradition (or extend one strain of it—see the footnote above) and I shall approach the text as a fictional work, one whose climax comes in the section on "Panopticism"—a section which, not coincidentally, also presents another version of the Inaccessible Authorities. Part of the problem in reading *Discipline and Punish* and so, ironically, part of the book's

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behavior: "'But look,' said Frieda, 'you're no longer even aiming for Klamm [*es ist ja nicht einmal mehr Klamm Dein Ziel*], perhaps that's what upsets me most; it was bad enough that you were always pushing past me to Klamm, but that you now seem to be turning away from Klamm [*von Klamm abzukommen scheinst*] is far worse, it's something not even the landlady could have foreseen'" (160). What exactly is K. up to in this "turning away"? To answer, we might "look back" at *The Castle* from the perspective of another conspiracy theory narrative, namely *Gravity's Rainbow*: "Nalline Slothrop just before her first martini is right here, in spirit, at this Kruppfest. So is her son Tyrone, but only because by now—early in Virgo—he has become one plucked albatross. Plucked, hell—*stripped.* Scattered all over the Zone. It's doubtful if he can ever be 'found' again, in the conventional sense of 'positively identified and detained'" (712). Near the end of *Gravity's Rainbow* Tyrone Slothrop, the protagonist of Pynchon's novel, experiences what may be the most bizarre fate of any postmodern character. In culminating his orgiastic journey through "The Zone," Pynchon's version of post-World War II Germany, Slothrop scatters—i.e., he vanishes from under the very nose of the Hidden Hand conspiracy that has been pursuing him (see Chapter Two) by integrating into the Zone and into the novel's very text. Such "scattering" is also what happens to K. the end of *The Castle*—at least in the narrative as Kafka left it. K. foregoes his focused desire to enter the Castle and instead disperses his energies and integrates into the village which also functions (via the various stories of the Castle narrated by the villagers) as *the text* of the Castle authorities.

Admittedly, this last suggestion seems somewhat hurried and ill-defined. To clarify my point I now turn to the other twentieth-century conspiracy "narrative" I want to

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persuasiveness stems from the fact that Foucault convinces his readers to take him at face value. Although Roland Barthes proclaimed the "Death of the Author" in 1969, readers seem to forget this lesson when encountering *Discipline and Punish*. Though the exact genre of the work may be in dispute—is it history? sociology? literary theory?—no one, it seems, is inclined to doubt that Foucault's is a serious critical text which should be read *seriously* and *without irony*. Yet consider the "thesis" of *Discipline and Punish* as it appears at the beginning of Part Three:

> There can be no question here of writing the history of the different disciplinary institutions, with all their individual differences. I simply intend to map on a series of examples some of the essential techniques that most easily spread from one to another. These were always meticulous, often minute, techniques, but they had their importance: because they defined a certain mode of detailed political investment of the body, a 'new micro-physics' of power; and because, since the seventeenth century, they had constantly reached out to ever broader domains, as if they tended to cover the entire social body. Small acts of cunning endowed with a great power of diffusion, subtle arrangements, apparently innocent, but profoundly suspicious, mechanisms that obeyed economies too shameful to be acknowledged, or pursued petty forms of coercion—it was nevertheless they that brought about the mutation of the punitive system, at the threshold of the contemporary period. Describing them will require great attention to detail: beneath every set of figures, we must seek not a meaning, but a precaution; we must situate them not only in the inextricability of a functioning, but in the coherence of a tactic. They are the acts of cunning, not so much of the greater

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> reason that works even in its sleep and gives meaning to the insignificant, as of the attentive "malevolence" that turns everything to account. Discipline is a political anatomy of detail. (139)

I give this incredible paragraph (of which kind there are many in *Discipline and Punish*) in full because it allows us to watch in miniature many of the phenomena that occur in and are described by Foucault's book. The paragraph begins on a humble note. Foucault makes no grand claims to give a comprehensive history, but only offers to "map on a series of examples [*repérer seulement sur une série d'exemples*]." Further, he asserts that he will not deal with great historical events but only with "meticulous, often minute, techniques [*techniques minutieuses toujours, souvent infimes*]"—though these techniques, however minute, gain a surprising political resonance and come to cover "the entire social body [*le corps social tout entier*]." Still, to be fair, up to this point in the paragraph Foucault's writing is almost wholly objective. Starting with the next sentence this situation changes: Foucault has just described the minute invasion; now it happens in his own text! The paranoid words and phrases proliferate: "suspicious [*supçonneux*]," "shameful [*inavouables*]," "precaution [*précaution*]," "tactic [*tactique*]," "acts of cunning [*ruses*]." Foucault's objectivity gives way to a decidedly suspicious point of view. Foucault also brings his "techniques" uncomfortably close to us, to "the threshold of the contemporary period [*au seuil de l'époque contemporaine*]"—wasn't he just talking about the seventeenth century? Finally, what had been a long and verbose paragraph, ends with a short proverb that tidily sums it all up, a mnemonic of sorts: "Discipline is a political anatomy of detail [*La discipline est une anatomie politique du détail*]." Foucault indoctrinates even as he argues. What is at stake, the mnemonic shows, is not really "a

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series of examples," not "the different disciplinary institutions," but the entire field of discipline under which everything else is subsumed. Contrary to what he had just claimed, Foucault now asserts that this will not be some trivial history, however trivial its objects, but a comprehensive *theory.*

It is a theory that Foucault takes great pains to extend, historically and institutionally. Not long after this "thesis" Foucault maps the exact route that his history will take. He tells us that he will focus on the eighteenth century, and will touch both on particular figures (Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, Leibniz, Buffon, Frederick II and the new "Newton of 'small bodies,' small movements, small actions") and disciplines (pedagogy, medicine, military tactics and economics) (140-41). The new Newton, of course, is Napoleon: "Napoleon did not discover this world; but we know that he set out to organize it; and he wished to arrange around him a mechanism of power that would enable him to see the smallest event that occurred in the state he governed" (141). Napoleon culminates the development of Foucault's historical trend and, as a historical figure, also defines what Foucault had earlier meant by the "threshold of the contemporary period,"—1815 at latest. Michael Donnelly confirms as much, asserting that "indeed much of *Discipline and Punish* read[s] as if on Foucault's view the years around 1800 marked a threshold, the initiation of a new epoch in power relations, etc. Once across this threshold it is as if one could begin talking about the characteristics of the epoch unfolding ahead" (27). In mapping his history Foucault also refines his "series of examples": pedagogy, medicine, military tactics and economics. More specifically, as it later becomes clear, what Foucault has in mind is showing how five institutions—first the school, the hospital, the army and the factory; and, later, the police—evolved in an almost identical way and at a

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closely coordinated pace during the period in question. Finally, as the culmination of this evolution, Foucault presents Napoleon, the master of instituting the new disciplinary technique but himself, ironically, a figure far from anonymous. Yet Foucault's discussion of Napoleon again is surprising: "set out to organize [*a entrepris de l'organiser*]," "wished to arrange [*a voulu aménager*]," etc. On one hand, Foucault describes what Napoleon *desired* to do (though such a thing may have been impossible). On the other, Foucault presents these desires as if they had been realized, as if they were part of history, albeit a "History of Detail." What, then, are we to make of this unresolved tension between actual history and Foucault's personal objective, i.e., his habit of reading desire as event? How do we account for Foucault's shift, as I discussed above, from impersonal analysis to a suspicion-laden theory?

In his classic essay, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," Richard Hofstadter sets out to explore the parameters of conspiracy theory in American history. Though most of Hofstadter's findings (as I implied in the Introduction) are irrelevant to this discussion, in the fifth section of his essay Hofstadter does "abstract the basic elements in the paranoid style": that it subscribes to the belief in "a 'vast' or 'gigantic conspiracy as *the motive force* in historical events" and that that it is marked by the "rather curious leap in imagination that is always made at some crucial point in the recital of events" (29 and 37, emphasis in original). These tendencies return us to the two questions I raised at the end of the last paragraph. What creates the strange shifts and unresolved tensions in *Discipline and Punish*, I want to suggest, is the fact that Foucault writes in the "paranoid style" (as I use the term, see Introduction). His theory is not so much a historical theory as a conspiracy theory, the conspiracy coming in that Foucault

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locates a force that develops transhistorically, from the seventeenth century to at least 1815, *and* that coordinates five diverse and distinct institutions: the army, the school, the factory, the hospital, and the police. In other words, Foucault proposes a conspiracy of vast and incredible proportions. Interestingly, Donnelly criticizes *Discipline and Punish* on just this point:

> There are, on Foucault's account, myriad sites of discipline—a great array of disciplinary practices. It is a virtue of Foucault's researches that they again and again try to locate specific effects of these different practices. But if these mechanisms are to work in concert, to programme "the basic functioning of society," what is it that renders them coherent or consistent? What produces a uniform *pattern* of discipline such that the results can be summed up as a form of political rationality, or rule over individuals? Foucault rejects the notion that there is any calculating class of human agents behind the scenes pulling the disciplinary strings. But what impersonal force then allows Foucault to talk of discipline univocally, as a strategy by which whole peoples can be ordered? If the answer comes back, it is the general diagram which programmes or informs specific practices here, there and everywhere else, that simply transfers the problem without resolving it. (28-29)

Donnelly discovers a giant hole in the text. If Foucault's conspiracy lacks consciously-motivated conspirators, then who or what controls the conspiracy? Foucault doesn't provide an answer and the narrative loops back on itself: disciplinary practices are both their own cause and end result. It is a configuration, incidentally, that takes us back to Eve Sedgwick and her indictment of the "paranoid hermeneutic"—that it is a priori rigid,

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works by circular logic, and so necessarily makes discoveries that only reiterate its initial assumptions (see Introduction). Alternately, this configuration alerts us to another interesting and innovative element of *Discipline and Punish*. In Foucault's construction the authorities—wherever they may be—are elsewhere and so not an actual part of the disciplinary mechanism.

Or, the authorities thus become *inaccessible*, and we are left with the disciplinary loop and with Foucault, the conspiracy theorist. One of the unique features of *Discipline and Punish* is that Foucault gives us a narrative which remains "anonymous" until the powerful declaration in the final pages of the book: "I shall stop this anonymous text [*Je m'arrêterai sur ce texte sans nom*]" (307). This intrusion of the first person, of Foucault, is significant in that it forces us to realize that up to this point the narrative has been written in an impersonal third person voice. Yet this anonymity is only Foucault's stance, not a reality of the narrative. If anything, in *Discipline and Punish* Foucault produces one of the most paranoid works in conspiracy theory history. To give just a few examples of his paranoid strategies: Repeatedly Foucault chooses loaded vocabulary that undermines any attempts at objectivity: e.g., "Hierarchized, continuous and functional surveillance may not be one of the great technical 'inventions' of the eighteenth century, but its insidious [*insideuse*] extension owed its importance to the mechanisms of power that it brought with it" (176). He exhibits traces of overinclusion akin to the kind I noted in Walter Hartright's behavior (see Chapter Three): e.g., "This infinitely scrupulous concern with surveillance is expressed in the architecture by innumerable petty mechanisms. These mechanisms can only be seen as unimportant if one forgets [*on ne les trouvera dérisoires que si on oublie*] the role of this instrumentation, minor but flawless, in the

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progressive objectification and the ever more subtle partitioning of individual behavior" (173). Further, the narrative frequently assumes the second person voice of the disciplinary imperatives, a curious move which makes the book seem as if it were disciplining the reader: e.g., "Finalize [*Finaliser*] these temporal segments, decide [*fixer*] on how long each will last," etc. (158). And, finally, Foucault makes radical leaps in reasoning which he presents as if they were logical steps, two of which (my favorite) I give here:

> A port, and a military port is—with its circulation of goods, men signed up willingly or by force, sailors embarking and disembarking, diseases and epidemics—a place of desertion, smuggling, contagion: it is a crossroads for dangerous mixtures, a meeting-place for forbidden circulations. (144)
>
> * * *
>
> [. . .] and when one wishes to individualize the healthy, normal and law-abiding adult, it is always by asking him how much of the child he has in him, what secret madness lies within him, what fundamental crime he has dreamt of committing. (193)

In the first instance, for Foucault circulation in a port necessarily implies contagion; in the second, from the child within Foucault effortlessly jumps to "secret madness [*folie secrète*]" and "fundamental crime [*crime fondamental*]." In all of the above instances, Foucault's narrative betrays its "anonymous" narrator, and we note the "curious leaps" that guide Foucault's reasoning.

There is the fact too, as already noted, that the structure of *Discipline and Punish* has the fascinating tendency to imitate what the prose describes—as if to drill Foucault's

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points into the reader's head in a school-like manner. The best example of this phenomenon (setting aside the meticulous segmentation of the entire book) occurs in "Docile Bodies," the first section of the third part of the narrative. At the end of this section Foucault summarizes his main points, that "discipline creates out of the bodies it controls four types of individuality, or rather an individuality that is endowed with four characteristics [. . .] And, in doing so, it operates four great techniques: it draws up tables; it prescribes movements; it imposes exercises; lastly, in order to obtain the combination of forces, it arranges 'tactics'" (167). In other words, the section centers on the segmentation, distribution and regulation of bodies. What, perhaps, is not so obvious at first is that this summary comes at the close of what is among the most segmented sections of the book. For example, in "Docile Bodies" we get segments with headings: "The art of distributions," "The control of activity," etc; we get numbered segments within these headed segments; and on one occasion we even get a numerically segmented paragraph (see 157ff). Further, this imitating facet of the narrative also occurs on the smaller scale. For instance: in the second section of Part Three, "The means of correct training," Foucault describes the method of disciplinary punishment: "Disciplinary punishment is, in the main, isomorphic with obligation itself; it is not so much the vengeance of an outraged law as its repetition, its reduplicated insistence [*sa répétition, son insistance redoublée*]" (180). The sentence starts to repeat even as it describes—syntax reinforces meaning. Nor is this a confined instance. In *Discipline and Punish* this repetition manifests itself in the sudden appearance and subsequent proliferation of key words (e.g., the second use of the word "surveillance" [*surveillance*] occurs in the sentence that immediately follows the book's first use of the word, see 172-73), and in the

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presentation of ideas (for a memorable instance see the paragraph that begins "The panoptic modality [*La modalité panoptique*]" on 221-22).

There is the further matter of Foucault's competence as a scholar. As critics have already noted, there are numerous problems with Foucault's historical methods. George Steiner, in a review of another book by Foucault, notes Foucault's frequent failure to cite his sources: "The trouble is that Foucault speaks as if he were a solitary explorer, opening up silent seas. Where allusion is made to fellow-scholars or thinkers, it is usually anonymous and abusive" (29). Foucault's theorizing is also problematic: "It is part of the enormous but also indistinct task he has set for himself, that so many of Foucault's generalizations are too nebulous to be tested, while a good number of his particulars are too esoteric or devoid of context to be truly representative" (Steiner 30). Historian H.C. Erik Midelfort, in discussing *Madness and Civilization*, first censures Foucault for "deliberately disregarding" important information, then goes on to enumerate an array of Foucault's scholarly shortcomings—among them that Foucault fails to assimilate crucial information; that his use of historical material "invites misinterpretation"; that he extrapolates too freely from his sources, disregarding "chronological or regional differences"; that his periodization has problems (257); that he creates "polemical distortions"; and, in short, that his "arguments fly in the face of empirical evidence, and that many of [his] broadest generalizations are oversimplifications" (252-59). Quite a slew of charges!

Discipline and Punish is plagued by similar problems. Foucault, for example, often speaks of the army, the school, the hospital, and the factory as if they were one institution (see, e.g., 157). He also seems to derive broad movements from single

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examples, going (for instance) from the Hôtel-Dieu of Paris to a passage where it suddenly becomes unclear whether Foucault is still talking about the specific hospital or medical institutions in general: "The old form of inspection, irregular and rapid, was transformed into a regular observation that placed the patient in a situation of almost perpetual examination [. . .] in the internal hierarchy, the physician, hitherto an external element, begins to gain over the religious staff and to relegate them to a clearly specified, but subordinate role in the technique of the examination," etc. (185-86). In addition, occasionally in *Discipline and Punish* Foucault uses unattributed quotations, a habit especially surprising given that the narrative seems so meticulously documented (see, e.g., 178-79). And, most notoriously, Foucault often blurs the line between what his evidence says, and what he wants it to say—in the case of Bentham's Panopticon, admitting that "[n]o doubt [*sans doute*] Bentham presents it as a particular institution closed in upon itself [*une institution particulière, bien close sur elle-même*]. Utopias, perfectly closed in upon themselves, are common enough," while moments later he turns Bentham upside-down:

> But the Panopticon must not be understood as a dream building [*ne dois pas être compris comme un édifice onirique*]: it is the diagram of a mechanism [*le diagramme d'un méchanisme*] of power reduced to its ideal form [*forme idéale*]; its functioning, abstracted from any obstacle, resistance or friction, must be represented [*peut bien être représenté*] as a pure [*pur*] architectural and optic system: it is in fact a figure [*une figure*] of political technology that may and must [*qu'on peut et qu'on doit*] be detached from any specific use. (205)

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Now Foucault treats the Panopticon not as "a particular institution" but as an abstract model. Or, in other words, in *Discipline and Punish* Foucault presents us with a text that purports to be scholarly to the highest degree, but which contains a number of scholarly flaws.

Yet what concerns me here and what will return me to my discussion proper is another problem inherent in Foucault's narrative. Michael Donnelly describes it thus: "As compared with the careful reconstruction of 'discipline' and disciplinary practices in the early-nineteenth century, everything after is drawn slapdash, in a rush to the present; indeed the whole intervening period is more or less flattened-out" (25). Foucault, having taken the reign of Napoleon as an endpoint (see above), defines everything that follows as "the contemporary period," the period—incidentally—in which Foucault's reader is situated. Like Walter Hartright at the conclusion of *The Woman in White*, so Foucault's "anonymous" narrator attempts to draw his readers into the "paranoid" mindframe. In the narrative this happens in various ways. I have already noted Foucault's use of the imperative voice, but I might also cite Foucault's tendency to guide his reader's suspicions, as (for example) when he asks, "[I]s a science of the individual possible and legitimate?," and then telling his readers that "one should look [*il faut regarder*] into those procedures of writing and registration, one should look [*il faut regarder*] into the mechanisms of examination, into the formation of the mechanisms of discipline, and on a new type of power over bodies" (191)—a suggestion especially ironic as the best place in which to study all these processes (and so Foucault would have it) is *Discipline and Punish* itself. Finally, there is Foucault's penchant for leaving gaps in the text which, presumably, the reader is supposed to fill in: "The fact that [the Panopticon] should have

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given rise, even in our own time, to so many variations, projected or realized [*tant de variations projetées ou réalisées*], is evidence of the imaginary intensity that it has possessed for almost two hundred years" (205). Foucault never defines what these "many variations, projected or realized" are, but he assumes that his readers *surely* could, couldn't we?

So, to take my discussion of *Discipline and Punish* into its final turn, it is now necessary to pose the following question (similar to that I posed in Chapter Three, but in a different context): If *Discipline and Punish* is marked by so many problems—a duplicitous and paranoid narrator, a slew of scholarly shortcomings and a tendency to implicate the reader—why should we bother to read the narrative at all? The answer, I suggest, is because *Discipline and Punish* is a radically new kind of conspiracy theory narrative. Foucault gives us an unprecedented conspiracy, one in which the Inaccessible Authorities and the Vanishing Subject(s) combine to form a single, startling entity.

To flesh out what I mean by this statement I now finally turn to the most famous and influential section of *Discipline and Punish*, that on "Panopticism." Unlike the concept of surveillance which subtly creeps into the narrative and, by extension, into Foucault's version of history via a "secret invasion [*invasion à peine secrète*]" (170) or infiltration [*s'est infiltrée*] (216), Jeremy Bentham's utopic structure appears suddenly two-thirds of the way through the narrative:

> Bentham's *Panopticon* is the architectural figure of this composition [of the leper and separation, and the plague and segmentation]. We know the principle on which it was based: at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring;

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> the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside allows light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately. In short, it reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions—to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide—it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap [*La visibilité est un piège*]. (200)

Beside the configuration itself of the Panopticon, there are numerous interesting elements in this passage. First of all, the panoptic tower (in that it recalls Dante's Mount of Purgatory, Shelley's Mont Blanc, Browning's Dark Tower and the tower of Kafka's Castle) now becomes the new geographical site of the Inaccessible Authorities—though, I should add, the Panopticon proper includes the tower [*une tour*] and the surrounding annular building [*un bâtiment périphérique*]. Next, Bentham tells us (or is it Foucault?) that the Panopticon is to be used with madmen, patients, condemned men, workers and schoolboys alike, i.e., that all these individuals are at some level equal—though,

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curiously, Foucault now silently omits the soldier from this mix. And, finally, Foucault ends with one of his mnemonics, though (again curiously) one wonders why a patient who is sick, for instance, needs a "trap" in the same way that a condemned man might. Or, as these last two points indicate, Foucault's continues to write in the "paranoid style" and there are the same logical leaps and historical distortions that I noted earlier.

Yet the Panopticon, really, is not what matters. Rather it is but an "architectural figure [*la figure architecturale*]" and what is truly at stake is the psychological process that the Panopticon represents. On one hand, it induces "in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power [*le fonctionnement automatique du pouvoir*]" so that "the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers [*ils sont eux-même les porteurs*]" (201). On the other hand, "it automatizes and disindividualizes power [*il automatise et désindividualise le pouvoir*]" so that "[p]ower has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes," and so that "any individual" guided by any motive "can operate the machine." In fact, argues Foucault, "the more numerous those anonymous and temporary observers are, the greater the risk for the inmate of being surprised and the greater his anxious awareness of being observed [*le risque d'être surpris et la conscience inquiète d'être observé*]" (202). In what are some of the most fascinating and memorable passages in *Discipline and Punish* Foucault details the operational procedures of the Panopticon and, hence, panopticism. The passages make clear that panopticism [*panoptisme*] and surveillance [*surveillance*] (concepts that Foucault uses interchangeably), and the Panopticon itself are not one and the same—the former (panopticism/surveillance) being the psychological *affect* which

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the latter produces or represents architecturally, but the former functioning regardless, i.e., "detached from specific use [*détacher de tout usage spécifique*]" (205), of whether the latter actually exists or not. In fact, between the concepts of the Panopticon and panopticism there occurs the same tension that appeared between the emergence of Napoleon, a figure less than anonymous, and the anonymously-directed historical process whose culmination or endpoint Napoleon represented: "The scarcely sustainable visibility of the monarch is turned into the unavoidable visibility of the subjects" (189). Authority is just an after-image; panopticism depends on the fact that the subjects of discipline themselves believe themselves to be visible—on the fact that the subjects, by internalizing the authorities, obviate the need for the actual authorities. Or, in keeping with my argument, the subjects (as subjects) partially *vanish* because they simultaneously become the authorities, i.e., those who sub*ject*. Therefore, authority and subject, conspirator and victim, appear in and as the same figure, and through this configuration Foucault develops a powerful new kind of Inaccessible Authorities, ones who *seem to be elsewhere* but who actually exist *inside the consciousness* of the disciplinary subjects.

So anyone, Foucault suggests, guided by any motive can now become an agent in the "secret invasion" of panopticism. It is espionage of the most surreptitious sort. Foucault, in effect, turns the process of the French Revolution and the succeeding Reign of Terror (of which Napoleon was the final result) on its head. From the visible King, Foucault moves to a power that is anonymous and secretly built into "the very foundations of society [*les soubassements de la société*]" (208) And yet, I must stress, unlike Pip's Hidden Hand conspiracy or Pesca's "Brotherhood" (see Chapters Two and Three respectively) the conspiracy of panopticism is malevolent. It uses the police, for

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example, to intensify its process, "thousands of eyes posted everywhere [. . .] unceasing observation [. . .] accumulated in a series of reports and registers" (214); and it targets a priori any groups that may oppose it: "It must also master [*maîtriser*] all the forces that are formed from the very constitution of an organized multiplicity; it must neutralize [*neutraliser*] the effects of counter-power that spring from them and which form resistance to the power that wishes to dominate: agitations, revolts, spontaneous organizations, coalitions—anything that may establish horizontal conjunctions" (219). Panopticism, argues Foucault, is constituted in such a way that it "neutralize[s] " opposition, that it involves all of society in its operation, and so that it becomes (if we finally choose to believe his conspiracy theory) one of the most pervasive, resistant and so terrifying conspiracies yet imagined in literature.

* * *

After somewhat extended preliminary remarks I now turn back to the nineteenth century and to three specific works—Anthony Trollope's *The Warden*, Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* and, briefly, Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*—all of which offer memorable examples of the literary transition between the Inaccessible Authorities of Dante, Shelley et al, and those of conspiracy theory narratives like *The Castle* and *Discipline and Punish*. I open the discussion, however, with a look at some broad patterns in the growth of the Victorian information industry. In *George Eliot and Blackmail* Alexander Welsh describes these patterns, their causes and their historical implications. Although Welsh's work focuses on the mid-Victorian social, economic and political trends that contributed to the rise of blackmail as a topic in literature, I shall glance at his work here because Welsh also illuminates the historical background of *The Warden* and *Villette*. To

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supplement and to balance Welsh's arguments which, admittedly, are Foucauldian, I will also briefly turn to the work of historian Edward Higgs.

Victorian privacy, asserts Welsh, was especially affected by three developments in information technology—the press, the post and the telegraph. Each of these developments facilitated long-distance communication and so could operate as a benevolent social tool, but each also put the individual at risk by establishing a new system of surveillance and by creating a form of information that existed out of the control of any given person. The press formed the most notorious branch of the Victorian information industry, and with time the press's invasive practices became so threatening that the right to privacy had to be invented (Welsh 52-61). This created somewhat of a paradox. On one hand, publicity could be used as an instrument of democracy, as a test of truth, as an alternative to politics, and as a venue that allowed the national government to monitor local governments and private institutions. On the other hand, publicity could also contribute to the breakdown of community. Printed materials inhibited direct contact between individuals, came to emphasize homogeneity over eccentricity and individuality, and (as John Stuart Mill asserted) acted as an agent through which society seemed to conspire against the individual and so to increase the need, in society, for privacy (Welsh 64-70).

Other broad Victorian developments also intensified the growth of "private life." The first of these, a self-regulating economy, required "not only knowledge operating at a distance, but people working at a distance—at a distance from each other and from work itself." This development placed a greater burden on the honesty of the individual, and on such documents as credentials and the dossier. The situation also encouraged secret-

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sharing as a means to intimacy, while raising the temptation towards (and the value of) betrayal (Welsh 72-73). The second development that intensified the need for privacy was urbanization and the social mobility it created. Constant geographical movement created rifts in people's lives, rifts which allowed an individual's past to remain hidden (Bulstrode of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* is the obvious example here), and so city life especially contributed to the phenomenon of individuals living in isolation, surrounded by seeming strangers, all of whom might be watching (Welsh 74-77). Finally, the third development was England's acceptance of representative government. Representative government emphasized not custom or inheritance as a justification for power, but the merit of the individual. Such government, although it allowed society to become accountable to itself, increased the split between public and private lives and caused wide-spread distrust among various groups of people (Welsh 77-79). One of the most common forms this distrust took was the public's belief (or fear) in conspiracies and secret societies as the operative agents of history—a fear similar to what Hofstadter characterizes as central in the "paranoid style" (in his definition—see above). This belief, asserts Welsh, was more prevalent in mid-Victorian England than it had been at any other point in the country's history (80-81).

To the above developments, Welsh correlates the growth of Peel's police force. The police, and by extension the law, represented a form of publicity to which all of England had to submit. On one hand, law enforcement stepped into the place that had traditionally been occupied by religious prohibitions. On the other hand, the police through its information gathering and surveillance became a new knowledge repository, one which compelled a more intense need for privacy. This happened primarily because

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all police information functioned as circumstantial evidence—a form of evidence which, though it allowed sound adjudication in some instances, also distributed the potential for guilt over a larger part of the British population (Welsh 87ff).

Edward Higgs also takes up this aspect of Victorian England, albeit from a different angle. Nineteenth-century England, asserts Higgs, stressed freedom and as the population grew the state's involvement in society decreased (180). Mechanisms that may have been used to curtail freedom, Higgs adds, were actually employed towards benevolent ends. The census, for example, conducted by the General Register Office (GRO) was based on a modest set of questions (name, sex, age, marital status, occupation, physical disabilities, etc.) and the data acquired were used mostly in scientific and medical pursuits, or for official action only at the level of local government. Similarly, civil registration grew not out of the need to control deviancy, but from "the need to improve the title to middle-class property in a period of rapid economic change by recording lines of descent." The same was true of institutions such as the Land Registry, the Public Record Office, and the Probate, Patents and Designs Registries (180-81).

Equally benevolent, continues Higgs, in terms of civil registration was the recording of the cause of death which contributed to an exhaustive program of medical research with the GRO. This project, along with the census data, led to the creation of "national and occupational life tables, and statistics of death per thousand by locality and disease." Such tables eased the efforts of insurance companies and friendly societies used by the working classes. Individuals could make informed decisions about where to live, how to invest money, and which occupation to choose. Mortality statistics also helped

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compel local authorities into improving sanitation and to shelter the working classes from disease and poverty (Higgs 181-82). Consequently, all these procedures of information gathering worked not towards restriction of the individual but the "construction [. . .] of civil, political and social citizenship" or "the constitution of the social norms of a liberal capitalist society, and the socialization of citizens into them, within the framework of the local and national state" (Higgs 182). Even the police, asserts Higgs, did not so much systematically collect information (as Foucauldian versions of history, such as Alexander Welsh's, would have it) as much as watch—"the local information available to the Victorian policeman was mostly what he carried in his head"—and attempt to deter crime through their visibility *to* the public (Higgs 183).

Therefore, given the arguments of Welsh and Higgs (neither of which I wish to favor), we might argue that in the mid-Victorian period the rise of the information industry and the accompanying growth of publicity worked both to the individual's detriment and advantage, and we see this tension manifested vividly whenever the issue of blackmail arises and, in a very different (comic) register, in Anthony Trollope's *The Warden* (1855). *The Warden* is the novel that first established Trollope as a novelist and, though among the shorter of his works, it is an immensely rich and complex work. I consider it here because of the conspiracies and cabals that abound in the narrative, because the novel takes up the issue of publicity, and because the narrative turns on the concept of confronting authorities, in particular the Church of England (via its Barchester representatives) and the *Jupiter*, both of which (I will argue) provide excellent, albeit comic, Victorian versions of the Inaccessible Authorities. Thus, although it may seem a (giant) leap to go from the works of Kafka and Foucault to a novel like *The Warden*,

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throughout my discussion I shall try to show that there are many parallels between the works and that it can be useful to read them together.

The narrative of *The Warden* opens simply, with a dispute over the will of John Hiram between two parties (of which we learn through Barchester "gossip"). On one side, Trollope sets the Rev. Septimus Harding, a figure of absolute integrity (we discover later), who himself first learns of the possible injustice of his situation via "murmurs." These murmurs allege that Hiram's will is not properly carried out and that much of the warden's income (over eight hundred pounds a year) should really go to the twelve old men that Harding, as warden, has been appointed to oversee. Previously Harding had "never felt any compunction as to receiving his quarterly sum of two hundred pounds. Indeed, the subject has never presented itself to his mind in that shape" (16). Against Harding, Trollope pits John Bold, a figure of some controversy (depending on the perspective), but also one motivated by humanitarian ideals. Bold, a surgeon by profession, "frequently binds up the bruises and sets the limbs of such of the poorer classes as profess his way of thinking," but recently he has made a name for himself as "a strong reformer": "His passion is the reform of all abuses; state abuses, church abuses, corporation abuses (he has got himself elected a town councilor of Barchester, and has so worried three consecutive mayors, that it became somewhat difficult to find a fourth), abuses in medical practice, and general abuses in the world at large" (18). Because of these dispositions, Bold emerges in an a rather sympathetic light much akin to that of Harding.

Bold's attack against Harding (and the Church of England) centers on three fronts. First, Bold questions Hiram's will from a legal vantage, asking whether Hiram's

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intentions are actually being carried out. Second, Bold attempts to enlist the support of the so-called "beadsmen," namely the old men themselves—though this project fails, contributing to the novel's comedy: a number of the old men are happy with their lot and see Harding as a benevolent warden. And, third, Bold attempts to stir public support for his cause by enlisting the aid of Tom Towers, a figure Trollope hyperbolically describes as "a very leading genius, and supposed to have high employment on the staff of the *Jupiter*" (96). Through these ventures Bold assumes the role of both a comic conspirator and a mastermind, a stance Trollope's narrator reinforces calling Bold the "Barchester Brutus" (61), while the old men who do rebel become a "vile cabal" (195). Yet despite the narrator's labels, Bold clearly also feels uneasy in his role. Trollope humorously sets Bold's private life in direct conflict with his public goals. He is on friendly terms with Harding, is the lover of Harding's daughter Eleanor, and, as the narrator tells us, Bold's "heart smote him as to his intimate alliance with Tom Towers" (108). Bold, we see, experiences a conflict between his duty to justice and his private feelings for Harding and Harding's daughter.

This conflict comes to the fore when it emerges that by questioning the legality of Harding's position, Bold in effect assails the Church of England and specifically one of its Barchester representatives, Dr. Grantly, the archdeacon and son of the bishop of Barchester. In *The Warden* Trollope positions Dr. Grantly (on whose side Harding as warden de facto falls) as the church's arch-defender. Grantly is a figure marked by vigor and one who believes intensely in the justice of the Church, in the value of the Church as an institution, and in the ultimate importance of his own work: "He did not believe in the Gospel with more assurance than he did in the sacred justice of all ecclesiastical

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revenues. When he put his shoulder to the wheel to defend the income of the present and future precentors of Barchester, he was animated by as strong a sense of a holy cause" (45). His belief, however, rests not on rational grounds but on a belief in the "church's infallibility" (32) or what might be termed the idea of "might makes right": "Who could lie basking in the cloisters of Salisbury, and gaze on Jewel's library and that unequalled spire, without feeling that bishops should sometimes be rich?" (47). So when Grantly first confronts the rebellious old men, not logic but this belief in the infallibility prompts his obviously self-righteous (and self-serving) reading of the will. "'That was what John Hiram meant,'" Grantly tells the men, "'you have not read John Hiram's will, and I doubt whether those wicked men who are advising you have done so. I have; I know what his will was; and I tell you that that was his will, and that that was his intention'" (53). The more Grantly insists, the more it becomes obvious to Trollope's audience that Grantly is motivated by his own "secular" interests. Yet through the speech Trollope, as does Collins in Count Fosco's case (see below), also positions Grantly as a staunch, counter-revolutionary-like figure, one ready to resort to sophistry to further his cause. Simultaneously, Trollope's exaggerated language suggests that the narrator is lambasting Grantly as much as describing him: "He was about to defend the holy of holies from the touch of the profane; to guard the citadel of his church from the most rampant of its enemies" (45). Though Bold, obviously, comes into conflict with Grantly, Bold is not quite so formidable (to say the least) as he appears when viewed through Grantly's imagination.

