Textual Seduction: The Power of Storytelling in Nineteenth-Century French Short Fiction

By

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ABSTRACT: Textual Seduction: The Power of Storytelling in Nineteenth-Century French Short Fiction

This dissertation explores the theme of seduction and the power of storytelling in nineteenth-century French short fiction, focusing on its manifestations in works by Honoré de Balzac ("Sarrasine" [1830] and "Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan" [1839]), George Sand ("La Marquise" [1832], "Metella" [1833], and *Isidora* [1845]), and Gérard de Nerval (*Sylvie* [1853]). These works, written at a moment of increasing literacy and intense debate about the dangers of reading, illuminate questions about the power of art and the nature of imagination. Each work depicts characters reacting to storytelling and sometimes to other forms of art: for naive characters, a powerful imagination makes them more susceptible to the destructive power of seduction. For characters better versed in the ways of the world, seduction is a source of playfulness and pleasure.

Drawing on narratology and cognitive psychology, I examine how seduction relies on theory of mind—our capacity to see other people as motivated by thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and intentions. The mechanisms of seduction displayed in this corpus illustrate the richness and complexity of singular experiences. At the same time, they reveal patterns: the most successful seducers are the most subtle mind-readers, able to tailor their seductions to their intended target, and the easiest targets are those who are most prone to misread others.

In their depictions of characters reacting to storytelling or to works of art, these texts offer positive and negative models of reading. Characters who become so absorbed that they confuse fiction and reality often suffer. Others learn how to maintain a balance between enjoying the imagined world of the text and remaining grounded in reality. All of these texts offer insight into broad questions of cognition and how and why we read. Studying seduction as the subject of these texts and as a metaphor for the relationship between text and reader furnishes an opportunity to discuss the ways in which we conceive—historically and currently—of the power of fiction.

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION: 'Jamais fille chaste n'a lu de romans': Art, Seduction, and the Imagination

On July 7th, 2011, the British paper *The Telegraph* published an article entitled "Mills and Boon cause 'marital breakdown'." The article described a study that laid the blame for divorce, adultery, and unwanted pregnancies at the feet of romance novels; Mills and Boon is a British publisher of romance novels, owned by Harlequin. Such accusations would not seem out of place in an eighteenth-century sermon against the dangers of reading fiction, such as those of Jesuit preacher Charles Porée or in the writing of a nineteenth-century critic such as Alfred Nettement.[1] Jean-Jacques Rousseau prefaced his best-selling eighteenth-century novel *La Nouvelle Héloïse* with a similar warning: "Jamais fille chaste n'a lu de romans" (5). Ernest Pinard, in his 1857 indictment of *Madame Bovary*, leveled a similar and an even more specific claim against that novel:

> Qui est-ce qui lit le roman de M. Flaubert ? Sont-ce des hommes qui s'occupent d'économie politique ou sociale ? Non ! les pages légères de *Madame Bovary* tombent en des mains plus légères, dans des mains de jeunes filles, quelquefois de femmes mariées. Eh bien ! lorsque l'imagination aura été séduite, lorsque cette séduction sera descendue jusqu'au cœur, lorsque le cœur aura parlé aux sens, est-ce que vous croyez qu'un raisonnement bien froid sera bien fort comme cette séduction des sens et du sentiment ? (408)

Madame Bovary is dangerous for two reasons: first, it is read by young women who are ill-equipped to resist it, because of their lack of education or some innate weakness—either way, educated men are in no such danger. Second, the novel effects its "seduction" through the imagination, which grants access to the heart and the senses, thus rendering cold reasoning impossible.

These warnings from Rousseau, Pinard, and *The Telegraph* date from 1761, 1857, and 2011 respectively, and they demonstrate a persistent anxiety about the dangers of reading, especially the seductive powers of fiction over the imagination. This debate about the

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[1] For more on Alfred Nettement, see Sandrine Aragon, *Des Liseuses en péril: les images de lectrices dans les textes de fiction de La Prétieuse, de l'abbé de Pure à Madame Bovary de Flaubert (1656-1856)*, Champion, 2003.

consequences of reading endures, even in our present age when silent reading is no longer new or unusual, and reading is often presented as beneficial for its own sake.[2] Why is this? Indeed, if we broaden the terms of our search, we will find that there is hardly a medium or genre of art that has not come under fire for allegedly corrupting the innocent: from Plato banishing imitative poets from the Republic (370), to early modern debates about the morality of the theater,[3] to twentieth-century fears about movies, comic books, television, rock, and rap, there is a long tradition of anxiety over the power of art.[4] This anxiety, on its surface, renews itself endlessly because there is always some new genre or form of art to worry about. It is not only new stylistic conventions that concern us, but also new channels of diffusion, such as serialized novels in newspapers in the nineteenth century or smartphones in the twenty-first.[5] However, the recurrent nature of this anxiety and the similar forms it adopts across eras—fears for the young, the uneducated, the female—suggest a deeper cause, one rooted in our cognitive architecture. This anxiety is one thread in a tangle of questions about our relationship with art: What are the benefits or consequences of engaging with art? Are some ways of looking, listening, or reading riskier than others? And if art can harm us—lead us astray, seduce us, deceive us, cause "marital breakdown"—then why create it or engage with it in the first place?

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[2] A prominent American example of this attitude is the American Library Association's "READ" campaign, a series of posters of celebrities holding books, emblazoned with the word READ. Because we now value reading fiction, as long as it is the right kind of fiction, it is easy to find critics lamenting that young people spend their time and attention on other activities. The youth, it seems, is always in danger of being corrupted. See David Denby, "Do Teens Read Seriously Anymore?" *The New Yorker* 23 Feb. 2016, *The New Yorker*, web.

[3] See Jacques Bénigne Bossuet and Francesco Caffaro, *Maximes et réflexions sur la comédie; précédées de la lettre au P. Caffaro et de deux lettres de ce réligieux, suivies d'une épitre en vers addressée à Bossuet*, Paris, Librairie Classique Eugène, Belin, 1881; see also Pierre Nicole and Laurent Thirouin, *Traité de la comédie : et autres pièces d'un procès du théâtre*, Paris : H. Champion, 1998; see also Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, Éd. avec dossier, Flammarion, 2003.

[4] For more on the social role of art, its corrupting potential, and censorship, see Elisabeth Ladenson, *Dirt for Art's Sake : Books on Trial from Madame Bovary to Lolita*, Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 2007.

[5] Jacob Weisberg discusses concerns about the internet in a recent article. See Jacob Weisberg, "We Are Hopelessly Hooked," *The New York Review of Books*, web.

These are huge questions and we will grapple with them as long as we make art. In my dissertation, I will approach our relationship with art from two different perspectives. The first is a local, particular, literary perspective that analyzes texts by Honoré de Balzac ("Sarrasine" [1830] and "Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan" [1839]), George Sand ("La Marquise" [1832], "Metella" [1833], and *Isidora* [1845]), and Gérard de Nerval (*Sylvie* [1853]). These works illuminate questions about the power of art over the imagination. I have chosen works that feature seduction, because we often conceive of the power of art this way; it is Ernest Pinard's metaphor of choice for the dangers of *Madame Bovary*, above, and the warnings from Rousseau and *The Telegraph* are both concerned with lust and extramarital sex. According to these warnings, unwise or excessive indulgence in reading or other kinds of art has consequences for both individuals and society; sex is a major recurring concern because it is linked to the social order.

The eighteenth-century Jesuit preacher Charles Porée frames novel-inspired lust as the first step down a dark path: "For his part, Porée had indicted both the novel and the woman reader in the most unequivocal of terms when he had charged that women's reading of novels would lead to the loss of three precious feminine virtues—simplicity, modesty, and reserve—and that she would ineluctably be led down the path from moral and social to political evil" (Diaconoff 3). Social and political evil, for Porée, means that women might attempt "openly or in secret to direct royal deliberations, distribute the offices of war, play a role in the management of finances, influence the scales of justice" (3). Sexual desire leads to other kinds of desire. These acts of social and political power are all part of the public sphere. Novels breach the privacy of the home, where women should reside, and inspire women to want people, things, and powers that society forbids them. In the nineteenth century, critics of *Madame Bovary* thought that reading the novel would inspire women to want luxuries and freedoms beyond their station (Vatan 141). Novels spark the imagination and thus threaten the status quo. The underlying fear is for the structure of society itself.

Most critics focused their concerns on women's reading, but there was a more generalized fear, on behalf of all readers, of the social consequences of the imagination run wild. Jan Goldstein writes: "...the dominant specter was a world of self-enclosed, atomistic individuals, so nourished on their own imaginations that they lost contact with a shared, consensual reality and were propelled away from the social center in innumerable directions as if by centrifugal force" (59).[6] Goldstein, in the quoted passage, is writing about the eighteenth century, but it is worth noting how similar that fear sounds to our contemporary concerns about how smartphones are damaging our capacity for empathy and our ability to hold face-to-face conversations.[7] Even today, the proper functioning of society remains a concern, and the imagination retains its seductive power.

In the quoted passage from Goldstein and the article by Jacob Weisberg, the question of *attention* is implicit. Are we paying attention to each other, or to what is in our books, on our screens, or in our heads? Brian Boyd foregrounds the question of attention in his definition of art, and I think it is essential to the question of seduction, too. In the texts in my corpus, we find traditional seductions—one character attempts to get another character to fall in love or have sex—alongside works of art with seductive powers: paintings, sculptures, operas, folk songs, novels, theatrical performances, stories, and conversations that captivate their audiences. These are all works of art according to Brian Boyd's definition:

> In this sense, art covers a huge range of activities, from a child making up stories, humming, or drawing in the sand to Tolstoy, Mahler, or Zeng Jing. Let me suggest what they have in common: Art is the attempt to engage attention *by transforming objects and/or actions in order to appeal to species-wide cognitive preferences for the sake of the response this evokes. The more (1) the appeal is purely to these preferences, and the more (2) it operates within some tradition of appealing to (and hence, elaborating and refining) such preferences and (3) the more skilled and successful is the attempt to engage attention and evoke a rich response, the more centrally it will be art*." (*Origin* 148, emphasis his)

Regarding conversation, Boyd clarifies:

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[6] Regarding other possible negative consequences, the eighteenth-century physician Samuel Tissot wrote a treatise on diseases incidental to literary persons. See Samuel Tissot, *De la Santé des gens de lettres*, 1768, *gallica.bnf.fr*, web.

[7] See Jacob Weisberg, "We Are Hopelessly Hooked," *The New York Review of Books*, web.

> We engage each other's attention, of course, in casual conversation or in information exchange, but even here there may be elements of artfulness to the degree that we use images, allusions, jokes, mimicked intonations, or ironic deflations as we vivify gossip through selecting, highlighting, animating, reenacting, or stretching the truth toward fiction for the sake of holding an audience. (*Origin* 148)

Conversation is an important medium of seduction in all the works in my corpus, and I will discuss it in finer detail in each chapter. And even without the elements of artfulness that Boyd identifies, gossip has its own allure. "Gossip" is Blakey Vermeule's short answer to the question posed by her book *Why Do We Care About Literary Characters?*: "The very short answer is gossip: we need to know what other people are like, not in the aggregate, but in the particular. The word *gossip* must be shorn of any connotations of frivolousness, although not of its undercurrents of aggression" (xii, italics in text).[8] Humans are social animals, and our interest in other humans—our predilection for gossip—is one of the "species-wide cognitive preferences" to which Boyd refers above. Fiction appeals to our preference for social information by engaging a cognitive mechanism called theory of mind, which is our capacity for understanding that other people have thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and intention that may not be obvious to us; we use our theory of mind to deal with real people and fictional ones alike. Fiction asks us to imagine characters' mental states. There is pleasure in being offered an illicit glimpse into another mind, and there is also pleasure in deciphering a character's mental state from exterior clues.

It is a commonplace that the imagination is difficult to control; here, Brian Boyd argues that it is not merely difficult, but impossible to suppress our imaginative response to fiction:

> Another sign of a cognitive adaptation is the inability to suppress a response. [...] we are unable *not* to imagine and respond to the characters and events of a well-told story, even if the storyteller invokes fantasy with a time-honored "Once upon a time" or a new twist like Louise Erdrich's "You don't have to believe this, I'm not asking you to." We may know that the story consists of mere words, words with no pretense to report real events [...]--yet whether on the page or screen we cannot stop conjuring up and responding to the story's invented people and predicaments, and even, if occasion prompts, weeping tears at characters' fates. (189-90)

This idea that fiction is difficult or impossible to resist is key to the notion that fiction can be seductive, in addition to the pleasure of fiction. Using our theory of mind is obviously only one

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[8] For the long version of her answer, see Blakey Vermeule, *Why Do We Care about Literary Characters?* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.

source of the pleasure that we find in fiction. Speaking more broadly, it is fiction's access to the imagination that grants it some of its seductive quality. To define "imagination" in more technical terms, when we imagine things—when we consider hypothetical situations or fictional people, for example—we "decouple" our brain's inference systems from actual external input. Decoupling makes it possible for us to think about an action without performing it, or to represent something in our mind's eye (Cosmides and Tooby, "Consider the Source" 9).[9] It is the basis of pretend play and participation in the arts. However, when we run simulations of actions or emotional states in our heads, the same neural networks activate as when we actually do the actions or feel the emotions in question; the same thing happens when we witness another person perform an action or experience an emotion. Cognitive scientists refer to the structures responsible for this phenomenon as "mirror neurons" (Gottschall *Storytelling*, Kindle locations 811-833). This is important for reading fiction because, as Gottschall puts it, "[k]nowing that fiction is fiction doesn't stop the emotional brain from processing it as real" (*Storytelling* Kindle Location 848).

All the arts can elicit imaginative responses that touch the emotions and the senses. In the texts in my corpus, characters have overwhelming responses to musical and theatrical performances and subsequently fall in love with the performers. Béatrix de Rochefide is captivated by a painting in Balzac's "Sarrasine," and in Sand's "Metella," Olivier falls in love with Metella through hearing stories about her. We also see that seduction is an intensely personal experience. In Sand's "La Marquise," the actor who so enchants the marquise is not considered a good actor by the rest of the audience, so what is most powerfully seductive for one character may leave others indifferent. Balzac's princesse de Cadignan certainly knows this, as she uses everything she knows about Daniel d'Arthez's life and career to tailor her seduction. Successful seducers "read" their marks accurately, in the cognitive science sense of mind-

[9] For more on decoupling, see Leda Cosmides and John Tooby, "Consider the Source: The Evolution of Adaptations for Decoupling and Metarepresentation," *Metarepresentations: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*, Ed. Dan Sperber, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, 53–115.

reading: using their theory of mind. Successful seducers are also good at controlling how others read them; the princesse de Cadignan is very careful about what she reveals of herself.

In the case of seduction, engaging attention may be the means to an end—sex or marriage, for example—or an end in itself. How, then, can we distinguish seduction from artful conversation, or other attempts to engage attention? There is no simple dividing line, but seduction involves deception and sex. Littré's nineteenth-century dictionary gives the following definitions for the verb: "Faire tomber dans l'erreur, détourner du chemin de la vérité," "Faire manquer à un devoir, à ce qu'on doit," and "Plaire, toucher, persuader" ("Séduire"). The first definition hews most closely to the Latin *seducere*, with the prefix *se-* indicating separation and *ducere* meaning "to lead" (Littré, "Séduire"). The modern *Trésor de la langue française informatisé* also gives "détourner du droit chemin" as a definition, with the further specification "Amener une femme à se donner en dehors du mariage" ("Séduire"). In these definitions, we can already see the problem beginning to take shape: the things that please us, that touch us, and that persuade us can overlap with the things that deceive us and lead us astray. The seducer engages attention by adopting a persona, or making an empty promise, or withholding crucial information. The seducer's motivations may be sexual, or the seducer's attempt to engage attention may rely on sensuality, intimacy, or sexual content. Many of the seductive works of art represented in these works of fiction are love stories or nearly nude images. To borrow Brian Boyd's phrasing, the more an attempt to engage attention relies on deception and the more sexual it is, the more centrally it will be seduction. This definition will serve as a point of departure; many of the works in my corpus stretch or subvert this notion of seduction.

Before presenting the structure and content of each chapter, I would first like to delve further into two different ideas of *reading* that will shed light on the relationship between art and the imagination. First, I will briefly contextualize nineteenth-century attitudes about reading fiction, and second, I will discuss the cognitive science term *mind-reading* and the role it plays in our experience of fiction.

Reading Fiction in Nineteenth-Century France

Balzac, Sand and Nerval chose to depict the seductive power of art by writing about characters going to the theater, looking at paintings, listening to stories, or reading, among other activities. The works of art in the stories change, but as Balzac, Sand, and Nerval were all writing fiction, it is necessary to look at what people were saying about reading fiction in the 1830s and 40s in order to understand these works in their historical context.

The nineteenth century saw huge increases in literacy for women and workers as well as increases in the availability of printed reading material, namely novels and newspapers. I am discussing novels here because they were the most prominent form of fiction, and thus the subject of most discussions of fiction; most of the criticisms leveled at the novel could also apply to short fiction. Critics accused novels of being seductive, both in form and content, and women readers were in particular danger. Women were also the principal readers of novels. Martyn Lyons neatly summarizes the association between female readers and novels:

> Although women were not the only readers of novels, they were regarded as a prime target for popular and romantic fiction. The feminization of the novel-reader seemed to confirm dominant preconceptions about the female's role and about her intelligence. Novels were held suitable for women, because they were seen as creatures of the imagination, of limited intellectual capacity, both frivolous and emotional. The novel was the antithesis of practical and instructive literature. It demanded little, and its sole purpose was to amuse readers with time on their hands. Above all, the novel belonged to the domain of the imagination. Newspapers, reporting on public events, were usually a male preserve; novels, dealing with the inner life, were part of the private sphere to which nineteenth-century bourgeois women were relegated. (319)

The separation between the novel and the newspaper may not have been as clear as Lyons makes it seem in this passage, as many newspapers also published novels. The *roman-feuilleton*, or serial novel, played a huge role in the "rage de romans" that characterized the period of the July Monarchy (Lyon-Caen 26). Publishing fiction serially in newspapers not only helped sell papers, but was also more affordable for readers than buying books (Lyon-Caen 27). All the primary texts in my corpus were initially published in newspapers.[10] Émile de Girardin first introduced

[10] "Sarrasine" was first published in the *Revue de Paris* on November 21 and 28, 1830 (Castex 1543). "Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan" was first published under the title "Une

serial novels in *La Presse* in 1836 and because of his success, other papers soon followed suit; indeed, "le tirage de la presse quotidienne parisienne passa, entre 1836 et 1847, de 80 000 à 180 000 exemplaires" (Lyon-Caen 28). Novels and short stories published in the *rez-de-chaussée*, that is to say under the fold of the paper, thus appeared alongside news stories, opinion pieces, and advertisements, as well as literary criticism. The rise in popularity of the novel went hand in hand with a boom in criticism, in which the moral and social role of literature was much discussed.

"In the eighteenth century, the novel was not regarded as a respectable art-form" (Lyons 314) and although novels became the most popular form of literature in the nineteenth century, they were still frequently derided. In addition to viewing novels as frivolous, critics also feared that novels were a threat to fragile individual imaginations and, what's more, an instrument of corruption and social dissolution. Christelle Girard characterizes the views of literary critics in the 1830s, such as Sainte-Beuve and Désiré Nisard, as follows:

> [L]es commentateurs vilipendent toutes les stratégies éditoriales et narratives mises en œuvre par le roman pour plaire. Ils reprochent aux romanciers de n'avoir qu'un seul dessein : séduire le lecteur par toutes sortes de mystifications et de procédés romanesques. (35)

So the narrative structures of the novel itself are at fault for its seductive nature. What are the seductive, mystifying strategies in question? One strategy was the use of surprising or unexpected elements to create suspense, as Margaret Cohen describes in her book *The Sentimental Education of the Novel*. Many authors, George Sand among them, disdained suspense as the latest vogue in fiction writing and equated it to tricking the reader (127). But keeping the reader in suspense from one installment to the next is an excellent way to sell future issues, as the boom in newspapers attests.

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princesse parisienne" in *La Presse* in August 1839 (Castex 1508). "La Marquise" first appeared in the *Revue de Paris* on December 9, 1832 (Hoog Naginski 35). "Metella" was first published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, October 15, 1833 (Glasgow 25). *Isidora*'s first two parts and a section of the third were published in installments in the *Revue Indépendante* in 1845; the last section of part three never appeared in the paper but was added before publication of the book (P. Reboul 587). *Sylvie* was originally published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* on August 15, 1853 (Bony, "Notice" 1210).

The novel's form is suspect, and so is its content: "La question de l'immoralité ou de l'indécence du roman contemporain obsède la critique littéraire sous la monarchie de Juillet" (Lyon-Caen 55). The question of how to describe and decipher society—as it really is, or as it *should* be—appears repeatedly in both criticism of the novel and in prefaces to many novels. Novelists claimed to be holding up a mirror to society, both to justify the perceived indecency of their subject matter and to defend the importance of novels as a genre. This attitude is not an entirely new phenomenon in the July Monarchy, and can be found in the prefaces of eighteenth century novels as well, but it becomes particularly prominent because of the boom in popularity of novels. Balzac, in his 1842 *Avant-propos de la Comédie humaine*, famously claims that he intends to be the "secrétaire" (*Œuvres complètes*) of his epoch and states in his essay "Théorie de la démarche" that the fundamental problem of writing is how to be both "Jean-Jacques et le bureau de longitudes" (150), that is to say, someone who carefully observes and documents the world, but still writes with feeling. George Sand also writes that "Ici, l'auteur vous répondra qu'avant d'être moral, il a voulu être vrai" (39) in the 1832 preface to *Indiana*. This concern for truth is a tactic that, according to Judith Lyon-Caen, "autorise toutes les peintures" (34).

In the nineteenth century, one of the major concerns with regard to reading—especially to *women* reading—was that a woman alone with a book was not truly alone. This concern about solitary reading predates the nineteenth century; the intimacy of silent reading was of great concern to eighteenth-century moralists, who feared that it allowed people to read shamelessly (Young 16).[11] The practice was also associated with masturbation (Goldstein 53, Goulemot 41-2). A woman reading in solitude was in actuality a woman alone with an author, who was

[11] This claim is not pulled from thin air. People do seem to read more shamelessly if they can keep their reading material hidden: in the twenty-first century, the rise of ereaders has allowed people to buy books from faceless online retailers and has also made it difficult for strangers on the subway to see what someone is reading, and there has been a corresponding boom in sales of romance and erotica ebooks. See Arifa Akbar, "How E-Readers Took the Embarrassment out of Erotic Fiction," *The Independent*, N.p., 14 May 2012, web. See also Julie Bosman, "Romance Books Are Hot in the E-Reading Market," *The New York Times* 8 Dec. 2010, *NYTimes.com*, web. See also Neil Richards, "The Fifty Shades of Grey Paradox," *Slate* 13 Feb. 2015, web.

exciting her imagination and planting ideas and emotions in her vulnerable mind. In the words of critic and moralist Alfred Nettement:

> L'Eden, c'est encore de nos jours, cette douce et chaste vie du foyer domestique, cette pure et charmante intimité dans laquelle aucun bruit extérieur ne retentit, cette harmonie des sentiments et des idées qui fait descendre le ciel sur la terre. Si le roman feuilleton entre dans votre intérieur tout cela disparaît. Malheur à vous ! L'ennemi est dans vos foyers. Il y a pénétré avec son cortège d'illusions décevantes, d'idées fausses, de molles et dangereuses émotions, de songes corrupteurs, d'images incendiaires. Ève, car, hélas ! Ève est immortelle, Ève sent son cœur battre malgré elle; elle ne recherche plus la société d'Adam, elle éprouve le besoin d'être seule. —Est-elle seule en réalité ?— Non, elle est avec les sentiments qu'un autre lui a donnés, avec les idées qu'un autre lui a inspirées. C'est précisément parce qu'elle n'est pas seule qu'elle quitte son mari. (445)

In this dramatic image, the enemy has not only penetrated within the walls of the home, but also further, into the mind of the reader. Reading silently and in solitude was a relatively new cultural practice, or at least it was new in its widespread practice among bourgeois women. Judith Lyon-Caen, in her study of readers' letters to Balzac and Sue, affirms that "Les récits de lecture évoquent ainsi une appropriation intense et apparemment solitaire des textes. Nulle allusion à des lectures collectives ou orales" (122). This practice was cause for concern among critics and parents of young women alike. When you read silently, there is a voice in your head "speaking" the words. And whose voice is that? Eve, standing in for all women readers in Nettement's text, wants to be alone—away from her husband—but she is not truly "seule." She is with "les sentiments qu'un autre lui a donnés, avec les idées qu'un autre lui a inspirées" (11). She is listening to the voice in her head, the voice of some unknown narrator. A novel is thus equated with another person—another mind. And in Nettement's analogy, the novel is the snake in garden, the seducer par excellence.