In fact, it is quite interesting to observe how Grantly's imagination distorts the conflict between him and Bold. To Grantly, Bold's attack represents a monumental event,

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and he and Bold—like Klamm and K—metonymically stand in for larger forces: "He [Grantly] was fighting a part of a never-ending battle against a never-conquered foe—that of the church against its enemies" (83). The battle is not between two figures, as it had seemed to be, but between "the church" and "its enemies," two vast groups. Given these players, the consequences of victory or failure also become (humorously) monumental, a point on which Grantly and his father, the bishop, agree:

> The bishop, in his simple mind, felt no doubt that John Bold, had he so much power, would shut up all cathedrals, and probably all parish churches; distribute all tithes among Methodists, Baptists, and other savage tribes; utterly annihilate the sacred bench, and make shovel hats and lawn sleeves as illegal as cowls, sandals, and sackcloth! (35)
>
> * * *
>
> "Should it be found that one after another of those who hold preferment abandoned it whenever it might be attacked, is it not plain that such attacks would be renewed till nothing was left us? and, that if so deserted, the Church of England must fall to the ground altogether?" (89)

To Grantly and his father, victory for Bold would be not a minor disturbance with local consequences, but a significant event that would spur imitation and might ultimately result in the destruction of the Church itself. Such a belief also guides Grantly's exhortations to Harding: "'what a grievous blow would such an act of apostacy give her! You owe it to the church of which you are a member and a minister, to bear with this affliction, however severe it may be'" (91). In a clearly exaggerated manner Grantly foregrounds Harding's position in the Church and stresses the allegiance Harding owes

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because of his position as a clergyman and member of the "brotherhood"—a term traditionally used to describe the clergy but one that, in conspiracy narratives (see, e.g., *The Woman in White* and, later, *1984*), will soon be co-opted by the forces that oppose the governing powers.

Yet in *The Warden*, despite Grantly's posturing, the above conflict plays out primarily as a series of interactions not between great forces but specific individuals, among them Harding, Bold and Grantly himself. These interactions and individuals, however striking or memorable (or comic) in themselves, gain in interest because of how they foreshadow the configurations of some conspiracy theory narratives, especially *The Castle*. For example, although through most of the narrative Grantly appears to be a rather one-sided and excessively belligerent figure, Trollope does try to undermine this characterization: "Do we not all know some reverend, all but sacred, personage before whom our tongue ceases to be loud and our step to be elastic? But were we once to see him stretch himself beneath the bed-clothes, yawn widely, and bury his face upon his pillow, we could chatter before him as glibly as before a doctor or a lawyer" (20-21). Trollope, in a move that has been praised by critics, shows us a warmer and more human side of the clergy, of Grantly, by humorously depicting the archdeacon as he talks in bed with his wife. Grantly thus appears as a very *accessible* individual (whatever powers he might represent) and one, ironically, with quite secular predilections: "He then walked across the room and locked the door; and having so prepared himself, he threw himself into his easy-chair, took from a secret drawer beneath his table a volume of Rabelais, and began to amuse himself with the witty mischief of Panurge; and so passed the archdeacon's morning on that day" (79). Like Harding and Bold, Grantly too has his

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foibles (in this case a secret pleasure in reading the ribald Rabelais) and these elements, in contrast to Grantly's hyperbolic self-righteousness, contribute to the comic tone of the novel. Yet, as mentioned, in *The Warden* this other side of Grantly receives decidedly less attention. More often, Grantly acts deceitfully and with little consideration for the ethical implications of his behavior (a situation, incidentally, that will again come to the fore in the opening pages of *Barchester Towers*). For example, he conspires with the present steward of Hiram's estates to impede Bold's cause (81) and he bullies Harding in an effort to make him keep the position of warden: "Oh, it was sad to see how that momentary gleam of joy passed away; how the look of hope was dispersed from that sorrowful face, as the remembrance of the archdeacon came back upon our poor warden, and he reflected that he could not stir from his now hated post. He was as a man bound with iron, fettered with adamant: he was in no respect a free agent; he had no choice" (99). Though the passage exhibits an exaggerated sentimentality (and no doubts takes a jab at Trollope's contemporary Dickens—as does Trollope's depiction of "Mr. Sentiment" [see 138-50]), Grantly here does restrict Harding's freedom in a way that echoes the treatment K. will receive at the hands of the Castle officials.

In addition, as the Castle's authorities in the case of K., so Grantly and his comrades make a sustained (and again comic) attempt to misdirect Bold's inquiries—an effort in which Harding himself inadvertently assists. For example, when early in the novel Bold, having read Hiram's will, approaches Mr. Chadwick, the steward, and asks for an account of "income and expenditure," Chadwick is decidedly evasive: "Mr Chadwick begged to say that if these inquiries were made merely out of curiosity, he must decline answering them: if Mr Bold had any ulterior proceeding in view, perhaps it

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would be desirable that any necessary information should be sought for in a professional way by a professional man. Mr Chadwick's attorneys were Messrs Cox and Cummins, of Lincoln's Inn" (24-25). Not only does Chadwick refuse to help Bold, but in a Kafkaesque manner Chadwick treats Bold with suspicion and even withholds the names of his employers. When Bold approaches Harding, Bold also encounters resistance. Harding refuses to answer any questions: "'Then, my dear fellow,'" Harding tells Bold, "'I can tell you nothing, for I'm as ignorant as a child. All I know is, that they pay me eight hundred pounds a year. Go to Chadwick, he knows all about the accounts; and now tell me, will poor Mary Jones ever get the use of her limb again?" (29). In an ironic turn, Harding sends Bold back to Chadwick. Yet, more ironically, Harding really is as "ignorant" as he claims and, unlike Chadwick, he likes Bold and bears him no ill-will. Harding's guilt, then, arises more by association than intent.

In the same vein, when Harding does attempt to assist Bold, Harding meets with the same sort of resistance as had Bold: "At first the bishop counseled but one step, recommended but one remedy, had but one medicine in his whole pharmacopoeia strong enough to touch so grave a disorder—he prescribed the archdeacon" (33). Rather than confront the fact of his ignorance or the possibility that the will might not be being carried out properly, the bishop (like each figure in the narrative before him) comically defers elsewhere. He also lapses into the kind of rhetoric about "tradition" and status quo that Grantly had earlier used (34). Of course, neither Harding nor Bold develop the existential angst that K. might show in Kafka's novel, but nonetheless we see that in Trollope's novel the clergy protect themselves in a way similar to that of the Castle's officials and that here Trollope's attack on such bureaucracy is just as incisive as Kafka's.

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The bishop's reference to "tradition," conversely, brings us back to an important facet of Victorian publicity. In the case of Hiram's will publicity operates in a benevolent and democratic capacity—the "facts" of the will come under public scrutiny and attempts to evade this scrutiny by references to "tradition" and "propriety" only serve to foreground the bishop's dishonesty. In addition, alongside direct deferral, Grantly et al also employ a more malicious form of misdirection to combat Bold. When Bold attempts to bring his suit forward, we discover that there is a serious flaw in his case. Through a development that again suggests *The Castle*, we discover that Bold has chosen the wrong defendant and we see that there is a palpable glee on the parts of Grantly and Chadwick as they discuss how they might further misdirect Bold (80). In addition, the situation here (in the deliberate way in which Grantly and Chadwick go about misdirecting Bold) recalls the words of another conspiracy theory narrative: "Proverbs for Paranoids, 3: If they can get you asking the wrong questions, they don't have to worry about answers" (*Gravity's Rainbow*, 251). Grantly and Chadwick seek to confuse Bold in exactly the way that Pynchon's proverb proposes.

To further his cause Grantly also hires the Sir Abraham Haphazard, the attorney general of England, to defend the Church's case. On one hand, Haphazard is a formidable figure, one that mock-heroically "conquered his enemies by their weakness rather than by his own strength, and it had been found almost impossible to make up a case in which Sir Abraham, as an antagonist, would not find a flaw" (82). Haphazard, as a lawyer, displays an almost preternatural and bombastic dexterity. On the other hand, Haphazard acts in as duplicitous a manner as Grantly and Chadwick do:

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> Sir Abraham Haphazard was deeply engaged in preparing a bill for the mortification of papists, to be called the "Convent Custody Bill," the purport of which was to enable any Protestant clergyman over fifty years of age to search any nun whom he suspected of being in possession of treasonable papers or Jesuitical symbols; and as there were to be a hundred and thirty-seven clauses in the bill, each clause containing a separate thorn for the side of the papist, and as it was known the bill would be fought inch by inch, by fifty maddened Irishmen, the due construction and adequate dovetailing of it did consume much of Sir Abraham's time. The bill had all its desired effect. Of course it never passed into law; but it so completely divided the ranks of the Irish members, who had bound themselves together to force on the ministry a bill for compelling all men to drink Irish whiskey, and all women to wear Irish poplins, that for the remainder of the session the Great Poplin and Whiskey League was utterly harmless. (72)

There is a sublime level of absurdity here, all the more powerful in that Haphazard's behavior again foreshadows the bureaucracy of conspiracy theory narrative like Kafka's *Castle* and in that, as Geoffrey Harvey writes, the sincerely and deeply ethical Septimus Harding will later have to confront such a lawyer for "an encounter of mutual incomprehension, which embodies Trollope's major statement in *The Warden* about the ineluctably private nature of moral imperatives, the unbridgeable gulf between human values and the rational formulations of law, and the inevitable conflict between the individual and society's institutions" (19).

Much of Trollope's aesthetic and ironic success in *The Warden* rests on the fact that he positions the humble Harding, ostensibly the object of Bold's attack, in a state of

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ignorance akin to that of Bold. Harding too attempts, unsuccessfully, to access the Church's authorities. For example, to Harding's questions as to who really "'does manage the hospital," Grantly (referring to Bold and the old men) dismissively states, "'Oh, let them find that out; that's another question: the action is brought against you and Chadwick; that's your defence, and a perfect and full defence it is. Now that I think very satisfactory'" (85-86). Grantly defers Harding's question in the same way that Bold's questions have been deferred and, rather than defending the case on legal or rational grounds, Grantly again falls on the type of self-serving "the church is infallible" rhetoric that he and the bishop had earlier used. Yet Harding, even more so than Bold, displays an amazing tenacity when it comes to resolving the issue and setting his conscience at rest. He first asks to see a copy of Haphazard's opinion of the case and, when this fails to appear, Harding makes his touching yet humorously momentous journey to London to confront Haphazard directly. It is an act Harding carries out despite Grantly's protests, "'Did you not know that it is not customary for clients to go direct to their counsel?'" (172), but it is also an act that tells Harding little beyond what he already knows. In the key scene, to Harding's pointed questions Haphazard responds with obvious and duplicitous evasion: "Sir Abraham declared that he couldn't exactly say in so many words that Mr Harding was legally entitled to, etc., etc., etc., and ended in expressing a strong opinion that it would be madness to raise any further question on the matter, as the suit was to be—nay, was, abandoned" (166-67). At the climax of *The Warden* stands this brief, highly ironic passage. To Harding's direct and precise inquiries, Haphazard responds with what, even the narrative itself stresses, is a vast emptiness: "etc., etc., etc." As had the bishop, so Haphazard falls back on the jargon of tradition, existing

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"institutions," and so on. Consequently, in *The Warden* the church officials and their representatives become the Inaccessible Authorities—even to one of their own—because this answer can never be directly spoken and because it is in the greatest interest of the authorities never to speak it, a point Trollope's satiric prose further reinforces. Yet what separates *The Warden* from a modern conspiracy narrative and so makes it a transitional conspiracy novel is that, despite the stance of the authorities, Harding still learns the truth. Haphazard's obfuscation tells Harding as well as any direct statement could that he, Harding, is not entitled to the full proceeds.

Therefore, the narrative of *The Warden* avoids endless speculation about the authorities and instead throws us back onto Harding, the protagonist, and the choice he must make. Specifically the narrative raises the question of what factors ultimately guide Harding's decision to resign. Kevin Floyd, for example, indicates that critics disagree as to Harding's primary motivation (88ff). Harding begins the novel with what seems to be a clear conscience: "Mr. Harding's demeanour certainly impressed Bold with a full conviction that the warden felt that he stood on strong grounds, and almost made him think that he was about to interfere without due warrant in the private affairs of a just and honourable man; but Mr Harding himself was anything but satisfied with his own view of the case" (30). Harding acts from a position of apparent assurance but, as the last sentence above shows, that is not quite the case. The narrative drive of *The Warden* actually depends on the fact that Harding becomes increasingly uneasy in his position as warden. This unease takes several guises and, I want to suggest, Harding's vacillation contributes to his power as an affective figure. The depiction of Harding is a highly imaginative one and so Trollope allows the reader to observe the minute psychological

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and emotional variations in Harding as he comes under attack by, in turn, Bold and the old men, Grantly and the Church, Tom Towers and the *Jupiter* (see below), and his own conscience. At times Harding longs for quiet and fears the approaching "storm" (54). At times his unease derives from the facts of the situation: "If it were necessary for him to suffer, he felt that he could endure without complaint and without cowardice, providing that he was self-satisfied of the justice of his own cause. What he could not endure was, that he should be accused by others, and not acquitted by himself" (91). Most often the fear of public opprobrium assails him: "His hair had stood on end and his flesh had crept as he read the things which had been written [. . .] he, that shy, retiring man, who had so comforted himself in the hidden obscurity of his lot, who had so enjoyed the unassuming warmth of his own little corner, he was now dragged forth into the glaring day, and gibbeted before ferocious multitudes" (93-94). Trollope powerfully and carefully outlines how the *Jupiter*'s attacks ignite Harding's shame, and we see how here the novel's satire, rather than providing ironic relief, seems to work in service of the *Jupiter*'s attacks. As the pressure grows Harding verges towards a breaking point—a development accelerated by the fact that Harding cannot evade the charges against him, especially in his own conscience.

As a result, Harding ultimately resigns as the warden. His conscience overwhelms all other considerations and, I would add, the public's continuous scrutiny via the *Jupiter* accelerates and reaffirms his decision. On one hand, Harding does resist the pressure of Grantly and refuses to settle on any position which he himself (i.e., Harding) has not considered thoroughly. "'Do not press me for an answer just at present," Harding tells Grantly, "I will do nothing lightly in the matter, and of whatever I do I will give you and

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the bishop notice'" (92). On the other hand, Harding quickly arrives at a conclusive decision: "'I have thought much of what the archdeacon has said, and of what this paper says; and I do believe I have no right to be here. [. . .] No right to be warden with eight hundred a year; no right to be warden with such a house as this; no right to spend in luxury money that was intended for charity'" (125). Despite all the Church's pressure, Harding decides to forego the position of warden. He has no right, he asserts, to any of the benefits he currently receives. Further, having made this decision Harding sticks to it however his friends and family may urge, "My friends and I differ on this subject, Sir Abraham, and that adds much to my sorrow; but it cannot be helped" (169), and he persists despite any ruling of the law: "What had he to do with Cox and Cummins further, having already had his suit finally adjudicated upon in a court of conscience, a judgment without power of appeal fully registered, and the matter settled so that all the lawyers in London could not disturb it" (178).

Because of his determination Harding thus attains a unique position in the novel, one—for example—Grantly had only aspired to through his posturing as a defender of the Church. As Geoffrey Harvey writes, because of his decision Harding becomes one of the real pillars of the Church: "he affirms the individual basis of moral choice, without which in the end, the fundamental integrity of social institutions such as the Church cannot be sustained" (17). But, I should stress, it is an achievement that brings with it a great emotional cost:

> Mr Harding returned to his parlour, meditating with a sick heart on what he had seen, and Bunce with him. We will not describe the parting of these two good men, for good men they were. It was in vain that the late warden endeavoured to

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> comfort the heart of the old beadsman; poor old Bunce felt that his days of comfort were gone. The hospital had to him been a happy home, but it could be so no longer. He had had honour there, and friendship; he had recognised his master, and been recognised; all his wants, both of soul and body, had been supplied, and he had been a happy man. He wept grievously as he parted from his friend, and the tears of an old man are bitter. "It is all over for me in this world," said he, as he gave the last squeeze to Mr Harding's hand; "I have now to forgive those who have injured me—and to die."
>
> And so the old man went out, and then Mr Harding gave way to his grief and he too wept aloud. (196-97)

In what is perhaps the high emotional moment of the novel, we witness not evasion, not a subject who vanishes as does Lucy Snowe in *Villette* (see below) or Slothrop in *Gravity's Rainbow*—that is what the Church officials do—but rather a very vivid example of human suffering, one caused in part by these same Church officials and their duplicitous machinations.

Before leaving *The Warden* I want to consider one further aspect of the novel. Harding, as mentioned, struggles at the intersection of four forces—his conscience, Bold, the Church and the *Jupiter*. So far I have discussed the first three of these, but in *The Warden* Trollope saves his best and most satirical writing for the last. The case against Harding's tenure as warden becomes public knowledge when the *Jupiter*, Trollope's satire on *The Times*, picks up and amplifies Bold's accusations: "It is impossible to conceive a case of greater injustice. It is no answer to say that some six or nine or twelve old men receive as much of the goods of this world as such old men require. On what foundation,

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moral or divine, traditional or legal, is grounded the warden's claim to the large income he receives for doing nothing?" (69). The *Jupiter*'s articles provide some of the most venomous passages in the novel, but its attacks are oriented in a distinct way, as here. The *Jupiter* through its use of the first person plural assumes the public voice and, as mentioned once already, seems to work on behalf of justice and democracy. Its attack goes directly to the evasion and obfuscation that Grantly et al perpetuate: "On what foundation, moral or divine, traditional or legal," etc. Yet as the above passage also shows, though the cause may be just and the conclusion correct, the *Jupiter*, ironically, has chosen the wrong victim for its attacks. The writer of the *Jupiter* article (presumably Tom Towers) has not gotten to know Harding as Trollope's reader has and so, to say the least, the article presents a distorted portrait—one wholly incongruous, as the reader knows, with Harding's real character. In doing so the newspaper thus exerts the kind of pressure that blackmailers might put on their victims.

The difference is that the *Jupiter* works through exposure, not just through the threat of it as a blackmailer might. As *The Warden*'s narrator tells us, the newspaper has a readership of some two-hundred thousand and its opinions are held in high esteem: "if the *Jupiter* had said so, it was better than a decision of the Lord Chancellor" (71). Because of this power and because it works at a distance from the subjects it discusses, the *Jupiter* as an entity—and so Trollope would have it (more below)—perfectly illustrates the dangers that the press might pose to the Victorian individual. Of course, this is only one side of the story and the Victorian press did tackle or help in ameliorating a number of Victorian social problems such as child prostitution, divorce laws and women's suffrage—all important democratic advances—but here Trollope obviously has a particular axe to

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grind. For instance, though the *Jupiter*'s opinions may be disregarded by many figures—among them Dr. Grantly, the bishop, Mr. Quiverful (Harding's possible successor for the wardenship), and, most memorably, Haphazard ("This poor little clergyman, cowed into such an act of extreme weakness by a newspaper article, was to Sir Abraham so contemptible an object, that he hardly knew how to talk to him as to a rational being" [167])—the newspaper still has an intense effect on Harding. "'Mr Bold can't un-write that, my dear," Mr. Harding bitterly tells his daughter as they discuss the *Jupiter*'s second article, "'Mr Bold can't say that that sha'n't be read by every clergyman at Oxford; nay, by every gentleman in the land'" (124). In this instance the *Jupiter*, ostensibly in the name of democracy, mercilessly and detrimentally assails an individual that Trollope positions as more sinned against than sinning.

As we know from *The New Zealander* (1855-56), Trollope's unpublished manuscript first brought to light by N. John Hall in 1972, Trollope had strong misgivings about the power accorded to *The Times*. In *The New Zealander* Trollope dedicates a whole chapter, "The Press," to *The Times* and its alleged abuses (detailed by Trollope, incidentally, in a rather "paranoid" way). On one hand, Trollope realizes that the newspaper is inseparable from British life: "For the Englishman Tea, Toast and Times are sufficient" (43). On the other hand, he condemns the "omnipotence of the press" and feels that no paper could be "so tyrannical, so irresponsible, so unapproachable, so far beyond punishment" as *The Times* (32). He sees *The Times*, I offer, as an entity akin to Kafka's Castle or Foucault's Panopticon. It is a newspaper whose control is "divided among many," whose writers are torn between various allegiances—including public opinion, the Editor, the newspaper itself, but never the truth—and whose only ambition is power

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(33-34). Further, Trollope believes that *The Times* works to silence all competing voices and, having done so, can operate with impunity: "Who is to guarantee," Trollope asks, "that such power as that now exercised by the Times newspaper shall be safely used, safely, that is, as regards the best interests of the country?" (35-36). So because of its power *The Times* has become a "new God," one predicated on hypocrisy and false morals, yet to which British citizens are forced to yield their individuality and which they follow as if it were "an omniscient, omnipresent, infallible guide" (38ff and 46ff).

In other words, Trollope ferociously assails *The Times* and his private feelings (however they may distort the real historical situation) also guide the creation of the *Jupiter*, Trollope's fictional newspaper. In discussing the *Jupiter*'s writer, Geoffrey Harvey states that Trollope "makes apparent his disdain for the anonymous leader-writer's self-appointed role as custodian of public morality. More specifically he criticizes his self-righteous tone, his ignorance of Hiram's Hospital, his reflex exaggeration of events, and his falsification of complex issues by reducing them to simple terms" (22). Yet, adds Harvey, it is an attack developed primarily through hyperbole: "Trollope is contrasting implicitly the quiet and subtle truths of his own realistic fiction with the hyperbole of journalism and the extravagances of the sensational novel" (22). Or, alternately, Trollope's attack (as I suggested above) may be to bring out the other side of the Victorian press, its potential ability (not necessarily exercised in real life) to exaggerate and so curtail or harm the liberty of the individual, and Trollope thus uses hyperbole and sensation more as a means to warn the Victorian public than to persuade them to share his "paranoid" pronouncements.

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In *The Warden* Trollope certainly accords the *Jupiter* a lot of power. The *Jupiter* is entrusted with the "governance of a subject nation," while through its status as the "Vatican of England" and through the location of its offices (which the narrative gives as "Mount Olympus"), the *Jupiter* becomes a narrative site that conflates the ruling powers of Christian theology with Greek mythology (130-31). Further, this "Mount Olympus," along with its aptly named figurehead Tom Towers, also presents the second version of the Inaccessible Authorities in *The Warden*, one that more obviously serves as a link between the Inaccessible Authorities of Dante and Shelley and those of Kafka and Foucault: "Who has not heard of Mount Olympus—that high abode of all the powers of type, that favoured seat of the great goddess Pica, that wondrous habitation of gods and devils, from whence, with ceaseless hum of steam and never-ending flow of Castilian ink, issue forth fifty thousand nightly edicts for the governance of a subject nation?" (130). Once again we see a link between natural splendor and the fruits of human civilization. Yet remarkably, for all the power that Mount Olympus and its inhabitant wield, a power that as the narrator suggests is universally known, the *Jupiter*'s offices are "a somewhat humble spot—undistinguished, unadorned, nay, almost mean," really a series of "small, dark, dingy buildings" (130). The disappointment that the narrator conjures thus ironically deflates the *Jupiter*'s seeming potency and, incidentally, parallels the disappointment that that K. experiences in his first glimpse of the Castle.

Throughout his depiction of the *Jupiter*, in fact, Trollope fosters this ironic contrast between the newspaper's mighty power and the humble spot/person from which this power issues. For example, the narrator claims that the *Jupiter* displays an incredible accuracy of judgment, that "[i]t is a fact amazing to ordinary mortals that the *Jupiter* is

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never wrong," and that time and again the newspaper shows "how futile are [Parliament's] meetings, how vain their council, how needless all their trouble!" (131). In a similar vein, the narrator portrays Tom Towers, apparently one of the *Jupiter*'s central writers, as an omniscient figure:

> Has not Tom Towers an all-seeing eye? From the diggings of Australia to those of California, right round the habitable globe, does he not know, watch, and chronicle the doings of everyone? From a bishopric in New Zealand to an unfortunate director of a North-west passage, is he not the only fit judge of capability? From the sewers of London to the Central Railway of India—from the palaces of St Petersburg to the cabins of Connaught, nothing can escape him. (131-32)

Like Foucault's Panopticon, Tom Towers has an "all-seeing eye," claims the narrator, one that ranges far beyond England's borders. But whereas the Panopticon represents the internalized process of the disciplinary subjects, for Towers no such psychological subjugation is necessary—all is revealed through the indisputable "facts" of the *Jupiter*. Conversely, despite the *Jupiter*'s power, its articles "bear no signature at all," and Tom Towers himself assumes a disarmingly modest demeanor: "No man knows who wrote the bitter words; the clubs talk confusedly of the matter, whispering to each other this and that name; while Tom Towers walks quietly along Pall Mall, with his coat buttoned close against the east wind, as though he were a mortal man, and not a god dispensing thunderbolts from Mount Olympus" (133). In Towers' very behavior there is an element that defers the inquiring mind elsewhere. Or, to understand the *Jupiter* and Tom Towers it is necessary to see that in them, however comic or satirical the configuration, Trollope

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creates a new kind of conspiratorial authority, one whose effects are visible, but whose agents remain shadowy and ostensibly beyond influence—if the agents can be linked to the authority at all.

This last point is the lesson that John Bold learns when he attempts to abandon his and, by extension, the *Jupiter*'s attack on Harding. First of all, though Towers seems to be the source of the *Jupiter*'s article, Bold cannot confirm this with any accuracy: "Very discreet in such matters was Tom Towers, and altogether indisposed to talk loosely of the concerns of that mighty engine of which it was his high privilege to move in secret some portion" (129). Though the narrative itself links Towers with the *Jupiter* articles against Harding, Towers denies involvement, a practice that is apparently habitual with him. Towers may consider himself "the most powerful man in Europe," yet he keeps these feelings private: "Tom Towers never boasted of the *Jupiter*; he scarcely ever named the paper even to the most intimate of his friends; he did not even wish to be spoken of as connected with it; but he did not the less value his privileges, or think the less of his own importance" (137). Trollope creates an intense contrast between the power Towers actually has and the persona he cultivates. In fact, when Bold directly confronts Towers—a confrontation comparable to Harding's encounter with Haphazard in importance—Towers remains aloof and never tips his mask: "'And now suppose for a moment that I had this power, and used it as you wish: isn't it clear that it would be a great abuse? Certain men are employed in writing for the public press; and if they are induced either to write or to abstain from writing by private motives, surely the public press would soon be of little value'" (146). Bold's request elicits not compliance from Towers, but a patronizing lesson on the civic duty of the press. It is an amazing and

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fiercely satirical moment, one that well encapsulates Trollope's depiction of the *Jupiter*. This is the closest Towers ever comes in the narrative to conceding that he has the power ascribed to him and so his words echo Jaggers' discussion of the hypothetical lawyer in *Great Expectations* (see Chapter Two), and yet even here Towers—unlike Jaggers in response to Pip—evades Bold through the very hypothetical language that he uses. Instead, Towers constructs the *Jupiter* as a self-motivated and self-sustaining force, one "too great to be moved by any private request" (146), and so one which, incidentally and despite Trollope's comic mode, increasingly comes to suggest a structure like Foucault's Panopticon.

* * *

In *The Warden* the Inaccessible Authorities, be they the Church of England or the *Jupiter*, still generally operate at the national level, while Harding (the target of these two forces) ultimately does not become a Vanishing Subject. He resigns because the *Jupiter* both awakens his conscience and keeps him *visible*, so to speak. Therefore, to continue my discussion of the two conspiracemes I now turn to one of the more enigmatic novels in the Victorian period, Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), the story or non-story (depending on the critic) of the orphaned and destitute Lucy Snowe. As the novel's date shows, Brontë's work appeared almost simultaneously with *The Warden* and the two novels, though different in many ways, touch on similar themes—among them the choice of the individual versus the law of the institution (an old theme, admittedly, in literature) and the issue of publicity versus privacy.

Although in recent years *Villette* has come under intense critical scrutiny, almost all of it has been favorable and much of it has centered on Lucy Snowe (*Villette*'s narrator

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and heroine) as the Vanishing Subject—though, of course, not using this phrase. In particular, critics have praised the narrative strategies that Lucy uses to disappear before the reader and before the surveillance that pervades the imaginary Labassecour, its capital Villette, and especially the pensionnat where Lucy becomes a teacher. As Joseph Allen Boone argues, Lucy evades surveillance because her narrative veers from the norm. By erasing herself from the plot as subject, she privileges her mental life over external reality and thereby can express her feelings via non-traditional venues such as set-pieces—e.g., "Cleopatra," "Vashti, etc." (Boone 34-37). Further, this evasive strategy grows naturally out of Lucy's reduced social circumstances. Because of these circumstances, the fact that Lucy has neither "name" nor family, she can withdraw from the events of life, pass as a "cypher" as she calls herself (445) and observe all that happens to those around her from her "watch-tower" (138)—the latter being a figure (so critics have indicated) which hints at Foucault's Panopticon but which, ironically, Lucy also uses to position herself against the institutional surveillance in Villette. Such a marginal life, however, though it protects Lucy's feelings, has its dangers. Self-effacement, indicates Boone, contributes to Lucy's solitude and propels her into a "non-life" and a "plotless existence" (45-46).

Lucy's two most powerful strategies of evasion are narrative omission and projection. The novel's most famous point of omission occurs at the end, when Lucy refuses to reveal whether M. Paul, her fiancé, survived the storm that waylaid his ship. The only possible clue comes much earlier in the novel, when she metaphorically describes the eight years that passed between her stay with the Brettons and her life with Miss Marchmont. On one hand, Lucy asks the reader to "[p]icture me then idle, basking, plump, and happy, stretched on a cushioned deck, warmed with constant sunshine, rocked

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by breezes indolently soft." On the other hand, this idyllic vision ends in disaster: "For many days and nights neither sun nor stars appeared; we cast with our own hands the tackling out of the ship; a heavy tempest lay on us; all hope that we should be saved was taken away. In fine, the ship was lost, the crew perished (94). According to innumerable critics, Lucy deflects M. Paul's death to this description of herself which appears near the novel's opening and which itself takes an ironic form, telling us little of what it purports to. Such deflection and irony, suggests Janice Carlisle, allow Lucy to express feelings that would otherwise remain hidden (35-36), while Penny Boumelha, discussing the particular case of the novel's women, adds that "[i]t has become virtually a commonplace to point out that the other women of *Villette* serve as doubles and alter egos, projections and fragments of Lucy herself" (116). Each of the other women (Polly, Miss Marchmont, Ginevra, Madame Beck, etc.) plays out some aspect of Lucy's personality and, taken together, they transform Lucy's narrative into a near monomaniacal novel of the self—monomania being a clinical term Lucy first uses to characterize Polly, then later applies to herself (as does Walter Hartright to himself [see Chapter Three]). Robert M. Polhemus agrees with such a characterization but attributes Lucy's behavior not to paranoia but eros. Eros, according to Polhemus, provides a crucial survival tactic in Lucy's case via its projective manifestations. By living out her desires vicariously Lucy achieves the experience but foregoes the attendant risks. The result is a narrative where everything magically connects together but, adds Carlisle, where *Lucy* makes these connections, not Providence as we would expect (Polhemus 111-13, 124 and Carlisle 282). Such an approach, I might add, augments the reading of *Villette* I explored earlier when I

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positioned the novel as a transitional work, one which suggested a Providential hand only to withdraw it later (see Chapter Two).

Thus, through the above strategies—at least following the critics I cite—Lucy becomes the model Vanishing Subject. She not only lacks a centered and definable personality, writes Boumelha, but also exists solely as a "series, a dispersal," one which the other characters interpret via their own predilections (115). To see what Boumelha means by a "dispersal" we need look no further than Dr. John and M. Paul, each of whom misinterprets Lucy in a different way—interpretations, incidentally, which tell us little about Lucy but much about the interpreters. Dr. John grapples with Lucy's personality only from a limited medical perspective, attributing her breakdown to "a matter of nerves" (329), while M. Paul ignores Lucy's denials and persists in "a chronic suspicion that I knew both Greek and Latin" (442). Yet Lucy's "dispersal," I would suggest, arises not because of these interpreters (though they do play a role in the dispersal's enactment in the narrative), but because Lucy herself encourages misinterpretation:

> The light in which M. de Bassompierre evidently regarded "Miss Snowe," used to occasion me much inward edification. What contradictory attributes of character we sometimes find ascribed to us according to the eye with which we are viewed! Madame Beck esteemed me learned and blue; Miss Fanshawe caustic, ironic and cynical; Mr. Home, a model teacher, the essence of the sedate and discreet: somewhat conventional, perhaps, too strict, limited and scrupulous, but still the pink and pattern of governess correctness; whilst another person, Professor Paul Emanuel, to wit, never lost an opportunity of intimating his opinion that mine was

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> rather a fiery and rash nature—adventurous, indocile and audacious. I smiled at them all. If any one knew me it was little Paulina Mary. (386)

Here in one of the novel's most famous passages Lucy makes no attempt to correct misperceptions of herself but instead racks up her victims. Each character, Lucy concedes, has some take on her—all radically divergent from one another—but none of these characters, with the exception of Polly, really *knows* Lucy. Yet Polly also, Boumelha notes, lacks the knowledge Lucy ascribes to her (115). Even this concession emerges as but another of Lucy's ruses. In sum, in Lucy's posturing there occurs the same sort of deferral that I noted in *The Warden*, in John Bold's and Septimus Harding's quests in accessing the Church authorities, but in *Villette* the emphasis is on the inaccessibility of Lucy, the subject. We, like the novel's characters, strain to get some kind of perspective on her. She, as a response, encourages—but only teasingly—such attempts and instead treats us with suspicion, refusing to confide at key moments, misdirecting at others.

In terms of the world of *Villette* Lucy also gains in her evasive capability because she is not beautiful and because she has no fortune. As to the latter quality, Mr. Home, Polly's father, makes one of the few assessments of Lucy in the novel that she acknowledges as correct: "he saw my walk in life lay rather on the shady side of the hill; he gave me credit for doing my endeavour to keep the course honestly straight. [. . .] 'Yours,' said he, 'is an arduous calling. I wish you health and strength to win in it—success'" (367-68). It is a rare insight, one of the few reliable perspectives on Lucy by an outsider, but even here the vision lasts but a moment. Lucy co-opts Mr. Home's feelings even as she describes them: she half-narrates his feelings (rather than letting him fully

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speak) and she chooses such clichés as "the shady side of the hill" over more direct and original expressions. Mr. Home, however, is onto something. It is this quality, for example, the fact that Lucy is poor and must work for her living, that causes Ginevra Fanshawe so much trouble in understanding Lucy: "Throughout our walk she rang the most fanciful changes on this theme; proving, by her obstinate credulity, or incredulity, her incapacity to conceive how any person not bolstered up by birth or wealth, not supported by some consciousness of name or connection, could maintain an attitude of reasonable integrity" (394). Ginevra struggles here, as she did earlier when Lucy and she stood side by side before the mirror (see 214ff), to come to terms with Lucy as an individual, with the fact that Lucy is only a "governess" or "teacher." In Ginevra's mind to be without "birth or wealth" and "name or connection" is to somehow be a mysterious person—yet mysterious in a superficial way, as if it were a game. So such a belief orients Ginevra's disposition towards Lucy. Lucy takes a much more sober view of the matter. She disdains the titles that Ginevra values, but in taking such a stance Lucy also sets herself against the opinion of "the world"—a position seemingly disadvantageous but one which Lucy, surprisingly, desires and has learned to use to advantage. Her privation, according to Boumelha, becomes a form of freedom "for it seems to place Lucy irretrievably outside the determining structure of class, family and patrilineage" (119).

This freedom, critics have also noted, also appears in the larger narrative structure of *Villette*. The novel's power, argues Joseph Allen Boone, derives from the gaps Lucy leaves. For example, her narrative evades its readers because it refuses to come to a conclusive ending. Since Lucy has no origins (or, at least, has hidden them), there can be no return to these origins, to quiescence. Instead over a subjective quest, i.e., one that

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would end at the end, the novel favors open-ended "pleasure" and "narrative desire" (Boone 57). This move, adds Boone, reveals a more subversive strategy: Lucy attempts to live in a hidden, liminal space. By choosing an endless interior voyage as her narrative's subject and by repressing her libidinal drives, Lucy introjects the discipline that pervades Villette (the novel and the place), but she also creates a private sphere that avoids the incarcerating qualities of courtship (i.e., the female version of the subjective quest). Her scheme of diffuse signification stands the Foucauldian paradigm on its head (Boone 43-44, 52-54). Yet, it must be stressed, Lucy's target in such a project is as much the reader as the people of Villette. By displacing death and loss throughout the narrative, on one hand, Lucy necessarily remains a mystery however we read her and, on the other hand, her narrative becomes the place where her readers define not her but themselves (Polhemus 115-18). Lucy herself vanishes and by doing so she becomes a conduit that channels the readers (via their projections) back on themselves. What is the larger significance of this process to conspiracy narrative? This pattern of projection and return, I believe, provides the basic mechanism by which the Inaccessible Authorities operate on their subjects. Because K. cannot get to the Castle, he can only project what the Castle is and discover his disappointment. Because Foucault's disciplinary subjects cannot see into the Panopticon, they can only project their fear that someone is watching. Because Lucy vanishes, when readers encounter her narrative they discover not her but only their own projections. The figure of Lucy demonstrates that to be a Vanishing Subject, i.e., one that subverts the Inaccessible Authorities, is only to mimic the positioning of the authorities by constructing the self as a site that causes projection and return.

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Unfortunately, though these critical readings provide a crucial insight to understanding the development of conspiracy theory narrative, I do not think that they fully account for the aesthetic power of *Villette*. In the conspiracy scheme that I have been exploring, *Villette*—like many other novels—is a transitional work: we cannot equate Lucy with the Vanishing Subjects that are in Kafka, Pynchon and Foucault. Rather Lucy's affective capability stems from the fact—as is also the case with Septimus Harding in *The Warden*—that to a large extent Lucy remains visible. This situation is apparent even in the novel's opening sequence. Ostensibly this sequence, as Borislav Knezevic indicates, centers on Polly's nascent relationship with John Bretton and allows Lucy to displace herself as subject. The sequence ends, however, with Polly's distress at her impending departure from Bretton and a depiction of Lucy's efforts to ameliorate this distress: "She came, however, instantly, like a small ghost gliding over the carpet. I took her in. She was chill; I warmed her in my arms. She trembled nervously; I soothed her" (92). Though Polly is the one who suffers, the compassion that Lucy displays towards Polly is equally moving. Lucy not only comforts Polly in the moment, but also commiserates on a larger scale by imagining the suffering that lies ahead for Polly: "'How will she get through this world, or battle with this life? How will she bear the shocks and repulses, the humiliations and desolations, which books, and my own reason tell me are prepared for all flesh?'" (93). Of course, it might seem that Lucy is projecting here, that "books" and "my own reason" serve to help Lucy evade expressing her own feelings, but it is equally valid to say, simply, that Lucy expresses her feelings indirectly or quietly. It is a reading Lucy herself later confirms: "I liked her. It is not a declaration I have often made concerning my acquaintance, in the course of this book: the reader will bear with it

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for once. Intimate intercourse, close inspection, disclosed in Paulina only what was delicate, intelligent, and sincere; therefore my regard for her lay deep. An admiration more superficial might have been more demonstrative; mine, however, was quiet" (461). In both these last two instances, the one early in Lucy's life and the one later, Lucy allows the reader a direct glimpse of her feeling which she herself admits are "quiet." Often, of course, Lucy's feelings are quiet to the point of being hidden or displaced as in the case of M. Paul's death, but that is not always what happens. For example, Lucy does not evade her readers when she reveals why she needs to keep her feelings quiet:

> "Do not let me think of [Louisa and John Bretton] too often, too much, too fondly," I implored: "let me be content with a temperate draught of this living stream: let me not run athirst, and apply passionately to its welcome waters: let me not imagine in them a sweeter taste than earth's fountains know. Oh! would to God I may be enabled to feel enough sustained by an occasional, amicable intercourse, rare, brief; unengrossing and tranquil: quite tranquil!" (251)

Though Lucy's language here is somewhat mannered and though through much of the passage she implores God for strength in suppressing her feelings, the passage itself is *an expression* of them. Lucy, not to mention the visible intensity of her prayers, also tells us that she "steeped that pillow with tears" and she acknowledges her tendency to put too much faith in a given person or situation: "let me not imagine in them a sweeter taste than earth's fountains know."

Villette, I believe, gains in its affective power because of how minutely Lucy takes us through her feelings. Right after the above outburst, Lucy asserts that such struggles as she undergoes "certainly make a difference in the general tenor of a life, and

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enable it to be better regulated, more equable, quieter on the surface" (252). Lucy concedes that a quiet life is preferable for the "surface" (where the "common gaze" falls), while also and not so obviously drawing her readers to what lies below her surface: an intense religious questioning and doubt: "take it to your Maker—show Him the secrets of the spirit He gave—ask Him how you are to bear the pains He has appointed—kneel in His presence, and pray with faith for light in darkness, for strength in piteous weakness, for patience in extreme need" (252). Although she conceals this doubt from her acquaintances, she does not conceal it from us. Yet even such a characterization is inaccurate. When Dr. John asks Lucy about her breakdown she responds with disarming honesty: "'I cannot put the case into words, but my days and nights were grown intolerable; a cruel sense of desolation pained my mind: a feeling that would make its way, rush out, or kill me—like (and this you will understand, Dr. John) the current which passes through the heart, and which, if aneurism or any other morbid cause obstructs its natural channels, seeks abnormal outlet. I wanted companionship, I wanted friendship, I wanted counsel'" (258). Lucy speaks simply, but to the point. The fault in this case, the evasion—if there is any—lies not with Lucy but Dr. John: either he does not listen to Lucy here or he lacks the imaginative capacity to think around his reductive diagnosis of "a matter of the nerves." Beyond the above instances of Lucy's attempts to communicate her feelings, there are also moments in *Villette* when Lucy seems to touch the limits of what it means to make a direct personal statement: "Oh, my childhood! I had feelings: passive as I lived, little as I spoke, cold as I looked, when I thought of past days, I *could* feel. About the present, it was better to be stoical: about the future—such a future as mine—to be dead. And in catalepsy and a dead trance, I studiously held the quick of my

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nature" (175). Though such fully expressive moments are infrequent in the novel, they are not as infrequent as would seem and the intensity of these moments (when they do come) at least tempers, if not undermines, those times when Lucy is less forthcoming.

As mentioned, Lucy's candor also appears in the way in which she explores her religious doubts. Robert Polhemus asserts that Lucy is a woman "fated to flutter on the periphery of middle-class life and notice" (109), but to me the question is more about how this situation occurs—how Lucy comes to reinforce it through her own behavior and how she conceptualizes the cause of her life's circumstances. Lucy's mind is an ever-questing entity and throughout *Villette* Lucy constantly formulates new interpretations of her life. Her skill as an artist, as a narrator, surfaces in how carefully she depicts the stages of her spiritual development. There are intense polemic moments, such the one I first quoted above in which Lucy implores her readers to confront the "Maker" directly; and there are more subtle (if that is the appropriate word) moments when Lucy reaches some kind of provisional conclusion:

> I did not, in my heart, arraign the mercy or justice of God for [Fate's adversity]; I concluded it to be a part of His great plan that some must deeply suffer while they live, and I thrilled in the certainty that of this number, I was one. (229)
>
> * * *
>
> "I suppose, Lucy Snowe, the orb of your life is not to be so rounded: for you the crescent-phase must suffice. Very good. I see a huge mass of my fellow-creatures in no better circumstances. I see that a great many men, and more women, hold their span of life on conditions of denial and privation. I find no reason why I should be of the few favoured." (451)

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In both these instances Lucy attempts to come to terms with the fact that she is not one of the chosen and so condemned to a life of suffering. Yet even between these two moments, which superficially make much the same argument, Lucy brings out the subtle modulations of her temperament. From seeing Fate as her "permanent foe" and understanding the necessity of her being among those who "deeply suffer," Lucy revises her view to a more generous one, now valuing the "crescent-phase" that is her lot and acknowledging that there is "no reason" why she should be "favoured." Whether we, Lucy's readers, agree with her philosophy, whether we sympathize with her suffering or are outraged that Victorian conventions force her into it, does not so much matter in terms of my argument, as the fact that Lucy does share her feelings with us, does make herself visible. Of course, such "visibility" might be a consequence of the first-person narrative structure of *Villette*, but Lucy is even more candid with her emotions, arguably, than first person narration necessitates:

> Amidst the horrors of that dream I think the worst lay here. Methought the well-loved dead, who had loved *me* well in life, met me elsewhere, alienated: galled was my inmost spirit with an unutterable sense of despair about the future. Motive there was none why I should try to recover or wish to live; and yet quite unendurable was the pitiless and haughty voice in which Death challenged me to engage his unknown terrors. (231-32)

The passage in its depiction of trauma foreshadows Ezra Jennings' opium induced dreams in *The Moonstone* (see Chapter One), but in reading this passage we might also ask the following question. To have a good understanding of Lucy, does it really matter at such moments whether we know precisely who "the well-loved dead" are? Such information

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seems beside the point when contrasted with the profundity and pathos of Lucy's suffering—and yet critics have been ready to assail her for withholding just such details.

In terms of her romantic feelings Lucy is equally forthcoming. On one hand, Lucy carefully delineates her prospects in love: "Suitor or admirer my very thoughts had not conceived. [. . .] I went to church and I took walks, and am very well convinced that nobody minded me. There was not a girl or woman in the Rue Fossette who could not, and did not testify to having received an admiring beam from our young doctor's blue eyes at one time or other. I am obliged, however humbling it may sound, to except myself" (177-78). In moments such as this Lucy powerfully underscores what it means to lead a shadow-life. She first gives us the normative picture of "all the teachers" and "all the pupils" and their lovers, then against this picture sets the solitude of her own life. Yet however intense her feelings, they never veer towards the sentimental. Instead, Lucy summons our compassion with an amazing narrative dexterity. The same holds true when Lucy explores her feelings concerning Dr. John: "I never had felt so strange and contradictory an inward tumult as I felt for an hour that evening: soreness and laughter, and fire, and grief shared my heart between them. I cried hot tears: not because madame mistrusted me—I did not care twopence for her mistrust—but for other reasons. Complicated, disquieting thoughts broke up the whole repose of my nature" (186-87). Like the previous few passages I cited, this one again raises the issue of Lucy's visibility. Despite the fact that Lucy's "other reasons" remain hidden, it is still fair to say that she takes her readers far into her emotions.

Therefore, through all of the above moments, those revealing and those evasive, Charlotte Brontë creates a new kind of literary affect, one which depends on the fact that

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her narrator simultaneously proffers and withholds—is and is not the Vanishing Subject. Thus, Brontë powerfully foregrounds the Victorian issue of the right to privacy. How much knowledge, these passages force their readers to ask themselves, is enough? At what point does our curiosity become an invasive tramping upon Lucy's dignity? Or, to sum up this portion of my observations concerning *Villette*: although the novel is enigmatic and (as many critics have asserted) Lucy does aspire to erase herself from the text and so become a Vanishing Subject, Lucy's project is only partially successful and *Villette* must be seen as a transitional novel, one that makes Lucy's general suffering and compassion quite visible, however particular details of her life may be repressed.

This insight becomes a key element of another aspect of *Villette*, one that I have hitherto ignored—that of conspiracy and surveillance. If Lucy is evasive, this behavior develops partly in response to the "espionage" that pervades the narrative. Lucy achieves her plot, indicates Boumelha, through her own projective tendency (as we have seen already), but also because she stumbles upon the plots of other characters in the book (105). These plots often surprise Lucy and, we might infer, are in part responsible for her evasive behavior. The most obvious example of the secondary plots comes in Ginevra's secret trysts with Alfred de Hamal. Admittedly, Lucy is an unreliable narrator and it is hard to determine how much she suspects of this affair before and how much she learns after the couple's elopement, but in this instance it seems as if Ginevra and de Hamal do trump Lucy's usually sharp counter-surveillance:

> "What I wonder at is, rather your secretiveness than your courage. How could you endure the visitations of that long spectre, time after time, without crying out, telling everybody, and rousing the whole house and neighbourhood?" (574)

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* * *

> "I watched you rise and leave the dormitory about eleven o'clock. How you returned alone, and on foot, I cannot conjecture. That surely was *you* we met in the narrow old Rue St. Jean? Did you see me wave my handkerchief from the carriage window?" (575)

Both these excerpts come from the letter Ginevra writes to Lucy after eloping with de Hamal and in both Ginevra visibly revels in the fact that her stratagems have outwitted Lucy. The passages gain further relevance when we realize that Lucy is actually trumped twice—first by de Hamal's machinations as the nun, then by the fact that Ginevra observes (unobserved) as Lucy leaves the dormitory during the night of Villette's grand fête. Another memorable instance of secondary plotting appears in M. Paul's conspiracy with Miret the bookseller to create a private school for Lucy:

> "Did you do this, M. Paul? Is this your house? Did you furnish it? Did you get these papers printed? Do you mean me? Am I the directress? Is there another Lucy Snowe? Tell me: say something." [. . .]
>
> "Ah! you said I had forgotten you all these weary days," said he. "Poor old Emanuel! These are the thanks he gets for trudging about three mortal weeks from house-painter to upholsterer, from cabinetmaker to charwoman. Lucy and Lucy's cot, the sole thoughts in his head!" (586)

Like Ginevra, M. Paul—as his raillery makes clear—revels in the fact that he has outwitted Lucy. His act, in turn, elicits noticeable surprise and desire from Lucy: surprise that she has so been tricked; desire to know what the trick means and how it was done. Getting the answer, she seizes on it "oblivious of all else." Yet the difference in M. Paul's

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machinations comes in that, unlike Ginevra, he works as a Hidden Hand not from selfish but benevolent ends. He endows Lucy with freedom in the same way that Pip does Herbert Pocket (see Chapter Two) and it is a gift—we might infer—that ultimately gives Lucy the leisure to write her narrative.

The plotting and "espionage" that Lucy does repeatedly subvert, that of Madame Beck and her legion of spies, eventually leads Lucy to a greater conspiracy and one with more sinister implications than those above. Through the pensionnat, writes Nina Auerbach, Madame Beck creates a "political organ that achieves the status of a little nation," really "a veiled political arena" whose "ceremonies and spectacles" gradually combine "history and legend, deception and revelation, convent and empire" (101, 105-06). Madame Beck founds not an institution of education, but a Panopticon-like power structure similar to that Foucault ascribes to Napoleon, with Beck at its center in a position that unites "the duties of a first minister and a superintendent of police" (137):

> She ruled all [the students], together with four teachers, eight masters, six servants, and three children, managing at the same time, to perfection, the pupils' parents and friends; and that without apparent effort; without bustle, fatigue, fever, or any symptom of undue excitement: occupied she always was—busy, rarely. [. . .]"Surveillance," "espionage"—these were her watch-words. [. . . and] she of course had her staff of spies: she perfectly knew the quality of the tools she used [. . .]" (135-36)

Beck skillfully controls a complex hierarchy, a "mass of machinery" that runs from her teachers and masters down to the pupils and even to the parents and friends of the pupils. The methods are "surveillance" and "espionage"; Beck has her "staff of spies"; and, it

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seems, these spies are ready for anything, even "a dirty occasion." Also, as in the case of Lucy's "watch-tower," so in the depiction of Madame Beck there are hints of the Castle and the Panopticon, creating the unsettling impression that Brontë had read Kafka and Foucault, and later we even learn that Madame Beck also operates from "some aperture or summit of observation" (182).

Madame Beck's own behavior prefigures the paranoid antics of Count Fosco (see Chapter Three). Like Fosco, Beck wears "shoes of silence" (147) and has a penchant for making sudden unannounced appearances: "'You ayre Engliss?' said a voice at my elbow. I almost bounded, so unexpected was the sound; so certain had I been of solitude. / No ghost stood beside me, nor anything of spectral aspect; merely a motherly, dumpy little woman, in a large shawl, a wrapping-gown, and a clean, trim night-cap" (127). Also like Fosco in the case of Marian's journal, Beck feels no compunctions in rummaging through Lucy's possessions: "In my dress was a pocket; she fairly turned it inside out; she counted the money in my purse; she opened a little memorandum-book, coolly perused its contents, and took from between the leaves a small plaited lock of Miss Marchmont's grey hair. To a bunch of three keys, being those of my trunk, desk and work-box she accorded special attention," etc. (131-32). *Villette* has a number of such wonderful moments. Beck's snooping, it seems, has no limits and she is equally deft in examining Lucy's hair and in refolding Lucy's clothes when the work is done; there too is that "face of stone" (132) which suggests both Fosco's and Big Brother's mesmerizing and impenetrable smiles. Yet the difference between Beck and Fosco, really between Lucy and Marian Halcombe, the heroine of *The Woman in White*, is that Lucy is much more adept at counter-espionage. Of course, Marian has her great moment perching on the

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verandah, but she gets caught; Fosco reads and writes over her journal. The irony in the passage above or when Beck later searches Lucy's desk (185-86), or even when Beck sneezes "out of season" (193), is that for all of Beck's espionage tactics Lucy still manages to observe Beck at work without herself (i.e., Lucy) ever being caught. Lucy's skill at counter-espionage also appears Beck's visit to the Bretton's, when Lucy discovers that Beck's "compliments, delight, and affability" had all been a performance—one, incidentally, on the order of Inspector Bucket's evening at the Bagnets in *Bleak House* (see Chapter One): "I followed her to the carriage, and looked in after she was seated and the door closed. In that brief fraction of time what a change had been wrought! An instant ago, all sparkles and jests, she now sat sterner than a judge and graver than a sage. Strange little woman!" (270-71). Both in her directed behavior here and in her general surveillance tendencies Beck exhibits traces of paranoia and yet, despite these paranoid tendencies, she (unlike Ginevra, de Hamal and M. Paul) still fails to outwit Lucy—at least in these local instances.

As the novel progresses, however, we discover that there is more at stake in Beck's games of espionage. Madame Beck and her spies emerge as but a single branch of the novel's larger conspiracy, the "secret junta" that Beck creates along with Madame Walravens, the grandmother of M. Paul's deceased fiancé, and Père Silas, the Catholic priest. The junta, asserts Auerbach, has tremendous implications in the narrative because its existence decisively reveals that in *Villette* "school, city and nation are in league and at one" (106). That the Catholic Church also stands behind the junta, as Boone adds (42), further ups the ante as it transforms the conspiracy from one with national implications to one with international implications. Madame Beck's educational espionage becomes

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espionage in the more modern sense with the only difference being that (in literature, at least) foreign governments will come to replace the Church as the central operative force (more below; see also Chapter Five). Conversely, the fact that Lucy is a devout Protestant puts her directly in opposition to those involved with the Catholic Church, especially Père Silas. "'Nor have I for a day lost sight of you,'" Père Silas tells her, "'nor for an hour failed to take in you a rooted interest. Passed under the discipline of Rome, moulded by her high training, inoculated with her salutary doctrines, inspired by the zeal she alone gives—I realise what then might be your spiritual rank, your practical value; and I envy Heresy her prey'" (487). To Silas, Lucy becomes the pawn in a game between larger forces, the Holy Church and "Heresy," and this fact justifies his continual surveillance of Lucy's life and relationship with M. Paul. As Lucy famously tells her readers: "We were under the surveillance of a sleepless eye; Rome watched jealously her son through that mystic lattice at which I had knelt once, and to which M. Emanuel drew nigh month by month—the sliding panel of the confessional" (503). As a result, I suggest, Lucy's evasive behavior also develops in response to the Catholic Church which she accuses of "trained cunning," and which she sees as manipulating M. Paul and ultimately compelling his fateful voyage to the West Indies: "His tenderness had rendered him ductile in a priest's hands" (595). In fact, Boumelha goes so far as to assert that Lucy's narrative evasion is based on the practices of Catholicism (103). Or, we might say in returning to the international aspect of the junta, the practitioners of Catholicism, because their number is so vast in the narrative of *Villette* (i.e., making up the majority of Labassecour's population), represent an immense conspiracy, generally inaccessible

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because of its vastness and because the majority of the Catholics (in the Foucauldian spirit) are guilty more by association than conscious intent.

On a lesser scale, Lucy intuits the junta's existence some time before she discovers it as an actual entity. According to Boumelha, Lucy exhibits traces of clinical paranoia. Through her projections Lucy sets herself up as a "centre of meaning—a sense that culminates in the hallucinatory scene of the 'secret junta' of enemies ranged against her in the park" (102). Yet, I would argue, such a reading does not seem justified by the text. Lucy likes to withdraw, to observe, to evade—but, as I asserted above, she is not as evasive as critics would have her be. Rather, it is Lucy's powerful capacity for insight (as well as her serendipitous decision to leave the pensionnat on the night of the grand fête) that leads her to confirm and refine her suspicions concerning the junta. The process of discovery develops through a series of three moments of revelation. The first of these occurs when Lucy encounters Père Silas at Madame Walravens' house: "all these little incidents [at Madame Walravens' house], taken as they fell out, seemed each independent of its successor; a handful of loose beads: but threaded through by that quick-shot and crafty glance of a Jesuit eye, they dropped pendant in a long string, like that rosary on the *prie-dieu*. Where lay the link of junction, where the little clasp of this monastic necklace?" (486). Here, in the instance of Lucy's first revelation, she comes to feel a connection, but as yet cannot articulate it. The moment recalls Hartright's initial suspicions about Anne Catherick (see Chapter Three), but Lucy only grows agitated by the idea of a connection and does not exhibit the same obsession with "fatality" that Hartright does. Instead, compared to some of Lucy's other emotional outbursts her assessment here is quite level-headed. There is also the fact that Lucy, by foregoing the

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Providential element (unlike Hartright), reads the situation correctly. The second revelation is more concrete and to the point: "And they, Père Silas and Modeste Maria Beck (that these two wrought in concert I could not doubt) opened up the adytum of [M. Paul's] heart—showed me one grand love, the child of this southern nature's youth, born so strong and perfect, that it had laughed at Death himself, despised his mean rape of matter, clung to immortal spirit, and, in victory and faith, had watched beside a tomb twenty years" (490). Lucy now makes the connection between Beck and Silas but she shows no traces of suspecting more than a modest link, i.e., that these two cooperated to reveal M. Paul's devotion to Justine Marie in the hope that it would deter Lucy. This discovery, however, only increases Lucy's admiration for M. Paul and just after the above passage she calls him her "Christian hero."

The last element in Lucy's chain of revelations comes in what must be the most spectacular portion of *Villette*—Lucy's opium-induced wanderings in the park on the night of Villette's grand fête. When Lucy comes upon the fête it strikes her as a visionary experience: "In a land of enchantment, a garden most gorgeous, a plain sprinkled with coloured meteors, a forest with sparks of purple and ruby and golden fire gemming the foliage; a region, not of trees and shadow, but of strangest architectural wealth—of altar and of temple, of pyramid, obelisk and sphinx; incredible to say, the wonders and the symbols of Egypt teemed throughout the park of Villette" (550). Through such visions as the one above and through Lucy's use of the present tense throughout her wanderings (except in the instance above), a surreal aura comes to surround the park and all its happenings. Lucy's first glimpse of the junta shows them placed in a curious position: "Three fine tall trees growing close, almost twined stem within stem, lifted a thick

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canopy of shade above a green knoll, crowned with a seat—a seat which might have held several, yet it seemed abandoned to one, the remaining members of the fortunate party in possession of this site standing dutifully round; yet, amongst this reverend circle was a lady, holding by the hand a little girl" (556). The junta is enthroned. The "knoll, crowned with a seat" suggests—however faintly—an image of divinity or power that echoes Dante's Mount of Purgatory or Kafka's Castle. The figures surrounding the seat become the authorities—here accessible because as this tangible group (as opposed to the Catholic Church as a whole) they can be localized and enumerated. One by one Lucy names those present: Désirée Beck, Madame Beck, M. Victor Kint, Joseph Emanuel, Père Silas, Madame Walravens—in short, the whole crew, "the whole conjuration, the secret junta" (558). Further, though the passage is the culmination of much of what happens in the latter part of *Villette*, it concludes not with Lucy's capitulation and the success of the junta, but with an affirmation of Lucy's persistence: "The sight of them thus assembled did me good. I cannot say that I felt weak before them, or abashed, or dismayed. They outnumbered me, and I was worsted, and under their very feet; but, as yet, I was not dead" (558). In addition, Lucy studies the junta without being discovered herself: she listens in on the junta's scheme; she affirms her proximity to the "truth"; and then she asserts: "The revelation was indeed come. Presentiment had not been mistaken in her impulse: there is a kind of presentiment which never *is* mistaken; it was I who had for a moment miscalculated; not seeing the true bearing of the oracle, I had thought she muttered of vision when, in truth, her prediction touched reality" (565). Lucy has an conspiracy-epiphany, one which reveals the conspiracy's extent but one which, by doing so, also empowers her (as is also the case with Slothrop's "paranoia"—see Chapter One).

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Lucy also discovers the junta's goal, their desire to thwart her love for M. Paul by marrying him off to his goddaughter Mademoiselle Sauveur. Elements of this conspiracy abound in *Villette* and significantly influence Lucy's emotional disposition. Beck and Silas, for example, surprise M. Paul and Lucy as the are walking in the allée défendue (538). Beck blocks Lucy from M. Paul's vision during his last visit to the school (541). And, in what may be the most powerful and affective scene in all of *Villette*, Madame Beck tries to drag M. Paul away when he makes his last visit to Lucy:

> Madame Beck, brought to the spot by vigilance or an inscrutable instinct, pressed so near, she almost thrust herself between me and M. Emanuel. "Come, Paul!" she reiterated, her eye grazing me with its hard ray like a steel stylet. She pushed against her kinsman. I thought he receded; I thought he would go. Pierced deeper than I could endure, made now to feel what defied suppression, I cried—
>
> "My heart will break!" (580)

There is an affective pathos in this moment—especially when read in context—that seems to touch Lucy's and, by extension, Charlotte Brontë's expressive capability. On one hand, we have a reprise of Beck's unflagging surveillance—especially cruel as Lucy had earlier warned Beck to stay out of her (Lucy's) life (see 544ff). On the other hand, Lucy confines what is her most visible and wrenching moment of pain in the entire novel to a single sentence—grand, simple, devastating: "'My heart will break!'" It is a moment that gains in resonance when we recall the happiness that M. Paul's friendship has already brought to Lucy's life: "While he spoke, the tone of his voice, the light of his now affectionate eye, gave me such a pleasure as, certainly, I had never felt. I envied no girl her lover, no bride her bridegroom, no wife her husband; I was content with this my

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voluntary, self-offering friend. If he would but prove reliable, and he *looked* reliable, what, beyond his friendship, could I ever covet?" (501). And the moment also gains resonance when we later learn just how short-lived Lucy's happiness is to be:

> We reached Madame Beck's door. Jean Baptiste's clock tolled nine. At this hour, in this house, eighteen months since, had this man at my side bent before me, looked into my face and eyes, and arbitered my destiny. This very evening he had again stooped, gazed, and decreed. How different the look—how far otherwise the fate! [. . .]
>
> We parted: he gave me his pledge, and then his farewell. We parted: the next day—he sailed. (592)

These ephemeral moments—Lucy's Ulysses-like glimpse of true and reciprocated love—are the closest that she ever comes to lasting happiness in the novel. Instead, it turns out that after M. Paul's (probable) death Lucy must live out her days in the presence of the junta: "Madame Beck prospered all the days of her life; so did Père Silas; Madame Walravens fulfilled her ninetieth year before she died. Farewell." (596). In the last words of the novel, Lucy again displaces herself. By foregrounding the junta here she emphasizes how responsible it is for her suffering, for the loss of her plot (which should have been the story proper of *Villette*) and for her tendency to become a Vanishing Subject.

Before leaving *Villette* I want to probe briefly in the novel's (historical) margins and explore the significance of Brontë's use of the terms "surveillance" and "espionage." In the narrative Brontë associates both these concepts not with England, but with the fictional and foreign Labassecour. For example, the word *surveillance* first appears in the

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narrative after Lucy has left England and is on the ship bound for Labassecour. The English, Lucy tells us, have dispensed with "surveillance" in both education and theology, and because of this young ladies like Ginevra Fanshawe are allowed to travel alone (114). Given this, Lucy's first glimpse of Labassecour becomes all the more telling: "the lights of the foreign sea-port town, glimmering round the foreign harbour, met me like unnumbered threatening eyes" (118). Though this moment demonstrates Lucy's tendency for projection, her projection still takes a very particular shape. Lucy personifies the foreign harbor as an entity that watches her; in Lucy's mind the surveillance begins before she even reaches the shores of Labassecour. Lucy further refines the concept of foreign surveillance in her depiction of the first night at Beck's pensionnat: "Her duty done—I felt that in her eyes this business was a duty—she rose, noiseless as a shadow: she moved towards her own chamber; at the door, she turned, fixing her eye on the heroine of the bottle, who still slept and loudly snored. [. . .] Mrs. Sweeny's doom was in Madame Beck's eye—an immutable purpose that eye spoke" (132). From the first Lucy characterizes Madame Beck via the latter's penchant for continuous and invasive observation. Yet this characteristic signals not so much the individual habits of Madame Beck (though she does represent an extreme case) as it does something generally "very un-English." Surveillance, Lucy suggests, is the characteristic of "foreign" lands.

Lucy also ascribes surveillance, if of a more sinister kind, to the Catholic Church. She labels surreptitious surveillance as a Jesuit trait and makes some effort to distinguish it from the surveillance that M. Paul practices. Lucy describes M. Paul in his efforts to keep her under surveillance as an "undisguised schemer"—a bumbler whom she can outwit and who stands no comparison with the Jesuits whose spying is "better masked"

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(386-87). So when Lucy catches M. Paul rummaging through her things—unlike in the case of her catching Madame Beck—Lucy confronts M. Paul without the fear of consequences: "My heart smote me: as I bent over him, as he sat unconscious, doing me what good he could, and I daresay not feeling towards me unkindly, my morning's anger quite melted: I did not dislike Professor Emanuel" (431). At this key moment Lucy highlights her congeniality towards M. Paul. His invasions, although intrusive, spring from M. Paul's benevolence, from the desire to give Lucy gifts. Here he does not try to snoop in Lucy's things as Madame Beck would, and his benevolence will resurface when M. Paul endows Lucy with her school. Lucy too subverts the style of Madame Beck's surveillance. Although above she creeps up on M. Paul *à la* Madame Beck, the ensuing conversation is cordial, touched with emotion even, not pervaded by suspicion. I draw attention to this moment because M. Paul's plotting is not always so benevolent. Later in the book M. Paul reveals, brags even, that he too, like Madame Beck and Lucy herself, has a watch-tower, a "magic lattice," from which he watches the school's teachers and pupils and he ascribes the practice to his Catholic/Jesuit upbringing. Lucy, however, condemns his behavior; her single comment goes to the heart of her feelings: "'It is not right, monsieur'" (452ff). Of course, Lucy also practices surveillance but her behavior is less invasive and, as we saw, geared much more towards survival and protection, while M. Paul's—at least in this instance—provides a way of achieving power (Boone 38).

So between the two case above there arises a narrative tension. In the first instance Lucy dismisses M. Paul's surveillance, saying she never saw "a franker, looser intriguer." In the second M. Paul attempts to position himself as a textbook Jesuit. What is the significance of this difference? Although I may be splitting hairs at this point, this

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tension does point the way to one of the more subtle aspects of Villette and of Labassecour as a whole. Although both these places are imaginary and although given Charlotte Brontë's biography it is obvious that they derive from Brontë's experiences in Belgium, Brontë's Victorian readers—not knowing her biography—might have associated Labassecour with France. Most obviously, there is the continuous use of French in the novel, but there is also the fact that Labassecour has a history akin to France:

> In past days there had been, said history, an awful crisis in the fate of Labassecour, involving I know not what peril to the rights and liberties of her gallant citizens. Rumours of wars there had been, if not wars themselves; a kind of struggling in the streets—a bustle—a running to and fro, some rearing of barricades, some burgher rioting, some calling out of troops, much interchange of brickbats, and even a little of shot. Tradition held that patriots had fallen: in the old Basse-Ville was shown an enclosure, solemnly built in and set apart, holding, it was said, the sacred bones of martyrs. (550)

Labassecour's revolution is set at a rather distant historical moment, but it is not hard to go from the events narrated here to those of the French Revolution. During a heated moment in the novel, when M. Paul has been especially belligerent to Lucy, she further reinforces the France/Labassecour association: "'Vive l'Angleterre, l'Histoire et les Héros! A bas la France, la Fiction et les Faquins!'" (429). To goad M. Paul, Lucy calls for the fall not of Labassecour, but of France.