Balzac also discusses the alleged dangers of reading in *Physiologie du mariage*. Allowing one's wife to read books of her own choosing is to introduce a spark into a powder keg, he writes, but worse than that, "c'est apprendre à votre femme à se passer de vous, à vivre dans un monde imaginaire, dans un paradis" (128). As in Ernest Pinard's indictment of *Madame Bovary*, it is again women who are at risk and the imagination that is to blame—although Balzac, provider of these imaginary worlds, is making fun. While the rest of this chapter advising men on

how to stop their wives from reading is tongue-in-cheek, the following passage, in which Balzac switches from giving mocking advice to husbands and begins to speak in terms of "on" and "nous" in order to describe the imaginative work of reading, feels sincere:

> Les romans, et même tous les livres, peignent les sentimens et les choses avec des couleurs bien autrement brillantes que celles qui sont offertes par la nature ! Cette espèce de fascination provient moins du désir que chaque auteur a de se montrer parfait en affectant des idées délicates et recherchées, que d'un indéfinissable travail de notre intelligence. Il est dans la destinée de l'homme d'épurer tout ce qu'il emporte dans le trésor de sa pensée. Quelles figures, quels monumens ne sont pas embellis par le dessin ? L'âme du lecteur aide à cette conspiration contre le vrai, soit par le silence profond dont il jouit ou par le feu de la conception, soit par la pureté avec laquelle les images se réflechissent dans son entendement. Qui n'a pas, en lisant les Confessions de Jean-Jacques, vu madame de Warens plus jolie qu'elle n'était ? On dirait que notre âme caresse des formes qu'elle aurait jadis entrevues sous de plus beaux cieux ; elle n'accepte les créations d'une autre âme que comme des ailes pour s'élancer dans l'espace ; le trait le plus délicat, elle le perfectionne encore en se le faisant propre ; et l'expression la plus poétique dans ses images lui apporte des images encore plus pures. Lire, c'est créer peut-être à deux. (128)

Here, the novelist and the reader each have a hand in "cette conspiration contre le vrai," and Balzac uses a number of terms to discuss the reader's role: "un indéfinissable travail de notre intelligence," "le trésor de sa pensée," "le dessin," "l'âme du lecteur," "son entendement." The reader is not passive; reading is imaginative work. Indeed, it is *creative* work, performed by two minds together.

If reading is creative work, that brings it closer to the creative work of writing. Lyon-Caen notes that many of Balzac's admirers wrote to him about their own desire to write (108), and a significant number of female fans also wrote to him about other desires:

> Le désir de visite, au féminin, se décline souvent en désir de rencontre amoureuse. Désir qui procède ici tout à la fois des stratégies propres à Balzac qui, conscient de l'importance du public féminin dans la réussite d'un romancier, s'était posé, dès *La Physiologie du mariage*, en spécialiste de la femme, mais qui constitue, plus largement, l'un des visages de l'adulation romantique de l'écrivain. (110-1)

Perhaps Alfred Nettement's suspicions about the seductive powers of the novel were not entirely unfounded![12]

This connection between reading and writing was of particular concern to Sylvain Maréchal, who wrote a brochure entitled *Projet d'une loi portant défense d'apprendre à lire aux femmes* in 1801, which Geneviève Fraisse discusses in her book *Muse de la raison*. Maréchal's law was never passed, but it was republished in 1841 and 1853, ostensibly to "faire rire" (24) but accompanied by quotations from contemporary authors. Fraisse summarizes some of Maréchal's concerns about women reading in this passage, specifically the possibility of seduction:

> La troisième caractéristique du danger est évidemment morale. Si l'esprit est relié au sexe, un esprit trop actif troublera l'ordre sexuel. Les lettres énervent quand elles ne corrompent pas, ont dit les philosophes ; l'énervement renvoie à la mise en péril du corps physique, la corruption à la mise en danger du corps social. La lecture trouble la paix du ménage car elle est incitation à la séduction. Considérant no. 24 : 'Combien une jeune fille qui sait lire a de la peine à résister à la tentation de jeter les yeux sur les lettres d'amour d'un séducteur éloquent', ou encore, Considérant no. 23 : 'Combien la seule conjugaison du verbe *Amo, j'aime*, a occasionné de chutes.' La lecture pousse à l'adultère, le latin, par son sérieux même, incite à la débauche ; pourtant Sylvain Maréchal n'est pas puritain. Il n'est pas puritain quant à l'amour, il l'est à l'égard du comportement public des femmes. (48)

It is not only fiction that endangers women, but also learning Latin! Like Charles Porée and Alfred Nettement, Maréchal is concerned with how reading inspires lust and allows women to be seduced, but also with the preservation of the status quo, and thus with women's participation in life outside the domestic sphere. That is why Fraisse identifies Maréchal's fear of women reading with a fear of women writing:

> Mais, pourquoi donc empêcher les femmes de lire, pourquoi même serait-il nécessaire d'interdire ? Considérant no. 26 : 'Combien la lecture est contagieuse : sitôt qu'une femme ouvre un livre, elle se croit en état d'en faire.' La lecture est dangereuse en ce qu'elle mène tout droit à l'écriture. Non pas l'écriture de lettres, de la correspondance féminine privée, de ce genre littéraire n'offusquant ni les hommes ni la société ; mais l'écriture des romans, des pamphlets, des essais politiques, bref de tout texte transformant une femme en femme-auteur. Article 4 : 'La Raison ne veut pas, plus que la langue française, qu'une femme soit auteur.' La grammaire se fait nature, donc vérité. (35)

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[12] Jann Matlock also discusses how critics "berated [Balzac] as the 'lady's man' of July Monarchy literature" (166) in Jann Matlock, *Scenes of Seduction: Prostitution, Hysteria, and Reading Difference in Nineteenth-Century France*, Columbia University Press, 1994.

Reading and writing give women access to the public sphere. Maréchal fears women's writing leaving the private sphere and entering the public sphere,[13] and he is certainly not alone. Women writers, *les bas-bleus*, are "mercilessly mocked and treated as a threat" (Lyons 316). Women writing threatens both the public and private spheres. Honoré Daumier illustrated this latter idea with a series of caricatures called *Les Bas-bleus* that feature women shirking their duties as mothers and wives in favor of writing, with captions like "La mère est dans le feu de la composition, l'enfant est dans l'eau de la baignoire !" (Daumier). Daumier, like Nettement, fears that novels will penetrate into the home and disrupt domestic life. These fears, as sexist and dated as they may be, are founded on something true: learning to read makes it possible to learn to write. The two skills are fundamentally connected. Reading does often lead to writing. Writing allows women to participate in public life and potentially to upset the status quo.[14]

These concerns about women participating in public life and upsetting the order of things are extrapolated from the initial moment of women getting ideas from reading; fiction is the spark in the powder keg of the imagination, to borrow Balzac's metaphor, and once women can imagine other worlds, why would they be satisfied with this one? It all begins with fiction breaching the private sphere, to return to Alfred Nettement.

What is most interesting about Alfred Nettement's concerns about reading is the idea that reading brings us, as readers, into contact with another mind. This is certainly true of reading a letter—even a letter by a fan to an author they do not know—but might it also be true of reading a novel? The letter-writers studied by Lyon-Caen certainly tried to imagine the person behind their favorite novels: "les lettres sont le lieu d'une intense production imaginaire, où le lecteur tente de donner à son destinataire un visage, une identité. Et où chercher l'écrivain, si ce

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[13] The complex relationship between public and private life is often at stake in Balzac's work; for more on this subject, especially in "Les Secrets," see M.T. Farrant, "Le privé, espace menacé? Des premières 'Scènes de la vie privée' aux 'Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan'," *L'Année balzacienne* 15 (1994): n. pag., *ProQuest*, web.

[14] Fraisse convincingly argues that many otherwise disparate political thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries agreed that women did not have a place in the public sphere, and that excluding women is part of the foundation of democracy. See Geneviève Fraisse, *Muse de la Raison: démocratie et exclusion des femmes en France*, Paris: Gallimard, 1995.

n'est d'abord dans son œuvre ?" (113). The question of whether the reader's suppositions about the author are correct is far less important than the simple knowledge that behind the text, there is an author. But it is not so far-fetched to think that reading a text, even a work of fiction, might lend some clues as to the author's personality. Any reader scanning a text for clues about the real person behind it, or tracking the interior lives of the fictional people inside it, is engaged in another type of reading, one that contemporary cognitive scientists call *mind-reading*, which I will now discuss.

Reading Minds: Evolution, Cognition, and Theory of Mind

Putting these texts in the context of their historical moment and examining their use of language is "zooming in," to borrow a metaphor from Brian Boyd; I will now use the lens of evolution to zoom out (*Origin* 380). It may seem bizarre, or at the very least unnecessary, to bring millions of years of natural history into a study of works of short fiction from nineteenth-century France, but humans are animals. Our minds, like the rest of our bodies, have been shaped by evolution. Our minds "are of ancient stock and have not been fundamentally altered by the increasing speed of cultural play" (Vermeule xiii). Acknowledging that our minds are subject to some biological constraints is not the same thing as saying that we are all slaves to instinct—we resist and overcome our impulses all the time. To paraphrase Jonathan Gottschall, studying human nature through the lens of evolution is not pessimistic, defeatist, or a conservative defense of the status quo. We must study our behavior using all of the tools available to us, so that we can understand and change ourselves (*Literature, Science, and a New Humanities* 34). Evolution matters for humanists because "Humans have evolved psychological capacities that shape cultural forms at least as much as, and probably much more than, they are shaped by them" (Vermeule 9). The impulse to create and indulge in art of any kind is a human universal; that is to say, there are no cultures without art (Pinker 404). The universality of the impulse indicates

the behavior is an evolved one. There are competing theories of how and why humans evolved this way.[15]

Studying literature through evolution and cognition is not meant to replace other approaches, nor does it mean subjugating literature to science. Literary scholars can and must contribute to the huge, ongoing interdisciplinary conversation about what it means to be human; whenever it is possible, we should do so in concert, rather than in conflict, with the sciences. Lisa Zunshine prefers to combine multiple approaches:

> I do not share the feelings (be they hopes or fears) of those literary critics who believe that cognitive approaches necessarily invalidate insights of more traditional schools of thought. I think that it is a sign of *strength* in a cognitive approach when it turns out to be highly compatible with well-thought-through literary criticism, and I eagerly seize on the instances of such compatibility. Given that the human mind in its numerous complex environments has been the object of study of literary critics for longer than it has been the object of study of cognitive scientists, I would, in fact, be suspicious of any cognitive reading so truly "original" that it can find no support in any of the existing literary critical paradigms. (*Why We Read Fiction* 5, italics in text)

Approaching literature with cognition in mind rarely yields a shocking result that is incompatible with all previous study. As Zunshine says, literary critics—and, I would add, writers—have been studying the mind for much longer than cognitive scientists. Blakey Vermeule concurs:

> …literary authors have often described cognitive heuristics and biases correctly, long before philosophy and science were able to do so. Literary authors get these biases right, not because they *essentially* have some greater insight into human psychology, but because of their incentives: they need to know what interests people, what appeals to them. (27)

What cognitive approaches offer us, as literary scholars, is a chance to look at what we know from a different angle. Cognitive science opens up the hood and lets us look at the underlying machinery of the mind, and in doing so, it often reveals that skills, behaviors, or perspectives that come so easily to humans that we take them for granted are marvelously complex. There is still much we do not know about evolution and cognition, and our current understanding will undoubtedly change, but we must work with what we have.

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[15] For a brief overview, see Brian Boyd, "Evolutionary Theories of Art," *The Literary Animal: Evolution and the Nature of Narrative*, Ed. Jonathan Gottschall and David Sloan Wilson, 1st ed. Northwestern University Press, 2005. 147–176.

One of the skills that seems simple, but that cognitive science reveals as complex, is the one discussed in Zunshine's book *Why We Read Fiction*: *Theory of Mind and the Novel*. Theory of mind, also called mind-reading, is a cognitive science term for how we understand that other people are motivated by thoughts, feelings, intentions, and beliefs that may not be obvious to us. The term "mind-reading," in both its colloquial and its cognitive meanings, suggests that *reading* is our preferred metaphor for understanding other people. We think of understanding other people in the same way that we think of understanding books. When we imagine a mind—the mysterious interior life of a person—our first point of comparison is the inside of a book. Even before books, or writing of any kind, *story* was essential to our understanding of ourselves and others.[16] Storytellers have known this for a long time: stories are as close as we can get to experiencing the world as someone else. We thirst for social information, and fiction can give it to us in a way unlike any other.

The term theory of mind can be misleading for "theory of mind is not a 'theory' in the sense of an explicit and culturally produced structure of propositions" (Boyd 145).[17] Theory of mind is also sometimes called "intuitive psychology" or "folk psychology." As social animals, it is one of our most crucial tools, and we make use of it in all interactions with other people. Theory of mind is not an exclusively human faculty, as some other species of birds and mammals have been shown to understand others in terms of their goals and intents (Boyd, *Origin* 141),[18] but

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[16] For an in-depth exploration of this topic, see Jonathan Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012. On self-making as a narrative art, see Jerome Bruner, *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life*, Harvard University Press, 2003.

[17] Cognitive science divides our ability to reason into a number of different faculties and intuitions, such as an intuitive physics (how objects fall), an intuitive engineering (how we make and use tools), a spatial sense, a number sense, and several others (Pinker 220). It is common to refer to these faculties as "theories." For example, our intuitive physics is sometimes called a "theory of bodies" (Cosmides and Tooby 85).

[18] For an example of animals using theory of mind, see Rachael C. Shaw and Nicola S. Clayton, "Careful Cachers and Prying Pilferers: Eurasian Jays (Garrulus Glandarius) Limit Auditory Information Available to Competitors," *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 280.1752 (2013).

> …a fully human theory of mind requires a capacity for interpreting others not simply through outer actions and expressions, and even through inner states like goals, intentions, and desires, but uniquely also through *beliefs*. […] At the fully human level of theory of mind, we pass one crucial step further: we also infer what others *know* in order to explain their desires and intentions with real precision. (Boyd, *Origin* 142-3)

Boyd also adds that at this level, "theory of mind becomes not only an intuitive psychology but an intuitive epistemology" (*Origin* 145). Our intuitive psychology is astoundingly complex and it totally transforms the way we see the world, but it comes so naturally to us to assess the motives and emotions of those around us that we almost never consider this faculty in our daily lives. Indeed, even cognitive scientists did not introduce the term until 1978 (*Origin* 141). Theory of mind's importance is most obvious when we examine the behavior of people who do not possess it, such as very young children. A classic experiment called the Sally-Anne test checks whether children understand that someone else can hold a false belief about the world. The experiment goes like this: the children watch Anne put a marble in a jar. Anne leaves. Sally enters. Sally takes Anne's marble and puts it in another place, usually a bowl or a basket that is also in the room. The children are asked where Anne will look for her marble when she comes back. Children learn to answer this question correctly (Anne will look in the jar) somewhere between the ages of four and five, demonstrating their understanding that someone else can hold a false belief about the world. Children younger than four tend to answer that Anne will look for the marble in its new location, because they do not understand that Anne does not possess all the same knowledge that they do (Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction* 8-9; Boyd, *Origin* 145-6).[19]

Theory of mind evolved to allow us to engage in more complicated social situations, and thus, to deal with real people. But we also engage our theory of mind when we read:

> Literature pervasively capitalizes on and stimulates Theory of Mind mechanisms that had evolved to deal with real people, even as on some level readers do remain aware that fictive characters are not real people at all. The novel, in particular, is implicated with our

[19] In *Why We Read Fiction*, Zunshine writes that theory of mind is often impaired in autistic children, a view that is common among cognitive scientists, but which many scientists and critics, Zunshine among them as of 2012, no longer hold. For more on theory of mind and autism, see Ralph James Savarese and Lisa Zunshine, "The Critic as Neurocosmopolite; Or, What Cognitive Approaches to Literature Can Learn from Disability Studies: Lisa Zunshine in Conversation with Ralph James Savarese," *Narrative* 22.1 (2014): 17–44.

> mind-reading ability to such a degree that I do not think myself in danger of overstating anything when I say that in its currently familiar shape it exists because we are creatures with ToM. (*Why We Read Fiction* 10)

According to Zunshine, fiction tests our theory of mind, and we derive pleasure from being tested, whether or not we pass. (A murder mystery is more enjoyable if we don't know who the killer is.) In another work, Zunshine jokes that mind-reading could be called "mind-*mis*reading" given how frequently we guess incorrectly about other people (Savarese and Zunshine 21). However, fiction provides a kind of practice. There are recent studies that have concluded that "people who consumed a lot of fiction outperformed heavy nonfiction readers on tests of social ability" and that these "differences in social abilities 'were best explained by the kind of reading people mostly did'" (Gottschall, *Storytelling* Kindle location 900-7). Gottschall also points out that these findings are surprising, and "If anything, stereotypes of nerdy bookworms and introverted couch potatoes might lead us to expect that fiction degrades social abilities rather than improving them" (Kindle location 907).

One of the ways that evolution works is by rewarding behaviors that enhance fitness, such as eating and reproducing, with sensations of pleasure. Leda Cosmides and John Tooby have even seen fit to describe the role of pleasure in natural selection by recourse to a metaphor of seduction: "Natural selection, a relentless but devious task-master, seduces you into devoting your free time to these improving activities by making them gratifying" ("Does Beauty Build Adapted Minds?" 16). We engage with fiction because it gives us pleasure, and it gives us pleasure because, among other things, it trains us to use our imaginations and it hones our theory of mind:

> This may be the most important function of pure fiction. By appealing to our fascination with agents and actions, fiction trains us to reflect freely beyond the immediate and to revolve things in our minds within a vast and vividly populated world of the possible. (Boyd, *Origin* 199)

Boyd is articulating a position common to several scholars who differ significantly on the evolutionary role of art but can agree on the adaptive function of narrative (Pinker 405,

Sugiyama 191, Carroll 87).[20] Narrative—and more broadly speaking, fiction—helps us to navigate the real world by empowering our imaginations. In the same way that our hands or our eyes or our mouths all have multiple purposes, so does fiction:

> Research results have been consistent and robust: fiction does mold our minds. Story—whether delivered through films, books, or video games— teaches us facts about the world; influences our moral logic; and marks us with fears, hopes, and anxieties that alter our behavior, perhaps even our personalities. (Gottschall, *Storytelling* Kindle location 1855-7)

However, it bears pointing out that the pleasure of Cosmides and Tooby's "improving activities" ("Adapted Minds" 16) can be indulged excessively. We also find pleasure in the taste of salt and fat, both things with nutritional value that were once scarce in our diet, hence our cravings for them. Now that salt and fat are more readily available to us, we have to moderate our consumption of them if we want to remain healthy. But we seem to feel the same fears about indulging our desire for fiction to excess, as the frequency of alarmed news articles about the number of hours that Americans spend watching TV can attest.[21] Fiction also frequently comments on the subject of people who read too much or too intensely or in some other, wrong manner, with the most famous examples being *Don Quixote* and *Madame Bovary*. My corpus is full of characters who stumble in the real world because they are led astray by their own love of engaging the imaginary, whether it is through reading or creating art.

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[20] There is no consensus among scholars yet as to whether the human drive to create and indulge in art is an adaptation, that is to say "a biological trait, physiological, psychological or behavioral, shaped by natural selection to enhance the fitness of members of a species" ("Evolutionary Theories of Art" 150), although I personally prefer Brian Boyd's theory that art is an adaptation with not one but many functions. It affects sexual selection, social cohesion, and the development and use of our mental faculties, and no single category among the three can account for the wide variety of ways in which we engage in art. He develops this view fully in *On the Origin of Stories*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009.

[21] In fairness to those articles, the numbers are astonishing. "According to a number of different surveys, the average American spends several hours each day watching television programs. By the time American children reach adulthood, they will have spent more time in TV land than anywhere else, including school. And these numbers don't account for the time we spend in movie theaters or watching DVDs. When you add in these figures, Americans spend about nineteen hundred hours per year awash in the glow of television and movie screens. That's five hours per day" (Gottschall *Storytelling*, Kindle location 213).

And therein lies the connection between this discussion of our human desire to create and engage in art, especially narrative, and the works of nineteenth-century French short fiction in my corpus. The texts in my corpus depict the seductive power of art, and this depiction should cause us to question what kind of impact reading "Sarrasine" or "Les Secrets" might have on us, their readers. What does it mean to be seduced by a text? If fiction empowers our imaginations, can it cause our imaginations to overpower us? Does literary seduction necessarily entail a confusion of truth and fiction? These questions intersect with the question of how our cognitive architecture handles fiction in several ways. Theory of mind evolved to deal with real people, but it also underlies our comprehension of fiction. Blakey Vermeule identifies mind-reading as a key way that texts attract readers' interest: "Inwardness, penetration, and knowing are all elements of the way we represent mind reading. And mind reading has something to do with what it means to be absorbing" (*Literary Characters*, 247). Vermeule is referring to two feelings that she calls "absorption" and "suspension": "The feelings of absorption and suspension are each so integral to the core experience of fiction that the contest between them will never be unwound" (*Literary Characters*, 248). "Absorption," being immersed in the imagined world of the text, is a huge part of the pleasure of fiction. "Suspension" is its opposite: the knowledge that what we are reading is fiction, that it must be kept at a distance. (Vermeule is using the term "suspension" to mean the *opposite* of "suspension of disbelief.") We find texts that challenge our theory of mind, like the ones in this corpus, especially absorbing. These texts also feature a number of characters who struggle with suspension when they read or listen to fiction, or when they have some other kind of aesthetic experience that requires balancing absorption and suspension.

This question of how to balance our experience of reading between absorption and suspension is related to the crucially important question of how to distinguish true information from false. In all the texts in my corpus, characters struggle to determine which information is false, an issue that is inextricable from keeping track of the sources of various pieces of information. In addition to knowing the source of a piece of information, it is also important for these characters to know what exactly the other characters in the story know, because that

knowledge will determine how to behave in their company. One way that we mentally filter and store information is "metarepresentation." Any kind of memory is a "representation" in cognitive science terms. We "tag" our memories with extra information—the "meta" in metarepresentation—such as their sources (our own thoughts, other people, sight, sound, etc.) and when and where we acquired them.[22] Our ability to distinguish true information from false, and useful from useless, depends on our ability to "tag" our memories. Source tags allow us to track gossip and navigate complicated social interactions, whether in the real world or in fiction. Successful reading often depends on remembering to tag a story as fiction, although sometimes the storyteller, author, or narrator works to make us forget that fact. This same skill is of use to the fictional characters in my corpus; characters who do not carefully evaluate all the information they are being told end up suffering. In real life and fiction, we often encounter information that is only contingently true, or that requires multiple tags, and sometimes we encounter information that involves multiple minds:

> Although ToM is formally defined as a second-order intentionality—for example, "I believe that you desire X," or Peter Walsh thinks that Clarissa "would think [him] a failure" (43)—the levels of intentionality can "recurse" further back, for example, to the third level, as in the title of George Butte's wonderful recent book, *I Know That You Know That I Know*," or to the fourth level, as in "I believe that you think that she believes that he thinks that X," and so forth. (Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction* 28)

All of the texts in my corpus require their readers to track similarly nested orders of intentionality at one point or another, which is part of the pleasure of reading them. Examining these chains of intentionality can shed light on the intricacies of their construction.