Similarly, besides his Jesuit pursuits it emerges that M. Paul has another interest, one that correlates well with his more benevolent plots. This interest surfaces during a

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speech he makes at the Hôtel Crécy when he addresses his audience "as future citizens and embryo patriots":

> The times which have since come on Europe had not been foretold yet, and M. Emanuel's spirit seemed new to me. Who would have thought the flat and fat soil of Labassecour could yield political convictions and national feelings, such as were now strongly expressed? [. . . W]ith all his fire he was severe and sensible; he trampled Utopian theories under his heel; he rejected wild dreams with scorn—but, when he looked in the face of tyranny—oh, then there opened a light in his eye worth seeing; and when he spoke of injustice, his voice gave no uncertain sound, but reminded me rather of the band-trumpet, ringing at twilight from the park. (396-97)

What we have here is a revolutionary speech, strong with "political convictions and national feelings," one which looks in "the face of tyranny" and denounces "injustice." Although the dating in the above passage is vague, again it is not hard (especially given the novel's publication date, 1853) to associate the "times which have since come on Europe" with the period of the revolutions of 1848—an association now supported by Brontë's own biography because she gained the experiential material on which she based *Villette* between the years 1842 and 1843. There is also the fact that the only use of a form of the word *conspiracy* in the entire novel appears in an allusion to M. Paul, when Lucy describes him as having a paletôt "sinister and conspirator-like" (425). Consequently, although we shouldn't overemphasize the above "revolutionary" details, they are all relatively consistent and together combine to associate Labassecour with France, to bring out M. Paul's revolutionary side (i.e., the one that underpins his more

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benevolent surveillance), and to set the novel's events in a period not too long before the events of 1848.

There is also Brontë's ascribing the words "surveillance" and "espionage" to foreign practices. As I mentioned in the last chapter, England stood out among European nations in that it did not have a revolution in 1848. The Chartists were controlled; the Fenians were still a nascent entity. This distinction, that of having no revolution, was something the Victorians themselves took pride in, and there was a societal attempt (however misguided) to correlate revolution and the like with France in particular. This tendency, writes Carolyn Dever in "'An Occult and Immoral Tyranny': The Novel, the Police, and the Agent *Provocateur*," is most apparent in England's imaginative literature: "The French serve as a symbol for the failure of ethical coherence, all the more powerfully because they function as a site of identification as much as alterity. In English representations of the French criminal justice system, revolution follows upon revolution, cops are quite often robbers, and 'detection," far from being preventive, is enacted through gestures of political espionage against private citizens" (297). In *Plots and Paranoia* Bernard Porter takes up this same issue. England's County and Borough Police Act of 1856, writes Porter, established a uniform police system that left local authority intact so as to prevent the provincial police from "being turned into a French-style state police." Yet the act only continued a trend that had been begun by Peel's police force (see Chapter One), a force which cultivated a stance of being humane and, because it courted public opinion, which sought to avoid any kind of secret or espionage-like activities (Porter 69-72). The restraint of the police, adds Philip Thurmond Smith, was especially visible in the police's handling of mobs. Instead of force, the tactics centered on the

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science of group psychology and on preventive measures such as putting a "careful watch [. . .] on large assemblies, usually by a few plain-clothes constables in the crowd who would relay information back to the strong detachments of police scattered about the are a in convenient, discreet location, so as not to provoke the crowds." Notably, in the 1850s the only major exception to this rule, the Sunday Trading Disturbances of 1855 in which the police did use force, spurred a Royal Commission to investigate the police's behavior (Smith 116-18). Similarly, writes Porter, in the 1840s espionage was used only against the Chartists and generally outside of London. The scandal in the Mazzini affair of 1844 in which the British government was found to have opened the letters of Giuseppe Mazzini, an Italian patriot leader, foregrounded the public's aversion to espionage. Throughout Britain the prevailing belief was that a free state, like England, because of the freedom it offered had no need to fear revolutionaries and amazingly—though Porter concedes that the historical record here is somewhat scant—after 1848 and through most of the 1850s there seems to have been almost no British-engineered espionage in England itself or its colonies (74-80). In fact, the one documented spy, John Hitchens Sanders, was apparently more interested in helping than harming the foreign exiles under his surveillance and may have even been a double-agent (Porter 91-94).

In Britain as a whole such espionage, therefore, represented a foreign practice and part and parcel of the European *counter*-revolutions that followed in the wake of 1848. In "The Holy Struggle Against Anarchy," Roger Price outlines the post-revolutionary situation abroad. Many of the European counter-revolutions, writes Price, succeeded because of the divisions among the original revolutionaries, divisions which led to chaos among the civil and military bureaucracies. The revolutionary groups, it seems, often

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disagreed over their goals and the limits of revolutionary reform (26-27). As a result, there arose a broad European societal desire to reestablish order and to bolster economic prosperity by restoring the old monarchical authorities. This desire, in turn, was fostered by conservative propaganda which stressed the sanctity of private property (as against the demands of the more extreme revolutionaries) and which benefited by the fact that "[r]espect for monarchy, the church, and for secular elites was undoubtedly widespread among the among the masses, and for a complex set of reasons including opportunism, material self-interest, and the lack of an acceptable alternative" (28). So the "social elites" soon returned to power. Because of their wealth, education, and social connections they had access to governmental offices and could influence the necessary key figures. In addition, the shared characteristics among the elites, such as ideology, political experience and an understanding of the state armies, allowed these elites to reunite, to regain confidence and, through their dominance of the governments and military, to limit the scope of revolutionary changes (31-35). On a long term scale, however, the army became too cumbersome a tool to use and the counter-revolutions resorted more and more to furthering their goals through everyday practices. For example, strategic constitutional revisions curtailed the reforms of 1848. Legislation was passed to "eliminate or restrict the activities of political clubs, workers' associations, and the press." A more effective and coordinated police force was developed. And, finally, a diverse array of venues was used to influence the masses including expenditure on public works and urban renewal, religion, education and the media—venues which even the pope came to use for the same ends (41-43, 48). In addition, as the example of France shows, increased espionage was also part of the process.

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Therefore, *Villette*'s positioning of "espionage" and "surveillance" emerges as part of a larger Victorian tendency. It is no coincidence that Charlotte Brontë associates these practices with the imaginary but foreign Labassecour, or that the decidedly Protestant Lucy Snowe condemns surveillance as a "dishonorable" and Catholic practice. We see a similar disposition, for example, in Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1859-60). When set against the novel's historical context, details from Count Fosco's life take on larger ramifications. Certainly, one of the most striking passages in *The Woman in White* centers on Fosco after his death. Fosco's body lies in state, "unowned, unknown, exposed to the flippant curiosity of a French mob," while his arm displays "two deep cuts in the shape of the letter T." Fosco, as this T (for *traditore* [traitor]) underscores, dies because he betrayed the "Brotherhood" (584). Yet this betrayal, indicates Hartright, was not an individual act but rooted in Fosco's involvement with Italy's counter-revolution:

> The year of which I am now writing was the year of the famous Crystal Palace Exhibition in Hyde Park. Foreigners in unusually large numbers had arrived already, and were still arriving in England. Men were among us by hundreds whom the ceaseless distrustfulness of their governments had followed privately, by means of appointed agents, to our shores. My surmises did not for a moment class a man of the Count's abilities and social position with the ordinary rank and file of foreign spies. I suspected him of holding a position of authority, of being entrusted by the government which he secretly served with the organisation and management of agents specially employed in this country, both men and women,

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> and I believed Mrs. Rubelle, who had been so opportunely found to act as nurse at Blackwater Park, to be, in all probability, one of the number. (584)

As in the case of Madame Beck, Count Fosco's penchant for surveillance and espionage is not so much a personal predisposition (though again Fosco does represent one of the art's extreme practitioners) but rather grows out of a broad governmental practice, that of counter-revolution. That Collins links this espionage with the decidedly foreign Count Fosco again points to the Victorian trend that I discussed above. In addition, Laura Fairlie's and Walter Hartright's revulsion to Fosco's espionage (domestic and international respectively) now links Collins's narrative with Brontë's and shows that both these novels are thus transitional in the history of fictional conspiracy narratives. Since Fosco works on behalf of distant, absent and (as the title that follow his name at the beginning of his confession attest [see 618]) mysterious forces, Fosco too becomes the representative of Inaccessible Authorities—ones, incidentally, that like the Catholic church in *Villette,* start to resemble those in modern espionage narratives (see Chapter Five).

Before closing this chapter, I want to examine one final aspect of the last passage above. Large numbers of foreigners, Hartright tells us, were arriving in England in the year of the Crystal Palace Exhibition in Hyde Park, i.e., 1851. What relevance does this have to my argument? As Phillip Thurmond Smith asserts, 1851 was a "watershed" year and a crucial turning point in England's attitude towards the political exiles living between its borders. The success of the Crystal Palace Exhibition reinforced the public's belief in the police force and strengthened its anti-espionage attitude (Smith 107, see also Porter 87-88). Before its commencement the Exhibition had been a source of anxiety. Numerous conspiracy threats were floated and many Englishmen feared that the "wrong

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types" of foreigners would be drawn to Hyde Park. A large police force was mobilized to monitor the event and, interestingly, foreign reinforcements were summoned to supplement the British police. However, continues Smith, in the end the Exhibition was a "rousing success" and it decisively demonstrated "British industrial supremacy and the blessings of liberalism and trade," to the extent that "[a]fterwards foreigners came to be taken more for granted in the public mind." As a result, after the Exhibition there was little supervising of aliens, little police surveillance and Britain (with a few exceptions later in the 1850s) generally took a laissez faire attitude towards foreign exiles—as long as it could preserve domestic tranquility and protect its allies from English-born plots (Smith 79-81). If anything, the Victorians believed that the exiles were forced to flee to England because despotic régimes existed elsewhere and the fact that Britain indiscriminately took these exiles in only demonstrated the superiority of the British government to those of other European nations (81-84). Collins' portrayal of Fosco, therefore, has a tinge of "the past" about it. The Crystal Palace Exhibition showcased how little need a country like Britain had for "espionage" and for figures like Count Fosco—a point that the Assistant Commissioner will reiterate in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (see Chapter Five). Yet, as I mentioned at the end of Chapter Three, Hartright (and so Collins) as a narrator still had the potential to infect his contemporary readers with "paranoia." The threat of conspiracy—however outmoded superficially—continued to gestate and, in literature (as I shall argue in the next and final chapter), was soon to surface in an array of striking new forms.

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Chapter Five: From Conspiracy to Conspiracy Theory

This chapter will be a departure from my previous chapters. Whereas up to now I have generally focused on the period of 1848-61 and have pursued close readings of the works in this period, I here move beyond these years to a survey of conspiracy fiction in the late-Victorian and the "long" Edwardian periods. Near the end of the nineteenth century conspiracy narratives proliferated in England and, as a result, these conspiracy narratives *as* conspiracy narratives and as a related body of works have been discussed by critics at some length. Among the most of important of these critical discussions are Barbara Arnett Melchiori's *Terrorism in the Late Victorian Novel*, virtually all of I.F. Clarke's work on "invasion-scare" narratives, Joseph A. Kestner's *The Edwardian Detective, 1901-15*, and innumerable studies on spy fiction, particularly those by John G. Cawelti and Bruce A. Rosenberg, David A.T. Stafford and Michael Denning. My own discussion, however, takes its cue from Stephen Arata's "The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization." In this essay, before his discussion of *Dracula* proper, Arata glances at the work of Melchiori (on dynamite novels) and Clarke, then introduces a third type of conspiracy genre (though not overtly designating it as such)—the reverse colonization narrative. Adding spy fiction to the list, we have the four types of conspiracy narratives that I shall take up in this chapter—dynamite, invasion-scare, reverse colonization, and espionage.

My approach in examining these narratives will be two-fold. First, I will explore works in the above four sub-genres in terms of unifying features—although my goal will not be an exhaustive survey on the order of Melchiori or Clarke. Rather I shall center my

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discussion on a generous selection of works (many, though not all, "canonical") from these genres, then draw connections while also letting a given work's complexity (in terms of conspiracy) and aesthetic merit dictate the length of any particular discussion. Next, while exploring the above sub-genres I shall also interrogate them—a process that I have already begun by dividing my chapter along the lines of only three (revised) conspiracy narrative genres: "Revolution Conspiracies," "Espionage" and "The Criminal Mastermind." What I want to suggest through my interrogation is that, while critics have been justified in demarcating the above genres (dynamite, invasion-scare, etc.), after a certain point, especially in the works that I shall be discussing, such distinctions breakdown. In terms of my argument that is exactly the point. As conspiracy fiction proliferates in the late-Victorian period there occurs a dual development: alongside the growth of formulaic conspiracy genres (spy fiction being the most obvious example), we see another type of conspiracy narrative mode finally coalesce, one in which the various types of conspiracies (and conspiracemes for that matter) appear side by side or become fused, and one which stresses *irony* and foregrounds the *indeterminacy* of its claims regarding the conspiracy elements. This new type of fiction narrative is conspiracy theory.

* * *

Before I begin my survey I want to sketch a few of the Victorian historical developments (and events) which contributed to the above-discussed proliferation of conspiracy narratives and which form essential "background reading" to my discussion. The first and most important of these developments (already touched on in Chapter Three) is the rise of the Irish Fenians. The Fenians, who took their name from *fianna*, the

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Gaelic name for the soldiers of the legendary King Finn, were an Irish secret society also known as the Irish Revolutionary (or Republican) Brotherhood, and the descendant of a number of other Irish secret societies, among them the Young Irelanders, who staged a short-lived uprising in Ireland in 1848, Fintan Lalor, a revolutionary group formed in the wake of 1848, and the U.S.-based groups, the Irish Republican Union and the Emmet Monument Association. Each of these groups, like the Fenians, engaged in "insurrections and symbolic acts of violence in a bid to rouse the Irish people and coerce the British government into making concessions to nationalist demands," as David Powell succinctly puts it (133-34, cf. Nowlan 90-92, Curran 746). Among early instances of such insurrections are the three failed invasions of Canada in the late 1860s/early 1870s by U.S.-based Fenians, and a series of aborted or failed uprisings in England between 1865 and 1867, each of which was betrayed by spies—various figures in the Irish instances and the long-serving British spy Thomas Billis Beach a.k.a. "Major Henri Le Caron" in the U.S. instances. The last of the Irish uprisings also led to a series of treason trials in Manchester and the subsequent execution of the "Manchester Martyrs"—three men responsible for rescuing Colonel Kelly, the leader of the Fenians, after his arrest in 1867 (Nowlan 90-92 and 98-99, Curran passim, Steele 230-31).

The events in Manchester brought an end to one stage of the rise of the Fenians, but were important in that they elicited public sympathy (in Ireland and the U.S.) for the Fenian cause and secured separatist republicanism as a key element of Irish nationalism. Although the topic is too complex to explore here, the 1870s and 1880s saw further examples of Irish mass protest and constitutional action, including the work of Michael Davitt's Land League, the founding of the Irish Home Government Association by Isaac

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Butt in 1870 (whose leadership was assumed by the charismatic Charles Stewart Parnell in 1879), the institution of the Irish National League in 1882, and the passing of the Reform Act in 1884 (which quadrupled Ireland's electorate). Yet none of these developments satisfied Irish demands and at best, notes David Powell, England attempted to continue the frustrating policy of "containment and concession" in its dealings with Ireland (133-35). In addition, although William Gladstone's espousal of Home Rule coupled with the victories of the Parnellites in the 1885 election inspirited the Irish cause and polarized British party politics along the Liberal-Nationalist and Home Rule-Unionist lines, on this front too the political work really centered on how to preserve the union. Gladstone felt that concessions in recognizing Ireland's separatist identity could keep the United Kingdom together, while Unionists argued that establishing a parliament in Dublin would soon engender demands for complete independence (Powell 137-38). In other words, Ireland's nationalism was perceived as a larger problem confronting the British Empire. On one hand, there was the possibility that Ireland, by gaining independence, would inspire other breakaway movements. On the other hand, as the end of the nineteenth century approached, the issue of Britain's defense came to the fore and many in the England held that Ireland was crucial to this defense, that is was "the keystone in the arch of Empire and national security, without which collapse and ruin would inevitably follow" (Powell 139-141).

In mentioning the Irish issue I want to draw attention to another form that Irish protest took in the early 1880s—the Fenian dynamite campaign. Between March 1, 1883 and January 31, 1885, the Fenians organized thirteen successful (and numerous unsuccessful) terrorist attacks in and around London on public buildings and monuments

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such as *The Times* newspaper offices, Scotland Yard, Victoria Station and London Bridge. Each of these attacks involved the use of dynamite (which Alfred Nobel had invented in 1863) and the attacks culminated on January 24, 1885 with near-simultaneous explosions at Westminster Hall, the House of Parliament and the Tower of London. Nor was this the first time that the Fenians had used dynamite. In 1867 there had been the notorious explosion at the Clerkenwell House of Detention which initiated an (unsuccessful) attempt to rescue Richard O'Sullivan Burke, later one of the Manchester Martyrs, and which proved especially embarrassing to the London police because they failed to stop the attack despite the fact that they had been forewarned (Smith 190-92). The dynamite campaign of the 1880s, however, was on a much larger and more sustained scale. As Barbara Melchiori observes, the attacks had wide-spread influence, causing (for example) panic among the citizens of London and eliciting continuous attention from the British press, a development which helped amplify British fears and spread news of the attacks abroad. Continuous press coverage (the announcement of clues, the descriptions of arrests and trials, etc.) also ensured that the attacks stayed in people's minds long after the actual events (Melchiori 1-33, passim). Further, as in the 1867 Clerkenwell case, in the 1880s the Metropolitan Police seemed helpless in the face of the attacks. Having failed to infiltrate the Fenian ranks, the police could only offer increasingly larger monetary awards in the hopes of eliciting information—though it later emerged that the spy "Le Caron" had helped capture no less than twenty-five bombers (Melchiori 17 and Curran 751-52).

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Given this prevalence of Fenian terrorism, it comes as a great surprise that there are few conspiracy narratives from this period that focus on the Fenians. The reason, according to Melchiori, is simple:

> The real fear of the middle-class writers was, as Henry James so clearly shows [in *The Princess Casamassima*], a fear of what was felt to be an inevitable and impending class struggle. The Irish question was only one aspect of this, confused by religious issues and conveniently isolated across the Irish Sea. What the novelist was tending to do was to take the popular fear of explosions, with their threat to life and property, and to canalise this fear so as to build up resistance to the whole socialist movement, which was rapidly growing at this time. (9)

This "whole socialist movement," consequently, also subsumed other revolutionary groups in England, among them the anarchists and the Russian Nihilists. Yet each of these groups, writes Melchiori, operated in a rather distinct way and in response to a very particular set of circumstances. The Fenians attacked public *buildings* and emerged from the background discussed above (7). The Nihilists, who opposed the autocratic practices of the Russian rulers, attacked public *figures*—the assassination of Czar Alexander II on March 13, 1881 being their most successful operation (23). The Socialists, under the aegis of the Social Democratic Federation, embodied an *internal* protest movement consisting of unemployed workers and avoided terrorist activities, relying instead on mass demonstrations and the "traditional aggression of stone throwing and window breaking" (Melchiori 9, 32, 52). Finally, the anarchists formed a different revolutionary group altogether. Their methods seemed much more ruthless (including random bomb-throwing), but, notes Bernard Porter, "[n]ative British anarchists were seldom involved at

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all in violent acts, apart from the Walsall factory, and Oscar Wilde's poor half-mad friend Barlas, who fired a gun in the direction of the Houses of Parliament on the last day of 1891" (*Origins* 103). Some in the British public did fear that the anarchists might win the race "to conquer the air" or release some form of disease into the air or water supply, but the real possibility of such acts was limited to the most extreme anarchists who, unlike their colleagues, believed in "indiscriminate and wholesale murder, in order to terrify." This latter branch of anarchists, however, generally lived abroad and, with the notable exception of the bungled Greenwich bomb which inspired Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, also performed most of their acts abroad (*Origins* 101ff).

Yet the presence of these various groups, whether substantially active or not, did influence the public (and British fiction writers), especially as the aims of the groups were not always well understood. As Porter and Melchiori both observe, there was a tendency for the British public to confuse all these movements. Both *The Times* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*, for instance, ignored dissent in and among these groups, and instead devoted considerable space to the revolutionary conferences in Paris and Zurich which included delegations from various revolutionary groups, all apparently working towards the same ends. This confusion, in turn, was mirrored by novelists and novels such as *The Princess Casamassima* which, asserts Melchiori, readily confuses "the external Fenian threat with internal social protest" (Melchiori 6-9 and Porter, *Origins* 105). Richard Deacon notes that the British police had similar problems. As late as the early twentieth century, for example, the police were still confusing the anarchists and the nascent Bolsheviks (167ff). Consequently, this wide-spread confusion developed in the British public to the point that there emerged a vague but prevalent "sense of an international

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conspiracy for the overthrow of the Establishment" (Melchiori 9). The situation also contributed to a number of what might be called uncharacteristic moves on the part of British law enforcement. These included employing an *agent provocateur* (a figure who first infiltrates then attempts to spur a suspect group to illegal acts in order to secure their arrest) so as to catch the anarchists involved with the Walsall bomb-factory, and using impersonation so as to expose and disband the anarchist-patronized Legitimation League, an organization which advocated free-love and worked to reform the marriage laws (see Oliver 77-82 and Porter, *Origins* 100).

As the turn of the century approached these fears were augmented by another, more serious threat—that of invasion. I.F. Clarke points to three sources as the origin of this fear: concern regarding the intentions of the French (and later the Germans) towards England, the acceleration of the arms race coupled with doubts about the strength of the British navy, and the fact that "the citizens of the first great technological nations had contained and codified their experience of incessant change within the new practice of future-watching" (5). One of the forms this codification took was the invasion-scare narrative. George Chesney's "The Battle of Dorking," which scholars generally regard as the first such narrative, appeared in 1871, and by the century's end these narratives became increasingly common. The invasion fear was also exacerbated by the Boer War which "quickly put a spotlight on the shortcomings of Intelligence in the British ranks," and a prevailing belief was that Britain's next enemy might be a substantially larger nation than the Boers, such as France, Germany or, perhaps, Russia (Beacon 147 and Porter, *Plots* 120-21). Of course, a significant portion of the British population still believed in the nation's supremacy and Britain did sign treaties with France in 1904 and

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Russia in 1907, as well as make efforts to promote better relations with Germany. Yet the fear of invasion continued to loom. Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany, for example, felt great animosity towards his uncle, the King of England, and it was well-known that the British Secret Service lagged behind those of France, Germany and even the United States (Porter, *Plots* 121, Stafford 495-96, Clarke 11, Kestner 11 and Deacon 146). Spy fiction, another literary genre which came to the fore in this period, also took up these themes. Spy fiction, writes Michael Denning, was both a "symptom" of Britain's crisis and an attempt at resolving it, at least in the popular imagination. The spy story also inverted the nineteenth-century imperialist adventure story out of which it developed. Spy fiction exhibited the "shift from an assertive, confident and expansionist genre to an increasingly, even paranoid, genre stressing vigilance and protection against invasion" (Denning 38-41). Or, as Joseph A. Kestner argues, the Edwardian period was marked by "doubt, uncertainty, complication and indeterminacy"—states which spy fiction mirrored by its repudiation of closure (Kestner 24, cf. Trodd 16).

All the above, however, should not imply that Britain easily submitted to these threats, internal and external. In the period in question, there occurred a significant expansion of British law enforcement and intelligence, albeit an expansion hampered by some serious issues and incidents. Although the Detective Department began with a staff of eight, by the time of Commissioner Mayne's death in 1868 the Department had grown to fifteen and under the new Commissioner, Edmund Henderson, it increased to 260. Henderson also worked to implement a more decentralized power structure (Ousby 129 and Smith 198-99). Even the notorious "Turf Fraud" case of 1877, in which five detectives were convicted of fraud and forgery, ultimately had beneficial results in terms

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of developing the detective force. Home Secretary Richard Assheton Cross appointed a commission to investigate the department and this commission, while locating a number of problems (including detective overwork and failures in transmitting and containing information), did lead to the reorganization of the detectives into the much more bureaucratic Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in 1878 (Petrow 93-95). Conversely, despite these improvements, the public reputation of the detectives was tarnished by incidents such as the Turf Fraud case, Fenian bombings, a series of murders in 1872-73, and, most famously, the Jack the Ripper incidents of 1888 (Ousby 128-30 and Porter, *Origins* 132). In addition, CID was also susceptible to a number of internal problems, among them the continuing possibility of corruption. Howard Vincent, for example, the first Director of CID, complained of the difficulty in keeping a consistent and prolonged watch on a large number of detectives working over a wide area. Similarly, the detectives' own connections with the criminal underworld, especially in the use of informers, brought them into precarious relations with the criminals (Petrow 95-99 and 103). The detectives' work habits were also frowned upon by the British public which disapproved of spying and "undercover" investigations (see Chapter Four). Yet already in the time of Vincent, the detectives were encouraged to collaborate with informers; the detectives occasionally resorted to *agent provocateurs* as in the Walsall incident; and later commissioners such as Edward Bradford and Edward Henry (both of whom had worked with Britain's police force in India) were "willing to condone more secretive methods, if necessary without the approval of the Home Secretaries" (Petrow 97ff). Over time, therefore, the detectives more and more engaged in espionage-like activities—as

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opposed to the old police method of prevention by public visibility—and a novel like *The Secret Agent* demonstrates that writers soon picked up on this development.

Another law enforcement institution that significantly expanded during the late-Victorian period was the Special Branch, first called the Special Irish Branch. As the original name suggests, the Special Branch initially arose (in 1883) in response to the Fenian bombings. Bernard Porter, however, points to a second cause:

> It was to do with the old problem of political refugees in Britain, which flared up again after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in St. Petersburg on 13 March 1881. No refugees in England were involved in that crime, so far as anyone could tell; but the existence of Britain as a safe asylum for men and women of this stamp was widely regarded on the Continent as unhelpful to foreign governments in their efforts to counter political violence generally. Consequently the tsar's assassination led to pressure on Britain, direct and indirect, to modify her asylum policy in some way. (*Plots* 102)

Among these refugees significantly active groups included those from Russia, France and Germany. In terms of the Fenians, the Special Branch's duties were rather straightforward: to keep Irish militants under surveillance, to investigate on behalf of the Irish government and to protect the Queen and her ministers (Deacon 104-05). With the collapse of Parnell's political career in 1891 and the general, if temporary, demoralization of the Irish cause, the Special Branch's interests shifted to the revolutionary and anarchist groups and the word *Irish* dropped out of the name. In this new area, the Special Branch's mission was somewhat more ill-defined. It's main role was not so much to protect Britain "as to help safeguard neighbors who might be less fortunate—more vulnerable to

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anarchist crime—than herself" (Porter, *Plots 118*). The role included sharing pertinent information with other nations, keeping Britain-based anarchists under extensive surveillance, prosecuting revolutionaries for seditious libel (as happened in the case of the Russian Vladimir Burtsev), and sometimes using "unlawful" methods such as searching residences without a warrant or intercepting letters (*Plots* 116-17). Yet, simultaneously, these activities had to be carried out without seeming to compromise Britain's principle of public asylum and without giving the impression that foreign governments were dictating Britain's political agenda (Porter, *Origins* 112-13). What is impressive, therefore, is that in the 1880s and 1890s the Special Branch was successful in most of its efforts: the Fenian dynamite threat died out, Britain remained immune to the anarchist activity that plagued the rest of Europe, and Britain's attempts towards controlling the refugees satisfied the demands of foreign governments (*Origins* 125-29).

The same historical incidents and forces which gave rise to spy fiction and invasion-scare narratives also contributed to the development of another British intelligence agency. As already noted, turn-of-the-century events (such as the Boer War) underscored Britain's deficiencies in counter-espionage. Consequently, a sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence (which itself was established in 1902) recommended creating a new intelligence organization which would provide a military supplement to the Naval Intelligence Department (Deacon 156-57). This organization, the famous M.I.5, was originally intended to perform both domestic counter-espionage and espionage abroad (M.I.6 later assumed the latter duty) and, although the government at first gave M.I.5 only lukewarm support, the agency soon began to thrive under the leadership of Captain Vernon Kell. In addition, developments such as the initiation of the

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Alien's Register (in 1911) and the passing of the Official Secrets Act (also in 1911) which served as a measure to control the disclosure of government information, assisted Kell's work (*Plots* 125-27). Kell, a polyglot and figure of cosmopolitan background who had seen service in China's Boxer Rebellion, also thoroughly understood the gravity of the German threat because of his previous experience in the German section of the War Office. As a result, soon after assuming his post he uncovered—using such tactics as surveillance and letter-opening—an elaborate German spy network that stretched over Britain, and in a dramatic sweep arrested twenty-one out of twenty-two of these spies on the day Britain declared war, August 4, 1914 (Deacon 157ff and Porter, *Plots* 128-29).

In concluding this section of my chapter, I want to emphasize two major trends evident in the historical events just narrated. Both these trends contributed to the proliferation and differentiation of British conspiracy fiction in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods. First, there was a general rise in the presence and activities of revolutionary groups in England. Second, in response to these groups (as well as the fear of invasion) British law enforcement and intelligence forces also expanded. This latter development, however, came at some cost to what might be called British public morality. As noted, in mid- to late-Victorian Britain there was a prevailing dislike of espionage. Yet such a tactic proved necessary in combating threats like the Fenians, the anarchists or Germany. Consequently, as David T.A. Stafford has argued, one result was the weakening of "traditional" British values, especially as Victorians gradually and generally came to accept espionage or at least turned a blind-eye to the use of such tactics as *agent provocateurs* (Stafford 506-07, cf. Porter, *Origins* 130-33). The increased use of espionage tactics also signaled a shift in Britain's political orientation. Whereas before the

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prevailing belief had been that liberal capitalism was compatible with liberal democracy—hence making illiberal expedients like espionage unnecessary—at the turn-of-the-century this belief began to disintegrate and an anti-liberal reaction (one which approved of espionage) set in (Porter, *Plots* 123-24). The result was the institutionalization of espionage and, hence, the passing of such laws as the Aliens Act of 1905 (which gave the Home Secretary power to deport undesirable aliens), and British interference with such ventures as the Legitimation League or, even as early as 1881, the prosecution of Johann Most—later a model for Hoffendahl in *The Princess Casamassima*—for publishing seditious articles in support of the Nihilists in the *Freiheit* newspaper (Porter, "*Freiheit*" passim).

* * *

I now turn to my survey of late-Victorian and Edwardian conspiracy fiction. I indicated earlier that by the beginning of the twentieth century such fiction had begun to proliferate and, if we follow a critic like Stephen Arata, we can trace this proliferation along distinct lines: invasion-scare, dynamite and reverse colonization narratives (Arata's trio) and spy fiction. However, in some cases (a number of which I shall consider here) these genre distinctions—whatever their superficial validity—become invalid. In some conspiracy narratives various types of conspiracies appear side by side and even become entangled. This, I suggested, is exactly the point. As I have suggested or implied elsewhere, conspiracy theory narratives usually depict a conspiracy that defies genre categorization (e.g., only a foreign invader, only a revolutionary group within the country) and location (operating in London, etc.) because the conspiracy is *everywhere*, because it has grown to the extent of being *generalized*, potentially *indeterminate*, and, as

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Michel Foucault would argue, even *beyond the conscious control or knowledge* of its conspirators. These elements, from one perspective, are what make the conspiracy theorist so "paranoid": the conspiracy could be anywhere, anyone could be involved, its size seems even to exceed comprehension—it has what Kant would call sublime proportions. Therefore, given these characteristics, what I am suggesting is that the conspiracy theory narrative mode ultimately develops from the proliferation of conspiracy narratives (as happens in the late-Victorian period) and from the proliferation/fusion of various conspiracies within these narratives. Of course, I do not deny the existence of formulaic conspiracy genres (such as spy fiction) which evolved alongside the phenomenon of conspiracy theory—numerous critics, most notably John G. Cawelti and Bruce A. Rosenberg, have demonstrated that such formulaic conspiracy fiction exists and that it operates according to fixed rules. Rather in what follows I want to emphasize a number of literary moments which break away from these formulae.

To begin this project I propose first to rearrange and revise Arata's conspiracy categories. In this chapter, therefore, I shall divide late-Victorian/Edwardian conspiracy fiction into three types. The first of these types, to which I will devote the most space, is the "revolutionary conspiracy" narrative. Superficially this type of narrative depicts a specific group (e.g., anarchists, Nihilists) or a generalized group (the lower-class masses) in its attempts to overthrow the existing "social order" or a specific government such as that of Russia. The second of these narrative types, to which I shall also devote a fair amount of space, is the "espionage" narrative. The term *espionage* generally signifies one of two things. On one hand, there is "espionage" as it appears in the mid-Victorian novel

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meaning "observation or surveillance" (see Chapters Two and Four).[1] On the other, modern "espionage" comes to cover a broader concept which might be defined as "the surreptitious attempts of one government to steal the secrets, infiltrate the power structure or monitor the military/political activities of another government, with the implied or overt final goal of self-defense, invasion or political domination." Yet in the narratives I will consider here I shall be dealing primarily with a transitional form of espionage which I call "early-modernist" and which may be defined thus: "either a foreign power attempts to invade the host country (with spies) so as to steal its secrets and is thwarted, *or* the foreign power succeeds in infiltrating the host country and/or stealing its secrets." Early-modernist espionage, therefore, subsumes invasion-scare and reverse colonization narratives as well as early spy fiction. The third type of conspiracy narrative I shall examine, albeit briefly, I call "the criminal mastermind" conspiracy narrative, which I designate with the assumption that a mastermind necessarily implies a conspiracy to do his bidding. In addition, in this final case I shall not explore a type of conspiracy narrative as much as use the section (as an excuse) to investigate the fictional depiction of one exemplary mastermind, Professor Moriarty, and the narrative indeterminacy that pervades the two Sherlock Holmes short stories in which Moriarty and his gang appear.

Revolutionary Conspiracies

Barbara Melchiori's *Terrorism in the Late Victorian Novel* remains the primer for this type of conspiracy narrative (however we demarcate its boundaries). Melchiori heroically wades through an array of these conspiracy narratives and her specific chapters

[1] This and each of the following espionage definitions, though placed in quotations, are my own.