What stories promise us, whether it is truth or fiction or something in between, is a crucial factor in how we are supposed to read them. It is here that cognitive psychology intersects with narratology, specifically Ross Chambers's idea that stories contain within themselves models (or "antimodels," 29) of how they should be read, moments in which the text instructs its reader in how to read it. These models can take the form of an explicit comment

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[22] There are many more kinds of "tags." For more on this subject, which I have greatly simplified, see Leda Cosmides and John Tooby, "Consider the Source: The Evolution of Adaptations for Decoupling and Metarepresentation," *Metarepresentations: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*, Ed. Dan Sperber, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, 53–115.

about how to read or a more implicit comment in the form of a character reacting to an embedded story.

Each work in my corpus depicts characters reacting to art, especially storytelling: for naive characters, a powerful imagination makes them more susceptible to seduction and its negative consequences. These naive characters, victims of seduction, suffer deception, disillusionment, and sometimes death. For characters better versed in the ways of the world, the imagination can be both a source of pleasure and a way of better understanding themselves and others. Studying seduction as the subject of these texts and as a metaphor for the relationship between text and reader furnishes an opportunity to discuss the ways in which we conceive—historically and currently—of the power of fiction.

Seduction has fascinated writers and readers since the serpent hissed at Eve, but it was a topic of particular prominence in eighteenth-century French literature. Valmont and Merteuil of *Les Liaisons dangereuses* are the most famous seducers of that century, but as Pierre Saint-Amand puts it, "une horde de séducteurs peuple le roman des Lumières" (11). These seducers are usually aristocrats who practice their craft in secret, although they often initiate young people into their ways, as in Crébillon fils's *Les Égarements du cœur et de l'esprit*. For Saint-Amand, the eighteenth-century seducer is a fearsome, bewitching figure of the Devil, and novels about desire and seduction explore the superstitious, shadowy underside of the Enlightenment (11-12).[23] The seducers studied in my corpus use many of the same tactics employed by their libertine predecessors, such as a careful command of their language and their appearance. The most successful among them do possess a similarly mesmerizing, irresistible allure for their victims. And libertine seducers place a high value both on being savvy mind-readers and

[23] For more on this topic, see Pierre Saint-Amand, *Séduire, ou, La passion des lumières*, Paris: Méridiens-Klinksieck, 1987. Stéphanie Genand also treats the *roman libertin* in light of the historical and political context at the end of the eighteenth century. See Stéphanie Genand, *Le Libertinage et l'histoire : politique de la séduction à la fin de l'Ancien Régime*, Oxford : Voltaire Foundation, 2005. Pierre Hartmann treats love, seduction, and subjectivity after the Scientific Revolution. See Pierre Hartmann, *Le Contrat et la séduction : essai sur la subjectivité amoureuse dans le roman des Lumières*, Paris : Champion ; Genève : Slatkine, 1998.

remaining unreadable to others. The marquise de Merteuil writes of how she learned to conceal her own reactions, even deliberately hurting herself until she learned to smile through the pain, an effort that she credits with her insight into reading others (Laclos 222-3). Secrecy is even more important for the marquise de Merteuil than it is for her male counterparts, whose seductions can be publicized after the fact without damaging their reputations. However, male seducers still value control over their faces and bodies. Here is the experienced seducer Versac explaining his methods to his protégé Meilcour in *Les Égarements du cœur et de l'esprit*:

> …vous devez apprendre à déguiser si parfaitement votre caractère, que ce soit en vain qu'on s'étudie à le démêler. Il faut encore que vous joigniez à l'art de tromper les autres, celui de les pénétrer ; que vous cherchiez toujours sous ce qu'ils veulent vous paraître, ce qu'ils sont en effet. (Crébillon 51)

For both Versac and Merteuil, disguising one's own character is equally as important as understanding others'. They use similar language for this second act: Versac uses the verb "pénétrer" above, and Merteuil describes her ability as "ce coup d'œil pénétrant" (Laclos 223). Penetration is one metaphor for this act, and the other is reading. Paul Young explores this metaphor in his book *Seducing the Eighteenth-Century French Reader*, where he writes of the body as text: seducers master theirs, thus becoming "unreadable" (63). Young does not make explicit reference to mind-reading in the cognitive sense, but the metaphor is the same. Theory of mind is the faculty underlying all discussion of what others are thinking and whether they can tell what we are thinking, and the obvious and inherent difficulty of mind-reading is what makes characters like Merteuil and Versac, who are both unreadable and superior readers, so fascinating.

The texts in my corpus are distinct from this tradition, since the seducers are not libertine aristocrats, but references to the eighteenth century as the supreme era of seduction haunt nineteenth-century texts. In *Madame Bovary*, when Emma attends the ball at the Vaubyessard and encounters a decrepit old duke, she is impressed with him despite the sauce dribbling down his chin: "Il avait vécu à la Cour et couché dans le lit des reines !" (109). For Emma, the grandeur of the Old Régime is inextricable from these liaisons. Similarly, the eighteenth century—or an imagined version of it—looms large in Balzac's "Sarrasine" and Sand's "La

Marquise." In both texts, a very old character appears in the frame story—in "Sarrasine," as in *Madame Bovary*, the decrepit figure appears in the midst of a glamorous ball—and the embedded story revisits their youth in the eighteenth century.

Balzac's "Sarrasine" and "Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan," Sand's "La Marquise" and "Metella," and Nerval's *Sylvie* all belong to the genre of what René Godenne calls the "récit court" in his study *La Nouvelle française*: "Ce qui caractérise avant tout la nouvelle du XIXe siècle, c'est son extrême diversité, tant sur le plan du contenu que sur celui du contenant […] il n'est plus possible de distinguer les domaines du conte et de la nouvelle; il n'y a plus qu'un domaine: celui du récit court (par opposition au roman)" (106). Godenne's "récit court" category includes a type of text he calls "la longue nouvelle" (95), a type of work which is usually less than a hundred pages and which focuses on "une matière anecdotique" (100), rather than many. Balzac, Sand, and Nerval are less categorical than Godenne; in their correspondence, they refer to these works as *contes*, *nouvelles*, *romans*, or, in the case of Nerval's *Sylvie*, "un petit roman qui n'est pas tout à fait un conte" ("À Maurice Sand"). So even Godenne's distinction between *roman* and *récit court* is blurred. Nerval may have made this distinction between "roman" and "conte" because he felt that "conte" evoked the oral, although Littré's *Dictionnaire de la langue française* specifies that "il n'y a pas de différence fondamentale entre le conte et le roman" ("Conte"). In contrast to Nerval's particularity about genre terms, Simone Bernard-Griffiths notes that "Comme nombre de ses contemporains, George Sand a tendance à employer indifféremment les termes de 'conte' et de 'nouvelle.' Les frontières entre conte et roman sont non moins floues" ("Metella" 44). I will also use a variety of terms for these works, such as short story, short fiction, and novella. In addition to the works listed above, I have included one novel in my corpus, albeit an unusual one: George Sand's 1845 work *Isidora*. While it is longer than a hundred pages, *Isidora* does concentrate on "une matière anecdotique" (Godenne 100).

Despite the different terms, there is an important formal element that ties the works in my corpus together. All of these works contain a frame story and an embedded story; one character tells another character a story. There is some variation in how authors employ this structure,

particularly in *Isidora* and *Sylvie*, but all of these texts foreground the reliability of their narrators by embedding stories. These particular narrative structures illuminate different aspects of the central questions of how we seduce using stories and how stories seduce us. These texts are particularly fertile ground for a critical approach founded on cognition, since the embedded stories require more sophisticated tracking of who said what, which engages the reader's theory of mind. Each text offers a different perspective on the workings of seduction, as a relationship between characters in the story and as a relationship between the text and its reader. The cognitive approach can shed new light on these texts, including those—like "Sarrasine" or *Sylvie*—that have already inspired many critical readings. The three texts by George Sand have not attracted as much study, and they merit more. Sand's attention to her characters' perceptions of each other, as well as their mental and emotional states, means these texts are particularly rich from a cognitive perspective. I will explore these texts in chronological order, from "Sarrasine" to *Sylvie*. Chapters will be grouped by author.

Chapter one, "'Une Passion d'artiste' : Art, Seduction, and Theory of Mind in 'Sarrasine,'" treats seduction and the imagination in Balzac's 1830 short story "Sarrasine." There are two seductions in "Sarrasine," one in the frame story and one in the embedded story, and mind-reading, or rather mind-*mis*reading, plays a crucial role in both. In the frame story, the nameless narrator promises Béatrix de Rochefide a story that will answer all her questions about the mysterious Lanty family if she will let him into her bedroom. This implicit pact primes Béatrix, and readers of "Sarrasine," for a particular kind of story—something scandalous and sensual. But the embedded story is not what Béatrix expects, and she reacts with horror, kicking the narrator out and breaking the terms of their pact.

Within the embedded story, Sarrasine's expectations are also subverted; the naive young sculptor "reads" Zambinella as a woman, but Zambinella is a castrato. As an artist possessed of a powerful imagination, Sarrasine is able to see a woman where none exists, and as a naive young man in a new country, he is not worldly enough to see through the ruse. Sarrasine's imagination is not his only problem. His passion, not properly channeled into his art, overwhelms him.

Sarrasine is unable to realize his mistake until it is too late. His death is a consequence not only of failing to perceive the deception, that is to say misreading the world around him, but also of revealing his own ignorance of the world, or allowing himself to be too easily read. As important as it is to evaluate the sources and circumstances of all the information we learn, it is equally important not to reveal information about ourselves that might make us vulnerable.

Sarrasine is vulnerable because of his artistic temperament. In Balzac's 1839 novella "Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan," the writer Daniel d'Arthez is also possessed of a powerful imagination and very little experience with women, but he survives—indeed, lives to enjoy—the experience of being seduced. What differs between Sarrasine and D'Arthez? In chapter two, "'Est-ce un dénouement?': 'Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan' and the Pleasures of Story," I will argue that D'Arthez recognizes the princesse as a fellow creative spirit, someone engaged in telling and acting out a story, and he respects her craft. He even participates in the story, perhaps unknowingly at first, but by the end of the novella, it is clear he possesses a certain awareness of the princesse's fiction. D'Arthez's worldly Parisian friends tell him about the princesse's sordid past and he never denies the truth of their accusations, which would reveal him as the princesse's dupe; instead, he questions their worth. D'Arthez, as imaginative as Sarrasine but more sophisticated as a reader, distinguishes between *belief* and *make-belief*. It is possible for artists to live and love happily, just as it is possible to navigate the complex relationship between life and art, provided we read carefully enough.

Invented, imagined, and idealized lovers populate the three George Sand texts treated in the third chapter, "'Une passion toute romanesque' : Seduction and Illusion in George Sand's 'La Marquise,' 'Metella,' and *Isidora*." In the 1832 short story "La Marquise," the marquise falls in love with an actor, while the young male protagonists of "Metella" (1833) and *Isidora* (1846) fall in love with women before ever truly meeting them. References to artifice and illusion permeate all three stories and raise questions about illusion and reality and the power of art—theater, oral storytelling, writing—over the imagination. Without denying the power of art to produce seductive illusions, Sand's texts critique instead the social reality that bases women's

worth on their reputations and treats them as "des êtres secondaires dans la société" (*Isidora* 33). Sparked by art, theater, reading, or oral storytelling, the imagination can offer access to a more just society than the ones to which Sand's female characters are confined, and thus it poses a danger to the established order. Imagining better lovers and better lives is not without its risks, though, especially for women. Sand's characters suffer disappointments and disillusionments if they do not remain carefully grounded in reality when they engage with art. Characters can also use their drive to create and engage in art for good: the marquise and Isidora become a storyteller and a writer, respectively, and this allows them to reflect critically on their lives and their places in society. Art can allow us to imagine a better world.

In chapter four, "'Bien des cœurs me comprendront': Reading the Mind and the Heart in Gérard de Nerval's *Sylvie,"* I treat Nerval's 1853 novella. It features a protagonist whose imagination leads him astray when he longs for the object of his present affections, an actress named Aurélie, to be the same woman he loved as an adolescent, Adrienne. In addition to being enamored of Aurélie-Adrienne, the narrator of *Sylvie* is also in love with a peasant girl named Sylvie, and he remembers all three women as he recounts his youth. *Sylvie*, because it involves the narrator examining his own perceptions and memories, is a particularly rich text for questions of theory of mind. The hero struggles to connect with all three women. His struggle is founded on an inability to grant these women the same interiority that he possesses—it is a failure of theory of mind. The hero cannot understand the women he loves, but the narrator, made wiser by his experience, is able to form a friendship with Sylvie. It is not the romantic connection he sought as a young man, but it is a lasting relationship, founded on a fuller recognition of Sylvie as a person. In "XIV. Dernier Feuillet," the narrator and Sylvie read a book together, sharing an emotional experience.

Sylvie is the story of success beyond seduction. The hero does not succeed with any of the three women—he may sleep with Aurélie, but their relationship does not last—and this is in part because he cannot connect with them. He cannot express himself. The narrator, on the other hand, has learned to express all the fruits of his experience—his nostalgia, his feeling of loss, his

disillusionment—in writing. In fact, he expresses himself so successfully in writing that he is confident he can achieve an understanding of "hearts" that goes beyond words. As the hero, he struggles to express himself in speech, but as the narrator, he can organize his text in a way that produces an understanding of hearts.

Studying seduction as the subject of these texts and as a metaphor for the relationship between text and reader furnishes an opportunity to discuss fiction's allures. It is no accident that so many writers have chosen seduction as a metaphor for our relationship with art, and seduction is also the critic Paul Hernadi's metaphor of choice when he describes the cognitive process of reading and its rewards:

> The requisite cognitive process involves what Sartre, referring to the reading of novels, called "directed creation": the reader's voluntary granting of his or her mental resources to figments of someone else's imagination. Far from being self-cued daydreaming, such directed creation is a collaborative act […] The notion of co-creation suggests that a literary transaction should be viewed not so much as production leading to consumption, but as seduction leading to consummation—to gratifying intercourse with someone else's imagination. […] [T]he pleasure of succumbing to literary seduction has long served as a psychological reward for what was once and perhaps still is a biologically advantageous thing to do. (56)

In this passage, Hernadi unintentionally echoes the earlier passage quoted from Balzac's *Physiologie du mariage*: "Lire, c'est créer peut-être à deux" (128). By studying these texts through the lenses of literature, history, and cognition, we can gain new insight into the question of seduction in nineteenth-century French literature and into the larger questions of the purpose and power of fiction.

CHAPTER ONE: 'Une Passion d'artiste' : Art, Seduction, and Theory of Mind in "Sarrasine"

Balzac's 1830 short story "Sarrasine" reveals the source of a mysterious Parisian family's wealth through a bleak tale of failed passion.[24] It has been much discussed by literary critics, especially since the publication of Roland Barthes's book S/Z. "Sarrasine" makes an excellent starting point for my study of short stories that depict the seductive power of art over the imagination, especially the power of storytelling. It is, as Ross Chambers writes, "a story about the power of art and the problem of its reception" (76), which is a description that could easily apply to the other works in my corpus. "Sarrasine" is structured so that it has a frame story and an embedded story, which is a structure that recurs to some extent in all of the works in my corpus, although it is not always so clearly delineated as it is in "Sarrasine." This story-within-a-story structure and the deception that is central to "Sarrasine" account for much of the critical interest in the text. I will approach this text with the aid of Ross Chambers's essay on the subject in *Story and Situation* and the concept of "models of reading" that he outlines in that book: texts present their readers with examples of how they should be read by depicting characters responding to stories, or perhaps even other types of art such as performances or paintings, and these characters can be "models" to be imitated or "antimodels" to be avoided by the reader. I will also use a concept from cognitive psychology called "theory of mind" as a tool to shed light on the complexities of not only the characters' interactions within "Sarrasine" but also our own responses to the layers of story in the text. Because the use of theory of mind is relatively new in literary criticism, it will allow me to examine this text from a different angle. "Sarrasine" is the story of a failed seduction, or perhaps the story of two failed seductions: one in the frame story and one in the embedded story. Why do they fail? Why tell these stories of failed seduction?

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[24] "Sarrasine" was first published in the *Revue de Paris* on 21 and 28 November 1830. Citations refer to the Pléiade edition. See Balzac, "Sarrasine," *La Comédie humaine*, Ed. Pierre-Georges Castex, VI, France, Gallimard, 1977, 1043–1076, 1543–1554.

I will arrive at a response to this question by discussing the storyteller (the seducer in the frame story), the content of the embedded story, and the listener in the frame story (or the would-be target of the seduction). The seductions in "Sarrasine" fail for a number of reasons, but I will argue that "misreading" is a common thread among them. The narrator of "Sarrasine" and his listener, Béatrix de Rochefide,[25] come to an agreement before the frame story is told: "une nuit d'amour contre une belle histoire" (Barthes, *S/Z* 95). Their pact is oral, and its terms are not stated aloud explicitly, so both of them are relying on theory of mind to parse what the other person expects. The narrator and Béatrix misread each other, which leads to their pact being broken at the end of the text. This misreading in the frame story is the echo of another misreading in the embedded story. "Sarrasine" is certainly "a story about the power of art and the problem of its reception" (Chambers 76), and both of those elements are inextricable from theory of mind. How does the storyteller select what story to tell, and how to tell it, without making assumptions about what the listener *wants* and *expects*? The listener's theory of mind is also engaged: the listener *expects* that the storyteller *knows* what kind of the story the listener *wants*. Even if the listener herself does not have specific expectations about the story, she still wants to know the secret at its heart, and the very act of desiring the secret implies some hoped-for future satisfaction; no one *wants* to be disappointed. Thus this delicate layering of intentionalities still exists, even if some of the reader's desires are vague. Béatrix is also primed for a particular kind of story by the narrator, as are readers of "Sarrasine"; I will return to this point later in the chapter.

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[25] In the earliest version of "Sarrasine," it is not Béatrix de Rochefide but an anonymous woman named "Mme de F" (Pugh 14). Balzac renames the listener to "Fœdora," the *femme sans cœur* of *La Peau de chagrin*, in an 1835 edition (Pugh 96). In the 1843 publication of the second volume of *Scènes de la vie parisienne*, the character becomes Béatrix de Rochefide (341). Béatrix de Rochefide is the only significant character in "Sarrasine" who reappears elsewhere in *La Comédie humaine* (Citron 82). In addition to "Sarrasine," she appears or is mentioned in *Béatrix*, *Une Fille d'Ève*, "Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan," *La Maison Nucingen*, *Modeste Mignon*, "Autre étude de femme," and "Un Prince de la Bohème." See Anthony R. Pugh, *Balzac's Recurring Characters*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974.

In "Sarrasine," the frame story and the embedded story are almost equal in length; "Sarrasine" is the only example of this phenomenon in all of *La Comédie humaine* (Citron 1038). The embedded story is more clearly delineated from the frame story, and in some early versions, the embedded story is announced by the sub-heading "II. Une Passion d'artiste."[26] There is also a chronological and geographic gap between the two stories, as the frame story takes place in 1830s Paris and the embedded story takes place in mid-eighteenth-century Rome. It is possible for the reader to be so absorbed in the embedded story in "Sarrasine" that they forget the frame story; this possibility is much more limited in, for example, Balzac's "Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan," which I will treat in the second chapter. In "Les Secrets," the embedded story is shorter and the frequency of interruptions—judgments passed by the Balzacian narrator on the princesse de Cadignan or emotional reactions by Daniel d'Arthez—is higher, so the frame story never recedes into the background, as it does in "Sarrasine."

And what kind of story is "Sarrasine" itself? The story begins when the narrator is at a ball at the home of the mysterious Lanty family. The action seems contemporary with the text's publication in 1830, although no date is stated in the text (Citron 1035). We can assume from Marianina de Lanty's performance of "O Patria! … Di tanti palpiti" from *Tancredi* that the action takes place some time after the opera debuted in Paris in 1822 (Balzac 1547). This narrator is not the typical omniscient Balzacian narrator but a "je" who is present in the story. He does not identify himself by name. He attends the ball with the beautiful young Mme de Rochefide, and he is startled out of his reverie when she is frightened by a "vieillard" who has suddenly come into the room, drawn by the enchanting voice of the beautiful young Marianina de Lanty (1047). No one is certain who the old man is, and there are many rumors that he is some sort of fantastic non-human creature, perhaps "un vampire, une goule" (1049). Mme de Rochefide takes the old man "pour un spectre" (1054), and is so frightened by him that she leaves the ballroom and draws the narrator into a boudoir, where she nearly faints. In the boudoir, there is a painting of "Adonis étendu sur une peau de lion" (1054), and Mme de

[26] This is not the case in the Pléiade edition.

Rochefide is fascinated by it. The narrator is jealous of the attention she pays to this work of art. He claims to know the story behind it, and promises to tell Mme de Rochefide the next evening at her house. She initially objects to the terms of this promise—and its implicit intimacy—but eventually relents and agrees to the narrator's terms.

The next night, he arrives at her house and begins to tell the embedded story, which begins with a biography of Ernest-Jean Sarrasine, a somewhat difficult young man possessed of an "imagination ardente" (1059). Sarrasine channels his passion into sculpture, and his chosen career takes him to Italy in 1758 (1059). He goes to the opera and falls in love with the "prima donna" Zambinella (1060). He sketches Zambinella's portrait obsessively. Sarrasine's interest in Zambinella draws the attention of others, and soon a meeting is set up between them. Zambinella gently rebuffs Sarrasine's advances, but nothing calms Sarrasine's passion. He resolves to kidnap Zambinella, but the next time he encounters the singer at the home of the cardinal who is her patron, "she" is dressed as a man. Zambinella is a *castrato*. Sarrasine realizes that he has fallen in love with an illusion and in a fit of rage, he tries to destroy the sculpture that he has been creating, which is a portrait of Zambinella. He also tries to murder Zambinella. Zambinella is frightened by his rage and screams, and then three men enter Sarrasine's studio and murder him on behalf of the cardinal.

This is the end of the embedded story. Madame de Rochefide is puzzled, and wants to know what relation this story could possibly have to the portrait of Adonis and the strange old man at the Lanty ball. The narrator explains that the portrait of Adonis was based on Sarrasine's sculpture of Zambinella, and that the old man is Zambinella himself. He is Marianina de Lanty's great uncle. This story explains the mysterious origins of the wealth of the Lanty family, which comes from Zambinella's career.

Madame de Rochefide is horrified by this story: "Vous m'avez dégoûtée de la vie et des passions pour longtemps" (1075). She then breaks the implicit promise of sex that she made to the narrator: "Laissez-moi seule" (1075). The narrator tries to reassure her that civilization has

made progress because it is no longer customary to castrate young boys, but she still finds the story upsetting. The frame story closes with the marquise remaining "pensive" (1076).

In my discussion of "Sarrasine," I will refer to the character Zambinella with both masculine and feminine pronouns, depending on which part of the story I am discussing. This practice, which preserves Zambinella's gender ambiguity, is the convention among critics. In the following sections, I will examine the failed seduction of "Sarrasine." I will treat the storyteller, his expectations of and promise to Béatrix; then, the embedded story and, with the aid of Ross Chambers, its two models of "reading" (in a more general sense of "responding to art," since "Sarrasine" deals not only with oral storytelling and literature but also opera, painting, and sculpture); and finally, Béatrix, her response to the embedded story, and what commentary, if any, "Sarrasine" makes on the seductive power of fiction.

'Je vous révélerai ce mystère'

The narrator of "Sarrasine" promises to reveal a mystery. He says he will explain the presence of the frightening old man at the Lanty ball. This offer is part of a pact. The narrator of "Sarrasine" wants to sleep with Mme de Rochefide. In this section, I will argue that the pact in "Sarrasine" fails in large part due to the storyteller's chosen technique; a failure which results from his misreading of Béatrix's desires and expectations. I will discuss the storyteller's physical presence as well as storytelling technique, focusing primarily on the narrator of "Sarrasine," but occasionally using Diane de Cadignan, of Balzac's short story "Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan," as a point of comparison. I will pay special attention to how the narrator uses deliberate misinformation and delays, including interruptions by the listener, to create suspense.

Suspense was not a new phenomenon in the nineteenth century.[27] But in 1830, when "Sarrasine" was first published, it was an increasingly popular device in realist fiction and in the

[27] Aristotle wrote that "the greatest means by which tragedy draws the soul are parts of the story, namely reversals and discoveries" (22, 1450a). "Suspense" in the sense of the apprehension a reader feels from not knowing the end of a story is a more modern phenomenon, but the importance that Aristotle places on "reversals and discoveries" suggests that there is still a kind

roman feuilleton. In contrast, sentimental novels and what Margaret Cohen calls "sentimental social novels," two connected genres of fiction (the first popular in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century; the second, the 1830s and 1840s), generally disdained the use of this device. Suspense was the subject of controversy, with some authors equating it to a cheap trick. Margaret Cohen discusses George Sand's attitude to it, as expressed in the introduction to *Lucrezia Floriani* (1846):

> George Sand makes explicit the continued authority of sentimental narrative logic when her narrator alerts the reader to expect it in the introduction to *Lucrezia Floriani*. Finely attuned to the significance of literary convention, Sand associates the principle 'all should be clear' with the long-standing practice of French novelists, in contrast to the passion for suspense that is the latest vogue. 'Thus, reader, to proceed in French fashion, like our worthy ancestors, I warn you that I will subtract from the narrative... its principal element, the spiciest seasoning in circulation in the marketplace: that is to say surprise, the unexpected. Instead of leading you from astonishment to astonishment... I will lead you step by step along a narrow, straight path, having you look in front and behind... If, by chance, there is a gully, I will say to you: 'Watch out, here is a gully'; if there is a waterfall, I will help you cross this waterfall, I will not push you in head first to have the pleasure of saying to others: There goes one tricked reader.' With her contrast, Sand takes aim at realist novels for how they solicit the reader, for these works play, of course, a primary role in propagating the fashion of suspense, along with the *roman feuilleton*. (127)

Suspense, the "spiciest seasoning," is not a source of pleasure, to hear George Sand tell it. Unexpected revelations in a story are just like being pushed "head first" into a waterfall. The mystery, once revealed, is a figurative cold shower. Had the narrator of "Sarrasine" only known this, he surely would have chosen a different strategy for telling his story. But the mystery is key to the narrator's entry into Mme de Rochefide's boudoir. Unlike Diane de Cadignan, who

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of fascination or pleasure in watching, say, Oedipus discover the truth at long last, even if we the audience have known it all along. What was new in the nineteenth century were stories in which the reader was as ignorant of characters' fates as the characters themselves. Modern detective fiction, a genre in which suspense plays a key role, also emerges in the nineteenth century, although as Lisa Zunshine notes, "The endeavor to historicize the nineteenth- and twentieth-century detective story is often complicated, however, by the acknowledgment that we can find 'proto-detective' narratives in much earlier epochs, from Daniel's interrogating of the elders in the biblical story of Susanna in the garden to Sophocles' *Oedipus* and Voltaire's *Zadig*" (126-7). "Sarrasine" is not a detective story per se, but it does pivot around a central mystery.

possesses many worldly charms, the narrator of "Sarrasine"—by his own account—appears to trade solely on the story he has to tell.

"Les Secrets" is the story of Diane's seduction of the writer Daniel d'Arthez, but she does not narrate her own story, so the view of Diane in "Les Secrets" is necessarily very different from the view of the narrator in "Sarrasine." The Balzacian narrator judges Diane de Cadignan harshly on occasion, but he also provides an account of her beauty, her voice, and her impeccable toilette. Storytelling is only one among many seduction tactics available to Diane, who possesses what we might call "feminine wiles." In contrast, the narrator of "Sarrasine" spends no time on his own appearance. He does not mention if he is young or old, handsome or ugly, rich or poor. The reader might guess that attending the glamorous Lanty ball with the beautiful Madame de Rochefide speaks well of him, but he never describes himself. Claude Bremond and Thomas Pavel suggest that the narrator may be an "arriviste" or a "parvenu," based on his reflections about the party guests at the Lanty ball, which would differentiate the narrator from the marquise de Rochefide, who is a legitimate aristocrat (Bremond and Pavel 240).

We do know his storytelling technique, and we also see the pact he makes with Madame de Rochefide before beginning his story. She wants her curiosity satisfied immediately, but he refuses to tell the story in the boudoir of the Lanty household. She can only hear the story if she will grant him access to her house:

> —Eh bien, j'irai demain soir chez vous vers neuf heures, et je vous révélerai ce mystère.
> —Non, répondit-elle d'un air mutin, je veux l'apprendre sur-le-champ. (1056)

Madame de Rochefide's curiosity eventually causes her to agree to these terms, which are not explicit, but their meaning is clear enough. The narrator expects to be compensated for his storytelling in sex. He uses the tactic of delaying the story in order to elicit Madame de Rochefide's agreement, and this technique of delaying the story—or prolonging silence—is one that he will employ again later. This exchange is predicated on the characters' use of Theory of Mind. The narrator of "Sarrasine" HOPES that Béatrix de Rochefide WANTS to know the story enough that she will repay him in sex. It is a gamble on his part, as is any such exchange, and he knows he runs the risk of failing, hence his lengthy preparations before telling the story:

demanding to be allowed into her bedroom, hesitating a number of times before starting, making a point of remarking on how the story has "des passages dangereux pour le narrateur" (1057). But the narrator certainly seems more prepared to explain the presence of the strange old man in the Lanty family than any other character we have yet encountered in the text, even if it is only through his attitude that we perceive this. The narrator disdainfully refers to the gossip surrounding the old man as "les contes les plus ridicules" (1047) and "niaiseries" (1048). He does not explain to Béatrix how he came to know the story he is promising to tell her—a point we will return to later in this chapter—but he presents himself to her as though as he unquestionably possesses the facts. When she first faints, they have the following exchange:

> J'ai peur, me dit-elle en se penchant à mon oreille.
> —Vous pouvez parler, répondis-je. Il entend très difficilement.
> —Vous le connaissez donc?
> —Oui. (1051)

In addition to presenting himself this way to Béatrix, the narrator also shares a lengthy portrait of the old man with the reader. The portrait is typically Balzacian in its detail, from the gold embroidery on the old man's clothing to the shape of his jawbone, but since the portrait comes from a "je" who is in the story rather than an omniscient narrator who is outside the text, it lends an air of authority to the narrator. He appears to be an expert on the subject of the mysterious old man. The mystery is also heightened by the fantastic gossip that precedes this portrait, which the narrator reports to the reader interspersed with Gothic literary references: the Lanty family could have come from the novels of Anne Radcliffe (1046) and the gossips compare the old man to a host of supernatural creatures (1047), notably vampires and artificial men, which the notes identify as allusions to Polidori's *The Vampire* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1546).

So the narrator possesses the key to this possibly supernatural mystery and he dangles his (alleged) knowledge in front of Béatrix like a lure. Rather than simply conveying the information to Béatrix straightforwardly, on the spot at the Lanty ball, the narrator makes the choice to tell it to her in the form of a story, one day later in her residence. This choice is predicated on assumptions about how to elicit his desired response from Béatrix: the narrator believes he

knows *what kind* of story Béatrix wants and *how* she wants to be told. His reading appears correct at the moment that Béatrix agrees to let him come into her home to tell the story, but Béatrix's true intentions are opaque to the narrator, and thus, to the reader. Does she accept only the letter, and not the spirit, of the pact? That is to say, her agreement indicates that she will let the narrator into her home, but she never intends to offer him sex. Or would she have been willing to fulfill her end of the pact and sleep with the narrator, had he told a more satisfying story? Either way, it is clear by the end of the tale that the narrator has misread Béatrix de Rochefide; I will return to this point in the next two sections.

This pact is not the only preparation that the narrator makes before telling his story. There is one more small delay before he begins:

> —Allons, dit-elle, j'écoute.
> —Mais je n'ose commencer. L'aventure a des passages dangereux pour le narrateur. Si je m'enthousiasme, vous me ferez taire.
> —Parlez.
> —J'obéis. (1057)

The narrator encourages Madame de Rochefide to interrupt him. This is different from the princesse de Cadignan's technique. In a way, she also encourages interruptions by lapsing into silence at certain points, but she never does so explicitly. To do so might disturb the ruse that she is simply recounting the events of her life as they happened to her. She denies that she is telling a story even as she relies on the writer Daniel d'Arthez's literary expertise to recognize her own mastery as a storyteller. The narrator of "Sarrasine," on the other hand, is very clear in identifying himself as "le narrateur" and demanding audience participation. He hopes, no doubt, to further excite Madame de Rochefide's curiosity by promising "des passages dangereux," but "vous me ferez taire" is a strange thing to ask of one's interlocutor. It is a rhetorical device, a bit of "reverse psychology," intended to elicit the listener's rapt attention and interest in the story rather than her dismissal. In Blakey Vermeule's terms, the narrator wants Madame de Rochefide to feel *absorption*, rather than *suspension*—the ability to keep the imaginary world of the story at a distance—and this rhetorical device is one of his tactics. However, Madame de Rochefide *will*

ask the narrator to be silent, but only after the story is finished, when she genuinely wants him to stop talking and go away. That is certainly not what he meant by "vous me ferez taire."

Claude Bremond and Thomas Pavel also highlight this passage:

> Le narrateur lui-même recourt à une précaution oratoire dont on ne sait si elle a pour but de mettre en garde l'auditrice ou de l'allécher : 'L'aventure a des passages dangereux pour le narrateur' (lexie 150). A première vue, cela veut dire que l'histoire touchera à des thèmes scabreux, qui pourraient choquer une jeune fille, mais bien entendu pas une femme mariée qui se pique d'être avertie. Mais la phrase suivante : 'Si je m'enthousiasme, vous me ferez taire' devient alors difficile à interpréter. Si en effet le narrateur risque de scandaliser de chastes oreilles en évoquant une passion qui a pour objet un castrat travesti, protégé par un cardinal homosexuel, on ne voit pas comment le narrateur balzacien, sauf complaisance improbable, pourrait 's'enthousiasmer' pour ces passages. Le verbe se comprendra mieux si l'on peut admettre que le narrateur continue en ce moment à entretenir chez son interlocutrice l'illusion qu'il va lui raconter l'histoire d'une passion torride, pécheresse sans doute, mais dans les limites d'une sexualité 'normale'. Dans ce cas, en effet, ce serait en sa qualité d'amoureux de Mme de Rochefide que, par une identification bien excusable avec l'amoureux dont il va raconter l'histoire, il risquerait de s'enthousiasmer. (254-5)

In their view, the narrator's warning that he might become overexcited is implicitly deceptive because it makes it seem like he will tell her a more conventional, heterosexual love story. The story for which the narrator prepares Béatrix and the story he actually tells her are quite different, hence her reaction when his tale is concluded.

Béatrix does interrupt the narrator, but her interruptions during the story demand *more* of him. At the end of his storytelling, it is his prolonged silence of the subject of Zambinella's sex that causes her distress. This is undoubtedly not the intended effect of all the narrator's delays. His slowness is meant to heighten her anticipation, to ratchet up her desire for more. The narrator claims he is in danger of growing too enthusiastic, too passionate, about the story, when really he is describing the effect he wants to have on Béatrix. The narrator's hesitations and the meandering course he takes toward answering Béatrix's initial question are meant to tease her. Indeed, Roland Barthes writes that this last hesitation is "analogue à la dernière station d'un strip-tease" (*S/Z* 94).

The narrator's story also differs from the princesse de Cadignan's in both form and content. Her story is sad and fundamentally unsatisfying, in the hopes of spurring D'Arthez

toward creating a new, happier ending. She is deceiving D'Arthez, but unlike the narrator of "Sarrasine," she has no plans to "révéle[r] ce mystère" (1056). The narrator of "Sarrasine," having promised a revelation, spends the entire story delaying it. This delay requires deceiving Madame de Rochefide about Zambinella's sex. Madame de Rochefide is drawn into the story by the promise of a mystery, but she objects to all the narrator's delays. As Ross Chambers points out, the narrator could simply reveal the secret from the outset, but "his adoption of storytelling mode, with its maintenance of narrative authority through suspense, shows that his motives are more complex than the simple need to convey information" (84). Without the secret and the suspense surrounding it, there is hardly a story at all. The narrator could simply have said to Madame de Rochefide "that old man is a castrato named la Zambinella; the portrait you're admiring is based on a sculpture of him in his youth and the Lanty family's wealth comes from his singing career," but that is not enough to get into her boudoir, let alone her bed.

When the narrator delays too long or dawdles on some subject that is not of interest to Madame de Rochefide, she intervenes. Her first interruption comes after the biography of the young artist Sarrasine that begins the story. The narrator dwells on Sarrasine's childhood and his artistic temperament. Then he begins to tell of Sarrasine's journey to Italy and his fascination with an opera singer called Zambinella, and that is when Béatrix loses patience:

> —Mais, me dit madame de Rochefide en m'interrompant, je ne vois encore ni Marianina ni son petit vieillard.
>
> —Vous ne voyez que lui ! m'écriai-je, impatienté comme un auteur auquel on fait manquer l'effet d'un coup de théâtre. (1063)

The narrator is deceiving Béatrix from the moment that he uses feminine pronouns to describe Zambinella, who is not a woman but a castrato. The sentence "Vous ne voyez que lui" misleads Béatrix—and, consequently, the reader—into thinking that *Sarrasine* is the old man at the Lanty ball. Sarrasine is, after all, the only male character in the story so far. The narrator becomes impatient with Béatrix's interruption "comme un auteur", which is, as Chambers points out, an acknowledgement of his artistic intent. It is funny that the narrator should describe *himself* as "impatienté" when surely it is a more fitting description for Madame de Rochefide, who has sat

through many minutes of storytelling at the point. Impatience is a natural response to the delay in telling the story and the story's seemingly irrelevant beginning; it is the response the narrator is cultivating, in the hopes of transforming that impatience into excitement and eagerness. Madame de Rochefide's interruption shows a certain investment in knowing the end of the story, and as such it is proof of the narrator's power over her.

Béatrix's next interruption is spurred by the narrator directly addressing her in the story:

> Oh ! comme son cœur battit quand il aperçut un pied mignon, chaussé d'une de ces mules qui, permettez-moi de le dire, madame, donnaient jadis au pied des femmes une expression si coquette, si voluptueuse, que je ne sais pas comment les hommes y pouvaient résister. Les bas blancs bien tirés et à coins verts, les jupes courtes, les mules pointues et à talons hauts du règne de Louis XV ont peut-être un peu contribué à démoraliser l'Europe et le clergé.
>
> Un peu ! dit la marquise. Vous n'avez donc rien lu ?
>
> La Zambinella, repris-je en souriant, s'était… (1065)

The narrator evokes the feminine fashion of the mid-eighteenth century, and with it, the trope of eighteenth-century debauchery. His deliberate understatement "un peu" draws a skeptical response from the marquise. Without naming any texts specifically, she makes clear that she is thinking of something scandalous that depicts the "demoralization" of Europe: "Vous n'avez donc rien lu ?" Mme de Rochefide is probably thinking of novels about libertines and seduction, or perhaps the narrator's mention of feet has her thinking of the scene in Marivaux's *La Vie de Mariane* in which heroine falls, hurts her foot, and then has to slip off her shoe and stocking in front of the hero, thus revealing her bare foot to him (66-68). The narrator's aside about women's stockings is designed to call these stories to mind. He mentions these stories to nudge Béatrix into thinking that his story could resemble them. Without knowing the end of the story, it is easy to think, at this moment, that Sarrasine and Zambinella might be about to embark on a great love affair. Given this hint about 1750s footwear and flirtation, Béatrix cannot be blamed if she adopts a certain set of genre-related expectations.

The narrator ignores her question, refusing to confirm whether he has read these same novels that she is thinking of. The unanswered question is enough to make his listener think of

them, and that is all he needs. He smiles because he knows now that Béatrix is hooked. The narrator KNOWS that Béatrix EXPECTS one kind of story, but her expectations will be wildly subverted by the story he intends to tell. His miscalculation is in thinking that Béatrix will enjoy being kept in suspense and then shocked by his revelation. He thinks he is using the "spiciest seasoning" to warm Béatrix up, but after he reveals the mystery, things cool off significantly. Béatrix reacts as if he has pushed her head first into a waterfall. She does not enjoy having her expectations subverted, especially because the mystery, once revealed, is desperately sad.

'C'est une illusion'

This section will explore the content of the embedded story in "Sarrasine" and how it contributes to Mme de Rochefide's eventual disgust. First, I will discuss descriptions of the voice and the act of listening. The voice can be an instrument of oral storytelling, as in the case of the narrator recounting this tale to Mme de Rochefide in her bedroom, or it can be an instrument of music, of which there are two important descriptions in "Sarrasine," one in the frame story and one in the embedded story. These descriptions of music are in the text alongside descriptions of other works of art, so I would like to highlight several moments of *ekphrasis* in "Sarrasine" in order to discuss the role of art—painting, sculpture, opera, and fiction—and the passions and deceptions (in the English sense of deceit, but perhaps also in the French sense of disappointment) that art evokes. With the aid of an essay that Balzac wrote entitled "Des Artistes" and another short story in *La Comédie humaine*, "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu," I will also discuss how Sarrasine's artistic genius, a category which includes both his creativity and his extraordinary sensitivity to art, allows him to be seduced by Zambinella and eventually causes his death.

The embedded story of "Sarrasine," on the other hand, tricks its fictional audience as well as its real one, since female pronouns are used for Zambinella throughout the story until the reveal. The narrator of "Sarrasine" succeeds in drawing Madame de Rochefide into the story, just as he succeeds in getting into her bedroom. The narrator then tells her the story of Ernest Jean

Sarrasine, a passionate young artist who falls in love with an opera singer, seduced by her singing voice and feminine charms, only to discover that the opera singer is not a woman but a castrato. Having discovered the deception, Sarrasine is enraged. Likewise, once the narrator's deception is revealed, Madame de Rochefide rejects him. Readers of "Sarrasine" are likely to be equally stunned by the revelation of Zambinella's sex and will perhaps react with the same sad pensiveness as Mme de Rochefide.

In contrast to how little we know about the physical presence of the narrator of "Sarrasine" from the text, the story he tells is all about the seductive physical presence—especially the voice—of la Zambinella. As a point of comparison, Diane de Cadignan's voice is also a key part of her storytelling technique, one that is frequently associated by the narrator of "Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan" with theater and with femininity. The princesse is "la plus grande comédienne de ce temps" (989) and the tone of her voice is more important than the words that she speaks (972-3). The ability to impart meaning through the sound of the voice rather than the words spoken is not only "digne de la plus habile comédienne" but also something that "les femmes savent" (972). The princesse's whisper—her words are "soufflées à l'oreille de l'écouteur"—adds a further degree of intimacy to her conversation. Daniel perceives her words not only through sound but through touch as well, since he can feel her breath on his skin. In addition to touch, the narrator of "Les Secrets" invokes the metaphor of music to explain the power of the princesse's voice: "Ces habiles dissonances, glissées dans la musique de leur amour faux ou vrai, produisent d'invincibles séductions" (972).

Music also seduces Sarrasine. The beauty of la Zambinella's voice has a strong effect on Sarrasine when he first hears it: "Quand la Zambinella chanta, ce fut un délire" (1061). He is utterly absorbed. Thomas Pavel identifies Zambinella's singing as the catalyst for Sarrasine's passion: "l'aspect le plus séduisant et le moins vraisemblable du spectacle, c'est précisément la voix de la Zambinella qui cause au sculpteur le grand choc amoureux" (306). Sarrasine's physical and emotional response, first described in the text as a "mouvement de folie, espèce de

frénésie" (1061) is orgasmic; Roland Barthes also famously reads it this way (*S/Z* 126). The power of Zambinella's voice is then described more fully as follows:

> Une puissance presque diabolique lui permettait de sentir le vent de cette voix, de respirer la poudre embaumée dont ces cheveux étaient imprégnés, de voir les méplats de ce visage, d'y compter les veines bleues qui en nuançaient la peau satinée. Enfin cette voix agile, fraîche et d'un timbre argenté, souple comme un fil auquel le moindre souffle d'air donne une forme, qu'il roule et déroule, développe et disperse, cette voix attaquait si vivement son âme qu'il laissa plus d'une fois échapper de ces cris involontaires arrachés par les délices convulsives trop rarement données par les passions humaines. (1061)

As with Daniel listening to Diane, Sarrasine feels "le vent" of Zambinella's voice, even though Zambinella is far away from him on stage. Zambinella is so captivating that her aria has the same intimacy as a whisper against the skin. The power of her voice makes it seem as though she and Sarrasine are in physical proximity, although they are not. Sarrasine is "heureusement placé près de la scène" (1060) but there is still enough space between Sarrasine's seat in the theater and Zambinella's place on stage that it is "presque diabolique" for Sarrasine to be able to smell the powder in Zambinella's hair and count the veins in her skin.

Sarrasine feels Zambinella's voice like a touch, and the rest of the description of Zambinella's voice is very physical. It is "agile," "souple comme un fil," and breath gives it "une forme". It rolls and unrolls, which, coupled with the thread metaphor and "puissance presque diabolique", is a rather serpentine description. It is also a very physical description. Balzac frequently uses the language of sculpture and words like "forme" to describe music, according to Sandra Collet:

> Il s'agit là d'une particularité de la perception balzacienne de la musique, que la médiatisation par la sculpture nous permet de dégager. En effet, l'art musical semble pris chez Balzac dans une logique paradoxale : alors même qu'il exploite un matériau en apparence insaisissable (parce qu'impossible à voir ou à toucher), une matière labile, évanescente et fugace, il agit puissamment sur les sens, allant jusqu'à déclencher des réactions physiques violentes. […] on peut évoquer la fréquence avec laquelle les mélomanes balzaciens, pour décrire la nature particulière de l'effet qu'a sur eux la musique, évoquent le sens du toucher [...] Médiatiser la musique par la sculpture permet ainsi à Balzac d'exposer fort clairement la sensualité extrême qu'il reconnaît à l'art musical. (110)

Sarrasine is a sculptor himself, so he is perhaps especially susceptible to the sensuality of music. Music, though immaterial, can touch its listeners. Sarrasine certainly feels the touch of

Zambinella's voice, and he has a "violent physical reaction" as well. Music can also elicit a powerful emotional response—elation, sadness, fear. According to two other short stories in *La Comédie humaine*, "Gambara" and "Massimilla Doni," music possesses a power unique among the arts: "la musique s'adresse au cœur tandis que les autres arts ne s'adressent qu'à l'intelligence" ("Massimilla Doni" 175) and "[l]a musique seule a la puissance de nous faire rentrer en nous-mêmes, tandis que les autres arts nous donnent des plaisirs définis" ("Gambara" 80). Music bypasses our intelligence and touches our hearts instead. It gives rise to something indefinable inside ourselves, as opposed to the other arts and their "plaisirs définis." A later passage of "Massimilla Doni" compares music to language, saying "Cette langue, mille fois plus riche que celle des mots, est au langage ce que la pensée est à la parole ; elle réveille les sensations et les idées sous leur forme même, là où chez nous naissent les idées et les sensations, mais en les laissant ce qu'elles sont chez chacun" (182). Music surpasses language. It has access to our interior; it is like our thoughts, even before they have undergone the mediation of being put into words.