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target such categories as Dynamite Romances, the Nihilists, Anarchist Theory and Poetry, the Irish Question and Social Protest novels. She also provides a useful, albeit short, bibliography of revolutionary novels and it serves the conspiracy-minded reader well to at least peruse her book. Such comprehensiveness is, of course, beyond the scope of the present study and I shall here limit my discussion to six works, beginning with a brief return to Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*. As I argued in Chapters Three and Four, *The Woman in White* is a key narrative in the history of conspiracy fiction because of its depiction of the Italian "Brotherhood." The Brotherhood, as Professor Pesca describes it, is a vast organization that operates in England, Italy and elsewhere. Its goal is "the destruction of tyranny and the assertion of the rights of the people"; members join by taking an irrevocable oath (and also receive a brand on the arm); and, as Walter Hartright learns, the organization always finds and takes revenge on traitors such as Count Fosco. In addition, although the Brotherhood has a president, it is structured in such a way that it retains some level of member anonymity and, as the case of Pesca best demonstrates, it operates through the use of "sleeper cells." Finally, in Chapter Three I argued that the Brotherhood might be in England in order to open a dialogue with other revolutionary groups such as the Fenians (who don't appear in Collins novel), but given the Melchiori argument cited earlier, it is just as likely that the Brotherhood has displaced the Fenians, a.k.a. The Irish Revolutionary *Brotherhood*, in Collins' novel. Certainly, the Brotherhood's organization and use of an oath resembles the configuration that the historical Fenians used in structuring their group (see Williams 92-93 and Smith 184).

I have returned to *The Woman in White*, however, for two reasons. First, I again wanted to touch on the relation of Collins' revolutionary group to the historical Fenians,

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given the information I added at the outset of this chapter (see previous paragraph). Second, I also wanted to suggest that Collins' book serves as a paradigm for a number of revolutionary conspiracy narratives I will discuss hereafter. For example, in *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), Henry James designs his vast, international and unnamed conspiracy in a way that substantially resembles Collins' Brotherhood. Further, as with the Fosco-Glyde conspiracy in *The Woman in White*, James' novel also has a second, lesser conspiracy—one again tied to the first. This lesser conspiracy in James' novel, more a "conspiratorial" group than an actual organization capable of carrying out political or criminal acts, consists of lower-class workers who meet at the "Sun and Moon" revolutionary club. This group engages in little more than "palaver" and their meetings usually end with each man making an "ass" of himself, "thumping the table and repeating over some inane phrase which appeared for the hour to constitute the whole furniture of his mind" (280). The character known as Delancey provides a typical example: "His opinions were distinct and frequently expressed; he had a watery (Muniment had once called it a soda-watery) eye, and a personal aversion to a lord. He desired to change everything except religion, of which he approved" (290). The one time in the novel when this group attempts to do something it operates more like a disoriented rabble than any kind of focused conspiracy, wanting "to go out somewhere and smash something, on the spot—why not?—that very night" (291). The members of the Sun and Moon, therefore, serve as a venue for James' irony and parody the revolutionary impulse in a way akin to *The Secret Agent* or *The Man Who Was Thursday* (more below).

The novel's other conspiracy, that controlled by the German mastermind Hoffendahl, is more significant—a vast, international and potentially earth-shaking affair.

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In describing it James points to "an immense underworld" and uses language that is especially apocalyptic and *serious*:

> "In silence, in darkness, but under the feet of each one of us, the revolution lives and works. It is a wonderful, immeasurable trap, on the lid of which society performs its antics. When once the machinery is complete, there will be a great rehearsal.[. . .] The invisible, impalpable wires are everywhere, passing through everything, attaching themselves to objects in which one would never think of looking for them. What could be more strange and incredible, for instance, than that they should exist just here" (330)

The description, though hyperbolic, is striking; Hoffendahl's conspiracy seems to have an almost unlimited presence in a way that powerfully foreshadows narratives like Borges' "The Babylon Lottery" or Foucault's *Discipline and Punish.* Of course, critics have argued that James' effusive language here demonstrates his lack of genuine political knowledge (see Scanlan 382-83), but Christine DeVine notes that many of James' ideas also derive from contemporary newspaper accounts of the social unrest that pervaded the country in 1885-86 and from press descriptions of the revolutionary groups in England (56ff). In addition, a number of conspiracy narrative developments converge or appear in the character of Hoffendahl. As a German who brings a potentially malignant movement into England, Hoffendahl's work foreshadows both invasion-scare and spy fiction, while his role as the center of "a very large plan [. . .] something that was to be done simultaneously in a dozen different countries" allows him to orchestrate a Providence-like "immense coincidence" (334), and so sets him in the position of a Hidden Hand or mastermind-type figure on the order of Professor Moriarty.

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The larger significance of *The Princess Casamassima*, however, lies in its irony, a concept that can't be explored without considering the novel's central character. *The Princess Casamassima,* despite its title, traces the life of the frail and aptly-named Hyacinth Robinson from his early childhood to the point of his suicide, which he commits rather than realize the conspiratorial vow he has made to Hoffendahl. Hyacinth is the natural son of the English Lord Frederick Purvis and the French seamstress Florentine Vivier, whose own father, Hyacinth's grandfather, took part in the French revolution. Hyacinth thus has an "extraordinarily mingled current in his blood," one that splits both in terms of class (165) and nation (127). Margaret Scanlan notes that James uses Hyacinth both as a mirror of himself—the two share "a facility with the French language, a propensity for agonizingly platonic relationships with women, a reverence for the monuments of high culture, and a distaste for the smudges and smells of poverty"—and as a means to explore the tension between revolutionary groups and the high culture these groups want to subvert (385). In addition, adds Scanlan, that Hyacinth is half-French and not half-Irish is because James disliked the Fenians and saw the French as the exemplary revolutionary nation (383-84). Whatever the case, in the novel Hyacinth attempts to pursue each of his callings—the lower-class/French/revolutionary (through his conspiratorial oath to assassinate a prominent political figure) and the upper-class/English/conservative (by abandoning the social struggle for the high culture of the Princess's world and of Paris)—and fails in both endeavors. For instance, though Hyacinth dreams of "literary distinction" as a means of contributing to high culture, he ultimately remains "a wretched little bookbinder" (112) whose ambition stalls at "doing his little piece of work" (266). Similarly, as a revolutionist he lacks the necessary ironic

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disposition—as the Princess and Paul Muniment agree, Hyacinth is "deplorably conventional" because he takes things "seriously" (500).

The Princess Casamassima and Paul Muniment, thus, come to serve as foils to Hyacinth because of the irony they exhibit towards the revolution. On one hand, Muniment's profession as a chemist symbolically associates him with dynamite (Melchiori 34) and he may also be a precursor to the bomb-wielding Professor in Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. Further, James also emphasizes a number of Muniment's other "revolutionary" characteristics, many of which distinguish him from Hyacinth. Muniment's robust "workman"-like appearance markedly contrasts with Hyacinth's frailty and James frequently notes Muniment's intelligence, his "tremendous head" and the idea that Muniment is an exceptional figure, one set apart to be a revolutionary leader (see 127-28). He is both popular and respected at the revolutionary Sun and Moon club and he has connections to the much more significant Hoffendahl conspiracy. As a result, in Hyacinth's eyes Paul Muniment becomes a "fine embodiment of the spirit of the people" (446) and he elicits Hyacinth's esteem: "he had the greatest expectations of Paul Muniment's future; he was sure that the world would hear of him, that England would feel him, that the public, some day, would acclaim him" (217). In Hyacinth's conception, Muniment is a very promising revolutionary, a figure much of the kind that Hyacinth at first aspires to be. On the other hand, Muniment seems to resist his natural calling:

> Simple and kindly as he was, and thoughtful of the woes of beasts, attentive and merciful to small insects, and addicted even to kissing dirty babies in Audley Court, he sometimes emitted a short satiric gleam which showed that his esteem for the poor was small and that if he had no illusions about the people who had

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got everything into their hands he had as few about those who had egregiously failed to do so. (391)

Muniment displays an ironic detachment from the revolutionary cause which allows him perspective (unlike the sober Hyacinth), but which also allows him to be cold and calculating as when he betrays Hyacinth or declares that he will use the Princess only as long as her money holds out (see 577-81).

James' use of irony also emerges in his depiction of the Princess. The overt trajectory of the Princess's development runs exactly counter to that of Hyacinth: she abandons her position of wealth in order to join the revolution. In this respect she repeatedly invokes her earnestness, e.g., "Try me, test me; ask me to put my hand to something [. . .]" (453); and, as Hyacinth discovers, her "personal passion" arises from her unfavorable experiences with the Italian aristocracy. As a result, despite Hyacinth's oath, the Princess goes farther into the revolution than he ever does. She thoroughly extends "her revolutionary connection," she corresponds with Hoffendahl, and she even seems to assume the position of a revolutionary mastermind: "she held in her hand some of the strings that are pulled in great movements" (486). Yet this dedication notwithstanding, like Muniment the Princess ultimately takes an ironic stance towards the revolution. James constantly foregrounds the fact that the Princess is an aristocrat performing the role of revolutionary. To cite a few examples: she never foregoes her title; to Hyacinth "her present phase" is "little more than a brilliant *tour de force*" (418); Madame Grandoni, the Princess's elder companion, mocks her feigned poverty; and Muniment in his final conversation with the Princess assures her that she will return to her aristocratic husband (578ff). As a result, though the figures of Muniment and the

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Princess as well as in his depiction of the members of the Sun and Moon, James injects an element of irony into what might otherwise be a straightforward and "serious" conspiracy narrative on the order of *The Woman in White* or *Great Expectations.*

From *The Princess Casamassima* I want to move forward to Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* (1911). Although some twenty-five years separate this novel from James' work, I shall group the two together (along with *The Woman in White*) because of the generally *un*-ironic manner in which each of these novels depicts its central conspiracy. In particular, *Under Western Eyes* presents the subversive work of a group of Nihilists (headed by Peter Ivanovitch and the macabre Madame de S.) against the Russian government and lays a heavy emphasis on what Conrad calls "cynicism." According to Conrad, the Nihilists revolt because they feel that Russian politics necessitate it: "'The degradation of servitude, the absolutist lies must be uprooted and swept out. Reform is impossible. There is nothing to reform. There is no legality, there are no institutions. There are only arbitrary decrees. There is only a handful of cruel—perhaps blind—officials against a nation'" (112). It is a conspiracy, therefore, with a serious and humanitarian goal. Conrad contrasts this disposition with the perception of the "Europeans of the West" for whom "all ideas of political plots and conspiracies seem childish, crude inventions for the theatre or a novel" (92). The Nihilists, in other words, cannot afford the kind of irony that a figure like Paul Muniment or the Princess Casamassima take towards revolution. Conrad even suggests that the Nihilists may not be capable of it: "Whenever two Russians come together, the shadow of autocracy is with them, tingeing their thoughts, their views, their most intimate feelings, their private life, their public utterances—haunting the secret of their silences" (90). Autocracy is ingrained

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into the Russia soul in such a way that it cannot be ironically evaded. *Under Western Eyes* thus becomes an attempt to define this "shadow of autocracy" for the West: "for this is a Russian story for Western ears, which, as I have observed already, are not attuned to certain tones of cynicism and cruelty, of moral negation, and even of moral distress already silenced at our end of Europe" (138). In this way, Conrad contrasts Russian "cynicism and cruelty" and what might be called Western "optimism" (more below).

That said, I turn to Conrad's Nihilist conspiracy itself. Conrad first introduces this conspiracy in the opening scene of the novel. This scene depicts the successful assassination (with dynamite) of Mr. de P., "the President of the notorious Repressive Commission." The attack is carried out by an unnamed peasant and one Victor Haldin who is later captured by the Russian police, interrogated, tortured and killed. Through the assassination Haldin assumes heroic proportions in the eyes of his fellow conspirators and the act comes to serve as the novel's symbol of courage in the face of tyranny. In the span of the novel, incidentally, it is the only terrorist act that the Nihilists carry out successfully—though they also take part in what turns out to be "an abortive military conspiracy in Russia" (see 276ff). Instead in exploring this group Conrad shifts his emphasis from acts of the conspirators to a look into the inner workings of the conspiracy. Like Hoffendahl's movement, the Nihilist conspiracy takes on international proportions and we hear of the conspiracy operating in America, Zurich, Dresden, Geneva, Prussia, Saxony, Würtenberg and Stuttgart. However, although the last-named is one of Europe's "revolutionary centres" (164), the novel's primary conspiratorial action centers on Geneva—on the run-down Château Borel (the "mystic revolutionary salon" of Madame de S.) and on the meetings that occur in the apartment of the conspirator Julius Laspara. It

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is in these places that the array of Nihilist conspirators congregates. Their number includes "revolutionist members of committees, secret emissaries, vulgar and unmannerly fugitive professors, rough students, ex-cobblers with apostolic faces, consumptive and ragged enthusiasts, Hebrew youths, common fellows of all sorts"—or as the narrator designates them, "fanatics, pedants, proletarians all" (184). Like James, Conrad constructs a conspiracy comprised mainly of members from the lower-classes.

Yet Conrad's novel is curious in that along with a fierce denouncement of the Russian autocrats, it also offers a harsh critique of the revolutionaries—a critique surprisingly prophetic given the real Bolshevik revolution that would follow Conrad's novel by only a few years. The critique appears most succinctly in the "Author's Note":

> The ferocity and imbecility of an autocratic rule rejecting all legality and in fact basing itself upon complete moral anarchism provokes the no less imbecile and atrocious answer of a purely Utopian revolutionism encompassing destruction by the first means to hand, in the strange conviction that a fundamental change of hearts must follow the downfall of any given human institutions. These people are unable to see that all they can effect is merely a change of names. (lxi)

To Conrad revolution and autocracy are alternate sides of the same coin and in the novel he underscores this interchangeability. On one hand, he offers a fleeting but suggestive glimpse into Russia's counter-revolutionary forces such as the police and military. There is the merciless General T. whose "automatic smile" has "an air of jovial, careless cruelty" (36) and who embodies "the whole power of autocracy [. . .] the incarnate suspicion, the incarnate anger, the incarnate ruthlessness of a political and social régime on its defence" (70). There is Councillor Mikulin, General T.'s right-hand man, the mastermind

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responsible for Russia's "general police supervision over Europe," and a character who offers "a display of bureaucratic stoicism in a Russian official's ineradicable, almost sublime contempt for truth" (258). There is also the mercenary Nikita, whom Conrad himself calls "the perfect flower of the terroristic wilderness" (lxi) and who sells his services both to the Russian police *and* the Nihilists, carrying out brutal murder "in both camps" (320). On the other hand, the leaders of the Nihilists emerge in no better a light. Peter Ivanovitch, for example, "the noble arch-priest of the Revolution" (177) and the figure whose autobiography (which details his grueling escape from a Russian prison and subsequent rescue by "the people") provides the ideological heart of the Nihilist conspiracy, seems no better an individual than his companion Madame de S. whose true nature appears best in her demeanor: "The immovable peevishness of the face, framed in the limp, rusty lace, had a character of cruelty.[. . .] Her rigidity was frightful, like the rigour of a corpse galvanized into harsh speech and glittering stare by the force of murderous hate" (187-88). Such depictions, therefore, complicate—if not disintegrate—whatever line there may have been between revolution and counter-revolution, and Conrad's novel becomes as much a tale of revolution as of counter-revolution and, as regards my larger argument, of the *espionage* strategies used by the counter-revolution.

Under Western Eyes takes as its central focus the career of Kirylo Sidorovitch Razumov, a figure who becomes a counter-revolutionary spy (similar to Count Fosco), and much of the narrative is in fact based on the journal that Razumov keeps during his time as a spy. Surprisingly, Razumov begins the novel in a situation that echoes that of Hyacinth Robinson. Razumov is the natural son of a Russian aristocrat and, as it emerges, despite his illegitimate status he still pledges loyalty to the Russia aristocracy/autocracy:

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History not Theory.

Patriotism not Internationalism.

Evolution not Revolution.

Direction not Destruction.

Unity not Disruption. (54)

Soon after he betrays Haldin and just before Councillor Mikulin's question of "Where to?" drives him to become a spy, Razumov writes this incredible set of mnemonics and tacks it to his wall. In addition, like Hyacinth, Razumov also seems to be a figure of limited ambition, due in part to his poverty. He lives a regulated life, one industrious in its own way, and—though he envisions distinction as a "celebrated professor"—he ultimately selects "obscurantism" over "the light of incendiary torches" (27). Haldin's decision to take refuge in Razumov's rooms, however, alters the course of the latter's life. As noted, Razumov betrays Haldin, joins the counter-revolution, then travels to Geneva to spy on the Nihilists at the Château Borel. It is there that he meets Peter Ivanovitch and Madame de S. as well as Haldin's sister and mother, all of whom (unsuspectingly) revere Razumov as the friend of Haldin and a hero in his own right. Although I cannot go much farther into Razumov's character, I should note that it is while spying in Geneva that Razumov's conscience finally overwhelms him. He develops a sort of monomania in remembering the night on which he betrayed Haldin and he, Razumov, begins to fear that the Nihilists have discovered his secret. As a result, in the end Razumov experiences a guilt-ridden (and rather Doestoyevskian) mental collapse, one incidentally which recalls the fates of such diverse conspirators as the Macbeths, Arthur Havisham in *Great Expectations* and Sir Percival Glyde in *The Woman in White*.

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Yet Conrad's ultimate vision of revolution and counter-revolution in *Under Western Eyes* is not without its redeeming moments. One need look no further than the self-sacrifice and inherent heroism in Victor Haldin's act. There is also the figure of Sophia Antonovna whose climactic encounter with Razumov occurs two-thirds of the way through the novel. Antonovna offers a radically different vision of revolution from that advocated by Ivanovitch and Madame de S.: "'There are a lot of us who have been at work for fifteen years—I mean constantly—trying one way or another, underground and above ground, looking neither to the right nor the left! I can talk about it. I have been one of those that never rested. . . . There! What's the use of talking. . . Look at my grey hairs!'" (207). Antonovna embodies revolution in its most benevolent and resilient aspect. To Razumov Antonovna also suggests a "revolutionary" purity that other conspirators lack: "She was much more representative than the great Peter Ivanovitch. Stripped of rhetoric, mysticism, and theories, she was the true spirit of the destructive revolution" (220). Antonovna becomes the type of figure that might most effectively destroy Russia's autocracy and so pave the way for a better future. Conrad also uses Antonovna to critique revolutionary women like the Princess Casamassima or Madam de S., both of whose final interests turn out to be self-serving or highly suspect. Antonovna comes from a working-class background and the "tormented existence" of her father (himself an exploited laborer) serves as the primary cause of her revolutionary tendencies. Thus, Antonovna attains a unique and intense identification with the revolution, one untouched by irony. "'Life,'" she tells Razumov, "'not to be vile must be a revolt—a pitiless protest—all the time" (219). Because of her dedication and impassioned self-negation it is, thus, Antonovna who becomes the most insurmountable obstacle in Razumov's developing

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career as a spy. His discussion with her significantly undermines his belief in the autocratic doctrines he has hitherto followed. In addition, Antonovna's presence serves to foreground Conrad's complex achievement in *Under Western Eyes*—a critique of revolution and the espionage of autocracy and a gesture towards redeeming the revolutionary spirit both from Western irony and Russia's debilitating "cynicism."

Given the course of my discussion I think it appropriate now to turn to a few "revolutionary" narratives that partake (if only partially) of the ironic conspiracy tradition. The first of these, Conrad's short story "The Informer: An Ironic Tale" (1906), was published as part of Conrad's *A Set of Six* collection and asserts its irony in the very title. Coming one year before *The Secret Agent* and five years before *Under Western Eyes* the story serves as a prototype for both. The "tale" comes from a Mr. X (as recounted by an unnamed narrator) and describes the activities of a group of anarchists operating out of a government building on the fictional Hermione Street in London. These activities are limited but typical. The anarchists run a printing press and produce "revolutionary literature of the most inflammatory kind." They also produce explosives (which they distribute from the building using Stone's Dried Soup tins as a diversion), and have dug their way into the vaults of a public building (which they are planning to blow up) adjacent to theirs. As in *The Princess Casamassima* and *Under Western Eyes*, there is also an aristocratic woman involved, one Lady Amateur, who along with her brother joins the anarchist cause because it's the fashionable thing to do: "She had acquired all the appropriate gestures of revolutionary convictions—the gestures of pity, of anger, of indignation against the anti-humanitarian vices of the social class to which she belonged herself."

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Conrad's story, however, is more a yarn than a serious work and gains its significance, I offer, primarily from two components. The first of these are the characters Sevrin, the "informer" of the title, and the Professor. The Professor will reappear (under the same name) in *The Secret Agent*; here his presence is limited. He produces explosives for the anarchists and Conrad gives us only a few important details: "His was the true spirit of an extreme revolutionist. Explosives were his faith, his hope, his weapon, and his shield. He perished a couple of years afterwards in a secret laboratory through the premature explosion of one of his improved detonators." Like Sophia Antonovna and Paul Muniment, in "The Informer" the Professor represents the true revolutionist. In addition, unlike the Professor in the *Secret Agent* whose threat Conrad leaves open and even celebrates at end of that novel (see below), here Conrad does away with the Professor in one sentence. Sevrin as an "informer" offers the prototype for Razumov and, perhaps, Verloc in *The Secret Agent*. Sevrin is a spy for the police and his presence transforms the tale from a simple dynamite yarn to one about dynamite and espionage.

The second, more significant component is the story's overt irony. As in James' depiction of the Sun and Moon conspirators, there is a sense throughout Conrad's story that he is making fun of the anarchists he describes. This disposition emerges most through the tale's unnamed narrator who recounts a burgeoning friendship with Mr. X, an anarchist met through a mutual friend. On one hand, Mr. X is a famous writer like Peter Ivanovitch: "He is the greatest rebel (*révolté*) of modern times. The world knows him as a revolutionary writer whose savage irony has laid bare the rottenness of the most respectable institutions. He has scalped every venerated head and has mangled at the stake of his wit every received opinion and every recognized principle of conduct and policy.

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Who does not remember his flaming red revolutionary pamphlets?" On the other hand, in a way that suggests James' depiction of Hoffendahl or Doyle's of Professor Moriarty, Conrad sets Mr. X at the center of numerous conspiracies: "But this extreme writer has been also the active inspirer of secret societies, the mysterious unknown Number One of desperate conspiracies suspected and unsuspected, matured or baffled. And the world at large has never had an inkling of the fact!" In Conrad's depiction, Mr. X becomes at once a Hidden Hand and an Inaccessible Authority. More importantly, because of his writings Mr. X has become quite wealthy and so is a "rare monster," one who could easily pass for "Vicomte X de la Z if he chose"—so well dressed is he, so refined, such a connoisseur of good food (the narrator and he share many a fine dinner). The narrator's friendship with Mr. X also offers a unique opportunity to resolve some nagging questions: "Does a man of that—of that—persuasion still remain an anarchist when alone, quite alone and going to bed, for instance? Does he lay his head on the pillow, pull his bedclothes over him, and go to sleep with the necessity of the *chambardement général* as the French slang has it, of the general blow-up, always present to his mind? And if so how can he?" In response Mr. X tells the tale of Hermione Street and Sevrin the informer—a tale, the mutual friend reveals that the end of the story, which might just be an elaborate deception, i.e., an ironic tale:

> "Isn't X well worth knowing?" he bubbled over in great delight. "He's unique, amazing, absolutely terrific."
>
> His enthusiasm grated upon my finer feelings. I told him curtly that the man's cynicism was simply abominable

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> "Oh, abominable! abominable!" assented my friend effusively. "And then, you know, he likes to have his little joke sometimes," he added in a confidential tone.

Just when the narrator seems to pin down Mr. X as a cynic, the anarchist slips out of his grasp. Unfortunately, we never learn any more about this "joke" because the narrator states that he has been "utterly unable to discover where in all this the joke comes in," but Conrad leaves us with at least two possibilities: either Mr. X himself was the informer or he has concocted the entire tale simply as a pleasant way to pass the evening.

Such irony, albeit in a limited form, carries over into Conrad's next work of revolutionary conspiracy fiction, *The Secret Agent* (1907). In his "Author's Note" Conrad tells us that his "solitary and nocturnal walks all over London" inspired the novel (an origin similar to that of *The Princess Casamassima*—see James' "Introduction" to that novel) and he draws attention to the fact that he applied an "ironic method" to his subject which he carried "right through to the end" ("Introduction," *The Secret Agent* xxxvii). The novel also has strong ties to contemporary historical events. Most obviously, the manner of Stevie's accidental death derives from the bungled dynamite attack of Martial Bourdin in February 1894 near the Greenwich Observatory, an attack which also killed its bomber and raised an outcry because of the police's failure to predict it (Porter, *Origins* 126-27). There is also evidence, writes Roger Tennant, that Winnie Verloc resembles Conrad's wife, that Conrad had firsthand experience of revolutionaries through his father, a Polish anarchist, and that *The Secret Agent* articulates Conrad's own dislike of the upper-classes and the Russians (Tennant viii). In addition, says Tennant, Conrad's depiction of his anarchists derives from his observations of the Fenian situation; his knowledge of the

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police practices originates from the memoir of Robert Anderson, who worked against the Fenians and later became Assistant Commissioner of the police; his fictional portrait of Sir Ethelred is based on Sir William Harcourt, the Home Secretary at the time of the Fenian outrages and one of the figures responsible for prosecuting Johann Most for his *Freiheit* articles (see above); and, finally, Verloc himself resembles a man named Samuels, one-time police spy and *agent provocateur*, whose espionage may have been partially responsible for the Aliens Act of 1905 (Tennant xvii-xx). There is also the fact that Conrad sets the novel in about 1888, i.e., six years earlier than the real Greenwich bombing and so historically closer to the real Fenian dynamite campaign.

The topic of the book is complicated and, though I have placed the novel in this section, it resists genre categorization. For instance, Conrad tells us that his book is a critique of the anarchist enterprise: "I remember, however, remarking on the criminal futility of the whole thing, doctrine, action, mentality" ("Introduction," *The Secret Agent* xxxiii), but he also locates the novel's center in the story of Winnie Verloc ("Introduction," *The Secret Agent* xxxvi ff). Thus, we might say that the book has a dual focus, Greenwich and Winnie. As much as either of these topics, however, the story really centers on Mr. Verloc, the crucial link between Greenwich and Winnie and the "secret agent" of the novel's title. Joseph A. Kestner, conversely, argues that though the subject of the book is anarchists, its object is "to examine conflicting agendas among law-enforcement agents" which are full of "jealousy and suspicion" (158). According to Kestner, the novel critiques the police or what might be termed the counter-revolutionary forces. Barbara Melchiori, in turn, argues that Conrad defends the establishment, a reading in which Roger Tennant also concurs (Melchiori 81 and Tennant viii-ix). Finally,

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we should again note the title—the fact that the novel itself declares its subject to be espionage, and we might also note that in addition to his work as a Russian spy against the anarchists (a position similar to Razumov's), Mr. Verloc also operates as an *agent provocateur*, and as an informer for the British police. In other words, *The Secret Agent* is rife with various strains of conspiracy narrative and brings us closer than any novel I have hitherto examined to the threshold of conspiracy theory narrative.

I now turn to look at *The Secret Agent*'s depiction of counter-revolution in the figures of Mr. Vladimir and Mr. Verloc. In the novel Mr. Vladimir, the Russian ambassador and the man who concocts the fictional Greenwich plot, best represents the oppressive counter-revolutionary forces of Russia. Like the real Russians (and other Europeans of this period—see above and Chapter Three) Vladimir assails Britain for the laxity of her laws, for the fact that, as was common throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, Britain gives asylum to all political refugees (including anarchists) that apply for it. England, argues Vladimir, "is absurd with its sentimental regard for individual liberty" and he devises the Greenwich attack as a means to shake up the "imbecile bourgeoisie" and in order to demonstrate the "madness" of the anarchists—to show they go beyond "vengeance or terrorism" and are "purely destructive" (29). To carry out the attack Vladimir calls on Mr. Verloc, an agent so secret that he is known only by the symbol Δ (27). Mr. Verloc, as mentioned, has a number of loyalties, including the British police. As far as Conrad allows us to see it, however, Verloc's philosophy is simple: "He had been loyal to his employers, to the cause of social stability—and to his affections," i.e., his wife (239). The continued well-being and happiness of these institutions, in turn, allows Mr. Verloc to devote himself to his natural métier, that of

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"indolence" (12-13). In one sense then, the trouble in the novel arises when Mr. Verloc decides to use Stevie, his wife's beloved but half-witted brother, to pursue the interests of the former two institutions, the Russians and social stability.

Subsequently, Conrad's deployment of irony in *The Secret Agent* most readily comes to the fore in his depiction of Verloc. Verloc's divided loyalties and the fact that he is forced to prioritized them ensures that he lacks a true moral or ethical center: he exhibits "the air common to men who live on the vices, the follies, or the baser fears of mankind; the air of moral nihilism common to keepers of gambling hells and disorderly houses; to private detectives and inquiry agents[. . .]" (13). In a similar way, he lacks any nationalistic grounding, having had an English mother and a French father (a parentage, incidentally, the reverse of Hyacinth Robinson in *The Princess Casamassima*). Nor has Verloc had much past success as a spy. While serving in the French artillery, Verloc apparently managed to steal "the design of the improved breech-block of their new field-gun," but was caught in the process and served "five years' vigorous confinement in a fortress" (20). Similarly, Mr. Vladimir castigates Verloc for having done "nothing" in his role as *agent provocateur* and suggests that Verloc was originally taken on only because of the indulgence of Baron Stott-Wartenheim who had "social revolution on the brain" (25ff). There are also Verloc's personal characteristics: he is overweight, has a wife, and doesn't seem to be very intelligent. For example, the debacle at Greenwich perfectly encapsulates Verloc's lack of *savoir-faire* and forethought. He reacts with shock and surprise to Stevie's death; he makes no move to conceal his involvement or consider how Winnie might react to her beloved brother's death; and he relies on a combination of luck and hope in his original conception of Stevie's escape: "He had foreseen Stevie distracted

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and lost—sought for—found in some police station or provincial workhouse in the end. He had foreseen Stevie arrested, and was not afraid, because Mr. Verloc had a great opinion of Stevie's loyalty, which had been carefully indoctrinated with the necessity of silence in the course of many walks" (230). Conrad, ironically, gives Verloc all the traits we would never expect to find in an efficient spy. In addition, Verloc—like Hyacinth Robinson—seems to be at the mercy of an array of forces. Inspector Heat reveals that he has blackmailed Verloc into becoming an informer (130-31) and in the long conversation with Winnie that precedes Verloc's death, Verloc reveals his hatred of Vladimir for forcing him into the bombing. There is also Verloc's severely dysfunctional marriage with Winnie (229ff).

Yet despite these characteristics (or, perhaps, because of them) Verloc fits right in among the members of the Revolutionary Red Committee, the group of anarchists upon which he is spying. These anarchists become another site for Conrad to develop his irony. Rather than being a fearful group, the anarchists turn out to be a "lazy lot." All of them owe their leisure to various female patrons and their main revolutionary activity seems limited to producing "Future of the Proletariat" pamphlets with the grand goal of "the education of the [future] masters of the world" (50). Each of these anarchists, as critics have also noted, is a foreigner and each is marked by grotesque, exaggerated characteristics. In terms of the revolution, these anarchists do little more than spew big ideas. Karl Yundt's vision is typical: "'I have always dreamed [. . .] of a band of men absolute in their resolve to discard all scruples in the choice of means, strong enough to give themselves frankly the name of destroyers, and free from the taint of that resigned pessimism which rots the world. No pity for anything on earth, including themselves, and

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death enlisted for good and all in the service of humanity—that's what I would have liked to see'" (42). Yundt sets his version of anarchy in polar opposition to "resigned pessimism" and defines it as a force bent mainly on destruction. "Resigned pessimism," conversely, emerges as a concept analogous to what Conrad terms "cynicism" in *Under Western Eyes*: "In its pride of numbers, in its strange pretensions of sanctity, and in the secret readiness to abase itself in suffering, the spirit of Russia is the spirit of cynicism" (*UWE* 55). Michaelis, the so-called "ticket-of-leave apostle" (because of his status as a restricted parolee), preaches a similar creed, one that Conrad explicitly aligns with "optimism":

> He was so far from pessimism that he saw already the end of all private property coming along logically, unavoidably, by the mere development of its inherent viciousness. The possessors of property had not only to face the awakened proletariat, but they had also to fight amongst themselves. Yes. Struggle, warfare, was the condition of private ownership. It was fatal. Ah! he did not depend upon emotional excitement to keep up his belief, no declamations, no anger, no visions of blood-red flags waving, or metaphorical lurid suns of vengeance rising above the horizon of a doomed society. Not he! Cold reason, he boasted, was the basis of his optimism. (43)

Michaelis does little more than regurgitate classic Marx and affirm his commitment to such a philosophy, but—we might observe—Conrad does associate optimism with the belief in a future where capitalism and private property have been abolished, the future that arises beyond the destruction that Yundt preaches and which Sophia Antonovna envisions in *Under Western Eyes*. Optimism, therefore, is an active principal; pessimism

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and cynicism passive ones. Yet in the mouths of these anarchists these terms mean little—thus underscoring Conrad's irony. For all his talk Yundt is "no man of action [. . .] not even an orator of torrential eloquence" and does little more than act (if the terms even thus applies) as "the venomous evoker of sinister impulses," while Comrade Ossipon, another of the anarchists and one who seems especially dangerous, is the first to disassociate himself from the Greenwich bombing (see 48 and 77ff).