The sensuality of Zambinella's voice is largely due to its mobility. This is not merely Balzac playing with metaphor: historically, the "unusually flexible vocal instrument," pure tone and extraordinary breath control were prized qualities of castrati singing (B. Gordon 647). Zambinella's agile operatic performance may call to mind another. The narrator and Madame de Rochefide have just come from the Lanty ball, where they heard Marianina de Lanty singing. Madame de Rochefide was distracted from her performance by the appearance of the old man who will later be revealed to be Zambinella, but the song bears further investigation.

The old man is drawn to the ball by "la voix de Marianina, qui finissait la cavatine de *Tancrède*" (1050). *Tancredi* is an 1813 opera by Rossini, which was quite successful in the 1820s in Paris (1548). The opera is notable in "Sarrasine" because the principle role in *Tancredi*—that of the titular character—is intended for a contralto, most likely a woman dressed as a man (Osborne). Marianina is singing the cavatina sung by Tancredi, *O Patria!… Di tanti palpiti*, a piece notable for its impressive range of notes. It requires a singer who can sing

powerfully both high and low (Rossini). Marianina is performing the role of a male character, intended for a woman in breeches, while at the ball wearing a dress. Her song choice heralds the gender ambiguity in the rest of the story. Furthermore, the two operatic performances described—Marianina's and Zambinella's—share in their inability to be captured by the text.[28] The description can only evoke the sound of their singing. In both cases, the narrator relies on this quality of music to insist on something almost impossibly beautiful.

Marianina's voice is compared to that of several contemporary opera singers: "Son chant faisait pâlir les talents incomplets des Malibran, des Sontag, des Fodor, chez lesquelles une qualité dominante a toujours exclu la perfection de l'ensemble" (1045). Two of the opera singers specified here performed in the role of Tancredi in Paris: "En 1829, la Malibran et la Sontag y avaient triomphé" (1548). These comparisons might have called to mind the sound of particular voices for readers in the 1830s, even though the singers are only mentioned to demonstrate how Marianina surpasses them. Marianina's voice, impossible to capture in the text, is difficult to imagine in its perfection. However, imagining an approximation of Marianina's voice is still easier than imagining a castrato's voice, since "All written accounts of castrato voices suggest that they sounded and felt different from the sound of female voices, boy sopranos, and unaltered falsetto" (B. Gordon 651), but most nineteenth-century readers had probably never heard one. Balzac's narrator is correct when he states that "On n'y fait plus de ces malheureuses créatures" (1075), since the practice of castrating young boys began to disappear in the late eighteenth century (B. Gordon 651).

Marianina's performance even draws out the old man. His entrance is theatrical: "Il semblait être sorti de dessous terre, poussé par quelque mécanisme de théâtre" (1050). The allure

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[28] Marianina sings something from a real opera that would have been recognizable to readers. Zambinella's performance is significantly less anchored in reality. Zambinella performs in an unspecified opera by Jomelli, opposite a tenor named Vitagliani. As Katherine Kolb points out in in her article "The Tenor of Sarrasine," at the time of the frame story (around 1758), audiences would have been accustomed to hearing two sopranos sing opposite each other as the hero and heroine. It was not until decades later that the hero-heroine pair of a tenor and a soprano became common (1568).

of Marianina's music is irresistible to the old man, even though it is mentioned twice that he is mostly deaf: "il resta pendant un moment à regarder cette fête, dont le murmure avait peut-être atteint à ses oreilles" (1050) and "Il entend très difficilement" (1051). Zambinella's voice also causes strong reactions in those who listen. Zambinella's voice is so agile and supple and sensual that it causes an "espèce de frénésie" in Sarrasine while he is in its presence; the description in words cannot do it justice. The old man's own voice is also described by recourse to metaphor: "Sa voix cassée ressembla au bruit que fait une pierre en tombant dans un puits" (1051). Although there is a stone in this metaphor, it is nothing like the complex, sculptural descriptions of Marianina and Zambinella's performances. Ironically, it is much easier to imagine the sound of a stone dropped into a well than to imagine the sound of the operatic performances described. Hence, the narrator insists on their effect—drawing out the old man, causing a paroxysm of emotion in Sarrasine—to demonstrate their power.

Just as the beauty of Marianina and Zambinella's voices is impossible to capture in text, Zambinella's physical beauty also eludes other forms of representation. Sarrasine draws Zambinella obsessively, but fails to capture her completely. Sarrasine has previously only encountered feminine beauty in pieces: "il avait jusqu'alors cherché ça et là les perfections dans la nature, en demandant à un modèle, souvent ignoble, les rondeurs d'une jambe accomplie; à tel autre, les contours du sein …" (1060). Zambinella's body brings all these pieces together, and yet still Sarrasine can only really comprehend her as an "assemblage of parts" (Chambers, *Story and Situation* 79):

> L'artiste ne se lassait pas d'admirer la grâce inimitable avec laquelle les bras étaient attachés au buste, la rondeur prestigieuse du cou, les lignes harmonieusement décrites par les sourcils, par le nez, puis l'ovale parfait du visage, la pureté de ses contours vifs, et l'effet de cils fournis, recourbés qui terminaient de larges et voluptueuses paupières. C'était plus qu'une femme, c'était un chef-d'œuvre ! ("Sarrasine" 1060-1)

Compared to the description of Zambinella's voice, which focuses on movement, this description of Zambinella's body is very still. This passage could be describing a statue rather than a live human being, and indeed, Zambinella is "plus qu'une femme" because she is "un chef-d'œuvre". This sentence involves a passage from a grammatically feminine noun (une femme) to a

grammatically masculine noun (un chef-d'œuvre), and as such it is an important signal of Zambinella's ambiguous gender identity. It is the reverse of what happens in the portrait of the old man at the ball, in which grammatically feminine nouns like "une créature" and "une idole" are used (Bremond and Pavel 234). Sarrasine is a sculptor, and after falling in love with Zambinella, he attempts to sculpt her. It is no accident that Balzac pairs these two characters representing the most tangible art (sculpture) and the least tangible (music). As Sandra Collet explains, mediating music through sculpture allows Balzac to explain the powerful sensuality of music, and in the case of this story, "la médiatisation de la musique par la sculpture acquiert une dimension nouvelle, puisqu'elle constitue la trame même du récit, opérant non plus à un niveau rhétorique et métaphorique, mais bien mise en scène au cœur de la fiction" (111). Sarrasine literally tries to materialize music by sculpting Zambinella, who is defined by how impossible she is to capture. She is elusive and illusory. Her voice escapes the text. Her beauty escapes images, whether in two dimensions or three. Sarrasine wants to capture Zambinella in art, and when his drawings and sculpture fail, he conceives a plan to capture Zambinella bodily. His artist's passion, fueled by repeated failures, drives him to attempt a kidnapping, which also fails.

When Sarrasine finds out Zambinella's sex, he realizes that the sculpture he has created does not really represent Zambinella, who is not a woman. His own "chef-d'œuvre" is also "plus qu'une femme" (1061). Sarrasine throws a hammer at the sculpture, but in his rage, he misses and the statue remains intact (1074). The image of an enraged artist attempting to destroy their life's work calls to mind another character in *La Comédie humaine*: the artist Frenhofer of "Le Chef d'œuvre inconnu."[29] Frenhofer has spent nearly a decade working on a secret painting, an image of a woman entitled *La Belle Noiseuse*. He has shown it to no one, but the young artist Poussin offers Frenhofer his mistress as a model in exchange for a glimpse of *La Belle Noiseuse*. Frenhofer agrees, but when he finally shows the painting to Poussin, it is an incomprehensible mass of colors and lines. Poussin can only tell that there is a woman beneath all the paint because

[29] This short story was initially published in *L'Artiste* in July and August of 1831 (Eigeldinger 6). This places its publication eight months after that of "Sarrasine."

he can see a woman's foot emerging from one corner of the confusion. In his shock at finally seeing the horror of a painting, Poussin cannot hold back from commenting on it, and on hearing Poussin's comments, Frenhofer suffers the terrible realization that he has failed to translate his vision into a work of art that can be understood by others. The next time Poussin tries to return to Frenhofer's studio, the artist has burnt the whole thing down, killing himself and destroying his life's work in the process.

Frenhofer obsessively reworks his masterpiece, just as Sarrasine obsessively draws Zambinella again and again. Both Frenhofer and Sarrasine are described by the word "génie" ("Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu" 38; "Sarrasine" 1058), and they are both artists whose passion—specifically a passion for a woman who exists only in their imagination—leads them astray. This obsessive returning to the same subject is, for Balzac, intimately linked with artistic failure. In his essay "Des Artistes," Balzac explains his conception of genius and the creation of art. The artist is "le jouet d'une force éminemment capricieuse" (252). The word "artist" in this essay applies to all those who create and all who "applique[ent] la pensée à une production nouvelle des forces humaines, à une combinaison neuve des éléments de la nature, ou physique ou morale" (252), so Gutenberg, Descartes, and even Napoleon are all artists (253), according to Balzac. The artist receives a "vision" (252) or an "idea" (253) of their work, and their job is to transform that idea into a work of art so that others can appreciate it too. The artist is "l'apôtre de quelque vérité" (257): they bring their divine idea to earth in order to share it with others. The artist has access to a vaguely Platonic "sphère inconnue" of ideas ("Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu" 38; "Des Artistes" 253), and the power to translate these idea into work of art is what constitutes genius. Genius fails when the idea in question cannot be shared with others. The idea remains an idea, accessible only to the artist, and never takes form.

Genius is first and foremost a creative power, because those who possess it can translate ideas into forms. However, genius also has a dangerous aspect: this creative power risks becoming a destructive madness. Genius is already difficult to distinguish from madness, as Balzac explains in this passage: "L'artiste … doit paraître déraisonner fort souvent. […] il a tous

les symptômes de la folie" (256). Appearing mad does not indicate the failure of genius; on the contrary, the artist seems mad because they are gifted with a capacity to see that others do not possess. Genius fails when the artist does not succeed in showing others what they themselves can see. Spending too much time on a work of art, as Frenhofer does, or obsessively returning to the same subject, as Sarrasine does, are common reasons for failure. Immediacy is of the utmost importance: "Quand un poète, un peintre, un sculpteur donnent une vigoureuse réalité à l'une de leurs œuvres, c'est que l'invitation avait lieu au moment même de la création" (253). Inspiration must be instantly channeled into a work of art, because genius is a fire that devours the artist from the inside if it is not used to light the world. In Frenhofer's case, the metaphorical fire of genius becomes literal when he sets fire to his studio.

For Sarrasine, his creative genius is what makes him so sensitive to Zambinella's first performance. His imagination also plays a role in his deception. He is too capable of seeing Zambinella as the perfect woman of his imagination. In *De l'amour*, Stendhal commented on the tendency of lovers to perfect the object of their affections in their imaginations:

> Laissez travailler la tête d'un amant pendant vingt-quatre heures, et voici ce que vous trouverez: aux mines de sel de Salzbourg, on jette, dans les profondeurs abandonnées de la mine, un rameau d'arbre effeuillé par l'hiver; deux ou trois mois après on le retire couvert de cristallisations brillantes: les plus petites branches, celles qui ne sont pas plus grosses que la patte d'une mésange, sont garnies d'une infinité de diamants, mobiles et éblouissants; on ne peut plus reconnaître le rameau primitif.
>
> Ce que j'appelle cristallisation, c'est l'opération de l'esprit, qui tire de tout ce qui se présente la découverte que l'objet aimé a de nouvelles perfections. (5)

Zambinella seems to crystalize, in Sarrasine's imagination, as an ideal form of feminine beauty. Sarrasine's desire to possess that ideal, whether as a sculpture or in person, is overpowering. Sarrasine's sexual experience at the opera is not the only sexual aspect of his artistic career; his period of drawing her obsessively, described as a "paroxysme d'activité" (1062) is somewhat masturbatory: Sarrasine fantasizes about Zambinella "en la plaçant dans toutes les situations imaginables" (1062). Sarrasine spends all his energy in this way, absorbed in his own fantasies. He is too naive to know that no women are allowed to take the stage in Rome. His imagination, untethered from this crucial information about the real world, makes his passion for Zambinella

possible. This combination of naïveté, passion, and devouring genius proves fatal. Sarrasine is seduced and deceived by art, mistaking illusion for reality. Zambinella's voice cannot be captured in sculpture, and the image that he has created of the woman he thought existed is, as he says just before dying, "une illusion" (1074).

Because Sarrasine is naive, the illusion created by Zambinella is carried forward in a long chain of other artworks. Under the spell of this illusion, Sarrasine creates a sculpture that is, unbeknownst to him, a copy of an illusion. Sarrasine dies, but unlike Frenhofer, he fails to take his work with him. The statue lives on, and it inspires more art, so copies of copies proliferate. The cardinal who is Zambinella's patron keeps the sculpture, puts it in a museum, and "C'est là qu'en 1791 la famille Lanty la retrouva, et pria Vien de la copier. Le portrait qui vous a montré Zambinella à vingt ans, un instant après l'avoir vu centenaire, a servi plus tard pour l'*Endymion* de Girodet, vous avez pu en reconnaître le type dans l'Adonis" (1075). So the portrait that Madame de Rochefide is so taken with is a copy of a copy of Zambinella. Madame de Rochefide's desire to know the secret behind this painting of Adonis is what triggers the telling of the embedded story, which is the last link in a long chain of illusions. Unlike the Adonis and the Endymion, the deception of the embedded story is perpetrated knowingly, echoing Zambinella's initial deception. This chain of artworks is not so different from a chain of nested intentionalities, since each work of art is created by a person with certain knowledge or beliefs about the subject of their art. In this case, it involves many levels of ignorance. The narrator KNOWS that Béatrix DOES NOT KNOW that the Adonis she is admiring was created by a painter who DID NOT KNOW that the sculpture he was copying was made by a sculptor who DID NOT KNOW that his subject was a castrato.

Given this long chain of artists who did not know what they were truly copying, we (as well as Madame de Rochefide) have cause to question how the narrator came to be in the privileged position of knowing the embedded story. Pierre Citron identifies this issue as something that distinguishes "Sarrasine" from most of Balzac's other works:

> Enfin, la cinquième différence, et peut-être la plus importante, est que dans tous les autres textes, le narrateur est soit acteur soit témoin de l'histoire qu'il raconte et qui constitue le noyau de l'œuvre. Dans *Sarrasine*, non seulement il n'apparaît nullement que le narrateur ait une raison particulière de connaître l'histoire, mais il est invraisemblable qu'elle soit connue de qui que ce soit. ("Interprétation" 82)

This is true. Sarrasine cannot tell his own story, since he dies. Zambinella would have no reason to recount this story, since his history and the origin of his fortune are a secret in Paris. Who else could possess this knowledge? It is clear that the narrator is not as old as Zambinella at the time of the Lanty ball, so the narrator cannot possibly have witnessed the events of the frame story. Bremond and Pavel dismiss this issue: "L'obscurité dans laquelle demeurent plongées les sources du savoir du narrateur est un défaut qui trahit sans doute le manque d'expérience d'un jeune auteur" (192), but the lack of sources for the story deserves more attention than that, especially given the attention paid to tracing the history of the painting of Adonis and its multiple copies. In a way, the painting becomes more powerful with more distance from its subject. Sarrasine deems his sculpture a failure and tries to destroy it, but the androgynous Adonis stretched out on a lion skin, with his genitals covered by shadows,[30] is still able to captivate Béatrix. Perhaps the narrator's story, whose sources are also shadowy, shares in this same power; it is almost as if art, fiction included, becomes more captivating the further it is from the real and the closer it is the "sphère inconnue" to which only the artist has access. Ross Chambers goes so far as to suggest that the narrator's entire story is "a fabulation" (84). Eric Bordas also points out that the narrator glosses over how he knows the story in the text:

> Personne n'est dupe, ni le narrateur, ni le lecteur: un certain mode de récit est définitivement mutilé d'une légitimité sans remords. […] C'est une "histoire assez connue en Italie," conclut le narrateur (1075), se dispensant bien de nous expliquer par qui et comment il a appris ce qui était pourtant présenté au début comme un impénétrable secret: éviction du narratif, balzacien, du métadiscours poétique; seule demeure l'évidence du romanesque et son prestige ambigu. (46)

In light of how little evidence or explanation the narrator gives for how he came to know the story, it seems plausible that he did invent it. But if the narrator invented the embedded story, he could have told *any* story to Madame de Rochefide, so why this story? It is suspenseful, at least

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[30] This detail is not in the text; I am extrapolating from Girodet's *Endymion*. But the figure's androgyny is made explicit by Béatrix's comment "Il est trop beau pour un homme !" (1054).

in the way that he tells it, and it does have an air of mystery to it, but mostly it is shocking and sad. It is a story that demonstrates the power of art—of Zambinella's beautiful performances, of Sarrasine's overpowering desire to sculpt Zambinella, of the Adonis painting that fascinates Béatrix—but also the dangers of absorption in artistic illusions. Given that the narrator wants to sleep with Béatrix, a story about the pitfalls of desire is a strange choice.

'Vous me ferez taire'

So the narrator tells Béatrix a story about artistic illusion and the disillusionment that often follows, and she responds, accordingly, with her own disillusionment. Béatrix, as the listener to the embedded tale in "Sarrasine," is the most obvious model reader. In this section, with the aid of the work that Ross Chambers has already done on "Sarrasine," I will discuss Béatrix and other models of reading in the text, especially Sarrasine. I will focus particularly on Sarrasine's artistic temperament and how it hinders his ability to "read" the world around him. This discussion of artistic temperament will also be important in my second chapter on "Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan," which offers a different, perhaps more optimistic perspective on the seductive power of art. I will conclude by discussing suspense as a narrative technique and how suspense engages our theory of mind.

The narrator preceded his story with a request that Béatrix silence him if he became too enthusiastic, which he probably considered a rhetorical flourish. He intended his "vous me ferez taire" remark to demonstrate how riveting his story would be. To his surprise, Béatrix does in fact want him to be quiet at the end of the story, just after he reveals the secret:

> —Mais ce ou cette Zambinella ?
> —Ne saurait être, madame, que le grand-oncle de Marianina. Vous devez concevoir maintenant l'intérêt que madame de Lanty peut avoir à cacher la source d'une fortune qui provient…
> —Assez ! dit-elle en me faisant un geste impérieux.
> Nous restâmes pendant un moment plongés dans le plus profond silence. (1075)

Here, in two sentences, is the answer that Madame de Rochefide wanted at the ball. Who is that old man? He is Marianina's great-uncle, who was once a famous castrato. The secret that Béatrix

wants is not even really part of the embedded story. It is not so surprising that she seems to feel tricked. (Pushed head first into a waterfall, perhaps?)

Béatrix's "Assez !" is not what the narrator wanted when he encouraged her to curtail his enthusiasm. She does not want all the sordid details of the Lanty fortune; she has heard enough. Ross Chambers writes that the narrative "point" of a story is to mobilize desire for more narration (10). Here, the narrator has failed to elicit a desire for more in Béatrix, and as Ross Chambers also writes, he has ceded his narrative authority because Béatrix now knows his secret (74). He has no more power over her, so this time she interrupts him not to ask for more, but to silence him. Instead of more storytelling, there is only "le plus profond silence" (Balzac 1075).

Béatrix's rejection of the narrator, "Vous m'avez dégoûtée de la vie et des passions pour longtemps" (1075), can be read as an indictment of the depressing content of the story and also of the narrator himself. *Vous*, she says, not *votre histoire*. It is clear that the content of story disturbs her, but it is also the manner of telling that she finds objectionable. The narrator deliberately deceived her by using feminine pronouns for Zambinella. Her response to this is to break their pact by asking to be left alone (1075), and then, finally, to sit in silent contemplation of the story: "Et la marquise resta pensive" (1076). Ross Chambers speaks of Madame de Rochefide's final approach to the story as "meditative" and "distanced" and he compares it to Sarrasine's "passionate involvement" with Zambinella's performance (93). Madame de Rochefide learns from her experience of disillusionment; she responds to the story thoughtfully.

Sarrasine responds with destructive rage. He was drawn in by Zambinella's performance because of his artistic sensibilities, but Ross Chambers points out that the other artists in the story do not confuse art and reality so easily: "But the text hints strongly that the deceptiveness of signs *need* not reduce the artist to despair" (81), because the other members of Zambinella's troupe of opera singers play this joke on Sarrasine out of affection and a desire to initiate him into their world. They never expect Sarrasine to become so passionately attached to Zambinella, because they assume that as an artist, he will share their worldview: "to know life, for an artist, is to know the power and the deceptiveness of signs, and the plot mounted by the singers is in

theory nicely calculated to bring about just such an awareness … that it misfires is no fault of theirs; the cause lies in the young man's ineradicable innocence and even more in his excessive power of passion, which, once released, cannot be satisfied in a world of illusion" (81). The other singers and Madame de Rochefide are models of reading that we are meant to follow, in contrast to Sarrasine, who is an antimodel.

Sarrasine mixes his artistic and romantic desires, which is always a dangerous prospect for artist characters in *La Comédie humaine*. Sarrasine is a visionary artist, possessed of a "seconde vue" (Pavel 304, Bonard 65), like many of Balzac's geniuses. While the "seconde vue" is a blessing and a curse for Sarrasine, as both the cause of his artistic genius and the cause of his fatal error, it is not necessarily a curse for every character who possesses it. As Olivier Bonard puts it, "Chez les uns, la seconde vue paraît inoffensive, elle est même le principe d'un bonheur plus élevé et plus rare; chez Sarrasine elle conduit à la solitude et à la mort" (89). Balzac's interest in the power of the "seconde vue" and the creative and destructive power of imagination seems to stem from an awareness of his own imaginative powers and a desire to understand them (Bonard 87). In the beginning of the 1836 short story "Facino Cane," Balzac writes "Quitter ses habitudes, devenir un autre que soi par l'ivresse des facultés morales, et jouer ce jeu à volonté, telle était ma distraction. A quoi dois-je ce don ? Est-ce une seconde vue ? est-ce une de ces qualités dont l'abus mènerait à la folie ? Je n'ai jamais recherché les causes de cette puissance; je la possède et m'en sers, voilà tout" (1020). The narrator of "Facino Cane" is a young Parisian author, and André Lorant's introduction refers to him as "Balzac" (1009), as does Olivier Bonard (90). While the narrator's description of his gift is unquestionably supernatural later in the story, as he reports that "mon âme passa dans le corps du joueur de clarinette" (1022), it is clear that his gift is grounded in observation: "Chez moi l'observation était déjà devenue intuitive" (1019). The narrator's first example of using his gift does not involve anything so miraculous as his soul passing into another body; he follows some people through the street and eavesdrops on their conversation to learn about their life (1020). So the narrator of "Facino Cane" possesses the fictionalized version of Balzac's real life observation and imagination. We might say of Balzac

himself that he was an excellent "mind-reader" in the cognitive sense, while the narrator of "Facino Cane" is a mind-reader in the traditional sense. His imagination, which he refers to using the phrase "seconde vue," is powerful and not entirely within his control, hence his wondering if such an ability might drive him mad. Most of the characters who possess this second sight in *La Comédie humaine* are an exploration of the potential downsides of this power.