In contrast to these hot-air anarchists Conrad sets his most formidable and original creation in *The Secret Agent*, the dynamite-obsessed Professor. The Professor is the novel's most authentic representative of the means and goals of anarchy: "To destroy public faith in legality was the imperfect formula of his pedantic fanaticism; but the subconscious conviction that the framework of an established social order cannot be effectually shattered except by some form of collective or individual violence was precise and correct. He was a moral agent—that was settled in his mind" (81). The Professor celebrates the means, "collective or individual violence," as much as the ends, and his role as a "moral agent" in this respect offers a memorable antidote to Verloc's "moral nihilism." The Professor is determined to break up "legality" and believes that "a new conception of life" is possible only after "a clean sweep and a clear start" (73). Surprisingly (or perhaps not, given Conrad's other anarchists in the novel), the Professor's impetus in urging anarchy is the same as Mr. Vladimir's: the Professor castigates British revolutionaries for their tendency to "talk print [sic], plot, and do nothing" (73), and offers himself as the active corollary to these passive men: "The world is mediocre, limp, without force. And madness and despair are a force. [. . .] Give me that for a lever, and I'll move the world" (309). The Professor, therefore, becomes a kind of Nietzschean

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superman with—most importantly—dynamite thrown into the mix. This last element, in fact, is most responsible for the Professor's incredible revolutionary potential. He is both willing to give dynamite to anyone (as the case of Stevie demonstrates) and is himself at all times rigged with a substantial amount of explosives:

> "The other day I came suddenly upon Chief Inspector Heat at the corner of Tottenham Court Road. He looked at me very steadily. But I did not look at him. Why should I give him more than a glance? He was thinking of many things—of his superiors, of his reputation, of the law courts, of his salary, of newspapers—of a hundred things. But I was thinking of my perfect detonator only. He meant nothing to me. He was as insignificant as—I can't call to mind anything insignificant enough to compare him with—except Karl Yundt perhaps. Like to like. The terrorist and the policeman both come from the same basket. Revolution, legality—counter moves in the same game; forms of idleness at bottom identical." (69)

I cite this wonderful passage (my own favorite in the novel) because it perfectly encapsulates the polarity that Conrad engineers between the Professor on one side, and the anarchists and the police on the other—both of whom, argues the Professor, serve the same cause, i.e., stability, idleness, indolence, pessimism. As a result, it becomes the Professor who, because of his own continuing destructive potential (unlike the Professor in "The Informer" who blows himself up) and because of his willingness to distribute dynamite to anyone, ultimately endows Conrad's novel with that conspiratorial indeterminacy which will become a staple of conspiracy theory narratives:

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> And the incorruptible Professor walked, too, averting his eyes from the odious multitude of mankind. He had no future. He disdained it. He was a force. His thoughts caressed the images of ruin and destruction. He walked frail, insignificant, shabby, miserable—and terrible in the simplicity of his idea calling madness and despair to the regeneration of the world. Nobody looked at him. He passed on unsuspected and deadly, like a pest in the street full of men. (311)

Conrad's novel ends not with the closure of Verloc's or Winnie's death, but on this note—the sustained and "open" destruction that a figure like the Professor embodies.

Before leaving *The Secret Agent* I want to glance at its depiction of the British police. Conrad represents this institution via two figures: Chief Inspector Heat and his superior the Assistant Commissioner. *The Secret Agent*, of course, is also a detective novel, modernist in its affect because the surprise that appears in Heat and the Assistant Commissioner when they learn of the Greenwich bombing also registers in the reader. Conrad omits the actual bombing from the narrative and follows a non-chronological sequence in describing the events surrounding the bombing. For example, the narrative action of Chapters Four through Seven, though obviously placed before Chapter Eight and the first half of Chapter Nine, actually succeeds the action of those latter two chapters. The result is that the reader, not knowing a priori what has happened in Greenwich, must depend on the detective work of Inspector Heat (at least ignoring the possibility of an "educated guess") as Heat unravels "the whole amazing truth" that points to Stevie as the bomber. We have already seen such reader involvement, another staple of conspiracy theory narrative, operating in *The Woman in White* and we will encounter it again in *The Riddle of the Sands* and *In Search of Lost Time*.

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This narrative omission also foregrounds another of *The Secret Agent*'s central themes, the inner workings of British law-enforcement. In Chapter One I discussed the rise of the police detective and emphasized the public persona which these detectives cultivated—one free from corruption and the use of informers. Conversely, early in this chapter I noted the increased use of espionage, informers and *agent provocateurs* by the police and the Special Branch as the twentieth century approached—a development, incidentally, which harkened back to the practices of thief-takers. Given these two trends, then, it becomes apparent that Conrad uses *The Secret Agent* to critique modern police procedures. Heat, for example, represents the modern detective. He follows the rules and he does become the novel's Subject Who Knows (in terms of outing the bomber), but he fails to predict the bombing—argues the Assistant Commissioner—because Heat relies on "preventive" policing and on the use of informers: "in the close-woven stuff of relations between the conspirator and police there occur unexpected solutions of continuity, sudden holes in space and time. A given anarchist may be watched inch by inch and minute by minute, but a moment always comes when somehow all sight and touch of him are lost for a few hours, during which something (generally an explosion) more or less deplorable does happen" (85). Espionage emerges as an essential but ultimately useless component of Heat's detective work. The Assistant Commissioner, in turn, who represents the mid-Victorian liberal attitude towards policing, attacks espionage on a number of fronts. He argues that spies "fabricate" their facts and instigate "panic, hasty legislation, unreflecting hate" (139) and he points to the fact that Verloc's allegiance to the Russians compromises Verloc's reliability, that Verloc can thus be "more reckless that the most reckless of conspirators" (140). In response to Heat's failure to understand the cause of the bombing,

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the Assistant Commissioner also correctly surmises its "episodic" nature, that it is not part of a "general scheme" of anarchist activity, but a single event and one planned *abroad.* Verloc, argues the Assistant Commissioner, matters little compared to what "lies behind him somewhere" (140ff). Or as the Assistant Commissioner tells Mr. Vladimir in their climatic confrontation at the end of *The Secret Agent*'s tenth chapter, what needs to be done in England is "the clearing out of this country of all the foreign political spies, police, and that sort of—of—dogs. In my opinion they are a ghastly nuisance; also an element of danger" (226). Unlike Heat who can only solve the crime, the Assistant Commissioner sees the larger truth, can become a Subject Who Knows on a grand scale—the problem is not the bombing, he suggests, but the presence of the enemy in England. In other words, though it takes some work to bring this out, *The Secret Agent* is as much a dynamite novel and espionage story (as I noted above) as it is an invasion-scare narrative.

To end my discussion of revolutionary conspiracy fiction I turn to one further novel, G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare* (1908), a work which perhaps embodies the representational limit of ironic conspiracy fiction. In no other novel I shall consider does the author seem to satirize the whole revolutionist project as much as Chesterton does. Chesterton himself acknowledged that he wrote the book as a response to contemporary pessimism, that "[i]t was not intended to describe the real world" but rather "the world of wild doubt and despair which the pessimists were generally describing at that date; with just a gleam of hope in some double meaning of the doubt, which even the pessimists felt in some fitful fashion" (*Illustrated London News*,

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June 13, 1936).[2] The concept of a "double meaning of doubt" which betrays "a gleam of hope" characterizes the book well, especially in its privileging of the project of law and order over the anarchist goals of chaos and subversion (cf. Kestner 171). On one hand, intense and seemingly irreducible visionary imagery pervades Chesterton's novel:

> This particular evening, if it is remembered for nothing else, will be remembered in that place for its strange sunset. It looked like the end of the world. All the heaven seemed covered with a quite vivid and palpable plumage; you could only say that the sky was full of feathers, and of feathers that almost brushed the face. Across the great part of the dome they were grey, with the strangest tints of violet and mauve and an unnatural pink or pale green; but towards the west the whole grew past description, transparent and passionate, and the last red-hot plumes of it covered up the sun like something too good to be seen. (11)

There is a wild, anarchic excess in the world Chesterton depicts much in line with the book's subtitle, "A Nightmare." In a similar way, to Syme, a policeman and the novel's protagonist, each of the anarchists embodies "some extreme end, so to speak, of some wild road of reasoning" (61) so unconventional and debauched seem their demeanors. These excesses, thus, create a vertigo of meaning within the novel similar to what Franklin Blake encounters in examining the various theories regarding the Moonstone's theft (see Chapter One) and in this novel too the excess undermines Syme's grasp on reality:

> The ex-Marquis had pulled the old straw hat over his eyes, and the black shade of the brim cut his face so squarely in two that it seemed to be wearing one of the

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[2] This source is quoted on 186 in G.K. Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday* (New York: Penguin, 1986).

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> black half-masks of their pursuers. The fancy tinted Syme's overwhelming sense of wonder. Was he wearing a mask? Was anyone wearing a mask? Was anyone anything? This wood of witchery, in which men's faces turned black and white by turns, in which their figures first swelled into sunlight and then faded into formless night, this mere chaos of chiaroscuro (after the clear daylight outside), seemed to Syme a perfect symbol of the world in which he had been moving for three days, this world where men took off their beards and their spectacles and their noses, and turned into other people. (127)

Syme confronts the world of *The Man Who Was Thursday* head-on. It is a world marked by indeterminacy, one, for example, in which identity seems kaleidoscopic, changing with each blink of the eyes. On the other hand, as the last quote also demonstrates, in Chesterton's novel whatever the variables in the end they reduce—ironically—to a symbol of law and order. Each of the members of the General Council of Anarchists turns out to be a policeman in disguise while Chesterton aligns Sunday, their leader, with the figureheads of Christianity (more below).

I begin with a look at how Chesterton constructs his central anarchist conspiracy. Chesterton is careful to emphasize both the immense size of the group and indeterminacy inherent in this size. He first names the group the "Central European Council" (31), then changes the name no less than eight times! They are called in turn the "General Council of Anarchists of Europe" (38), the "European Dynamiters" (55), the "Council of Seven Days" (74), the "Anarchist Council" (123), the "Supreme Council" (125), the "Supreme Anarchist Council" (150), the "Central Anarchist Council" (161) and the "Council of the Days" (182)—each name being used no more than once in the novel. Such an array of

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names is apt to make the reader dizzy (the proliferation of acronyms in *Gravity's Rainbow* has a similar, if more intensified, effect), but that—I assert—is the point. The novel's indeterminacy appears even here: one group seems to become many, is one, exists ubiquitously, and so on. Chesterton also associates his anarchists with the pessimism seen in *The Secret Agent* and in *Under Western Eyes*, and states that the anarchists are "a rich and powerful and fanatical church, a church of eastern pessimism, which holds it holy to destroy mankind like vermin" (122). Yet he also specifically distinguishes his particular group, saying it shouldn't be confused "with those chance dynamite outbreaks from Russia or Ireland" (40). This group represents a conspiracy more permanent, more powerful. Chesterton's anarchists, though they "wish to deny all those arbitrary distinctions of vice and virtue, honor and treachery" (23) and plot to kill the French President and the Russia Czar with dynamite, embody a new sort of conspiracy. "Aristocrats" are its leaders; the conspiracy is global in its scope, including "South African and American millionaires"; and the movement has a fascinating structure:

> "This is a vast philosophic movement, consisting of an outer and an inner ring. You might even call the outer ring the laity and the inner ring the priesthood. I prefer to call the outer ring the innocent section, the inner ring the supremely guilty section. The outer ring—the main mass of their supporters—are merely anarchists; that is, men who believe that rules and formulas have destroyed human happiness. (47)

The movement also operates via a curious set of beliefs:

> [The outer ring] believe that all the evil results of human crime are the results of the system that has called it crime. They do not believe that the crime creates the

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punishment. They believe that the punishment has created the crime. They believe that if a man seduced seven women he would naturally walk away as blameless as the flowers of spring. They believe that if a man picked a pocket he would naturally feel exquisitely good. These I call the innocent section."

"Oh! " said Syme.

"Naturally, therefore, these people talk about 'a happy time coming'; 'the paradise of the future'; 'mankind freed from the bondage of vice and the bondage of virtue,' and so on. And so also the men of the inner circle speak—the sacred priesthood. They also speak to applauding crowds of the happiness of the future, and of mankind freed at last. But in their mouths"—and the policeman lowered his voice—"in their mouths these happy phrases have a horrible meaning. They are under no illusions; they are too intellectual to think that man upon this earth can ever be quite free of original sin and the struggle. And they mean death. When they say that mankind shall be free at last, they mean that mankind shall commit suicide. When they talk of a paradise without right or wrong, they mean the grave. They have but two objects, to destroy first humanity and then themselves. That is why they throw bombs instead of firing pistols. The innocent rank and file are disappointed because the bomb has not killed the king; but the high-priesthood are happy because it has killed somebody." (47)

The movement consists of layers of conspiracy or a conspiracy *behind* the conspiracy, with the latter misguidedly working in the service of the former. Of course, we have seen such layering before in the relations, for example, between the Sun and Moon group and Hoffendahl's conspiracy in *The Princess Casamassima*, but here the relationship is

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articulated and depends on exploitation. It is also metaphorically linked with the church (recalling a novel like Trollope's *The Warden*). In addition, while the "outer ring" seeks to realize a utopist vision of life—like the Professor or Sophia Antonovna—the "inner ring" wants nothing less than complete annihilation.

Chesterton's novel, in short, presents a strikingly original type of conspiracy, one that exploits the lower classes. The question is, how seriously we should take these claims as to the conspiracy's structure and size? Does the conspiracy even exist, given that the policeman speaking above works in the service of Sunday who turns out not to be a conspirator at all? *The Man Who Was Thursday*, as noted, represents an endpoint of ironic conspiracy fiction. Chesterton seems simultaneously to tell a story about anarchists as well as make fun of the conventions by which such a story might be told. Consequently, the novel is full of slapstick comedy and rollicking chase scenes (foreshadowing those in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and in *Gravity's Rainbow*). Chesterton also assails anarchist posturing through the comic means by which various detectives assume and abandon "anarchist" identities with striking ease. The anarchist-detectives, for example, are both common looking and eccentric, the appearance of each incorporating some "demoniac detail" similar in effect to the "twist given in a false and curved mirror" (58). Yet each of these details turns out to be geared towards maintaining deception. The narrator, for instance, makes much of the menacing "opaque spectacles" that Bull, the anarchist known as Saturday, wears, but when Bull removes these spectacles his appearance magically changes. He becomes "a very boyish-looking young man, with very frank and happy hazel eyes" (102). In a similar vein, Wilks (Friday) narrates the manner in which he assumed the identity of the real Professor de Worms:

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> "Whenever he said something that nobody but he could understand, I replied with something which I could not even understand myself. 'I don't fancy,' he said, 'that you could have worked out the principle that evolution is only negation, since there inheres in it the introduction of lacuna, which are an essential of differentiation.' I replied quite scornfully, 'You read all that up in Pinckwerts; the notion that involution functions eugenically was exposed long ago by Glumpe.' It is unnecessary for me to say that there never were such people as Pinckwerts and Glumpe." (90-91).

There is also the way that Syme unmasks the Marquis de St. Eustache:

> Walking in a world he half understood, he took two paces forward and seized the Roman nose of this remarkable nobleman. He pulled it hard, and it came off in his hand.
>
> He stood for some seconds with a foolish solemnity, with the pasteboard proboscis still between his fingers, looking at it, while the sun and the clouds and the wooded hills looked down upon this imbecile scene.
>
> The Marquis broke the silence in a loud and cheerful voice.
>
> "If anyone has any use for my left eyebrow," he said, "he can have it.
>
> (119)

Each of these instances, of course, adds to the "wildness" of the novel and to the conspiratorial vertigo I noted earlier, but each also serves as a critique and parody of the anarchists, intimating that their ideology goes no farther than appearance. The comic elements also point to the greater irony that lies at the heart of *The Man Who Was Thursday*: "'Don't you know Sunday? Don't you know that his jokes are always so big

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and simple that one had never thought of them? Can you think of anything more like Sunday than this, that he should put all his powerful enemies on the Supreme Council, and then take care that it was not supreme?'" (123). Over the span of the novel the detectives (and the reader) come to realize that Sunday, the Providence-like leader and mastermind of the anarchists, "the man in the dark room" that enlisted their aid *against* the anarchists, has acted as the Hidden Hand in their lives, has manipulated them as part of some larger and more elaborate comedy.

What the comedy entails appears when we take a closer look at Sunday. As the leader of the anarchists, Sunday is a terrifying figure; his power and proportions are vast. Like Count Fosco, Sunday is an enormous man:

> Then, as Syme continued to stare at them, he saw something that he had not seen before. He had not seen it literally because it was too large to see. At the nearest end of the balcony, blocking up a great part of the perspective, was the back of a great mountain of a man. When Syme had seen him, his first thought was that the weight of him must break down the balcony of stone. His vastness did not lie only in the fact that he was abnormally tall and quite incredibly fat. This man was planned enormously in his original proportions, like a statue carved deliberately as colossal. His head, crowned with white hair, as seen from behind looked bigger than a head ought to be. The ears that stood out from it looked larger than human ears. He was enlarged terribly to scale; and this sense of size was so staggering, that when Syme saw him all the other figures seemed quite suddenly to dwindle and become dwarfish. They were still sitting there as before with their flowers and

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> frock-coats, but now it looked as if the big man was entertaining five children to tea. (55)

Not only Sunday as a whole, but each one of his features seems overwhelming. In fact, so overwhelming are the features that to even think of them inspires a feeling—as Syme demonstrates—akin to the surreal: "Sunday's [face] seemed almost to grow more actual during absence, as if a man's painted portrait should slow come alive" (84). In addition, like Professor Moriarty, Sunday takes the role of a powerful but hidden criminal mastermind: "'Caesar and Napoleon put all their genius into being heard of, and they *were* heard of. He puts all his genius into not being heard of, and he is not heard of. But you cannot be for five minutes in the room with him without feeling that Caesar and Napoleon would have been children in his hands'" (25). Sunday also serves as the single most important vehicle for Chesterton's irony. Despite his posturing as an anarchist, Sunday is an allegorized and ultimately benevolent figure, Chesterton's "gleam of hope in some double meaning of doubt" (see above). He is the policeman who hires all the detectives to spy on the anarchists, but he is also—as the detectives themselves finally agree—like "the universe itself." He has a complexity that defies categorization:

> "But I tell you this, that you will have found out the truth of the last tree and the top-most cloud before the truth about me. You will understand the sea, and I shall be still a riddle; you shall know what the stars are, and not know what I am. Since the beginning of the world all men have hunted me like a wolf—kings and sages, and poets and lawgivers, all the churches, and all the philosophies. But I have never been caught yet, and the skies will fall in the time I turn to bay." (154-55)

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In language that verges on the biblical, Sunday celebrates the enigma of himself and makes indeterminacy a permanent part of his character construction.

In the novel's final scene Sunday also reveals his ability to illuminate the metaphysical essence of the six detectives (Monday through Saturday), of the anarchist Gregory, and of Chesterton's fictional world. In his garden, in a moment I earlier compared to the climactic scene of *Villette* (see Chapter Four), Sunday first has each of the detectives assume a final costume that does "not disguise but reveal" (174) and that corresponds to that detective's day of the week in Genesis. Then before these detectives, Sunday parades a revelatory motley of individuals and objects—

> every shape in Nature imitated in some crazy costume. There was a man dressed as a windmill with enormous sails, a man dressed as an elephant, a man dressed as a balloon; the two last, together, seemed to keep the thread of their farcical adventures. Syme even saw, with a queer thrill, one dancer dressed like an enormous hornbill, with a beak twice as big as himself—the queer bird which had fixed itself on his fancy like a living question while he was rushing down the long road at the Zoological Gardens. There were a thousand other such objects, however. There was a dancing lamp-post, a dancing apple tree, a dancing ship. One would have thought that the untamable tune of some mad musician had set all the common objects of field and street dancing an eternal jig. (177)

It is a startling development, one of intense visionary and hallucinatory power, and one that presents the perfect response to Syme's earlier complaint, that hitherto he had "only known the back of the world" (170). Or, what Chesterton ultimately shows is that to

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understand Sunday, the leader of the anarchists, is—ironically—also to understand law, order and Christianity as the ultimate structuring principles of the universe:

> "Have you," [Syme] cried in a dreadful voice, "have you ever suffered?"
>
> As he gazed, the great face grew to an awful size, grew larger than the colossal mask of Memnon, which had made his scream as a child. It grew larger and larger, filling the whole sky; then everything went black. Only in the blackness before it entirely destroyed his brain he seemed to hear a distant voice saying a commonplace text that he had heard somewhere, "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?" (183)

Although Sunday's final appearance, in the moments when Syme transitions from his "nightmare" to waking reality, suggests "the colossal mask of Memnon," i.e., the stone statue of Amenhotep III near Thebes,[3] and so invokes Egyptian history and Greek mythology, Chesterton ultimately equates the suffering of Sunday with that experienced by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (cf. Matt 26:42). *The Man Who Was Thursday*—like a number of other works I considered above—thus elaborates the conspiracy fiction tradition by fusing the genres of dynamite novel and espionage with, surprisingly, the Christian morality tale. In this way, Chesterton's novel also brings revolutionary conspiracy fiction to the threshold of conspiracy theory narrative.

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[3] The colossal stone statues of Amenhotep II were said to emit harp-like sounds when touched by the rising sun and so believed to be the voice of Memnon greeting his mother, Aurora (i.e. the dawn).

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Early-Modernist Espionage

Earlier I indicated that fictional "espionage" could be defined in at least three ways—as mid-Victorian: "observation"; as early-modernist: "either a foreign power attempts to invade the host country (with spies) so as to steal its secrets and is thwarted, *or* the foreign power succeeds in infiltrating the host country and/or stealing its secrets"; and as modernist: "the surreptitious attempts of one government to steal the secrets, infiltrate the power structure or monitor the military/political activities of another government, with the implied or overt final goal of self-defense, invasion or political domination." Examples of the first kind of espionage include Georgiana Gargery's method of raising Pip in *Great Expectations*, Count Fosco's tracking of the activities of Laura Fairlie and Marian Halcombe in *The Woman in White*, or the common Victorian fictional practice of using spies to "shadow" someone. Early-modernist espionage is a concept harder to delimit; it might also be defined thus: "the fusion of invasion-scare and mid-Victorian espionage narrative," with the addendum that "invasion-scare narrative subsumes reverse colonization narrative"—an addendum historically warranted. Arata himself states that dynamite, invasion-scare and reverse colonization narratives all "sprang from the same font of cultural anxiety [. . .] of the 1880s and 90s" (623-24). Arata, however, also supports my larger definition when he notes that reverse colonization narratives rely on a "triple rhythm" in their narrative structure: the monster appears, the monster terrifies, the monster is expelled (641)—a concept that covers early-modernist espionage, with one caveat. In most of the espionage narratives treated below the "monster" (be it France, Germany or Russia) terrifies by invading England with secret agents only—i.e., total invasion remains at the level of a threat. That said, the fact that

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early-modernist espionage can be defined in so many ways points to the fact (and so returns to this chapter's central argument) that this type of conspiracy fiction—like revolutionary fiction—also relies upon the fusion of various kinds of conspiracies and conspiracemes. Yet unlike revolutionary fiction, early-modernist espionage does not place a significant emphasis on irony (which hitherto provided a convenient organizing tool) and so in the discussion that follows I shall instead draw attention to two other elements—the development of increasingly complicated and indeterminate conspiratorial plots and the attendant waning of the Subject Who Knows.

Before turning to a few examples of early-modernist espionage proper, I begin with two precursor narratives, *Dracula* and *The War of the Worlds*. In these novels, both of which depict an actual invasion of England, the emphasis falls on the effect that the foreign invaders have on the inhabitants of Britain. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), despite's Arata label of reverse colonization narrative and despite the novel's title and the fact that it seems to focus on only one man/monster, offers a wonderful conspiracy narrative, one that centers on the mastermind Count Dracula and his attempts to create a conspiracy of vampires in England.[4] Late in the journal that forms the novel's first section, Jonathan Harker describes the situation succinctly: "This was the being I was helping to transfer to London, where, perhaps, for centuries to come he might, amongst its teeming millions, satiate his lust for blood, and create a new and ever-widening circle of semi-demons to batten on the helpless" (60). In this respect *Dracula* foreshadows a conspiracy theory narrative like *Discipline and Punish*. Though the analogy does not

[4] The standard critical reading of *Dracula* is that Van Helsing et al form a conspiracy-like organization or counter-force to drive Dracula out of England and, ultimately, to defeat and kill him. My reading, thus, goes against the grain in its emphasis on the *vampire conspiracy* that Dracula engenders.

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completely hold, like Foucault's unwitting conspirator-victims (see Chapter Four), Dracula's victims also become potential conspirators, even if initially against their will. In addition, as this passage demonstrates and as Dracula later confirms when he states that he wants victims "'to do my bidding and to be my jackals when I want to feed'" (312), Dracula's conspiracy is unique among those I consider. Its main purpose seems to be to perpetuate itself—hence the fifty coffins of Transylvania soil that Dracula ships to England; hence Lucy Westerna's seduction of children in her role as the "Bloofer Lady" (see 183-84). Dracula's conspiracy also stands out because of his means of "colonization," because of *how* such "colonization" threatens the citizens of England:

> "I didn't quite dream, but it all seemed to be real. I only wanted to be here in this spot. I don't know why, for I was afraid of something, I don't know what. I remember, though I suppose I was asleep, passing through the streets and over the bridge. A fish leaped as I went by, and I leaned over to look at it, and I heard a lot of dogs howling. The whole town seemed as if it must be full of dogs all howling at once, as I went up the steps. Then I had a vague memory of something long and dark with red eyes, just as we saw in the sunset, and something very sweet and very bitter all around me at once. And then I seemed sinking into deep green water, and there was a singing in my ears, as I have heard there is to drowning men, and then everything seemed passing away from me. My soul seemed to go out from my body and float about the air." (108)

Lucy here describes Dracula's assault not as terrifying (as the attack of a conspirator might be), but as a powerful and hallucinatory experience, one almost with a metaphysical dimension. The threat, by assuming such a pleasant and misleading guise,

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thus becomes all the more malicious. Yet Dracula's seduction also includes a shocking sexual element:

> By [Mina's] side stood a tall, thin man, clad in black. His face was turned from us, but the instant we saw we all recognized the Count, in every way, even to the scar on his forehead. With his left hand he held both Mrs. Harker's hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension. His right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her white night-dress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man's bare chest which was shown by his torn-open dress. The attitude of the two had a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten's nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink. (288)

In what must rank as among the novel's most intense and visionary passages, Dr. Seward provides a third-person perspective (in contrast to Lucy's first person description above) of the striking and sadomasochistic way in which Dracula masters his victims and so (on a larger scale) of threat that vampires offer to England.

Similarly, it is important to remember that Dracula gains much of his affective power through the fact that he is a *foreign* invader and that as a foreigner he has an array of strange and often eerie traits—most of which Jonathan Harker's journal enumerates. It is here, in the journal, that Harker first outlines what Dracula's conspiracy holds in store for British citizens and the journal is wonderfully vivid when it comes to revealing Dracula's amazing and terrifying traits: his fangs, the unforgettable hairy palms, his ability to communicate with wolves, his non-appearance in and fear of mirrors, his habit of sleeping in a coffin, his ability to turn into a bat, and, of course, his lust for blood:

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> There lay the Count, but looking as if his youth had been half restored. For the white hair and moustache were changed to dark iron grey. The cheeks were fuller, and the white skin seemed ruby-red underneath. The mouth was redder than ever, for on the lips were gouts of fresh blood, which trickled from the corners of the mouth and ran down over the chin and neck. Even the deep, burning eyes seemed set amongst swollen flesh, for the lids and pouches underneath were bloated. It seemed as if the whole awful creature were simply gorged with blood. He lay like a filthy leech, exhausted with his repletion. (60)

Stoker's writing is never as powerful or original as in such moments. Harker takes a near microscopic delight in cataloging the changes that fresh blood has wrought in Dracula's appearance. Yet, we should notice, there is another side to Dracula, one that elevates him above being a one-sided villain:

> "I myself am of an old family, and to live in a new house would kill me. A house cannot be made habitable in a day, and after all, how few days go to make up a century. I rejoice also that there is a chapel of old times. We Transylvanian nobles love not to think that our bones may lie amongst the common dead. I seek not gaiety nor mirth, not the bright voluptuousness of much sunshine and sparkling waters which please the young and gay. I am no longer young, and my heart, through weary years of mourning over the dead, is not attuned to mirth. Moreover, the walls of my castle are broken. The shadows are many, and the wind breathes cold through the broken battlements and casements. I love the shade and the shadow, and would be alone with my thoughts when I may." (33)

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Stoker gives us few glimpses into the consciousness of Dracula as intimate as this, yet that makes the passage all the more profound in how it problematizes (read intensifies) Dracula's ability to terrify. In its melancholia and lamentation of old age Dracula's speech recalls Tennyson's "Ulysses" or "Tithonus," but there is also the suggestion that Dracula would abandon his own conspiracy *if he could.* Dracula has reached the point of no return and, like Lucy Westerna later in the novel, he has become trapped by his involvement. Suddenly (and in a rather moving way) he seems more human than monster, more victim himself of the eternal life that vampirism involves than conspirator who wants to perpetuate it in others. The conspiracy thus turn on its own mastermind, on its own perpetrators.

The narrative of *Dracula* also touches on a number of historical themes which I discussed in the previous section. Stephen Arata describes *Dracula* as a reverse colonization novel, but he also makes an interesting link between *Dracula* and Ireland (and the Fenians). Stoker, Arata notes, was a "transplanted Irishman" whose allegiances may have been split, and his novel thus hints at "two equations in relation to English-Irish politics": "Dracula is to England as Ireland is to England," i.e., the colonized entity that comes back with a vengeance, and "Dracula is to England as England is to Ireland"—Stoker positions his novel (via the terror that Dracula inspires) as a critique of British policies in "colonized" countries like Ireland (633-34). Arata also makes some insightful points as to Dracula's method of invasion. Dracula imperils the integrity of Britain as a whole, argues Arata, but he also challenges the integrity of British individuals through his "biological" colonization, by spreading vampirism which passes like a disease from person to person (630)—a threat, I want to suggest, analogous to the contemporary

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British fear that anarchists would spread disease in England via such venues as the food and water supply (see above). Finally, Arata also adds that another part of Dracula's power lies in his ability to "pass" as an English citizen. Dracula easily imitates Jonathan Harker by assuming his clothes, etc., and the one time in the novel we see Dracula pursuing someone other than the novel's central characters, he demonstrates that he can easily blend into a British crowd and act as a "shadow": "I was looking at a very beautiful girl, in a big cart-wheel hat, sitting in a victoria outside Guiliano's. [. . . A] man came out of the shop with a small parcel, and gave it to the lady, who then drove off. The dark man [i.e., Dracula] kept his eyes fixed on her, and when the carriage moved up Piccadilly he followed in the same direction, and hailed a hansom" (178-79). Yet, indicates Arata, this mastery of English ways, English knowledge (using sources such as Bradshaw) and the English language begins when Dracula is still in Transylvania and arises out of what Arata calls "bad faith"—Dracula, of course, seeks not to integrate into British society but to conquer it (Arata 634ff). In terms of my argument, however, Arata's reading is most interesting in that he, so to speak, does my work for me, alternately positioning the novel now as analogous to a dynamite romance (through the Fenian connection), now as reverse colonization, invasion-scare, and espionage narrative.

Like *Dracula*, H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898) portrays a foreign invader (here of extra-terrestrial origin) that actually makes it into England. This invader, the Martians, is as fantastic and original as Stoker's, and much of the novel's power lies in the depiction of these Martians and Wells' exploration of the psychological effect that they have on British citizens, especially the unnamed artilleryman. The Martians arrive in

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a series of ten cylinders, launched at twenty-four hour intervals from Mars, and their arrival at first is completely misunderstood by mankind:

> The two men hurried back at once to the common, and found the cylinder still lying in the same position. But now the sounds inside had ceased, and a thin circle of bright metal showed between the top and the body of the cylinder. Air was either entering or escaping at the rim with a thin, sizzling sound.
>
> They listened, rapped on the scaly burnt metal with a stick, and, meeting with no response, they both concluded the man or men inside must be insensible or dead.
>
> Of course the two were quite unable to do anything. They shouted consolation and promises, and went off back to the town again to get help. (13)

The moment is marked by intense expectancy, made all the more intense by the fact that the men who find the cylinder assume that there are humans inside. There is something very poignant in how the men shout "consolation" into the cylinder. Yet the irony of this gesture emerges when the Martians make their appearance:

> They were, I now saw, the most unearthly creatures it is possible to conceive. They were huge round bodies—or, rather, heads—about four feet in diameter, each body having in front of it a face. This face had no nostrils—indeed, the Martians do not seem to have had any sense of smell, but it had a pair of very large dark-coloured eyes, and just beneath this a kind of fleshy beak. In the back of this head or body—I scarcely know how to speak of it—was the single tight tympanic surface, since known to be anatomically an ear, though it must have been almost useless in our dense air. In a group round the mouth were sixteen

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> slender, almost whiplike tentacles, arranged in two bunches of eight each. These bunches have since been named rather aptly, by that distinguished anatomist, Professor Howes, the *hands*. (140)

The Martians seem threatening, are fantastically Other and the affect is similar to that we saw in regard to Magwitch in *Great Expectations* (see Chapter Two). Despite the narrator's efforts to depict the Martians' appearance in terms of human organs (eyes, ears, etc.), the structure of the Martian's bodies resists such assimilation and the narrator's language slips even as he tries to affix it: "huge round bodies—or, rather, heads."

The Martians also seem fantastic because of what they bring to Earth. They have an array of bizarre machines—tripods, metallic spiders, a flying machine and the "aluminum"-making machine; while their weapons, such as the heat-ray and the black vapour, are capable of destruction on a scale hitherto unknown by man:

> Each of the Martians, standing in the great crescent I have described, had discharged, by means of the gunlike tube he carried, a huge canister over whatever hill, copse, cluster of houses, or other possible cover for guns, chanced to be in front of him. Some fired only one of these, some two--as in the case of the one we had seen; the one at Ripley is said to have discharged no fewer than five at that time. These canisters smashed on striking the ground—they did not explode—and incontinently disengaged an enormous volume of heavy, inky vapour, coiling and pouring upward in a huge and ebony cumulus cloud, a gaseous hill that sank and spread itself slowly over the surrounding country. And the touch of that vapour, the inhaling of its pungent wisps, was death to all that breathes. (97-98)

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Wells' description of this vapour, while fantastic for the time, is incredibly prescient of modern warfare. The Martians' method of eating, however, will be familiar: "they took the fresh, living blood of other creatures, and *injected* it into their own veins" (141). The Martians, like Dracula, have a predilection for blood. The difference is that the Martians do not turn their victims into fellow-conspirators but simply annihilate them. In fact, in the novel the Martians do little else than this—i.e., act as the purest embodiment of that destructive force with which Conrad's Professor in *The Secret Agent* is also associated. Like the Professor, the Martians are motivated by the desire for a new start, and they have come to Earth because of the Earth's abundant resources—through their telescopes they have seen "our warmer planet, green with vegetation and grey with water [. . .]" (4-5). Hence in their desire they differ little from the British—a similarity the narrator is quick to point out:

> And before we judge of them too harshly we must remember what ruthless and utter destruction our own species has wrought, not only upon animals, such as the vanished bison and the dodo, but upon its inferior races. The Tasmanians, in spite of their human likeness, were entirely swept out of existence in a war of extermination waged by European immigrants, in the space of fifty years. Are we such apostles of mercy as to complain if the Martians warred in the same spirit? (5)

In this way Wells' novel becomes a critique of colonization in the same way that *Dracula* was: as the Martians are to Earth, so Britain has been to the countries she has colonized.