As mentioned above, some of them survive and go on to find happiness. Many do not. After spending ten years working on his unknown masterpiece, Frenhofer burns down his studio with himself and all his works inside, while Facino Cane, having used his sight to perceive the treasure on the other side of a wall, goes blind a few years later and dies destitute in his old age. Sarrasine is among these unhappy characters; falling in love with the imaginary vision of Zambinella costs him his life. Bremond and Pavel write: "cette vision erronée entraîne une dépense d'énergie cérébrale aussi extenuante que la satisfaction réelle des désirs" (214). They are referring to the theory of vital energy in *La Comédie humaine*, usually expressed "La vie décroît en raison directe de la puissance des désirs ou de la dissipation des idées" (Lorant 1009). This theory is most famously illustrated in *La Comédie humaine* by Raphaël de Valentin in *La Peau de chagrin*, who is given a talisman that gives him his heart's desires in exchange for years of his life. Sarrasine devours his own life energy even more quickly than Raphaël, as Thomas Pavel points out: "Il vivra en quelques jours de délire toute une vie et, accablé, vidé, par la découverte de la vérité sur la Zambinella, il se prononcera déjà 'mort à tout plaisir, à toutes les émotions humaines,' avant même que les agents du cardinal Cicognara, le protecteur du castrat, ne le percent de leurs stylets" ("Energie et illusion" 303). Sarrasine could perhaps have lived with his gift if only he had used it correctly. Bonard suggests that the second sight is accompanied by "un désir irresistible de travail que seul le travail le plus concret et le plus matériel apaisera" (69); Sarrasine works in a frenzy when he first returns from the opera after seeing Zambinella, but after that he concentrates all his work into a single statue of Zambinella. Frenhofer's error is spending ten years on a single painting rather than channeling his gift into multiple new works. Sarrasine fuses his artistic and romantic desires into his longing for the ideal creature that his

second sight sees in Zambinella; his desire is by definition impossible to satisfy, and so it consumes him instead.

Sarrasine's motivations are not only sexual but also artistic: he falls in love with the ideal of beauty embodied by Zambinella. He falls in love with a being who can only ever exist in the realm of the ideal, and then he desires to be loved by this ideal being, and "le besoin d'être aimé remplace le désir d'être artiste" (Pavel 310). Sarrasine's desire is narcissistic.[31] It is never really about Zambinella. Barbara Johnson makes some thoughtful remarks on Sarrasine's narcissism, pointing out that he does not love Zambinella for Zambinella's sake, but loves the idea of Zambinella as "the image of the lack of what he thereby thinks he himself possesses" (10). Zambinella is weak and feminine, and so if Zambinella loves Sarrasine—her opposite—it confirms that Sarrasine is strong and masculine. This narcissism, Johnson remarks, also affects the narrator: "the Marquise sees the narcissistic delusion inherent in the narrator's own passion, and, banteringly foreshadowing one of the reasons for her ultimate refusal, protests: 'Oh, you fashion me to your own taste. What tyranny! You don't want me for myself!'" (10).

Sarrasine's naïveté and his narcissism, which are intimately linked, lead to his death. Had he been better equipped to "read" the prank that Zambinella and the other actors pull, he would have lived. But he accepts the information that is presented to him—*La* Zambinella, *prima donna*, is a woman—as unquestionably true. Sarrasine believes so strongly that Zambinella is a woman that none of Zambinella's own hesitations and protests, not even "Et si je n'étais pas une femme ?" (1069) give him pause. Sarrasine plows through the question as though it were rhetorical, and readers who have never encountered the text before and do not know what to expect might do the same. For this hypothetical reader, we might pose the question: is the puzzle of "Sarrasine" solvable? Can the twist be predicted? There is an accumulation of details, such as Zambinella's non-rhetorical question about his own sex, that make everything perfectly clear in hindsight. But it would certainly require a very savvy first-time reader to overcome the deceptive

[31] Helen Borowitz analyzes the myth of Narcissus as a source for "Sarrasine." See Helen Borowitz, "Balzac's Sarrasine: The Sculptor as Narcissus," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 31.1 (2002): 41-52.

structure of "Sarrasine." Much like Béatrix is primed by the narrator's mention of eighteenth-century fashions and debauchery to expect a titillating conclusion to his story (1065), readers are also primed to expect a certain kind of story by literary allusions in the beginning of "Sarrasine." The allusions to Byron and Radcliffe evoke some extraordinary, perhaps even supernatural, mystery at the heart of the Lanty family, and yet the narrator disdains the public gossip about the possibility that the old man is a vampire or a ghoul as "l'exagération naturelle aux gens de la haute société" (1047), intimating that he knows better. Ross Chambers remarks on these allusions:

> The narratee is thereby warned, on the one hand, not to attach excessive significance to the narrator's claim to possession of the *true* solution to the mystery (it is, after all, yet another narrative or fable) and, on the other, not to be a dupe of the narrative technique of suspense, which consists of posing a question, then solving it. The true enigma is elsewhere, on a more philosophical plane; … the narratee is specifically forearmed against the deceptiveness of the narrator's tale. (89-90)

Chambers later identifies "the true enigma" as "the wider mystery of art and its relationship with life" (90). I do not contest this, but I would argue that the use of suspense in "Sarrasine" is a large part of the pleasure of reading it. It seems possible to me for the mentions of Byron and Radcliffe to serve a double purpose: that of alerting the reader to the possible mystery at hand, as well as the purpose that Chambers proposes, which is that of alerting very savvy readers to the deceptive nature of this story, or any suspenseful story. Chambers is correct that the true mystery of "Sarrasine" is not the one solved by the narrator's offhand remark that Zambinella is Marianina's great uncle, but we should not dismiss the importance of suspense to the story as a whole. It is the trappings of mystery that draw us into the story, and without the initial, "false" mystery of the identity of the old man and the source of the Lanty fortune (we could call it a "red herring" mystery), we would never arrive at what Chambers calls "the true enigma."

To read "Sarrasine" is to be pushed headfirst into George Sand's metaphorical waterfall. Indeed, this metaphor seems more apt for "Sarrasine" than for a narrative that conforms more closely to the conventions of suspense, in which it would generally be possible for the reader to guess the "twist" and solve the mystery before having the solution revealed in the text.

"Sarrasine" is not told, either in the frame story or the embedded story, in a way that makes it possible for the reader to conclude that Zambinella is a castrato, and the old man at the ball, and the model for the painting of Adonis in the Lanty boudoir. And yet the conventions of suspense are still important. A reader who begins "Sarrasine" for the first time without knowledge of its ending cannot know in what way exactly her expectations will be subverted by the "deflationary dénouement" (Chambers 90), "forearmed" by the literary allusions though she may be. Such a reader flips the first few pages because she wants to know more of the story. Whether this reader is informed enough to pick up on clues, such as allusions to Byron and Radcliffe, that "Sarrasine" will not be what she expects, or whether she is reading more naively, it is still the case that "Sarrasine" is a text that, in Lisa Zunshine's words, plays with our "cognitive capacity for storing information under advisement" (124). Savvy readers may be rewarded for correctly tagging information that comes from the narrator as contingently true (or simply untrustworthy) in that they will be *less* surprised by the unconventional ending. Less savvy readers may feel "slapped" by the text, to paraphrase Zunshine's description of texts with unreliable narrators, which "encourag[e] us to believe what a given protagonist (e.g., Lovelace or Humbert) is saying, only then to slap us with a revelation that we should not have trusted him in the first place" (124).

Perhaps the best outcome readers can hope for, in the wake of the deceit of "Sarrasine," is to evaluate the world, and all the information in it, more carefully. Mme de Rochefide expects a very different story than the one she gets, but unlike Sarrasine, she recovers from having her expectations subverted. To protect herself from future deceptions and disappointments, she adopts a guarded, distrustful attitude toward the narrator and the world at large: "Oui, les âmes pures ont une patrie dans le ciel ! Personne ne m'aura connue ! J'en suis fière" (Balzac 1076). "Personne ne m'aura connue" is a sentence of particular interest, and it recalls an earlier moment in the text, mentioned by Barbara Johnson: "the Marquise sees the narcissistic delusion inherent in the narrator's own passion, and, banteringly foreshadowing one of the reasons for her ultimate refusal, protests: 'Oh, you fashion me to your own taste. What tyranny! You don't want me for

myself!'" (10). This is a situation with multiple levels of intentionality: Béatrix *thinks* that the narrator *thinks* that she is a different kind of person (from whom she thinks she is). Béatrix demonstrates in this moment that she is a sophisticated interlocutor. She perceives the narrator's ideas about her character and all that it implies in their world. This moment not only foreshadows her ultimate refusal, but also serves to alert readers that the narrator may not be entirely correct about everything. Béatrix de Rochefide rejects the narrator and is able to recover from being deceived because she is already a more careful "reader," in the sense of reading the intentions and beliefs of others, than Sarrasine. The deceptive story makes her more so, as she resolves to never let anyone know her. She will defend her own vulnerable interiority by becoming unreadable. They will all have to fashion her to their own taste.

Sarrasine, however, is so naive and susceptible to his own imaginative powers that he cannot recover. Sarrasine's grasp on Zambinella—as a character in the fiction he has created for himself, and as person who exists in Rome—is more tenuous. When confronted with Zambinella's status not only as a castrato, but also as the kept boy of the Cardinal Cicognara, Sarrasine cannot live with this new story because it reveals his own personal version, in which Zambinella is a woman, to be impossible. He becomes enraged, and then destructive. Interestingly, he first takes aim at the statue he has made, rather than at Zambinella himself. Thomas Pavel explains: "La statue est une pièce incriminante, qu'il importe de détruire, au dossier moral de l'artiste: témoignage irréfutable de son erreur cette œuvre fixe dans la pierre l'impossible fusion entre l'idéal artistique et le véritable objet de ses désirs déçus" (310).

The statue is the physical representation of Sarrasine's error. Sarrasine "reads" incorrectly and then does not possess the means to adjust his cognitive frame; it destroys him. Sarrasine does not understand that Zambinella, even when off stage, is continuing to play a role. He is unable to mark the difference between theater and reality, for reasons of naïveté and excessive imagination, as discussed above. Sarrasine's error is important to us because we are all at risk of making the same mistake, as readers and theater-goers and people who participate in art generally. Indeed, there are other examples of this error:

> In thinking about literary experience, we should keep in mind that the mental processing of evoked worlds as virtual rather than actual won't occur if people who are invited and expected to switch cognitive frames fail to do so. For example, outraged spectators of medieval passion plays were reported to have punished or even killed actors impersonating Judas, and TV stations are said to receive condolence letters addressed to surviving onscreen relatives of deceased soap opera characters. Such radical disconnections between "literary stimulus" and "nonliterary response" reveal with spectacular clarity that literary seduction can only invite, but not enforce, literary consummation. (Hernadi 57)

While these examples of "radical disconnections between 'literary stimulus' and 'nonliterary response'" serve as a good point of reference in discussing how people perceive or fail to perceive the boundaries between art and reality, I should say that what happens in "Sarrasine" is slightly different. It is true that Sarrasine is incredibly taken with Zambinella when he sees the performance at the opera, and at first glance he does fail to distinguish the stage persona of the *prima donna* from Zambinella-in-real-life. But as Ross Chambers points out, Sarrasine's naive error is complicated by the trick that the other actors play on him; they do not "invite" him to switch cognitive frames (from seeing Zambinella perform in the opera to perceiving that in reality Zambinella is a castrato playing a role), although they do "expect" him to realize his error sooner than he does. There are two level of intentionality here that can be stated in two ways. The actors *think* that Sarrasine *will realize* that Zambinella is a castrato; conversely, Sarrasine *does not suspect* that Zambinella and the other actors would *deceive* him. Sarrasine is too trusting. In falling for their prank, he reveals too much about himself: he unknowingly feels sexual and romantic desire toward a man. This information makes him the target of ridicule, and then of jealousy on the part of Cardinal Cicognara, who sees him as a potential rival.[32] Sarrasine's death is a consequence not only of failing to perceive the deception, that is to say misreading the world around him, but also of revealing his own ignorance of the world, or allowing himself to be too easily read. As important as it is to evaluate the sources and circumstances of all the information we learn, it is equally important not to reveal information

[32] For more on Cardinal Cicognara, see Philip Stewart, "What Barthes Couldn't Say: On the Curious Occultation of Homoeroticism in S/Z," *Paragraph* 24.1 (2001): 1–16, *Edinburgh University Press Journals*, web.

about ourselves that might make us vulnerable. This is why Mme de Rochefide declares that "Personne ne m'aura connue" (Balzac 1076).

Béatrix draws a practical and philosophical lesson from the text, thus presenting readers with a model of reading that is radically different from Sarrasine's. But Balzac offers this distant, philosophizing example with one hand, while with the other, he offers an invitation to reread the text of "Sarrasine"; now that the mystery is uncovered, readers can have the pleasure of rediscovering the clues that pepper the beginning and middle of the text, foretelling what will be revealed at the end. Decodable clues that focus on people's secrets invite a kind of reasoning that engages our theory of mind in a satisfying way.[33] Balzac, a cleverer seducer than his narrator, tempts readers to return to his text, even as he is describing Béatrix's horror at the embedded story. Béatrix's condemnation of the embedded story also provides a way for Balzac to write about its shocking and sexual content, acting as a thin veneer of morality.

In the next chapter, I will further discuss "Sarrasine" in comparison with another, later Balzac novella: the 1839 text "Les Secrets de la Princesse de Cadignan." Unlike "Sarrasine," "Les Secrets" takes a more positive view of seduction. Sarrasine is susceptible to Zambinella's performance—and he misses key indications about Zambinella's sex—because of his artistic temperament. Sarrasine is passionate, possessed of a powerful imagination, and naive about the world. In "Les Secrets," the writer Daniel d'Arthez shares some of these characteristics, but he survives—indeed, lives to enjoy—the experience of being seduced. What differs between Sarrasine and D'Arthez? I will argue that D'Arthez recognizes the princesse as a fellow creative spirit, someone engaged in telling and acting out a story, and he respects her craft. He even participates in the story, perhaps unknowingly at first, but by the end of the novella, it is clear he possesses a certain awareness of the princesse's fiction. D'Arthez's worldly Parisian friends tell him about the princesse's sordid past and he never denies the truth of their accusations, which would reveal him as the princesse's dupe; instead, he questions their worth. D'Arthez, as

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[33] Both Lisa Zunshine and Blakey Vermeule comment at length on theory of mind and detective fiction. See Vermeule, *Literary Characters*, 72-75. See also Zunshine, *Why We Read*, 121-153.

imaginative as Sarrasine but more sophisticated in his view of the world, is capable of making the shift between cognitive frames.

CHAPTER TWO: 'Est-ce un dénouement?': "Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan" and the Pleasures of Story

Balzac's 1839 text "Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan" tells of the princesse's creation of a new identity for herself after the July Revolution and her subsequent seduction of the writer Daniel d'Arthez.[34] The centerpiece of this seduction is the princesse's fictionalized version of her life story that explains away all the (true) gossip about her bad behavior that D'Arthez has heard. "Les Secrets" is a story about reputations and rumors, and it tests our ability to read minds and it raises questions about what it means to read successfully. The last line of the story has the ring of a challenge: "Est-ce un dénouement? Oui, pour les gens d'esprit; non, pour ceux qui veulent tout savoir" (1005). The cryptic final line of "Les Secrets" is an excellent example of Ross Chambers's idea that stories contain models of how they should be read. The narrator offers two choices to the reader: be satisfied like "les gens d'esprit," or know all the details. The two choices are modeled by D'Arthez, who seems satisfied with the story that the princesse has told him, and Rastignac, the marquise d'Espard, and the other characters, who want to know everything. Relying on textual analysis and Chambers' theory of models of reading in *Story and Situation*, I will argue that "Les Secrets" presents an alternative model of reading to the various models proposed by "Sarrasine." Daniel d'Arthez is able to enjoy and even participate in the princesse's fiction while still distinguishing it from reality; unlike Sarrasine, who believes too readily in the illusion before him and dies as a result, and also unlike Béatrix, who rejects seduction entirely, D'Arthez allows the princesse to seduce him and lives. He even maintains the respect of his Parisian peers and friends. I will use Lisa Zunshine's work on reading and cognitive science in *Why Do We Read Fiction?* to highlight the ways in which this model of reading is dependent on the reader's theory of mind.

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[34] "Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan" was first published under the title "Une princesse parisienne" in *La Presse* in August 1839 (351). Citations refer to the Pléiade edition. See Balzac, "Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan," *La Comédie humaine*, Ed. Pierre-Georges Castex, VI, France, Gallimard, 1977, 949–1005.

Because the story is so much about rumor and reputation, it requires the reader to keep track at all times of who said what and who believes what. The question of whether D'Arthez is duped or complicit can only be answered if the reader exercises her mind-reading skills on all the characters, since the narrator does not make the reader privy to D'Arthez's thoughts at certain key moments of the story. This is not typical of the omniscient Balzacian narrator, who in this case gives the reader access to the thoughts of every character in "Les Secrets" *except* D'Arthez. How does D'Arthez "read" the princesse and her story? Based on close readings of the text, I will argue that D'Arthez is fully aware of the princesse's fiction, and chooses to participate in it, thus becoming complicit in his own seduction. "Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan" is not a tale of fiction's dangers, but of its pleasures.

D'Arthez is no fool. He is the perfect target for the princesse's seduction because he is both sensitive to it and moved by it, but not entirely duped. As a writer himself, D'Arthez can appreciate the princesse's knack for creating fiction. When Rastignac and the marquise d'Espard tell him scandalous stories from the princesse's past that directly contradict everything the princesse herself has told him, he defends her against the accusations not by questioning their veracity, but by questioning their importance. Thus, he maintains both his relationship with the princesse and the respect of Parisian society. Stories can bring us pleasure—at one point, the narrator confides in the reader that he, too, would like to be seduced by the princesse[35]—but we should strive to be as savvy a reader as D'Arthez, not mistaking fiction for truth, no matter how well it is told or written. "Les Secrets" presents a relatively positive view of seduction: it is possible to take pleasure in being seduced, and that pleasure can last indefinitely. Participating in the princesse's story brings D'Arthez love and happiness, and clinging stubbornly to the facts brings the marquise d'Espard nothing but bitter jealousy. In this chapter, I will explore the perspective on seduction presented by "Les Secrets," with occasional comparisons to the earlier

[35] "S'il est permis de risquer une opinion individuelle, avouons qu'il serait délicieux d'être ainsi trompé longtemps" (989).

and far more famous text "Sarrasine," discussed in chapter one. Analyzing these two texts will allow us to arrive at a better understanding of seduction and storytelling in Balzac's work.

'La duchesse de Maufrigneuse, enterrée dans la princesse de Cadignan'

"Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan" opens with the narrator's revelation of one of the princesse's many secrets. The first paragraph is the story of how the princesse de Cadignan, formerly known as the duchesse de Maufrigneuse, has hidden the truth of her past behind the July Revolution. Recent political events have destroyed many aristocratic fortunes, and the princesse has had "l'habileté de mettre sur le compte des événements politiques la ruine complète due à ses prodigalités" (949). These are our protagonist's first two attributes: *l'habileté* and *la prodigalité*. She has already used the first to disguise the second, taking advantage of the "désastres" of the Revolution to retell her story (949).

The finances of the Cadignan family are in dire straits, the narrator tells us, "en aussi mauvais état que celles de la branche aînée des Bourbons" (949). The narrator associates the Cadignan family fortune with that of the recently deposed elder Bourbon line, and in doing so, he goes along with the princesse's lie. Her financial problems, he has told us only three sentences prior, are in no way the result of the July Revolution. They are due only to her unchecked spending. The narrator's ambivalent and shifting attitudes toward the princesse—sometimes longing to be seduced by so skillful a woman, sometimes horrified by her duplicity—are already displayed in this first paragraph.

Indeed, after this little slip toward the princesse's version of events, the narrator immediately returns to the business of revealing her secrets:

> Cette femme, si célèbre sous son premier nom de duchesse de Maufrigneuse, prit alors sagement le parti de vivre dans une profonde retraite, et voulut se faire oublier. Paris fut emporté par un courant d'événements si vertigineux, que bientôt la duchesse de Maufrigneuse, enterrée dans la princesse de Cadignan, mutation de nom inconnue à la plupart des nouveaux acteurs de la société mis en scène par la Révolution de Juillet, devint comme une étrangère. (949)

The princesse disguises not only the true cause of her financial ruin, but also the entirety of her well-known past. She has a new name and she wants a new role, and the theatrical metaphor is made explicit at the end of this paragraph: the July Revolution is a change of scenery, a new set decoration for the stage that is Paris. This new mise-en-scène is complete with a new cast of actors. Lucienne Frappier-Mazur says that "Les Secrets" is the Balzacian work in which "la métaphore théâtrale atteint une manière de sommet" ("La Métaphore théâtrale" 65). Indeed, Frappier-Mazur writes: "A ce propos il convient de rappeler que l'on hésite sur la date à laquelle [Balzac] a songé au titre de *Comédie humaine*. L'idée elle-même était tout à fait courante à l'époque romantique. La plupart des érudits qui ont étudié la question penchent, avec des arguments variés, pour 1839-1840" (65). "Les Secrets" was composed and published in 1839, and the metaphor's appearance in its first paragraph is only the beginning of a complex network of theatrical vocabulary and allusions that are used throughout the text.

The princesse's former identity, the duchesse de Maufrigneuse, is now "enterrée" beneath her new name, and because this change remains unknown to most other Parisians, the princesse is now "une étrangère" (949). By identifying the princesse solely by her titles, the text emphasizes the ease with which she discards one role and takes up another, as well as the jarring totality of this change: for almost everyone else in Paris, even though they too are "acteurs" who should be aware of the duplicitous nature of their peers, the well-behaved princesse de Cadignan is a completely different person from the infamous duchesse de Maufrigneuse. They are so different that it is as if the duchesse de Maufrigneuse has *died*, hence Balzac's use of the adjective "enterrée." It is not until much later in the text that the princesse's given name of Diane, one element of consistency between her two personalities, is revealed to the reader.

This first paragraph very elegantly sets up the tension between the princesse's present and her past and emphasizes her superior theatrical skills. The princesse will use these skills, as well as her intellect and creativity, to rewrite her own history. She will tell the new story of her life to the writer Daniel d'Arthez in the hope of getting him to fall in love with her. She has never known true love. Her heart, she tells her friend and rival the marquise d'Espard, remains

"innocent[e]" and untouched, despite her numerous affairs (958). Her plan is to find a man that she is capable of loving, but who will not be driven away by her bad reputation. The marquise and the princesse settle on the writer Daniel d'Arthez as the ideal target for the princesse's seduction.

It is interesting that D'Arthez is a writer, for the princesse, as a seducer, is also a kind of writer. She rewrites her life story so that he will fall in love with her. Authors and seducers are not so dissimilar: they are both artists, according to Brian Boyd's definition of art as an attempt to "engage attention" (*Origin* 148). Both authors and seducers want to captivate the attention of their audience. Seducers have an additional (sometimes hidden or unspoken) goal of obtaining sex, romantic affection, or a relationship from their audience. It is not surprising that the seducer is a figure that fascinates the writer, for they sometimes use the same methods to engage attention—skill with words chief among these methods—and these methods rely on the same deeply rooted cognitive preferences to evoke a response.

As I discussed in my introduction, the seductive power of the arts has often led critics to warn the public against theater or novels, for example. In a clever reversal of this idea, the princesse's skill as a seducer is based in part on her avid reading of D'Arthez's novels; reading is not a danger for her. Instead, it empowers her to seduce D'Arthez.

After presenting the princesse as a deceiver in the story's opening paragraphs, one of the first things that the narrator tells us about the princesse is her love of reading, a love that she discovered during her period of isolation and transition between her two identities. Having sacrificed her former, more scandalous diversions in hopes of making a good marriage for her son, the princesse has now replaced them with reading. Her love of reading is linked to a desire to write, according to gossip:

> …la princesse s'était jetée dans le royaume de la philosophie. Elle lisait, elle qui avait, durant seize ans, manifesté la plus grande horreur pour les choses graves. […] Dans les cercles élégants, on disait que Diane voulait écrire un livre. (954-5)

The other desire that the princesse has never been able to satisfy is her desire to know true love. With her friend and erstwhile rival the marquise d'Espard, she plans the seduction of the writer

Daniel d'Arthez, whom she judges to be the ideal man for her project. But before I discuss Daniel d'Arthez, I will examine Diane's reading more closely.

'Des lectures diurnes et nocturnes'

As I discussed in the introduction, one of the major concerns of nineteenth-century moralists with regard to women's reading was that a woman alone with a book was not truly alone. A book can offer something even more intimate than a face-to-face encounter with a stranger—a mind-to-mind encounter. That is exactly what Diane de Cadignan has with Daniel d'Arthez when she reads his work.