In terms of my argument, *The War of the Worlds* also partakes of various conspiracy genres. Consider the famous opening sentence: "No one would have believed

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in the last years of the nineteenth century that this world was being watched keenly and closely by intelligences greater than man's and yet as mortal as his own; that as men busied themselves about their various concerns they were scrutinised and studied, perhaps almost as narrowly as a man with a microscope might scrutinise the transient creatures that swarm and multiply in a drop of water" (3). The Martians begin their project via espionage, and their invasion initiates a series of events that help "to topple [the] social order" (36), a result very similar to what the various late-nineteenth century revolutionary groups tried to do. Much of Wells' novel follows the panic and mass migration that ensues from the Martians' arrival. Nor does the threat end with the death of the Martians. The narrative resists closure and stresses the need for continued vigilance,[5] attempting an affect of fear or "paranoia" similar to what I will show happens in *The Riddle of the Sands*: "for many years yet there will certainly be no relaxation of the eager scrutiny of the Martian disk, and those fiery darts of the sky, the shooting stars, will bring with them as they fall an unavoidable apprehension to all the sons of men" (203). The Martian invasion creates a kind of permanent wound in the human psyche, a lasting need to be on guard.

In regard to this wound, the novel's most interesting character is the unnamed artilleryman whom the narrator encounters while he, the narrator, is escaping across the British countryside. The artilleryman provides the perfect register of the psychological damage that the Martians have inflicted. On one hand, the artilleryman exhibits intense resignation because of the Martian presence: "'Cities, nations, civilisation, progress—it's

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[5] This point is reinforced by the fact that a 1938 radio adaptation of the novel by Orson Wells which, when broadcast in the United States, caused residents in New Jersey to panic and flee their homes.

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all over. The game's up. We're beat'" (175). Yet this resignation leads not to his collapse, but to intricate fantasies of humans becoming involved in the Martian project: "'Very likely these Martians will make pets of some of them; train them to do tricks—who knows?—get sentimental over the pet boy who grew up and had to be killed. And some, maybe, they will train to hunt us'" (177). The artilleryman imagines something like a human-Martian conspiracy. On the other hand, he also envisions a counter-force, one that will prepare surreptitiously while the Martians continue their invasion, acts as "spies" against the Martians (179), and bide its time: "'I'm going on, under their feet. I've got it planned; I've thought it out. We men are beat. We don't know enough. We've got to learn before we've got a chance. And we've got to live and keep independent while we learn. See! That's what has to be done'" (175-76). In the face of the Martian threat, the man exhibits a heroic resilience. Yet there is something quite delusional in the artilleryman's visions on both ends, and the narrator takes pains to emphasize this fact: "It was the coal cellar of the place, and when I saw the work he had spent a week upon—it was a burrow scarcely ten yards long, which he designed to reach to the main drain on Putney Hill—I had my first inkling of the gulf between his dreams and his powers. Such a hole I could have dug in a day" (180). The narrator fails to fall under the spell of the artilleryman and indicates that what he dreams is in excess of the situation and his own capabilities, even given the unprecedented Martian threat. As a result, though here I hesitate to push the argument too far, in constructing such an open-ended theory, the artilleryman seems more a deluded Subject Who Tries to Know than one who does with any degree of rational accuracy.

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From these reverse colonization narratives I move to a series of simple early-modernist espionage tales—three of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes short stories: "The Naval Treaty" (1893), "The Adventure of the Second Stain" (1904-05), and "The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans" (1908). I group these espionage stories together because each operates on the same premise and foregrounds Sherlock Holmes' powers in the same way: a compromising document disappears and though its "reappearance" in the hands of a foreign power could have catastrophic consequences for England, in each case Sherlock Holmes retrieves the document before it is made public. In "The Naval Treaty" it is a treaty that "defined the position of Great Britain towards the Triple Alliance, and foreshadowed the policy which this country would pursue in the event of the French fleet gaining a complete ascendancy over that of Italy in the Mediterranean. The questions treated in it were purely naval" (450). In "The Second Stain" it is the letter of a "certain foreign potentate" describing his dislike of "some recent Colonial developments of this country" and uses an array of "provocative phrases" (653). In "The Bruce-Partington Plans," as the title indicates, the document is comprised of the plans for the Bruce-Partington submarine. Each of the documents, therefore, concerns England's interests abroad or at sea and in the stories of the latter case thus hints at invasion-scare. There is also the following curious pattern: in the first story the document never reaches a foreign power; in the second, a spy acquires the document but fails to leave England; in the third, the spy leaves England with the document but returns because of one of Sherlock Holmes' ruses. In short, each time the espionage comes closer to succeeding.

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Each of the Holmes stories also underscores the role of the Subject Who Knows in resolving the case, while the last story also hints at a possible waning of Holmes' powers. "The Naval Treaty" might best be described as proto-espionage because it contains no spy per se. Percy Phelps, an employee in the Foreign Office, is assigned to copy the England-Italy treaty. A chance development puts the treaty in the hands of Phelps' future brother-in-law, Joseph Harrison. Though both the French and the Russians, Doyle tells us, would like to see the treaty, Harrison is working for neither and steals the document only to pay off his debts. Before he can do so, however, Phelps takes sick (for nine weeks with brain-fever) in the room where the treaty is hidden. The story gains interest, I suggest, primarily because it includes a hand-drawn map (451) which invites *the reader* to puzzle over the case and because the story showcases Holmes' talents in becoming the Subject Who Knows despite the fact that the case seems plagued with "too much evidence" (467). As to the latter point, it is also useful to contrast Watson's investigative work with Holmes':

> I lay tossing half the night myself, brooding over this strange problem and inventing a hundred theories, each of which was more impossible than the last. Why had Holmes remained at Woking? Why had he asked Miss Harrison to remain in the sick-room all day? Why had he been so careful not to inform the people at Briarbrae that he intended to remain near them? I cudgelled my brains until I fell asleep in the endeavour to find some explanation which would cover all these facts. (21)

Holmes provides the antidote to the interpretive vertigo of Watson whose behavior begins to parallel that of a conspiracy theorist.

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In "The Second Stain," Lady Hilda Trelawney Hope steals the letter from the dispatch box of her husband because she is being blackmailed by Eduardo Lucas, an "international spy" living in England. Lucas here, like Mr. X in "The Informer" (and later, of course, James Bond et al) by day lives the life of a society darling and playboy, and is also "on intimate terms with the leading politicians of several countries" (658). This story too derives its primary interest from Holmes' capabilities as the Subject Who Knows. On one hand, he treats the presence of spies in England as a given; on the other, he reveals that the names of these spies "are tolerably familiar" to him (654), i.e., he positions himself as a match for any spies that may be in the country.

The last story, "The Bruce-Partington Plans" opens with a scene that is typical of many Holmes stories and that will later become a staple of spy fiction: the hero (Holmes) is at home, excessively bored, awaiting adventure which soon arrives. The espionage in this story has a more sinister bent. The secret agent Oberstein conspires with a British citizen, Colonel Valentine (who, again, is strapped for money) to steal the Bruce-Partington plans and, later, to frame Arthur Cardogan West (a loyal employee of Valentine's brother) for the theft. Oberstein subsequently flees to the continent, plans in hand, but Holmes lures him back. The story also introduces Holmes' brother Mycroft, whom Doyle depicts as a Subject Who Knows on par with Holmes (Mycroft provides his brother with a list of all the significant spies living in London) and as a mastermind (albeit governmental) on the order of Moriarty: "The conclusions of every department are passed to him, and he is the central exchange, the clearing-house, which makes out the balance. All other men are specialists, but his specialism is omniscience" (914). In other words, in contrast to the other two stories, the case of "The Bruce-Partington Plans resists

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easy closure and ultimately requires the collaboration, however incidental, of two formidable Subjects Who Know to resolve it.

Erskine Childers' *Riddle of the Sands* (1903), a work which critics often cite as the first spy novel, also presents the investigative work of two (albeit amateur) detectives, but the plot they confront is of a much more complicated sort than anything Holmes faces. *The Riddle of the Sands* is also an interesting work in that, besides its innovative aspects, the novel also played an important role in real British history. On one hand, write John G. Cawelti and Bruce A. Rosenberg, the novel bridges the genres of invasion scare and spy fiction (40) or, as I would argue, is early-modernist espionage because it challenges the distinction between invasion-scare and spy fiction. On the other hand, Childers wrote the novel, which depicts the fictional preparations for an invasion of England by Germany from the Frisian Islands on Germany's northwest coast, as a wake-up call to England and (as I shall argue below) the work tries to do that by using a very interesting narrative strategy. Yet this narrative strategy aside, *The Riddle of the Sands* still walks a fine line between fiction and reality. For example, though the names of the central characters are false, Childers initials the Preface, dates it in the present, and affirms that the real-life counterparts of his characters "are now living in the midst of us" (14). The novel also gives a rather detailed and accurate assessment of British naval capabilities in relation to Germany, provides maps of the Frisian Islands so precise and extensive that British Naval Intelligence would later resort to using them (Masters 12), and Childers' "Postscript" (dated March 1903) reveals that almost concurrently with the novel's publication—or, as some critics maintain, *because* of the novel's publication—the British government took a number of defense precautions very similar to those suggested by Childers, including

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setting up a Committee of Imperial Defence (an offshoot of which would become M.I.5, see above) and creating a North Sea naval base (278). In addition, Childers proves a fascinating study because of his own remarkable and revolutionary life. Though a British citizen who served in the Boer War, he was Irish on his mother's side and some ten years after publishing *The Riddle of the Sands* became a propagandist for Home Rule. Later he joined Sinn Fein, served as a gunrunner for the Irish Republican Army, was captured, denounced by Churchill (who had earlier praised *The Riddle of the Sands*), and finally executed by a firing squad as a traitor to England. His son, it might also be noted, Erskine Hamilton Childers, was naturalized as an Irish citizen and in 1973 became President of Ireland.

As mentioned, *The Riddle of the Sands* centers on two Englishmen, Davies and Carruthers, and their fishing and fowl-hunting expedition in the range of the Frisian Islands. Carruthers, a government employee with "a safe, possibly brilliant future in the Foreign Office" begins the story plagued by the same kind of boredom that assailed Holmes in "The Bruce-Partington Plans" and will return with Richard Hannay in the opening of *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (see below). At the key moment, however, a letter arrives from a college acquaintance (Davies) soliciting Carruthers' help for the Frisian expedition. When he journeys out to the Frisian Islands, however, Carruthers discovers that he and Davies have little in common (as was also the case in college), that Davies' "yacht" is a decrepit little craft, and that Davies, despite his invitation, doesn't seem to need Carruthers on the expedition.

But the truth soon emerges. While sailing around the Frisian Islands, Davies has stumbled upon some kind of German plot, spearheaded by a figure named Dollman (who

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had earlier tried to kill Davies and is, in fact, an Englishman masquerading as a German), and Davies has invited Carruthers along for help in unraveling this plot. Though the men's subsequent adventures are too involved to detail here, I will observe that through their work the men become what critics of spy fiction have called "amateur" spies and employ a number of spy tactics, among them impersonation and shadowing, and play a dangerous game of wits with Dollman et al:

> Every word that I could recollect of that critical conversation I reviewed with Davies, who had imperfectly understood what he had not been directly concerned in; and, as I did so, I began to see with what cleverness each succeeding sentence of von Brüning's was designed to suit both of two contingencies. If we were innocent travelers, he was the genial host, communicative and helpful. If we were spies, his tactics had been equally applicable. He had outdone us in apparent candour, hiding nothing which he knew we would discover for ourselves, and contriving at the same time both to gain knowledge and control of our movements, and to convey us warnings, which would only be understood if we were guilty, that we were playing an idle and perilous game, and had better desist. But in one respect we had had the advantage, and that was in the version Davies had given of his stranding on the Hohenhörn. Inscrutable as our questioner was, he let it appear not only that the incident was new to him, but that he conjectured at its sinister significance. A little cross-examination on detail would have been fatal to Davies's version; but that was where our strength lay; he dared not cross-examine for fear of suggesting to Davies suspicions which he might never have felt. (151-52)

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The men also discover Dollman's secret, that despite being British he has been spying on England, scouting out (for instance) the geography of Chatham, and they penetrate the "riddle of the sands," so called because of the sands that appear between the Frisian Islands at low tide. The Germans are plotting a light-craft invasion of England, one that will be in the charge of four men—one to coordinate the German navy, one to "superintend the six canals [from which the Germans would begin the invasion] and the construction of lighters," one man to organize local labor, and one man (Dollman), to provide "the indispensable link" to England:

> He undertakes to furnish reliable information as to the disposition of troops in England, as to the hydrography of the coast selected for the landing, as to the supplies available in its vicinity, and the strategic points to be seized. He proposes to be guide-in-chief to the expedition during transit. And in the meantime (when not otherwise employed) he was to reside at Norderney, in close touch with the other three, and controlling the commercial undertakings which were to throw dust in the eyes of the curious. (274-75).

In other words, *The Riddle of the Sands* has all the elements, including invasion-scare and mid-Victorian espionage components, to make it a complex example of an early-modernist espionage narrative.

The novel also devotes considerable attention to the detective work of the two men and underscores how they discover the real plot only *after* considering a number of competing conspiracy "theories"—only after considerably stalling as Subjects Who Try to Know. To understand this development, it is necessary to recap Britain's situation in 1903 as the novel lays it out. In the narrative Childers (via the voice of Carruthers) argues

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that Britain, whose economy and well-being depend on the sea, has grown careless in her control of it and is hampered by a number of weaknesses—among them a small army, no navy-army cooperation, no plans for the repulsion of an invasion and, most importantly, no North Sea defense preparations (96 and 272-73). Germany's navy, conversely, thanks to the leadership of Kaiser Wilhelm II (who, in fact, briefly appears in the novel to make a final test of the invasion route), is burgeoning and the country also controls key stretches of the European coast, most significantly the Frisian Islands (80-81). In addition, Germany has the advantage of "perfect organization" and "perfect secrecy" (282)—that is, at least until Davies and Carruthers come along.

Stumbling upon what seem like German naval preparations, the two men combine their knowledge of the contemporary events with what they have seen during their survey of the Frisian Islands and create two competing theories to account for their observations. The "channel theory" (Davies' theory) argues that the area is being readied to facilitate the attack of small craft against the larger British ships in case of a battle near the German shore. The "Memmert theory" (Carruthers') insists that the island of Memmert will be used as a key defense position for the Ems estuary. Neither of the theories proves correct. It emerges—though not till late in the narrative—that the point is not defense of or attack *near* the German coast, but an invasion of England by the German navy (258-59 and 273-74). Up to the discovery, however, the men alternately debate and doubt their respective theories and, thus, the story gives prolonged emphasis to the men's status as Subjects Who Try to Know—i.e., to their wandering in a kind of hermeneutic limbo similar to those in *The Moonstone*, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, etc. *The Riddle in the Sands*, however, is unique in how it pulls the reader into this limbo. As noted, the book is

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full of very accurate maps of the German coast and repeatedly Carruthers draws the reader's attention to these maps. In fact, he even provides tips on how to use them:

> Note the spot marked "second rest" [. . .] and the course of the channel from that point westward. You will see it broadening and deepening to the dimensions of a great river, and finally merging in the estuary of the Ems. Note, too, that its northern boundary, the edge of the now uncovered Nordland Sand, leads, with one interruption (marked A), direct to Memmert, and is boomed throughout. You will then understand why Davies made so light of the rest of his problem. (194-95)

Childers subtly but skillfully lets "you" join the narrative action. In following the maps, therefore, some of which are conveniently marked with symbols such as an "X" or dotted-lines, we too begin an informed (or so it seems) evaluation of the "channel" and "Memmert" theories—we, the British readers of 1903, start to imitate the characters we are reading about! Through a curious narrative strategy (to which I alluded earlier) Childers' novel begins to waver between a fictional and non-fictional document—between a fictional and a real, historically-based assessment of Britain's disadvantageous position in relation to Germany. In other words, the book attempts to make the reader pro-active by inspiring fear and even "paranoia" in regard to Germany. Of course, I have already observed boundary-blurring between reader and text in other conspiracy narratives, but here Childers ups the ante. This is not the story of a particular revolutionary group (*The Woman in White*) or of an exercise in detection (*The Secret Agent*)—it is a story about "us," about Britain "today" and the deplorable state of "our" defenses.

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In John Buchan's renowned spy story, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1914), which was published just before the outbreak of World War I, the foreign invader takes the much more threatening form of three German spies who actually penetrate Britain's' borders and acquire a set of important naval plans. In terms of enemy, therefore, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* resembles *The Riddle of the Sands* (for which Buchan expressed warm admiration), while as to spies the novel is much in line with Doyle's stories except that Buchan makes his spies specifically German (Doyle's have no particular nationality). Buchan's novel is significant in the conspiracy tradition because it synthesizes the imperialist adventure stories of the nineteenth century (such as *Treasure Island* or *King Solomon's Mines*) with invasion-scare narrative and the older form of espionage (Cawelti 41). As in *The Man Who Was Thursday*, the book also presents an array of chase scenes and numerous close scrapes which showcase Richard Hannay's resourcefulness and resilience and thereby offer an excellent example of British "masculinity" against an enemy that threatens the very basis of English life (Kestner 360 and Cawelti 41-42). The story gains much of its excitement because the enemy, the Germans, pursues Hannay using a slew of modern devices including a monoplane, motorcars and telegrams. In addition, the novel owes some of its appeal to Hannay's near-preternatural ability not only to assume various disguises (*á la* Sherlock Holmes), but also to alter his behavior, including speech and mannerisms, in regard to these disguises. Finally, the novel also foregrounds the role of Providence in Hannay's adventures. Repeatedly in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* a fantastic coincidence brings Hannay face to face with the Germans or rescues him from their clutches so as to make him seem also like a Providential agent (cf. Cawelti 82ff). Buchan thus repositions Providence and the "evil" conspiracy as opposing forces.

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Here, however, I want to look at the novel's most significant and innovative aspects. Hannay learns of the German plot when his neighbor Frank P. Scudder (a free agent of various sorts) takes refuge in Hannay's apartment. Like Holmes and Carruthers, Hannay begins his tale mastered by boredom. He has just returned from the "veld" in Africa (Rhodesia—modern-day Zimbabwe, specifically) where he was a mining engineer and London, by comparison, seems dull. Scudder's appearance, consequently, comes as a welcome intrusion; Hannay soon begins to explore the details of the German plot. The plot is in no way a simple affair. Karolides, the Greek Premier, is to be assassinated in London by a conspiracy called the "Black Stone," which at this point involves at least two men, one of whom can "hood his eyes like a hawk" (12). Karolides matters, asserts Scudder, because he is "the one big man in the show" and "the only barrier between Europe and Armageddon" (2). The assassination, consequently, will implicate a number of countries: "'He'll be murdered by an Austrian, and there'll be plenty of evidence to show the connivance of the big folk in Vienna and Berlin'" (7). What complicates the situation and makes it much more interesting is the larger political situation that Scudder reveals:

> Away behind all the Governments and the armies there was a big subterranean movement going on, engineered by very dangerous people. He had come on it by accident; it fascinated him; he went further, and then he got caught. I gathered that most of the people in it were the sort of educated anarchists that make revolutions, but that beside them there were financiers who were playing for money. A clever man can make big profits on a falling market, and it suited the book of both classes to set Europe by the ears.

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> He told me some queer things that explained a lot that had puzzled me—things that happened in the Balkan War, how one state suddenly came out on top, why alliances were made and broken, why certain men disappeared, and where the sinews of war came from. The aim of the whole conspiracy was to get Russia and Germany at loggerheads.
>
> When I asked Why, he said that the anarchist lot thought it would give them their chance. Everything would be in the melting-pot, and they looked to see a new world emerge. The capitalists would rake in the shekels, and make fortunes by buying up wreckage. Capital, he said, had no conscience and no fatherland. Besides, the Jew was behind it, and the Jew hated Russia worse than hell. (4-5)

Some of this we have heard before. A "subterranean movement" involving anarchists sounds much like *The Princess Casamassima* et al, while the second conspiratorial layer of "financiers" echoes (but also alters) the aristocrat conspiracy in *The Man Who Was Thursday*. What is new is the conspiracy's method of operation: "the new world order" is to be achieved not by overthrowing the ruling classes directly, but through the manipulation of politics and historical events. Also new is what might be called a third layer in the conspiracy—behind it all is "the Jew." Of course, this last topic as a whole and what it led up to in World War II is beyond the scope of this study, but I will note that such a belief was very much in line with attitudes in many European circles. In literary/written documents it takes the form of such topics as, for instance, the Dreyfus affair in which Zola became involved and to which Proust devotes considerable space (though the affair not being a conspiracy per se is again outside this study's scope) and there was the deeply anti-Semitic Russian forgery known as *The Protocols of the Elders*

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of Zion (made public in 1905) which detailed the plot of a group of Jewish "Elders" to control the world.

Equally important, I suggest, is the type of conspiracy Buchan creates. Scudder presents a conspiracy of *global* extent and one that does not seek to change history but rather that *already* controls it. Further, add the fact that the details of the conspiracy (as Scudder first presents them) turn out to be an elaborate invention, and *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, like its precursor *The Riddle of the Sands*, suddenly veers very close to being a conspiracy theory narrative. Nor does the development end there. From a notebook that Scudder has left behind Hannay learns that most of what Scudder initially told him is actually "eyewash" and that the real plot is "immortally big"—war is inevitable; it will come as a big surprise to Britain (and occur because of events that Karolides' death sets in motion); Britain is to be blamed because she's lowered her guard and allowed Germany to ring her coast "with mines and submarines"; and the "Black Stone" is actually working to steal "a statement of the disposition of the British Home Fleet on mobilization" (35-36). I give the plot at such length because this second conspiracy "theory" wholly changes the nature of Buchan's novel. From a potential conspiracy theory narrative, we move back (so to speak) to a early-modernist espionage narrative. Or, one detailed theory replaces another and it is not till later in the novel (when Karolides is assassinated) that we discover, at least with some degree of certainty, that this second theory accurately covers the Black Stone's plot. Yet that we and Hannay must wait for confirmation and that Hannay, even in the last pages of the novel, still questions whether the three "Englishmen" he confronts are in fact German spies, foregrounds the

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indeterminacy that lies at the heart of *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and that problematizes—even if only temporarily—Hannay's status as the Subject Who Knows.

Before ending this section I want to consider one last espionage narrative, the Sherlock Holmes short story, "His Last Bow: *An Epilogue of Sherlock Holmes*" (1917). Though not the last Holmes story (Doyle would issue one more Holmes collection, *The Case-Book of Sherlock Homes*, comprised of stories written between 1921 and 1927), "His Last Bow" is meant to serve as an epilogue to Holmes career—as even the subtitle indicates—and the story also provides a moving swan song to Holmes as the ultimate Subject Who Knows. The story is set in August 1914, just days before the beginning of World War I and opens with a conversation between two Germans in England, Von Bork, a spy, and Baron Von Herling, "the Chief Secretary of the Legation." The conversation, led by Von Bork, centers on two topics and extends for some pages with the resulting effect that, despite the subtitle, the story attempts to "pass" on the reader—it seems not to be a Sherlock Holmes short story at all. First, Von Bork brags of his deep infiltration in Britain over the last four years, describes his collaboration with a man named Altamont, and displays a safe with "rows of stuffed pigeonholes" with labels such as "Fords," "Harbor defenses," "Airplanes," "Ireland," etc.; then the two men discuss how the Germans have distracted England from preparing for the war so that she will not be able or willing to aid either France or Belgium. In other words, "His Last Bow," though an espionage tale, exhibits the kind of behind-the-scenes political manipulation that appears in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. Soon after the above exchange the Baron leaves and the Irish-American named Altamont, accompanied by his chauffer, arrives. The suggestion, of course, is collaboration between the Irish revolutionary forces and Germany. In a surprise

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twist, however, Altamont turns out to be Sherlock Holmes. The game is up, and he and Watson (the chauffer) arrest Von Bork in a move that recalls M.I.5's apprehension of the German spy network on August 4, 1914 (see above).

In the conversation that follows, Holmes reveals that he has been undercover for the last two years. Thus, nearly all of the information that Von Bork received (and which the Germans took seriously) was "'a little untrustworthy'": "'It will require some checking and you have little time to check it. Your admiral may find the new guns rather larger than he expects, and the cruisers perhaps a trifle faster'" (979). In the game of espionage v. counter-espionage Holmes again emerges victorious and as the successful Subject Who Knows. The irony is that this time the problem is too big—the forces arrayed against Britain now are beyond even the resources of someone like Sherlock Holmes. As noted, the story is set just days before the War and the characters repeatedly display that they are well aware of this fact. In the story's final conversation between Watson and Holmes, Doyle drives this home in an especially powerful and moving way:

> "There's an east wind coming, Watson."
>
> "I think not, Holmes. It is very warm."
>
> "Good old Watson! You are the one fixed point in a changing age. There's an east wind coming all the same, such a wind as never blew on England yet. It will be cold and bitter, Watson and a good many of us may wither before its blast. But it's God's own wind none the less, and a cleaner, better, stronger land will lie in the sunshine when the storm has cleared. Start her up, Watson, for it's time that we were on our way." (980)

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"His Last Bow" thus provides an endpoint to one tradition of British conspiracy narratives—or, along with *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, the story decisively opens the door into the new realm of conspiracy theory fiction—a realm in which the conspiracies are too "immortally big" (Jameson's "conspiracy as totality" comes to mind here—see Introduction) and in which even the best of individuals, however much they seem to succeed, find that the "whole amazing" plot exceeds their investigative capabilities.

The Criminal Mastermind

Unlike in the previous two sections, here I shall examine only two works, both Sherlock Holmes short stories and both centering on the criminal mastermind Professor Moriarty and his criminal gang. The figure of the mastermind (which necessarily, in my reading, implies an attendant gang or conspiracy to carry out his plots) pervades conspiracy literature. Examples already discussed include Count Fosco, Hoffendahl and Sunday, but the list could easily be expanded to comprise Compeyson in *Great Expectations*, Godfrey Ablewhite in *The Moonstone*, Peter Ivanovitch in *Under Western Eyes*, the German spy who can "hood his eyes like a hawk" in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, and Dracula. As predecessors for these figures one might count Iago and a countless number of his successors including (closer to the period in question) the character of Fagin in *Oliver Twist* (1837) and the eighteenth-century thief-taker Jonathan Wild as he appears in such fictional works as Fielding's novel of the same name (1743) or in Harrison Ainsworth's *Jack Sheppard* (1839). The difference between these earlier characters, however, and the characters I have discussed previously lies in the scope of operations. In general, over time the extent of the mastermind's power increases from a "local" project,

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i.e., one involving a few people and limited to one community or city, to a "global" one, i.e., one of considerable size and with international connections. For example, David Nokes observes that the historical Jonathan Wild proclaimed himself "Thief-Taker General" and operated a sizeable criminal operation: "He instructed thieves what to steal, received the stolen goods from them, and then returned the goods to the persons robbed for a fee. Thieves who refused to operate with the scheme were easily caught and 'framed' by Wild, who sent more than sixty of them to the gallows" (9). Conversely, in the fictional depiction Fielding cuts a number of Wild's key accomplices, including Jack Sheppard, and instead focuses on Wild's villainy against Heartfree. As a result, in Fielding's tale, the emphasis is on Wild as a mastermind-like figure who plays "the part of a prompter" (154) Though we occasionally hear of Wild's fear of his gang's treachery, Fielding describes this gang *in toto* only once in the entire novel: "Wild had now got together a very considerable gang, composed of undone gangsters, ruined bailiffs, broken tradesmen, idle apprentices, attorneys' clerks, and loose and disorderly youths who, being born to no fortune, nor bred to any trade or profession, were willing to live luxuriously without trade or profession" (102). Thus, Wild and *not* his gang embodies the formidable criminal entity. A similar situation occurs in Harrison Ainsworth's depiction of Wild. In *Jack Sheppard*, Wild emerges as a much more brutal and cunning villain than in Fielding's version and seems to have extensive criminal connections throughout London, but beside bringing to the fore a few key figures such as Jack Sheppard, Blueskin or the Jew that serves as Wild's right-hand man, most of this gang is again relegated to the background and usually mentioned without emphasis or just in passing.

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In the mid- to late-Victorian and Edwardian masterminds here discussed, we see a different situation. A figure like Hoffendahl or Sunday gains much of his dramatic effect because of the vast forces that are at his disposal and the narrator of each tale underscores this fact, highlighting the size of the mastermind's conspiracy. Count Fosco, for example, whose operations at first seem limited, soon begins to collaborate with a variety of secondary henchmen (see Chapter Three). Hoffendahl has "vast" forces in his control. Sunday's anarchist conspiracy seems to stretch across the Earth. Yet in the late-Victorian period the most famous mastermind—because he opposes the most famous of detectives—must be the brilliant and formidable Professor James Moriarty, to whom I have already referred multiple times. Moriarty and his gang take center stage in two stories, "The Final Problem" and "The Adventure of the Empty House," and before concluding this chapter I want to examine these two stories and, briefly, touch on the curious relationship between them. Specifically, I want to explore how Doyle introduces indeterminacy into his depiction of the Moriarty gang, then consider the significance of this indeterminacy in the conspiracy fiction tradition.

Sherlock Holmes, of course, is the most famous detective ever conceived and, as numerous critics have noted, one of the few literary characters to have become a household name (see, e.g., Ousby 140). This owes in part to his "biographer," in part to Holmes' own dramatic personality, but also in part to the fact that Holmes is perhaps the ultimate Subject Who Knows. No problem is too big for him (almost), no detail insignificant enough to escape his attention. He rarely fails to solve a case. As Ian Ousby indicates, Holmes is "the perfect hero for his age" and fills the void that had impeded "writers of the 1870s and 80s, in their disillusion with the police detective" (141)—an

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observation to which I would add, given my historical discussion at the opening of this chapter, that through his investigations and methods Holmes publicly validates the techniques the police department, the Special Branch and, later, M.I.5 used secretly (and successfully) in their crusades against the Fenians, the anarchists, the Germans et al. Of course, Holmes has very human limits as the story "His Last Bow" demonstrates, but these limits rarely come to the fore and in his best moments, as during his confrontation with Professor Moriarty, Holmes pushes against these limits and seems to retain his position as the Subject Who Knows.

What makes Moriarty such a powerful adversary is that his intelligence and dexterity rival Holmes' own. Nowhere is the fact better revealed than in Holmes' classic first encounter with Moriarty in "The Final Problem" (1893):

> "You have less frontal development than I should have expected," said he at last. "It is a dangerous habit to finger loaded firearms in the pocket of one's dressing-gown."
>
> The fact is that upon his entrance I had instantly recognized the extreme personal danger in which I lay. The only conceivable escape for him lay in silencing my tongue. In an instant I had slipped the revolver from the drawer into my pocket and was covering him through the cloth. At his remark I drew the weapon out and laid it cocked upon the table. He still smiled and blinked, but there was something about his eyes which made me feel very glad that I had it there.
>
> "You evidently don't know me," said he.

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"On the contrary," I answered, "I think it is fairly evident that I do. Pray take a chair. I can spare you five minutes if you have anything to say."

"All that I have to say has already crossed your mind," said he.

"Then possibly my answer has crossed yours," I replied.

"You stand fast?"

"Absolutely." (472)

Doyle's writing is terse, rapidly attains a point of high intensity, and clearly underscores the equally-matched capabilities of the two men—a point that the conclusion of "The Final Problem" seems to reinforce by implying that the two men died together, locked arm-in-arm as they fell over the Reichenbach Falls. "The Final Problem" also emphasizes Moriarty's ability to terrify Holmes. For example, upon arriving at Watson's quarters Holmes nervously closes the shutters, declares his fear of air-guns, then describes the series of near-calamities that have befallen him since he began pursuing Moriarty's crime syndicate, including a falling brick just missing his head and an attack by a "rough with a bludgeon" (473). In the same way, when Holmes and Watson flee to Switzerland, Watson tells us that "never for one instant did Holmes forget the shadow which lay across him" (477). Moriarty, like no other criminal Holmes has ever faced, can threaten Holmes physically *and* psychologically.

Yet these abilities seem incidental when compared to Moriarty's other powers. Moriarty "pervades London," Holmes reveals, "and no one has heard of him. That's what puts him on a pinnacle in the records of crime" (470); Moriarty's arrest and the destruction of his gang, which Holmes is about to engineer, will clear up "over forty

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mysteries" (471). Moriarty is thus at once a criminal mastermind, the Hidden Hand behind much of London's crime, and an Inaccessible Authority:

> "For years past I have continually been conscious of some power behind the malefactor, some deep organizing power which forever stands in the way of the law, and throws its shield over the wrong-doer. Again and again in cases of the most varying sorts—forgery cases, robberies, murders—I have felt the presence of this force, and I have deduced its action in many of those undiscovered crimes in which I have not been personally consulted. For years I have endeavoured to break through the veil which shrouded it, and at last the time came when I seized my thread and followed it, until it led me after a thousand cunning windings, to ex-Professor Moriarty, of mathematical celebrity.
>
> "He is the Napoleon of crime, Watson. He is the organizer of half that is evil and of nearly all that is undetected in this great city. He is a genius, a philosopher, an abstract thinker. He has a brain of the first order. He sits motionless, like a spider in the centre of its web, but that web has a thousand radiations, and he knows well every quiver of each of them. He does little himself. He only plans. But his agents are numerous and splendidly organized. Is there a crime to be done, a paper to be abstracted, we will say, a house to be rifled, a man to be removed—the word is passed to the professor, the matter is organized and carried out. The agent may be caught. In that case money is found for his bail or his defence. But the central power which uses the agent is never caught—never so much as suspected." (471)

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In this wonderful passage Holmes details how he first learned of Moriarty, a "deep organizing power," and Holmes describes the spider-like way in which Moriarty has structured and controlled his conspiracy while himself retaining complete anonymity. Holmes places special emphasis on Moriarty's prowess and, in fact, Moriarty exhibits an almost Providence-like ability to stay out of reach, to remain an Inaccessible Authority. Thus, Moriarty functions as the absent-center of a vast criminal conspiracy, one responsible "for nearly all that is undetected in this great city" and so one comparable in size to a number of conspiracies I have already considered. Yet Moriarty's conspiracy cannot be so easily defined. Doyle—perhaps inadvertently—introduces a subtle element of indeterminacy into his depiction of the Moriarty conspiracy. When Moriarty comes to discuss this conspiracy, he describes it thus: "'You stand in the way not merely of an individual but of a mighty organization, the full extent of which you, with all your cleverness, have been unable to realize'" (472-73). Though this is the only such comment that Moriarty makes, we see that here he *challenges* Holmes' version of the facts and asserts that the truth exceeds Holmes' grasp. What should we make of this comment? Since both men seem to perish at the story's end, in "The Final Problem" Moriarty's challenge remains but a single, tantalizing comment.