Diane de Cadignan is not a young, unmarried woman, nor is she bourgeoise, and these are the groups of readers who inspired the most concern among critics. Still, her reading practice is similar to the reading practices described by Judith Lyon-Caen in her study of fan letters to Balzac and Eugène Sue: intense, solitary, and silent (122). Diane's reading is more illicit, by virtue of happening at night and in secret (and with an explicit goal of seduction in mind): "des lectures diurnes et nocturnes poursuivies avec une intrépidité digne des plus grands éloges" (984). The narrator's commentary that Diane's reading is praiseworthy is touched with irony. He recently contrasted her new interest in reading with her previous "horreur pour les choses graves" (954), and here we see that her dedication to reading D'Arthez's work is motivated by an interest in D'Arthez himself. Still, Diane proves herself a capable reader and critic, at least in Daniel's eyes: "D'Arthez, stupéfait et incapable de soupçonner que Diane d'Uxelles répétait le soir ce qu'elle avait lu le matin, comme font beaucoup d'écrivains, la tenait pour une femme supérieure" (984). The narrator's comments on Diane's reading emphasize her work and her intellect, rather than an immersion in the novels. Diane is a rare character, among those in my corpus, in that she tends toward suspension, rather than absorption, in her reading.

Before Diane embarks on her seduction of Daniel d'Arthez, the gossip surrounding her links her reading to a desire to write: "Dans les cercles élégants, on disait que Diane voulait écrire un livre" (954-5). Reading is done in private, but as discussed above, it is not a purely

solitary activity: it brings the reader into imaginary contact with the writer. Diane uses her reading of Daniel's novels to get closer to him, and even before she meets Daniel, her reading was already perceived as a breach between the private and public spheres, because people assumed it would inspire her to write. Writing letters is a personal, private kind of writing, and thus acceptable for women, but writing books puts women in the public sphere.

In her study of fan letters to Balzac, Judith Lyon-Caen notes that many of Balzac's admirers wrote to him about their own desire to write (108), and a significant number of female fans also wrote to him about other desires, asking to meet him in person. It is worth mentioning here that Balzac first met Mme Hanska, whom he eventually married, when she wrote to him after reading one of his novels; the transition from literary admirer to real-life lover is not so improbable.[36] Reading brings us, as readers, into contact with another mind. This is certainly true of reading a letter—even a letter by a fan to an author they do not know—but might it also be true of reading a novel? The letter-writers studied by Lyon-Caen certainly tried to imagine the person behind their favorite novels: "les lettres sont le lieu d'une intense production imaginaire, où le lecteur tente de donner à son destinataire un visage, une identité. Et où chercher l'écrivain, si ce n'est d'abord dans son œuvre ?" (113). Much like with theory of mind and interpreting another person's interior emotional state, the question of whether the reader's suppositions about the author are correct is far less important than the simple knowledge that behind the text, there is an author. But it is not so far-fetched to think that reading a text, even a work of fiction, might lend some clues as to the author's personality. A particularly clever reader, which Diane is, might be able to follow those clues correctly. Seen this way, Diane and Daniel are alone together before they even know each other. Jean Roudaut also points out in his preface to the work that because Daniel's friends tell him about Diane before he meets her, and vice versa, "La passion

[36] They were corresponding and had already met by the time Balzac was writing "Les Secrets" in June 1839. Balzac even mentioned "Une Princesse parisienne," the text's first title, to Mme Hanska in a letter dated July 15 of that year (Pléiade 1508). I do not mean to suggest that Diane de Cadignan is based on Mme Hanska (although there are characters in La Comédie humaine for whom Hanska was the model), merely that the story of a woman reader falling in love with a male novelist through the medium of his work might have been inspired by Balzac's own life.

est antérieure à la rencontre : elle est liée à une fabulation proprement romanesque" (16). I would add that this gossip is not the only way they "meet" before meeting in person, because Diane's reading allows her to learn more about Daniel and is thus key to making her seduction so effective.

Diane does not end up writing a book. Instead, she seduces Daniel. In addition to comparing her to an actress (989), he also calls her project "un roman" (989), and compares her preparing her toilette and arranging her skirts to an artist composing a masterpiece: "Elle ressemblait à un grand artiste se complaisant dans les lignes indécises d'une ébauche, sûr d'achever dans une heure d'inspiration le chef-d'œuvre encore flottant dans les limbes de l'enfantement" (985). Instead of writing a book, accessible to the entire reading public, Diane channels her intellect and creativity into this seduction, which occurs mostly in the private sphere. Most of the seduction takes place between Diane and Daniel alone, and only Daniel ever hears the story that Diane tells of her past, but they are seen together and their relationship is judged by a cast of other characters from *La Comédie humaine*.

Stories within stories: "Les Secrets" and *Illusions perdues*

In this section, I will examine how Diane crafts her story specifically to appeal to Daniel. Diane uses what she knows about Daniel as a writer—information gleaned largely from reading his books in secret—in order to gain his sympathy. First, I will analyze one of Daniel's earlier appearances in *La Comédie humaine*, namely two scenes from *Illusions perdues* in which he discusses writing and love with Lucien de Rubempré.[37] Diane is not present in either scene, so she cannot know what Daniel says in these conversations, but the fact that her story conforms so well to his suggestions is a testament to her reading of his work and her equally perceptive "reading" of his mind. I will examine not only the content of Diane's story but also the ways in

[37] *Illusions perdues* was published in three parts in 1837, 1839, and 1843 (Berthier 42-44); the second part was thus roughly contemporary with "Les Secrets," first published in 1839. Citations are from the GF Flammarion edition. See Honoré de Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, GF Flammarion, 2010.

which she prepares and persuades Daniel to accept it: first, she makes some cautionary and prefatory remarks about how her story is not *really* a story and second, she trades on Daniel's literary knowledge, decorating her story with references. These two strategies are what Ross Chambers calls "narrative duplicity" and "narrative self-referentiality" (52-3). Daniel's reactions to her story are also of interest, as a measure of how successful Diane is as a storyteller. Finally, I will discuss the implications of the embedded story for the rest of the text of "Les Secrets."

The Daniel d'Arthez of "Les Secrets" is a successful writer, but he also appears in *Illusions perdues* as a younger man. The D'Arthez of *Illusions perdues* is talented but penniless, and he works tirelessly on his craft while awaiting the recognition he knows he deserves. He encourages his friend and fellow struggling writer Lucien de Rubempré to follow this same virtuous path, giving advice like "le génie, c'est la patience" and "[u]n grand écrivain est un martyr qui ne mourra pas, voilà tout" (234), but Lucien does not possess the strength of will. He is afraid of the difficulties to come:

> —Vous vous attendez donc, vous, à des supplices ? dit Lucien.
> —À des épreuves en tout genre, à la calomnie, à la trahison, à l'injustice de mes rivaux ; aux effronteries, aux ruses, à l'âpreté du commerce, répondit le jeune homme d'une voix résignée. Si votre œuvre est belle, qu'importe une première perte… (235)

In *Illusions perdues*, this passage foreshadows Lucien's eventual betrayal of D'Arthez, but it has repercussions for "Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan" as well. D'Arthez is initially presented as being extremely naive about women in "Les Secrets," and the narrator even refers to him as a "dupe" ("Les Secrets" 973). But how much of a dupe can he be, if he is expecting "ruses"? It is undoubtedly true that D'Arthez subscribes to an idealized notion of love, both as a young man and later in life when he encounters the princesse. His remarks on love in *Illusions perdues* anticipate certain aspects of his relationship with Diane:

> —Mais, Daniel, est-ce que l'amour n'est pas partout semblable à lui-même ? dit le poète.
> —Ah! dit le républicain, en ceci je suis aristocrate. Je ne pourrais pas aimer une femme qu'un acteur baise sur la joue en face du public, une femme tutoyée dans les coulisses, qui s'abaisse devant un parterre et lui sourit, qui danse des pas en relevant ses jupes et qui se met en homme pour montrer ce que je veux être seul à voir. Ou, si j'aimais une pareille femme, elle quitterait le théâtre, et je la purifierais par mon amour. (335)

Diane is not an actress in the sense that Daniel speaks of in this passage, which is situated within a discussion of Lucien's mistress Coralie, a professional actress. Diane is an actress in a much more profound sense than Coralie: acting is not her profession, but her whole life.[38] D'Arthez does not fall in love with *an* actress. He falls in love with *the* actress: "la plus grande comédienne de ce temps" ("Les Secrets" 989). Whether she leaves the theater for him is a murky question that we will address later.

As a young man, D'Arthez may not have much respect for actresses like Coralie, but he does have respect for those who write plays. He tells Lucien of his hopes and grand projects, which are thus described by the narrator: "Il voulait, comme Molière, être un profond philosophe avant de faire des comédies" (*Illusions* 237). This mention of Molière as an inspiration to D'Arthez is later echoed by an allusion to Molière in "Les Secrets":

> Ici commence l'une de ces comédies inconnues jouées dans le for intérieur de la conscience, entre deux êtres dont l'un sera la dupe de l'autre, et qui reculent les bornes de la perversité, un de ces drames noirs et comiques, auprès desquels le drame de Tartufe est une vétille ; mais qui ne sont point du domaine scénique, et qui, pour que tout en soit extraordinaire, sont naturels, concevables et justifiés par la nécessité, un drame horrible qu'il faudrait nommer l'envers du vice. (979)

The narrator is describing the princesse's seduction of D'Arthez in this passage. So D'Arthez's wish to be "comme Molière" comes true, although not in the way that he intends. He does "faire [une] comédie," although not as its sole author. Molière was an actor as well as a dramaturge, and D'Arthez ends up as an actor in the drama that he plays out with the princesse de Cadignan.

Daniel and Diane both play many roles in this drama. The princesse writes, directs, and performs. Daniel is at first a spectator, and then an unknowing participant, and finally, in the novel's climactic scene, an actor who is aware of and complicit in his role. Part of the attraction of the princesse's seduction is that it offers D'Arthez a mirror of his own work as a writer. The centerpiece of Diane's seduction is the story that she tells him in order to explain away her reputation. It is a fictionalized version of her life, and D'Arthez is an excellent listener. The

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[38] Danielle Dupuis, in her study of two manuscript versions of *Les Secrets*, indicates that many of the changes made to a later version of the text serve to underline Diane's abilities as an actress. For more, see Danielle Dupuis, "'Une princesse parisienne' ou la fascination d'un personnage," *L'Année balzacienne* 9 (1988): 205–218.

storytelling scene in "Les Secrets" recalls a scene in *Illusions perdues* where Daniel listens to Lucien read his novel aloud:

> La lecture dura sept heures. Daniel écouta religieusement, sans dire un mot ni faire une observation, une des plus rares preuves de bon goût que puissent donner les auteurs. (236)

D'Arthez's skill as a listener is part of what makes him a good writer. He listens to the entirety of Lucien's novel and then offers a list of thoughtful criticisms. His reaction to Lucien's story is calm and careful, and his suggestions to improve the novel bear further investigation:

> —Vous êtes dans une belle et bonne voie, répondit gravement le jeune homme ; mais votre œuvre est à remanier. Si vous voulez ne pas être le singe de Walter Scott, il faut vous créer une manière différente, et vous l'avez imité. […] Vous serez neuf tout en adaptant à l'histoire de France la forme du drame dialogué de l'Ecossais. Walter Scott est sans passion, il l'ignore, ou peut-être lui était-elle interdite par les mœurs hypocrites de son pays. Pour lui, la femme est le devoir incarné. À de rares exceptions près, ses héroïnes sont absolument les mêmes, il n'a eu pour elles qu'un seul poncif, selon l'expression des peintres. Elles procèdent toutes de Clarisse Harlowe ; en les ramenant toutes à une idée, il ne pouvait que tirer des exemplaires d'un même type variés par un coloriage plus ou moins vif. La femme porte le désordre dans la société par la passion. La passion a des accidents infinis. Peignez donc les passions, vous aurez les ressources immenses dont s'est privé ce grand génie pour être lu dans toutes les familles de la prude Angleterre. (236-7)

Diane's "roman" ("Les Secrets" 989) happens to follow many of these suggestions. As her own heroine, she is virtuous and dutiful but far from "le devoir incarné." One of the cleverest aspects of her story, according to the narrator, is the way in which "[elle] se mettait elle-même en capilotade et se donnait des torts" (994). The princesse is careful to construct her own character as sympathetic but not without flaws.

Her story contrasts her innocence and naiveté with the desire and worldly knowledge of her mother, so the women are not all "d'un même type." Much like Daniel's advice to Lucien, in Diane's story, women are the bringers of disorder, and that disorder results from passion. Diane makes of her life a barely believable melodrama, so it is a story entirely about passion. She begins when she is a young woman, fresh out of a convent, and her mother marries her to Monsieur de Maufrigneuse. The marriage is not for Diane's benefit, but for that of her mother,

who is in love with Monsieur de Maufrigneuse. Women, Diane explains, are often more "amantes" than "mères," but of course "un homme de votre génie doit comprendre ces choses qui font l'étonnement des sots, mais qui n'en sont pas moins vraies" (989-90). This is the first of many flattering statements inserted into Diane's story, in which she insists that D'Arthez will understand what others find difficult to believe because of his superior intellect. Flattery, whether successful or unsuccessful, relies on theory of mind: the flatterer, in this case Diane, offers what she *believes* her listener (Daniel) *wants* to hear. Or perhaps "wants" is putting it too strongly; Diane, on occasion, seems to know Daniel better than he knows himself. She can predict what he will respond to before it has even occurred to him to want it. Because Daniel has studied, as Diane puts it, "la différence des caractères, des tempéraments, des attachements, des situations" (990) as a writer, he will understand how it is that Diane's mother could inflict this marriage on her daughter. D'Arthez's earlier advice to Lucien about women as the bringers of disorder seems especially ironic now, given that Diane is using what he *thinks* he knows about women against him in order to gain his sympathy and his trust. This is not the only moment in the text when Daniel's writerly knowledge of women will be his weakness. Earlier in the text, the narrator informs us:

> …la femme n'a été pour lui qu'un accident toujours redouté, il l'a trop observée pour ne pas la craindre ; mais à force de l'étudier, il a fini par ne plus la connaître, semblable en ceci à ces profonds tacticiens qui seraient toujours battus sur des terrains imprévus, où sont modifiés et contrariés leurs axiomes scientifiques. (963)

Daniel's careful observation of the world is no match for Diane's lived experience, and is indeed even a disadvantage. "À force de l'étudier, il a fini par ne plus la connaître": his work as a writer makes him vulnerable to the princesse's strategies even before she begins her performance as a storyteller. Diane's performance is formidable in part because she not only takes advantage of Daniel's lack of worldly experience, she also crafts her story specifically to appeal to him as a writer. This project hinges on Diane's use of theory of mind. Diane is no stranger to literary ambition herself, as we have already been informed that "Diane voulait écrire un livre" (954-5), which may give her some insight into D'Arthez. Her other source of insight is D'Arthez's writing itself, since when they first meet, she reads his entire œuvre, as I discussed in the

previous section. Diane impresses Daniel with her knowledge of his work and of literature in general, and then she incorporates this knowledge into her own work, in several forms. She appeals to Daniel's perspective as a writer, by comparing her story to other stories, and she trades on the very unbelievability of her story as a justification for why it should be believed.

> Vous autres qui faites des drames, vous n'en inventerez jamais un aussi noir, aussi cruel que celui-là. Ordinairement, d'après le peu que je sais de la littérature, un drame est une suite d'actions, de discours, de mouvements qui se précipitent vers une catastrophe ; mais ce dont je vous parle est la plus horrible catastrophe en action ! (991)
>
> Qui pourrait croire que la vie se traduit, pour la princesse de Cadignan, par une mauvaise nuit de mariage ; et toutes les aventures qu'on lui prête, par un défi de petite fille à deux épouvantables passions ? Mais personne. (994-5)

The story of Diane's life is so wildly unbelievable, so "noir" and so "cruel," that it could never work as literature—or theater, since we should note the explicit reappearance of the theatrical metaphor in Diane's word choice of "drame"[39]—and therefore it must be true. This warning is in itself already quite literary; it resembles the "Avertissement de l'éditeur" of *Les Liaisons dangereuses* as well as other epistolary novels of the eighteenth century. *Les Liaisons dangereuses* is of particular importance as a point of reference for "Les Secrets," as there is a certain resemblance between the marquise de Merteuil and the princesse de Cadignan, both well-read aristocratic women who use not only their beauty but also their intellect to get what they want from men.[40] The marquise is an accomplished stylist and storyteller as a letter-writer; the princesse is about to begin speaking her own story. That she prefaces it with a warning about how unbelievable it is echoes this passage of the "Avertissement de l'éditeur":

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[39] Lucienne Frappier-Mazur also discusses Diane's definition of the word "drame," and she points out that "Appliqué à drame, noir est presque une épithète de nature. A ce propos, il n'y a pas lieu, semble-t-il, de distinguer l'emploi des mots *drame* et *tragédie* chez Balzac. *Drame* est de beaucoup le plus fréquent des deux, mais *tragédie* ou *tragique* le double ou le remplace à l'occasion" ("La Métaphore théâtrale" 71).

[40] In her article "Echos des *Liaisons dangereuses* dans *La Comédie humaine*," Rose Fortassier rightly points out that the marquise d'Espard is the character most closely linked to the marquise de Merteuil, but she also notes "Ajoutons pour finir que la complicité de la Merteuil et de Valmont n'est point sans rapport, toutes proportions gardées, avec l'amitié armée des deux grandes coquettes, Mme d'Espard et Mme de Cadignan, qui s'entendent pour faire tomber dans leurs rets le naïf d'Arthez et deviennent rivales" (279).

> Il nous semble de plus que l'Auteur, qui paraît pourtant avoir cherché la vraisemblance, l'a détruite lui-même et bien maladroitement, par l'époque où il a placé les événements qu'il publie. En effet, plusieurs des personnages qu'il met en scène ont de si mauvaises mœurs, qu'il est impossible de supposer qu'ils aient vécu dans notre siècle (Laclos 25)

"Too awful to be true," says the "Avertissement." The "Préface du rédacteur," however, counterbalances the skepticism of the "Avertissement" by offering up justifications for which of the letters have been included in the collection and which faults of grammar or style have been left intact. The "Préface" treats the text as unquestionably a collection of letters—certainly not a novel—and raises questions about the usefulness of the text rather than its authenticity. Instead of suggesting that the letters are too awful to be true, the "Préface" tacitly suggests that they are so awful they can *only* be true. What monster would make up such a story? The princesse relies on the same tactic. Her tactic also echoes, in a distorted way, the common nineteenth-century prefaces by Balzac and Sand that I discussed in the introduction; Balzac intends to be the "secrétaire" of his epoch (*Œuvres complètes*) and George Sand writes that "Ici, l'auteur vous répondra qu'avant d'être moral, il a voulu être vrai" (39). The shocking nature of what is in the story cannot be blamed on the author. Blame should be laid on society instead. The fact that readers know quite well that Diane's warning is a set dressing, serving as a justification for telling Daniel exactly what she wants to tell him—her story is her own invention—throws the other prefaces into a new light. Speaking of these prefaces and their defense of novels, Christelle Girard also points out that "Si Balzac commente abondamment les gestes, la toilette et le travail vocal de la grande comédienne, aucun discours narratorial ne vient expliquer les procédés romanesques que Diane utilise pour séduire d'Arthez. Les ingrédients y sont pourtant tous, mais Balzac se garde de révéler trop explicitement la puissance d'un outil si fortement dévalué par la critique" (46-7). The narrator never intervenes to shed light on the structure or the register of Diane's story, even though he comments freely on all other aspects of her performance. She is allowed to speak her preface in peace.

According to Diane, her story cannot be an invented "drame" for two reasons. The first is that Diane makes the false, self-effacing claim that she knows very little about literature, implying that she could not have authored any such fiction. The second reason, which

undermines Diane's claim of literary ignorance, is that her story lacks the necessary formal structure to be literature: there is no series of actions with escalating tension. It is all climax, all "catastrophe," from beginning to end. Diane's assessment of her story's structure, much like the story itself, is not true. Her story has a fairly traditional structure. Like the tragedies that Aristotle wrote about in *Poetics*, it contains a reversal of fortune (*peripeteia*) combined with a discovery (*anagnorisis*): Diane's marriage to the man who turns out to be her mother's lover. Diane characterizes herself like a tragic hero: "the sort of person who is not surpassing in virtue and justice, but does not change into misfortune through bad character and vice, but on account of some missing of the mark" (Aristotle 1453a). Suffering, according to Aristotle, is more pitiable when it comes about between friends or family members (1453b). Diane is, of course, trying her hardest to elicit pity.

Diane's story also follows what Jonathan Gottschall calls "story's master formula": "Story = Character + Predicament + Attempted Extrication" (*Storytelling* Kindle Location 745). Her "attempted extrication" in Gottschall's terms is the destruction of her own reputation in order to hurt her mother. The consequences are that the princesse hurts herself most of all:

> Vous comprenez, mon ami, les hommes avec lesquels j'étais soupçonnée de légèreté avaient pour moi la valeur du poignard dont on se sert pour frapper son ennemi. Préoccupée de ma vengeance, je ne sentais pas les blessures que je me portais à moi-même. (992)

The sad resolution of her story is that Diane suffers for having destroyed her own reputation. Her mother dies and Diane tries to be a good wife, but it is too late, because monsieur de Maufrigneuse now detests her. Cruel gossip paints her return to her husband as another "dépravation": "c'est un triomphe que de ranimer les morts, elle n'avait plus que cela à faire" (993). Diane forgives even this joke at her expense—made by her close friend, the marquise d'Espard—and goes on to suffer unjustly in silence.

Before the curtain is drawn on her story, one last tragedy befalls her. A new character is introduced: a Republican solider named Michel Chrestien, who falls in love with Diane. Michel Chrestien was a friend of Daniel's, and Diane paints him in accordingly heroic and saintly terms. Michel is able to see Diane's true worth, despite her bad reputation. She has hope of finally

knowing real love. But their efforts to cope with their predicament have tragic consequences: he dies while saving her husband's life in the Revolution of 1830. After the Revolution and her family's ruin (two separate events that she deliberately conflates), Diane retreats from society to live quietly with the burden of all that she has endured. The end. There is nothing non-traditional about the structure of Diane's story. The outcome leaves something to be desired—no one likes to see bad things happen to good people—but of course, that's the point.

Diane's embedded story, much like the text of "Les Secrets," employs two strategies. In *Story and Situation*, Ross Chambers refers to these strategies as "narrative self-referentiality[,] whereby the story draws attention to its status as art" and "narrative duplicity[,] whereby the story pretends to be concerned only with its informational content and yet reveals in unobtrusive ways (usually by slight discrepancies) that it is not so" (52-3). The princesse explicitly denies that her story is art—unlike what D'Arthez "invents," it is not a "drama." So she is pretending to be concerned only with the information she is conveying to D'Arthez, and yet her story is not only quite carefully plotted but also cleverly decorated with literary allusions. These literary allusions are a sort of narrative self-referentiality, although their purpose is not to draw attention to her story's status as art, but to draw attention to her worthiness as a partner for Daniel. They showcase her own knowledge and sensitivity to all things literary. The terrible realization of her mother's love for Diane's husband comes to her after seeing a Racine play entitled "Deux Frères ennemis" (992). Her whole existence is a series of fantastic tales: "La révolte de 1830 est arrivée, au moment où je rencontrais au bout de cette existence des *Mille et une nuits* l'amour saint et pur que (je suis franche !) je désirais connaître" (994). In addition to these explicit references, there is also an implicit reference: Diane claims she is innocent, even though her reputation is that of "la plus mauvaise femme du monde" (992). She is an innocent with a poor reputation, rather than a wicked seductress whose reputation "s'est pourtant conservée pure" (Laclos 221). In her story, the princesse de Cadignan is the marquise de Merteuil in reverse. Simons and Laffitte also compare the princesse and the marquise (348 and 254, respectively). Rose Fortassier catalogues all of the "Echos des *Liaisons dangereuses* dans *La Comédie humaine*" in her descriptively titled

article; not only did Balzac read Laclos's work, but his characters frequently make reference to it. The princesse's resemblance to her fictional predecessor is deliberate.