The issue reappears in the next Sherlock Holmes short story in which the Moriarty conspiracy appears, "The Adventure of the Empty House" (1903). The central mystery of "The Empty House" is the "locked-room" murder of the Honorable Ronald Adair and, before Holmes' return, the mystery again showcases Watson's inability to become the Subject Who Knows: "All day as I drove upon my round, I turned over the case in my mind and found no explanation which appeared to me to be adequate" (483).

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Holmes, however, has no such problems: the murder, he declares, was committed using an air-gun (the same air-gun, in fact, Holmes was evading at the opening of "The Final Problem") and the killer was one Colonel Sebastian Moran, "[t]he second most dangerous man in London." Moran, Holmes also reveals, was one of Moriarty's chief co-conspirators:

> "[F]or a time he was chief of the staff. Moriarty supplied him liberally with money, and used him only in one or two very high-class jobs, which no ordinary criminal could have undertaken. You may have some recollection of the death of Mrs. Stewart, of Lauder, in 1887. Not? Well, I am sure Moran was at the bottom of it, but nothing could be proved. So cleverly was the colonel concealed that, even when the Moriarty gang was broken up, we could not incriminate him." (494)

It is an incredible disclosure and by it Holmes shows that Moran represents an even greater Inaccessible Authority than Moriarty had been. Holmes also offers a revised assessment of the Moriarty organization:

> "The instant that the Professor had disappeared, it struck me what a really extraordinarily lucky chance Fate had placed in my way. I knew that Moriarty was not the only man who had sworn my death. There were at least three others whose desire for vengeance upon me would only be increased by the death of their leader. They were all most dangerous men. One or other would certainly get me. On the other hand, if all the world was convinced that I was dead they would take liberties, these men, they would soon lay themselves open, and sooner or

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later I could destroy them. Then it would be time for me to announce that I was still in the land of the living." (486-87)

Holmes implies that neither he nor Moriarty had been quite right in their initial depictions of the criminal organization. The organization was bigger than Holmes had let on (and Moriarty was not its only center), but it was also not as vast as Moriarty had suggested. Of course, Doyle obviously didn't intend for his readers to notice the indeterminacy in "The Final Problem" or to observe this conspiracy "difference" between the two stories—these details are clearly incidental, present only for dramatic effect, or they might be seen as creative lapses on Doyle's part as, on occasion, he could be a careless writer (see Morley 7). At the same time, the indeterminacy *is* there in "The Final Problem" and its subsequent resolution in "The Empty House" thus places the two stories (when taken as a whole) in the tradition of conspiracy narratives where multiple conspiracy "theories" circulate before a final and "correct" theory surfaces (cf. *The Riddle of the Sands*, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, etc.). Doyle—however inadvertently—foreshadows in miniature the indeterminacy that will appear in expanded form in these other novels. Or, in my look at the indeterminacy and resolution in these two stories (which thus become ur-texts of sorts), and given my discussions of indeterminacy and irony as well as conspiracy fusion in the previous two sections, I have now brought my study of Victorian conspiracy fiction to its absolute limit. All that remains for my Afterword is a brief but suggestive "look ahead" at one fictional work from the other side of the conspiracy-conspiracy theory border, Marcel Proust's magnificent *In Search of Lost Time*.

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An Afterword: *In Search of Lost Time* and its "Inversion Theory"

In this last section, rather than summing up the main points of my study then looking ahead to conspiracy developments in the twentieth century (the latter of which I already done throughout my study and in the Introduction), I shall instead pursue a single "suggestive" reading of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (1913-1922) and in particular of the novel's fourth section, *Sodom and Gomorrah* (1921). As Lucille Cairns (among others) observes, *Sodom and Gomorrah* functions as both the literal and thematic center of Proust's novel, and represents his most explicit statement on homosexuality or, as he calls it, "inversion" (43).[1] *Sodom and Gomorrah* and especially its first section, alternately called the "Introduction to the Men-Women of Sodom" and "La Race maudite," was also the first part of the novel to be sketched (in 1909—setting it at the tail end of the period I discussed in the Chapter Five) and so operates as the narrative's

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[1] As many critics have noted, Proust's use of the term *inversion* and his depiction of homosexuality is, to say the least, tricky. Before beginning my discussion, therefore, it might be useful to clarify the terrain. Lucille Cairns observes that Proust uses the terms inversion and homosexuality interchangeably, but that in fact, "Homosexuality denotes attraction to or sexual relations with the same sex. Inversion, however, simply denotes an individual's assumption of the characteristics ascribed to the opposite sex; it may occur in homosexually or heterosexually oriented people" (43). Thus, writes Leo Bersani, Proust's depiction of homosexuality depends on an illusion—what Proust has in mind is the classic concept of, not homosexuality proper, but *anima muliebris in corpore virili inclusa*, i.e. the "woman trapped in a man's body" syndrome (131-32). Or, as Elisabeth Ladenson clarifies, Proust follows the paradigm in which "a man who desires another man does so insofar as he is himself in some essential way a woman. Desire even for a member of the same biological sex is thus seen as inherently heterosexual, as it were, and it is at least in part for this reason that Proust eschews the term "homosexuality," preferring "inversion" (256).

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"catalytic node," as Eve Sedgwick calls it (*Epistemology* 214). "La Race maudite" and how its revelations reverberate throughout *In Search of Lost Time*, however, matter to my argument because in his depiction of inverts Proust creates, in essence, what may be one of the first conspiracy theory narratives in fiction. Thus, in considering this conspiracy theory, I will show how it incorporates a variety of conspiracemes as well as conspiratorial indeterminacy and irony into its structure, and so how it both continues the conspiracy narrative tradition and breaks away from it in a striking and original way. Yet because I only want to be "suggestive," my discussion here will be brief and rather focused, foregrounding only the key conspiracy elements in Proust's narrative and concentrating only on two characters, the Baron de Charlus and the novel's fictional narrator (whom I shall call Marcel so as to distinguish him from Proust, the author).

In Marcel we see a figure who rests on the cusp between a Subject Who Knows and a Subject Who Tries to Know. In terms of the first stance, one of Marcel's great virtues is his zeal as a detective. *In Search of Lost Time* is as much the story of how Marcel becomes an author and writes his novel as it is a detailed narration of his various investigations. For example, the hundreds of labored pages of *The Captive* and *The Fugitive* amply demonstrate Marcel's investigative drive when it comes to examining the life of Albertine, his lover. The same holds for Marcel's success in making other discoveries such as when he sees Mlle Vinteuil and her friend engaged in a "sadistic" act with M. Vinteuil's picture (I.173 ff) or when he observes the bondage scene between M. de Charlus and the soldier (III.843 ff). Likewise, each of these moments shows that Marcel arrives at his discoveries, that he becomes the Subject Who Knows, through a combination of chance (or so he would have us believe) and daring on a par with

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Sherlock Holmes. Yet nowhere is Marcel's investigative success more in evidence than in the *Sodom and Gomorrah* section. It is here that Marcel first witnesses the invert encounter between Charlus and Jupien, and it is here that he launches his great jeremiad against inversion—creating, in effect, a conspiracy theory which argues that inverts not only pervade society but also often dominate it politically.

Of course, critics have noted that clues of the "invert conspiracy" (my term) pervade *In Search of Lost Time*, even before Marcel makes his discovery in *Sodom and Gomorrah.* Such clues, however, only become "clues" in retrospect. Elisabeth Ladenson, for example, argues that Proust structures his novel in such a way that it demands rereading. Marcel, she writes, "must play an edgy game that consists in both divulging to the reader only such information as his earlier self was privy to at any given point in the story he tells, and at the same time making more or less oblique reference to later events, of which he is at the time of writing necessarily aware." This project takes the form, continues Ladenson, of such sentences as "'This episode was later, for reasons I could not imagine at the time, to play a great role in my life'" and by this method Proust enjoins his reader "to imagine an enlightened rereading of the passage in question alongside her present ignorant reading" (252). From the outset Marcel creates a narrative in which we track the intellectual development of his younger self and only gradually comes to acquire the knowledge that his more mature self, the self that writes the narrative, already has. The result is that Marcel, especially in terms of inversion, a priori sets us at odds with his more mature self. Discounting the possibility of "an educated guess," we are destined to remain at the level of Subjects Who Try to Know until Marcel, the Subject Who Knows, enlightens us: "this accidental discovery is frequently misunderstood and a

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third person who is in the know must supply the elusive clue of which everyone is unaware" (III.203). Most people, Marcel suggests, may misinterpret an invert encounter unless "some person in the know," like himself, provides the "clue."

Yet Marcel is not quite the authority that his narrative sets him up to be. As Eve Sedgwick points out in her seminal reading of Proust, Marcel's depiction of inversion is rife with contradictions: "It offers what seems to have been the definitive performance of the presiding incoherencies of modern gay [. . .] sexual specification and gay [. . .] gender" (*Epistemology* 213). In this way, continues Sedgwick, Marcel establishes "*the spectacle of the homosexual closet*" by creating a homosexuality that cannot be reduced to one definition. For example, in terms of Charlus "every analytic or ethical category applied throughout *A la recherche* to the homosexuality of M. de Charlus can easily be shown to be subverted or directly contradicted elsewhere" (230). Similarly, adds Sedgwick, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, the section in which, as noted, Marcel makes his most explicit statements about homosexuality, is in no way excepted from this rule, "it is even internally rife with versions of the same contradictions that surround it" (217-18). Elisabeth Ladenson makes a similar reading. For her, however, male homosexuality, that of the Sodomites (more below), is less problematic and operates according to a binary system: "apparently virile men are subject to reevaluation as essentially effeminate once their 'true nature' is discovered" (257). The women, conversely, the Gomorrheans are not "double but multiple": "Such women run the gamut from shy tomboys to ostentatiously feminine courtesans, and their objects of desire tend to resemble them rather than being their opposites, as Proust's theory of Sodom suggests about their male counterparts" (258). Whatever the case, what Sedgwick and Ladenson draw attention to and what I

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would like to spend a little time examining, is the indeterminacy that pervades Marcel's depiction of inverts.

In *In Search of Lost Time* this indeterminacy operates along very particular axes and I think it useful to delimit these axes. During the opening of *Sodom and Gomorrah* Marcel first realizes that something usual may occur when he sees Charlus walking alone in the courtyard:

> No more now than a Guermantes, he seemed already carved in stone, he, Palamède XV, in the chapel at Combray. These general features of a whole family [*ces traits généraux de toute une famille*] took on, however, in the face of M. de Charlus a more spiritised, above all a softer refinement [*une finesse plus spiritualisée, plus donce surtout*]. [. . . for] what he suddenly suggested to me, to such an extent had he momentarily assumed the features, the expression, the smile thereof, was a woman. (II.625-26)

In an unguarded moment, Charlus reveals a surprising second identity—that of a woman. The moment hereby becomes the *locus classicus* in Proust's novel for the trope of *anima muliebris in corpore virili inclusa*. Yet, significantly, this inversion characteristic appears at the moment when, in Marcel's mind, Charlus most exhibits the traits that define him as a member of the Guermantes family. Marcel consequently aligns heredity and inversion, a point he later reinforces by calling Saint-Loup's inversion, a "hereditary disease [*le mal héréditaire*]" (III.704 ff). Marcel, however, soon complicates this simple cause and effect relationship:

> These descendants of the Sodomites [. . .] have established themselves throughout the entire world; they have had access to every profession and are so readily

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> admitted into the most exclusive clubs that, whenever a Sodomite fails to secure election, the black balls are for the most part cast by other Sodomites, who make a point of condemning sodomy, having inherited the mendacity that enabled their ancestors to escape from the accursed city. It is possible that they may return there one day [*Il est possible qu'ils y retournent un jour*]. (II.655)

In discussing the "descendents [*descendants*] of the Sodomites" Marcel creates a vast conspiracy on the order of those we saw in works such as *The Woman in White* and *The Princess Casamassima* (see Chapters Three and Five respectively). Yet, as the allusions to the biblical city of Sodom also emphasize, here Marcel endows inversion with a mytheopoeic origin. In the same vein, with his final statement, Marcel positions himself as a new kind of Subject Who Knows, one able to see the future and so more akin to a Sodomite prophet than a zealous detective. Moreover, the above two passages again emphasize the indeterminacy that marks the origins of inversion.

This indeterminacy carries over in the behavioral manifestations of inverts. For example, when Charlus first encounters Jupien in the opening of *Sodom and Gomorrah*, both men act in a peculiar manner:

> But I was equally unaware that [Charlus] was capable of improvising his part in this sort of dumb show [*cette sort de scène des deux muets*] which seemed to be long and carefully rehearsed. [. . .]Whatever the point might be that held M. de Charlus and the ex-tailor thus arrested, their pact [*leur accord*] seemed concluded and these superfluous glances to be but ritual preliminaries [*préludes rituels*]. (II.627-28)

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Like the members of other secret societies and revolutionary groups, whether fictional (e.g., Collins' "Brotherhood") or historical (the Fenians), Charlus and Jupien identify one another as inverts by a secret sign. Yet Marcel also stresses that the sign is not necessarily something learned, but rather performed instinctually—an issue Cairns also raises: "[The inverts] are in no sense presented as free agents having chosen their 'crime' of a deviant sexual orientation" (47). Marcel again draws attention to the hereditary/genetic component of inversion.

Similarly, throughout his narrative Marcel suggests that inverts can be identified by a number of external characteristics or behavior patterns. Inverts, for example, are connoisseurs of "works of art[, . . .] the dishes at a dinner party (and everything else between painting and cooking)" (III.220). They often display "an innate taste, a knowledge and feeling for female dress" (III.220); many in the first moments of the morning exhibit an "admirable female head" (II.643); while some even "go out of their way to choose clothes that resemble women's dresses, to redden their lips and blacken their eyelashes" (II.646). In fact, when Charlus arrives for a party at the Verdurins, his appearance encapsulates many inversion traits:

> [Moral degeneration] is easily detected, for it is never slow to materialise and proliferates upon a face, especially on the cheeks and round the eyes, as physically as the ochreous yellows of jaundice or the repulsive reds of a skin disease. Nor was it merely in the cheeks, or rather the chaps, of this painted face, in the mammiferous chest, the fleshy rump of this body abandoned to self-indulgence and invaded by obesity, that there now lingered, spreading like a film

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> of oil, the vice at one time so jealously confined by M. de Charlus in the most secret recesses of his being. Now it overflowed into his speech. (III.206)

Inversion now seems not only readily predictable, like the symptoms of a disease, but Marcel stresses that over time and from indulgence these symptoms become more pronounced. In addition, such "symptoms" are so distinct that in depicting them Marcel *educates* his readers (cf. *The Riddle of the Sands*—see Chapter Five) in how to identify inversion:

> For, once there is known to exist a system by which the authority to say what in him is voluntary and what compelled, what authentic and what imitative, what conscious and what unconscious, can be not only abstracted from [the invert] but placed in an ironclad epistemological receivership, the result is that not only the medical expert but *anyone* who witnesses and identifies the invert feels assured of knowing more about him than [the invert] knows about himself. (Sedgwick 225)

Such a "system" is what Marcel, the ostensible Subject Who Knows on inversion, purports to give to his readers.

Yet inversion, I want to stress, especially in terms of surface characteristics and because of its inherent nature, categorically resists such a systematized or Urizenic (as William Blake would say) approach. When Charlus reappears in *The Captive*, his invert persona starts to waver. As Marcel states, "[Charlus's] face, so far from disseminating, dispelled every scandalous rumor" (III.227). Nor can Charlus, as an invert, be identified by his sexual behavior: "the pleasure that his vice has to offer had become wearying. He [. . .] had gone to the opposite extreme [. . .] the imitation of conjugal life or fatherhood. Sometimes even this did not suffice him; he required novelty and would go and spend the

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night with a woman" (III.207). In terms of Charlus, these moments distinctly characterize the invert indeterminacy that I have tried to bring out. Nor is Charlus alone marked by this indeterminacy, as he himself inadvertently implies: "Nowadays they're also recruited from among the most rabid womanisers'" (III.310). Inverts, Charlus asserts here, can be "recruited" from among even the most seemingly-heterosexual individuals. In a similar vein, Marcel challenges the notion of hereditary inversion when, for example, he states that "inversion is curable [*l'inversion est guérissable*]" (II.648). In other words, in his depiction of inversion Proust creates a constitutional makeup that by its very nature resists systematization. And that is the point—is one of the key components that positions *In Search of Lost Time* as a conspiracy theory narrative.

It is a situation, in fact, analogous to that we saw in Chapter One during my discussion of Don DeLillo's *Libra*. As in the case of the evidence surrounding the assassination of Kennedy, the complexity of the invert characteristics ensures that anyone—including Marcel—who tries to tackle them must necessarily become a conspiracy theorist, a Subject Who Tries to Know (but can't). Nowhere, however, does this tendency receive more emphasis than in Sedgwick's reading of the novel. As noted, Sedgwick explicitly states that *Sodom and Gomorrah* is "internally rife with [. . .] contradictions," but simultaneously she spends a large portion of her discussion rigidly attempting to sort out these contradictions. For example, using Albertine and Charlus as, respectively, key representatives of Gomorrhean and Sodomite homosexuality, she first tries to homologenize them in terms of sexual orientation and gender (failing on both counts), then encounters the same problem in terms of sexual acts. Charlus, Sedgwick finds, has "a receptive anal sexuality," while Albertine's "erotic localization" is the "oral"

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(234-35). From here Sedgwick goes on to make the distinction—which strongly hints at a "system"—that Charlus has a "backward-looking sexuality" while Albertine embodies "a modern, less mutilating and hierarchical sexuality." Yet in the next paragraph, after stating that Charlus's and Albertine's "incommensurable wavelengths" might thus be "received on the same radio," Sedgwick adds that "the radio must be acknowledged [. . .] to have periods of going on the fritz" (237)! In short, the more Sedgwick tries to pin down inversion as Marcel presents it, the more such a definition evades her.

Equally important in positioning *In Search of Lost Time* as a conspiracy theory narrative is the size and political sway of the invert conspiracy. The conspiracy, in short, is vast. Lucille Cairns, for instance, points out that "no reader of the whole cycle can be left with a vision of homosexuality as the condition of a negligible and freakish minority" (45), while Marcel himself repeatedly indicates—in overt and subtle ways—the numerous inverts that he encounters. He also notes the extraordinary level of allegiance that distinguishes the inverts as a group: "on the days of general misfortune [. . .] the majority rally round [*se rallie autour*] the victim as the Jews rallied around Dreyfus" (II.638). In times of necessity the inverts stand together against the populace. Or, as Marcel also suggests, even as part of the populace,

> forming a freemasonry far more extensive, more effective and less suspected than that of the Lodges, for it rests upon an identity of taste, needs, habits, dangers, apprenticeship, knowledge, traffic, vocabulary, and one in which even members who do not wish to know one another recognize one another immediately by natural or conventional, involuntary or deliberate signs which indicate one of his kind to the beggar in the person of the nobleman whose carriage door he is

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> shutting, to the father in the person of his daughter's suitor, to the man who has sought healing, absolution or legal defence in the doctor, the priest or the barrister to whom he has had recourse; all of them obliged to protect their own secret but sharing with the others a secret which the rest of humanity does not suspect and which means that to them the most wildly improbable tales of adventure seem true, for in this life of anachronistic fiction the ambassador is a bosom friend to the felon, the prince, with a certain insolent aplomb born of his aristocratic breeding which the timorous bourgeois lacks, on leaving the duchess' party goes off to confer with the ruffian; a reprobate section of the human collectivity, but an important one, suspected where it does not exist, flaunting itself, insolent and immune, where its existence is never guessed; numbering its adherents everywhere, among the people, in the army, in the church, in the prison, on the throne. (II.639-640)

Through this incredible passage we learn that the inverts, though only "a reprobate section [*partie réprouvée*]" of humanity, not only dominate the ruling classes, but also seem to pervade all other strata of human society. More importantly, these inverts evade society's scrutiny and function as a sort of Hidden Hand, "suspected where it does not exist [*soupçonnée là où elle n'est pas*], flaunting itself, insolent and immune, where its existence is never guessed [*où elle n'est pas devinée*]"—or as Leo Bersani indicates, "We might also see here a Queer Nation poised for revolution" (*Homos* 149). Yet, I would add, these inverts seem less to be planning a revolution as much as they have *already* carried it out and infiltrated the existing power structure. As a result, Marcel's narrative,

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like a number of narratives I discussed in Chapter Five, exhibits a fusion of conspiracy genres, mixing as it does modern espionage with revolutionary fiction.

Further, like other revolutionary groups, the inverts also have a potent mastermind in the figure of Charlus. Understanding Charlus, writes Ladenson, is key to understanding the inversion narrative of *In Search of Lost Time* as a whole: "Once Charlus has been unmasked as an invert, moreover, even a reader with no prior expectations as to this particular character [i.e., Charlus] is, having [also] been acquainted with the theory of Sodom put forth in the opening pages of that volume, in a position to question the sexuality of various other male characters and even correctly to identify which ones will eventually be revealed as Charlus's Sodomite compatriots" (257). Yet, as Sedgwick implies, Charlus becomes the key to Proust's novel because as the representative invert Charlus's constitution is infinitely mutable: "the resistance to Charlus's conclusive subsumption under some *adequately* intelligible interpretive system, suggests that the scandalizing materiality of this fat man is too crucially productive at the enabling nexuses of incoherence in the text to be allowed to be fully sublimated" (226). In addition, Charlus may represent the single most politically powerful character in all of *In Search of Lost Time*. He is a man both well connected and one who understands how history operates "behind the scenes." The Emperor of Austria, Charlus claims, shows him special attention and Charlus's family, the Guermantes, surpasses the King of France in political influence (II.296). Similarly, as Marcel indicates, Charlus is fond of using the phrase "the chain of circumstances [*l'enchaînement de circonstances*]" which thus becomes a code by which Charlus indicates his access to vast secrets: "often, when he used it he joined hands as if in prayer but with his fingers stiffened, as though by this complexus to illustrate the

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said circumstances [*ces circonstances*], which he did not specify [*ne spécifiait pas*], and the links between them [*leur enchaînement*]" (II.297). At a key moment, when speaking privately to Marcel, Charlus even reveals the full extent of his knowledge and power:

> "I have often thought, Monsieur, that there was in me, thanks not to my own humble gifts but to circumstances which you may one day have occasion to learn, a wealth of experience, a sort of secret dossier of inestimable value [*une sorte de dossier secret et inestimable*], of which I have not felt myself at liberty to make use for my own personal ends, which would be a priceless acquisition [*serait sans prix*] to a young man to whom I would hand over in a few months what it has taken me more than thirty years to acquire. [. . .] I could give you an explanation that no one has dreamed of, not only of the past but of the future." (II.296-97)

In making his offer to Marcel, Charlus uses language that is especially revelatory. He stresses not only his "wealth of experience [*une trésor d'expérience*]" but also the value that it might have to someone like Marcel, the ultimate Subject Who Knows—if there is one—in the narrative of *In Search of Lost Time*. Further, by claiming to understand "the future" Charlus even inadvertently aligns himself with Marcel in the role of a Sodomite prophet.

Yet alongside these bombastic depictions of inverts, Proust also presents the invert conspiracy in a more subtle and less threatening vein. For example, when in *The Captive* Charlus declares that men wrongly accused of inversion are only "'between three and four out of ten,'" an incredulous Brichot counters, "'If [. . .] you are not mistaken, then we must confess that you are one of those rare visionaries who discern a truth which nobody round them has ever suspected'" (III.300-01). Brichot, arguably, represents the

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voice of reality—which Marcel records for the reader's convenience. Nor, outside of Charlus's prophecies and revelations, do the inverts seem that threatening. In the course of the narrative they commit no real conspiratorial acts such as bombing, assassination or *coup d'etat* and in fact, indicates Bersani, "no deliberate intent to commit wrong—can be discerned in these defendants" (47). The inverts have less a desire for power—even if because (according to Marcel) they already have it—than simply a wish to realize their own pleasures, a wish especially troublesome as these pleasures are "punishable, shameful, an inadmissible thing" (II.637). Even the Gomorrheans who inspire Marcel's "paranoid jealousy" and "fear" are malicious only in so far as they thwart "the narrator's need to appropriate Albertine for himself" (Cairns 50-51 and Bersani 53). Similarly, to the reader, for whom the indeterminacy of the invert conspiracy might offer an inducement to paranoid systematization, inverts do not appear threatening (as, for example, the possibility of a German invasion might have been to the reader of *The Riddle of the Sands*) because they seems to be contained, so to speak, within the pages of Proust's narrative.

This last point, however, is not so easy to defend. As Leslie Hill notes, in writing *In Search of Lost Time* Proust moved beyond the realist and naturalist narrative traditions (especially as seen in his precursors Zola, Balzac and Flaubert) to create a new kind of fictional narrative, one which recreates fictionally the "fragility and uncertainty of [the real world's] intelligibility." Whereas novels in the realist tradition had reached a limit, underpinned as they were by "codified assumptions" which circumscribed their "horizon of meaning" so that they could do "no more in fact than to connote a denotation of the real," Proust began "to explore reading as a mode of affective fusion and self-injection," a

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mode which implicates the reader (Hill 173-74). His work becomes not so much a fictional narrative as it is a real document that must be tested against the reader's reality (Sedgwick 241). Or, as Gérard Genette observes, through Proust's narrative strategies his novel becomes "only an optical instrument [that] the author offers the reader to help him read within himself" (261). In other words, though we have seen precedents in such narratives as *Villette*, *The Woman in White*, *The Secret Agent* or *The Riddle of the Sands*, Proust's novel is important as a work of modernist fiction because of the way it turns its readers back on themselves and their experiences. In the character of Marcel, Proust creates a subjectivity that is as vast and complex as our own—one that forces us to use our own experiences to verify Marcel's pronouncements about reality—and as a result the narrative is as much *about us* as about Marcel.

Though this narrative strategy as a whole in Proust is too large a concept to explore here, we see a powerful example of it at work in the depiction of inversion. Proust assails his readers with a swarm of contradictory invert details, both in terms of origins and behavioral characteristics. Such indeterminacy, I argued, is the point and helps position *In Search of Lost Time* as a conspiracy theory narrative. Yet that inverts exist at all Marcel takes as a given. His question instead is about the extent of inverts in society, the characteristics by which they can be identified, and the means by which they secretly collaborate. This is an important distinction. Most of Proust's readers, I suggest, would agree with Marcel as to the existence of inverts (read homosexuals) in society. But as to the inverts' power and pervasiveness, I would argue, such a consensus would not be as readily forthcoming—either among the readers themselves or between the readers (as a whole) and Marcel. Whose subjectivity, then, is closer to the truth? Can someone's

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subjectivity be "closer"? Is there a way, even, to arrive at such a "truth"? Asking these questions invariably takes us back to Marcel, the older Marcel who writes the novel about his younger self and who is the most informed Subject Who Knows in *In Search of Lost Time*. As noted earlier, Proust's narrative is structured in such a way that it demands rereading: only by finishing the novel do readers gain the knowledge (which the older Marcel already has) necessary for correctly interpreting the narrative's earlier events. Therefore, by challenging the older Marcel's invert theory we assume a vantage similar to that of the younger Marcel, whose "vicariated positionings," writes Sedgwick, "we are invited at once to scrutinize and to occupy" (221).

To clarify this point I shall turn briefly to one of Proust's contemporaries, Sigmund Freud, and, specifically, to Freud's famous case-history of Judge Schreber in "Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)" (1912)—a work published almost simultaneously with the opening books of *In Search of Lost Time*. Though I can look only briefly at Freud's work, his findings (however controversial they may otherwise be) prove useful in illuminating the psychological constitution of Marcel. According to Freud, (clinical) paranoia develops in three stages and arises because of a patient's failure "to master an unconsciously reinforced current of homosexuality" (59). First, early in life the patient develops a homosexual fixation, "[o]ne instinct or instinctual component [. . .] is left behind at a more infantile stage" (67). Next, this fixation is repressed and in an individual that does reach "the stage of heterosexual object-choice" the fixation is deflected into "the social instincts, thus contributing an erotic factor to friendship and comradeship, to *espirit de corps* and to love of mankind in general" (61). Occasionally, however, this

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arrangement is disturbed: some "intense wave of libido," reinforced perhaps by "a disappointment over a woman" (e.g., Marcel's failed relationship with Gilberte in the second book of *In Search of Lost Time*) or "a mishap in social relations with other men," leads to a "sexualization of the social instincts" (61-62). Consequently, the repression fails and there is an "*irruption,*" a "*return of the repressed,*" and the patient's homosexuality reappears in distorted state as a "*projection*" (66 and 68, emphasis in original). In Schreber's case this projection took two forms. First, owing in part to some professional disappointments, Schreber's suppressed desire for his doctor Flechsig irrupted in a paranoid delusion of persecution. Second, Schreber later developed fears of an imminent world-catastrophe—really, according to Freud, the projection of an "internal catastrophe": "his subjective world has come to an end since his withdrawal of love from it" (70). As Schreber's paranoia grew, he increasingly withdrew from the world and this withdrawal, in turn, exacerbated his paranoia.

Schreber's situation, I believe, helps us understand Marcel's. In addition to his emphasis on inversion in others—critics have noted—a strong, albeit unacknowledged (read repressed), homosexual current also orients Marcel (as it did openly the real Proust). Eve Sedgwick expresses it best when she writes that to describe inverts, to create "the *spectacle of the closet,*" Marcel must necessarily also have "the *viewpoint of the closet*" (222-23, emphasis in original). This is true both in a metaphorical sense and in a literal. To write his prodigiously long narrative Proust, the author, of course famously shut himself away in a cork-lined room, and for Marcel, the fictional author, it is fair to imagine a similar sequestration, a similar "withdrawal" from the world. Yet the withdrawal, the narrative insinuates, occurs as much from another cause as from the need

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to write. In *Sodom and Gomorrah* Marcel tells us of the inverts known as "solitaries" who "have retired into solitude from the day on which they discovered [their inversion], after having carried it within themselves for a long time without knowing it" (II.646). He suggests that not only do many outsiders live in ignorance of inversion, but even some insiders do not suspect their part in the conspiracy. Anticipating Foucault by some fifty years, Proust thus creates the same kind of unconsciously-acting conspirator that we will see in *Discipline and Punish* (see Chapter Four). Through passages such as the above, however, Marcel also implicates himself in the conspiracy. Sedgwick, in discussing the "freemasonry" passage (see above), makes a similar observation: "One might think from such a passage that no one is finally imagined to be 'of the other race' except the reader to whom [the passage] is addressed!" (218-19). Or, by presenting inversion as an "accursed" movement external to him, "a Queer Nation poised for revolution," Marcel emerges as the Paranoid Subject—because of his repressed homosexuality (if we follow Freud's reading), Marcel creates a paranoid vision very similar to Schreber's "world-catastrophe."

In closing, I want return to the issue of Marcel's authority versus the reader's. One of the key elements, I believe, that distinguishes the conspiracy theory of Proust's novel is its affect, i.e., in how Proust not only depicts paranoia, but also tries to transfer something like "paranoia" to the reader. As we saw, *In Search of Lost Time* necessitates rereading. During our first encounter we can do no more than occupy the "vicariated positioning" of Marcel's younger self. Marcel's older subjectivity therefore, as Harold Bloom would say of Shakespeare's, *contains us*. We are welcome to interpret the passages that Marcel explicitly or implicitly tells us will only be explained later, but there is no guarantee that

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we will make the "correct" interpretation, that we will fare any better than the young Marcel. As a result, the following situation occurs. Reading *Sodom and Gomorrah*, for example, we follow the young Marcel as he boldly shadows Charlus and Jupien on the way to their invert liaison. Through his eyes we peer through the fanlight at Charlus and Jupien:

> It is true that the sounds were so violent that, if they had not always been taken up an octave higher by a parallel plaint, I might have thought that one person was slitting another's throat within a few feet of me, and that subsequently the murderer and his resuscitated victim were taking a bath to wash away the traces of the crime. I concluded from this later on that there is another thing as vociferous as pain, namely pleasure [. . .] (II.631)

There is no difference at such moments, Marcel implies, between his younger self and his first-time readers. Up to this point neither he nor the readers—Proust's early-twentieth-century readers—had known of either the predominance or power of inverts. Hence the discovery is *shocking*. As Ladenson notes, in Proust's own day his revelations regarding homosexuality were sure to produce "outrage" and "*frisson*" (225). We, the "ideal" readers that Proust constructs, might have had some suspicions, but on the whole we were ignorant. How then, especially in our first encounter with *In Search of Lost Time*, could our (subjective) numerical estimate of inversion be correct? We lack the older Marcel's knowledge and it behooves us to defer to his subjectivity as the more "mature" and more informed. Thus, when he tells us of the invert conspiracy it should come as a revelation.

Of course, I do not want to suggest that all readers will read Proust in this way. This line of reasoning too quickly (and dangerously) aligns *In Search of Lost Time* with

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such notorious conspiracy documents as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*—documents that scapegoat one particular group for the development of a complex set of national and international circumstances. What I am trying to foreground, rather, is one version of Proust's "ideal" reader—that the narrative, however implicitly, does have the potential to create this kind of "paranoid" affect in this reader. Alternately and more to the point of my argument, it has this affect as well as creating a disposition to dismiss this affect. In reading Proust, in encountering his inversion theory, we assume an *ironic* stance. We acknowledge, for example, that such an invert conspiracy might be possible (though, of course, not to the extent that Marcel claims), while simultaneously denying its verisimilitude and expressing our "outrage." In this way, like numerous works that will follow it, *In Search of Lost Time* showcases the "paranoid style"—offering "something people buy into—often quite literally—on a non-committed basis" and so creating a disposition to believe and disbelieve at the same time (Knight 45—also see the Introduction). Or, to finally bring my study to its end, *In Search of Lost Time* offers a conspiracy theory narrative because, unlike any other earlier work that I have considered, the novel attains a conspiratorial critical mass. The emphasis is not on one conspiraceme or a few, the mixing of this conspiracy genre with that, but on the proliferation of conspiracy elements—among them a vast conspiracy acting as the Hidden Hand, conspiratorial indeterminacy and so (in Marcel) a Subject Who Tries to Know but doesn't quite succeed, a fusion of conspiracy narrative genres, the Paranoid Subject (again in Marcel), Charlus in the role of mastermind, and *irony* as one of the novel's distinguishing conspiratorial affects. Hence, we see that in some ways it takes but a small leap to go, for example, from the conspiracies of *The Woman in White* or *The Secret Agent* to that in *In*

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Search of Lost Time—most of the elements are there in the earlier works, even if in embryonic form. Proust's novel, however, does make that leap, does crystallize many of the conspiracy developments that I have been anticipating throughout my study, and so opens the door to a new kind of conspiracy narrative, one that became very popular and influential (to say the least) in the twentieth century and that continues to have resonance in our own day—the conspiracy theory narrative.

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