But Diane's "roman" resembles nothing so much as Balzac's own work. As I noted above, the prefaces that she gives before her story resemble those of both eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels, and Fischler even notes the resemblance of this preface to the "All is true" epigraph that precedes *Le Père Goriot* (264). Jean Kaempfer, in a very insightful article on "Les Secrets," notes that the action takes place in 1833 and that Diane's story, especially the parts focusing on the martyred young hero Michel Chrestien's love for Diane, resembles nothing so much as a Balzacian *roman de la vie privée* such as *La Femme de trente ans* (the first few parts are published between 1830 and 1832) or "La Femme abandonnée" (published in 1833). "Les Secrets" itself, published in 1839, is part of the later *Scènes de la vie parisienne*, a category that Kaempfer identifies as more disillusioned, as exemplified by the character De Marsay, who believes in pleasure but is "athée … comme un mathématicien" in matters of love, according to a description in *La Fille aux yeux d'or* (cited in 106). Kaempfer argues that "Les Secrets" is Balzac's proof that love can exist even in the cynical world of the *Scènes de la vie parisienne*. However, love's existence relies on the "discours mystique de l'amour" found in these earlier works (111). The only way to allow such a discourse into *Scènes de la vie parisienne* is to put it in the context of Diane's manipulation of Daniel, to show her repeating back to him the language and structures of his own novels. Since D'Arthez is a double of Balzac, and Diane reads D'Arthez's work as she prepares to seduce him, Diane is thus deliberately imitating D'Arthez's genre—Balzac's genre—when she tells her story: "La princesse, pour romancer sa propre existence, utilise une machine narrative comparable : nous n'exclurons donc pas qu'elle ait lu les romans en question--ils sont à la mode, en 1833--et, constatant leur efficacité, les ait imités à son profit…" (109, ellipsis in text). When Kaempfer refers to "les romans en question" here, he is speaking of *Balzac*'s novels. So not only does Balzac write characters who allude to works by Racine and Laclos, but he writes characters who could have read his own work. The boundary between the world of *La Comédie humaine* and our own world is deliberately blurred. Diane, in

her own work as a storyteller, also benefits from a blurring of boundaries between the story that she tells Daniel and the real world.

Diane's story is incredibly effective. It is not only the content of her story, but also the way in which she delivers it that makes it so powerful. Diane is careful with her toilette and even her poses. And most of all, she uses her voice. The princesse can use her voice like a touch. In many of their conversations, her words are "soufflées à l'oreille de l'écouteur" (972), a description that recalls the moment in "Sarrasine" when Sarrasine's feels Zambinella's breath, although she is on stage. The narrator also invokes the metaphor of music to explain the power of her voice: "Ces habiles dissonances, glissées dans la musique de leur amour faux ou vrai, produisent d'invincibles séductions" (972). And finally, the princesse uses her voice to lend credence to her story, which "avait été dite avec l'accent inimitable du vrai" (995). Here, as opposed to a reference to something verifiable in the real world, truth becomes an "accent", a certain way of speaking, a sound. As readers of "Les Secrets," we receive this information through the narrator, but Daniel hears and sees her performance in person.

Unlike when he listens to Lucien de Rubempré's entire novel in silence, Daniel interrupts Diane. The narrator also interrupts Diane's story twice, once to give us a window into Daniel's thoughts and once to include the parenthetical stage direction "(Elle fit un geste plein d'onction religieuse)" (994). Daniel reacts particularly strongly when Diane deprecates herself or waxes poetic about her misfortunes. After she sighs that despite her twenty years of suffering, she has at least twelve more years of being beautiful, if only someone would love her, the line "—Quel ange ! pensa d'Arthez" (990) appears. The story is next interrupted when he cries out in shock at the marquise's d'Espard's mockery.

> —Madame d'Espard ! s'écria Daniel en faisant un geste d'horreur.
> —Oh ! Je lui ai pardonné, mon ami. […]
> D'Arthez rebaisa la main de cette sainte femme… (993)

"[C]ette sainte femme" operates as the narrator giving voice to D'Arthez's view of the princesse and an ironic comment on Diane, who is far from saintly, and D'Arthez, who falls for her anyway.

D'Arthez's reaction to the end of the story is to kneel, place his head in the princesse's hands, and weep. Diane takes advantage of this moment to have her own private reaction, described thus by the narrator: "madame de Cadignan put laisser errer sur ses lèvres un malicieux sourire de triomphe" (995-6). D'Arthez is moved by the princesse's story, perhaps enough to forget that it is a story, but the narrator does not allow that to happen to us. We know that what D'Arthez has just witnessed was a storytelling performance of the highest caliber. It is not only the content of the story that lends it power, but also the storyteller herself, her voice, her expression, her "geste[s] plein[s] d'onction religieuse" (994). The princesse's performance is what prevents Daniel from listening to her story without being moved to interrupt, as he was once able to do with Lucien de Rubempré's novel. Her performance is so skilled that it transcends artificiality and becomes "naturel": "La perspicacité rétrospective de cet homme si naturel et si profond fut mise en défaut par le naturel de ce roman, par sa profondeur, par l'accent de la princesse" (997). Here we see Diane live up to the narrator's claim that she is "la plus grande comédienne de ce temps" (989).

The best acting is indistinguishable from genuine emotion, which the narrator emphasizes again with the line "ce manège, si habile qu'il arrivait à la vérité pure" (996). The story is not true in the usual sense of recounting factual events or anything that can be verified by another source, but Maryse Laffitte and Lucienne Frappier-Mazur have both commented on the relationship of the princesse's storytelling performance with the truth. Maryse Laffitte writes about the "vérité affective" (282) that the princesse's story communicates, namely that she is innocent, "vierg[e] de cœur" (259). This emotional truth, which Laffitte also calls "la vérité de son cœur - subjective," cannot be corroborated by facts and is in fact contradicted by "la vérité de sa vie mondaine - objective" (283). The princesse's storytelling performance, her "roman," makes possible the communication of this otherwise unbelievable truth (283-4). Indeed, Lucienne Frappier-Mazur goes further in that she does not distinguish "vérité affective" from simple truth. The princesse convinces not only D'Arthez with her performance, but also herself: "Non seulement la comédie jouée par Diane de Maufrigneuse est plus vraie que nature, comme il

se doit chez une actrice de cette qualité, mais encore cette comédie crée du réel. […] Elle arrive ainsi à créer un sentiment sincère, non seulement chez d'Arthez, mais en elle-même. Là réside le paradoxe : ce sentiment n'est viable qu'au prix d'une répétition indéfinie de la comédie qui l'a fait naître" (88). Diane does not perform well because her feelings are genuine; rather, her feelings become genuine because she performs well. Diane's (initial) lack of genuine feeling and her convincing performance recall Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, which Frappier-Mazur mentions as an influence on Balzac's ideas about acting. The best actors, according to Diderot, recreate the exterior signs of emotion, but their performance is based on observation, judgment, and imitation, not emotion:

> Qu'est-ce donc que le vrai talent ? Celui de bien connaître les symptômes extérieurs de l'âme d'emprunt, de s'adresser à la sensation de ceux qui nous entendent, qui nous voient, et de les tromper par l'imitation de ces symptômes, par une imitation qui agrandisse tout dans leurs têtes et qui devienne la règle de leur jugement ; car il est impossible d'apprécier autrement ce qui se passe au dedans de nous. Et que nous importe en effet qu'ils sentent ou qu'ils ne sentent pas, pourvu que nous l'ignorions ?
>
> Celui donc qui connaît le mieux et qui rend le plus parfaitement ces signes extérieurs d'après le modèle idéal le mieux conçu est le plus grand comédien. (1042)

What the actor really feels is of no importance, as long as the audience remains unaware of it. The exterior signs are all that matter. This is an unsettling notion: we rely on facial expressions, body language, tone of voice and other exterior signs to decipher each other in the world as well as on the stage, but there is nothing to stop someone skilled at acting from using their talents in the world, rather than on the stage. Our reliance on these exterior signs is unquestionable. From these signs, we try to assemble an idea of someone else's inner state. The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century concept of physiognomy was also founded on these exterior signs, including not only expressions but also the less changeable characteristics of the face and the body. S. J. Gendzier demonstrates that much of Balzac's thinking on physiognomy was inspired by Diderot's writings on the subject, although Balzac applied the concepts of physiognomy in a less rigorously scientific and more imaginative way, often fusing them with "l'occultisme et [la] fausse science" (188). Indeed, Diderot recognized the limits of the art, and Gendzier points out that *Le Neveu de Rameau* includes reflections on hypocrisy and how physiognomy is "souvent

trompeuse quant au caractère" (185). Diderot also reflects on acting in the world, rather than on stage, in *Paradoxe sur le comédien*:

> Ne dit-on pas dans le monde qu'un homme est un grand comédien? On n'entend pas par là qu'il sent, mais au contraire qu'il excelle à simuler, bien qu'il ne sente rien : rôle bien plus difficile que celui de l'acteur, car cet homme a de plus à trouver le discours et deux fonctions à faire, celle du poète et du comédien. Le poète sur la scène peut être plus habile que le comédien dans le monde, mais croit-on que sur la scène l'acteur soit plus profond, soit plus habile à feindre la joie, la tristesse, la sensibilité, l'admiration, la haine, la tendresse, qu'un vieux courtisan ? (1057-8)

The greatest actors are those who practice their craft in the world, rather than on the stage, convincingly pretending to feel what they do not. This description fits Diane de Cadignan, who is both "poète" and "comédien" on the stage of the world, writing and performing her own role. It is clear that she is acting in the tradition of *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, by imitating the exterior signs of a feeling without truly being subject to that emotion. Why, then, is she not a despicable hypocrite? Acting, once removed from the theater, should be indistinguishable from hypocrisy. It is deceit. People who signal emotions that they do not feel are untrustworthy. And yet the narrator's descriptions of Diane de Cadignan do not paint her as a hypocrite and as a deceiver, but as a masterful actress and storyteller. The narrator admires her skill and envies D'Arthez's position: "S'il est permis de risquer une opinion individuelle, avouons qu'il serait délicieux d'être ainsi trompé longtemps" (989). Diane's performance is acceptable in part because, as Frappier-Mazur argues, she ultimately does feel the emotion that she is portraying.

The princesse's performance is also justified because of her chosen audience, the writer Daniel d'Arthez. D'Arthez is sensitive enough to respond to the emotion in the princesse's performance, but smart enough to recognize her craft; he is not entirely deceived. After all, the philosopher David Davies writes, "there exists a long tradition according to which the producer of fiction does not lie" (68), and as a producer of fiction himself, D'Arthez would understand that. Davies also writes that "fictive utterance" is "a kind of speech that invites the receiver to make-believe rather than to believe what is narrated" (62). "Make-belief" is a term that recalls children's pretend play, and there is an element of playfulness in Diane and Daniel's

relationship, as though they have both consented to a game.[41] Even though the princesse does not announce her story as "fictive utterance," she appeals to D'Arthez's knowledge of literature by discussing generic conventions and story structure, as well as by prefacing her story with a warning that echoes the prefaces of other novels.

The narrator also refers to D'Arthez epithetically as "l'écrivain" while he listens to the story—"L'écrivain contempla pendant un moment cette femme adorable" (995)—and his deep knowledge of literary creation is the source of further reflections on the princesse's fictional autobiography later that evening:

> C'est vrai, se disait-il sans pouvoir dormir, il y a de ces drames-là dans le monde ; le monde couvre de semblables horreurs sous les fleurs de son élégance, sous la broderie de ses médisances, sous l'esprit de ses récits. Nous n'inventons jamais que le vrai. (997)

Storytelling accomplishes two opposite actions, according to this passage. Terrible things—which Daniel thinks of as "ces drames-là" with no apparent irony, although given other recent uses of this word, readers ought to perk up—are covered up by witty "récits," so storytelling has the power to conceal. Daniel's next thought seems strangely contradictory: "Nous n'inventons jamais que le vrai." If something is already "the truth," how can we invent it? But this is exactly what Daniel does, as a writer: he rearranges concepts and images from the real world into stories, which do not report objective facts and events, but may still reveal something about the world. Stories are inventions, but—to use Laffitte's term—they communicate *affective* truth. Stories can thus be (affectively) true and (objectively) false, revealing and concealing at the same time.

The princesse uses her story to reveal and conceal, just as she uses her clothing: her cleverly spread skirt "couvre tout et met tout en lumière à la fois" (969), or as Deborah Houk Schocket puts it, "the clothes that cover her also manage to suggest what they hide" (73). Schocket refers to Roland Barthes, who writes in *Le Plaisir du texte*: "L'endroit le plus érotique d'un corps n'est-il pas *là où le vêtement bâille ?*" (19, italics in text). These reflections on clothing recall a moment when Daniel, in one of his conversations with Lucien de Rubempré, specifies that he could not love a woman who revealed too much of herself by lifting her skirts

[41] Jonathan Gottschall treats pretend play in children and its relationship to fiction in depth. See Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal*.

for everyone to see: "Je ne pourrais pas aimer une femme … qui danse des pas en relevant ses jupes et qui se met en homme pour montrer ce que je veux être seul à voir" (*Illusions perdues* 335). The princesse not only dresses in clever concealing-and-revealing way that Daniel prefers; she also tells her story in this way, making it clear that Daniel, gifted writer that he is, is the only one who can really understand it. He will be "seul à voir" what she offers him through her story.

Daniel's writing career not only makes him more receptive to the princesse's story, it also allows him to recognize that the princesse is his creative equal. She is also a writer, even by Daniel's own youthful definition: "[u]n grand écrivain est un martyr qui ne mourra pas, voilà tout" (*Illusions* 234). Diane and Daniel have the following exchange after she finishes her story:

> —Mais, vous êtes… dit-il en relevant sa belle tête et la regardant avec amour.
> —Vierge et martyre, reprit elle (996)

Objectively, the princesse is neither virgin nor martyr. In terms of affective truth, she is "vierg[e] de cœur" (Laffitte 259) and according to Daniel's peculiar definition, she is a martyr because she suffers—and even symbolically dies, changing titles and leaving her former self "enterrée" at the beginning (949)—and yet lives to tell the tale. Suffering is a necessary part of a writer's formation. Daniel tells Lucien that he expects "des épreuves de tout genre" (*Illusions* 235). With her story, the princesse demonstrates that her sufferings easily fit into the list that Daniel offers Lucien: calumnies, betrayals, effronteries, ruses. Daniel sympathizes with and admires the princesse.

The princesse's story resembles the text of "Les Secrets," not only because it is embedded within it and because it superimposes a new interpretation over the same events that "Les Secrets" recounts, but also because, at a more fundamental level, the princesse's word choice echoes the narrator's. She tells Daniel: "Tout alors m'a servi, reprit-elle, les désastres de la monarchie et ses ruines m'ont aidée à m'ensevelir" (994). This sentence sounds like the first sentence of the text, which contains the phrase "désastres de la Révolution de Juillet" and the word "ruine" (949). "Ensevelir" in the princesse's story recalls the narrator's use of "enterrée" (949) in the first paragraph to describe what happens to the princesse's former identity. The princesse's use of the words "servir" and "aider" to describe her use of the "désastres" is a

reminder of the narrator relaying the same information from a very different perspective: "madame la princesse de Cadignan eut l'habileté de mettre sur le compte des événements politiques [sa] ruine complète" (949). In both versions of events, the princesse uses the revolution and retreats from society, but the narrator and the princesse paint very different pictures. The similarity between the princesse's story—which the narrator reminds us several times is a ruse—and the text of "Les Secrets" reinforces the importance of careful reading. We, as readers, are *almost* in the same position as Daniel d'Arthez, except that we possess access to different information. We read through the same story that D'Arthez is hearing and we watch as D'Arthez forgets himself and interrupts the princesse's story, even as the narrator is constantly interrupting our experience of the story to relate his own observations about the princesse. This information from the narrator represents one more order of intentionality and thus it requires another source tag. Everything in the princesse's story must be tagged "the narrator said that the princesse said." "Said" does not represent a specific intentional state (a belief, a desire) but theory of mind allows us to extrapolate that both the narrator and the princesse possess motivations that may be unknown to us. Or in the case of the princesse, those motivations may be known to us, but only through the filter of the narrator.

We know that the narrator is potentially unreliable because he points out all the ways in which the princesse is unreliable, and like the princesse, the narrator is telling a story. At various moments, the narrator employs both narrative self-referentiality—he speaks of the story's "dénouement" (1005)—and narrative duplicity, in which he pretends to be concerned only with the information he is conveying. Ross Chambers explains the co-existence of these two contradictory strategies:

> But one of the more durable axioms of Western aesthetics has it that the greatest art lies in the concealment of art and that the production of art—and hence, the gain in narratorial authority—is the greater when the art narrative is apparently nonart, that is, a form of communication concerned principally with its own referent (i.e., "what it is about," the narrative information being divulged). Hence, there is a constant tug-of-war between conflicting strategies… (53)

Perhaps this tug-of-war plays a part in the pleasure of reading; just as the most erotic sight is "là où le vêtement bâille" (Barthes, *Plaisir* 19) rather than complete nudity, this conflict between the story that conceals its 'storyness' and the story that reveals itself sparks our imaginations. On top of the game of processing the many different sources of all the information in a story, this is another sort of puzzle: is this story merely a recounting of events, or is it meant to convey something else, and if so, what?

It is a rare story that is "merely" a recounting of events, and neither "Les Secrets" nor the princesse's embedded story qualify. Certainly the princesse has a goal other than conveying information to D'Arthez, since readers know from the beginning that she plans to seduce him. Before I discuss this question further, I would like to examine the other kinds of tests in "Les Secrets," since the embedded story is not the final stage of the princesse's seduction.

'Deux fines couleuvres': Dinner with the Marquise d'Espard

The friendship between Mme d'Espard and Mme de Cadignan is founded on sharing secrets and schemes, and Rose Fortassier notes that it resembles the friendship between Merteuil and Valmont in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (279). Like Merteuil and Valmont's alliance, the princesse's friendship with the marquise eventually becomes a more hostile rivalry. After telling her story, the princesse sends D'Arthez to the home of the marquise d'Espard, where she knows that people will speak of her bad reputation. In fact, Diane covertly arranges the whole affair as a test when Madame d'Espard calls on her at her home after having heard nothing from the princesse for two months. Madame d'Espard, according to the narrator, is "amenée par une excessive curiosité" (998), which is undoubtedly the goal of the princesse's unusually long silence. The narrator underlines the princesse's calculating nature several times in this passage: their pleasant small talk is that of two "fines couleuvres" and Diane evaluates their conversation like a "Bédouin" evaluating a caravan (998), an unfortunate exoticizing stereotype meant to evoke craftiness. Both women may be snakes, but it is Diane who is the real predator, lying in wait, laying a trap for her friend. After Madame d'Espard's arrival and their half-hour of small

talk, Diane further prolongs her silence on the subject of Daniel. Diane is fully aware that the marquise d'Espard has come in search of information on this very topic, but she deliberately says nothing about it in order to needle the marquise's curiosity. Diane keeps her silence with a particular goal in mind, that of "using" the marquise and turning her into Diane's own personal "chien de chasse" (998)—this passage is full of hunting metaphors, and Allan Pasco rightly points out that Diane shares her name with the goddess of the hunt (426)—but she also enjoys tormenting the marquise with the mystery: "Diane s'amusait, la marquise enrageait" (Balzac 998).

After carefully working the marquise into this state, Diane finally steals the marquise's question right off her lips—"À l'instant où la princesse aperçut une interrogation sur les lèvres de son amie, elle lui dit" (998), an action which confirms that Diane knew what the marquise was after all along—and reveals that she has not seen the marquise in months because she has spent that time with D'Arthez. She reminds the marquise of their conversation three months past in which they plotted to find a way for Diane to entrap Daniel and finally experience true love, and then she remarks on how wonderful it is to be in love: "Ah ! Il n'y a que les gens de génie qui sachent aimer" (998). It is important to remember that in their earlier conversation, the marquise reveals that she has never known true love either (957), so the princesse de Cadignan is gloating.

Diane riles up the marquise by testing the limits of her patience and then boasting in front of her, and then she reveals what seems to be a fatal flaw in her newfound happiness with Daniel:

> Promettez-moi, si vous le voyez, de ne pas lui dire un mot de moi, mon ange, dit la princesse en prenant la main de la marquise. Je suis heureuse, oh ! Mais heureuse au-delà de toute expression, et vous savez combien dans le monde un mot, une plaisanterie vont loin. Une parole tue, tant on sait mettre de venin dans une parole ! Si vous saviez combien, depuis huit jours, j'ai désiré pour vous une semblable passion ! (998-9)

Diane skillfully emphasizes here not only that she has something wonderful that the marquise does not, but also that it would be so easy to take it away. A single word could destroy her happiness, so precarious is her situation. The princesse's strategy here is a perfect example of

what is colloquially called "reverse psychology," a strategy which relies on using theory of mind to intuit and direct someone else's intentions. What Diane wants, in fact, is for the marquise to test Daniel's devotion to her by telling him the truth of her reputation. Further investigating the complexities of theory of mind that are evident in this brief scene between Diane and the marquise d'Espard demonstrates what a brilliant manipulation it is on Diane's part. The scene is deceptively simple because the narrator relays it to the reader in such a way that both the princesse and the marquise's intentions are accessible.

Curiosity is not a uniquely human trait. Proverbially, cats also possess it, and speaking scientifically, so do many other mammals (Boyd 279). But according to Brian Boyd:

> …human curiosity extends far further [than other animals']. False belief makes all the difference. If we realize we can make mistakes through not knowing the whole situation, our realization adds a new spur to curiosity. We know we will often need to know *more* in order to choose what to do. (279)

Madame d'Espard's social status depends partially on her knowledge of the other people in her social circle, because this knowledge determines their status and the kind of treatment they ought to receive. A mistake could cost the marquise her own status, so it is important to keep up with her neighbors. More specifically, the princesse de Cadignan is her rival. Their whole relationship is an unspoken game of one-upmanship, so it is no surprise that "une excessive curiosité" (998) propels the marquise to the princesse's door. She wants to know who's winning.

Both women may be "couleuvres," but the narrator informs us in no uncertain terms that "l'une était plus forte que l'autre" (998): the princesse is the superior game player. This scene, in which she sets the marquise up to "betray" her, is her final move. In order to make this move, the princesse has to keep track of the marquise's intentions, and the reader must keep track along with her. Reading this scene resembles a more complicated version of the Sally-Anne test mentioned in the introduction, because the reader is tracking two orders of false belief as well as the other emotional states of the characters. The humor and suspense of the scene both hinge on Diane, and consequently, the reader, knowing that the marquise holds a false belief, or, in other words:

> Understanding that belief underpins desire and intention, and that belief can be wrong, allows us much finer accuracy in predicting others' desires, intentions, and behavior. It makes possible the complexity and sophistication of human interaction. We effortlessly assess others' beliefs about social situations and the consequences of any errors. That skill, central to social life, explains the force of *dramatic irony*, which pervades all storytelling… (Boyd 277-8)

Dramatic irony thus depends on engaging our theory of mind. Before analyzing the orders of intentionality in this scene, it may be helpful to revisit Lisa Zunshine's examples of different levels of intentionality:

> Although ToM is formally defined as a second-order intentionality—for example, "I believe that you desire X," or Peter Walsh thinks that Clarissa "would think [him] a failure" (43)—the levels of intentionality can "recurse" further back, for example, to the third level, as in the title of George Butte's wonderful recent book, *I Know That You Know That I Know*, or to the fourth level, as in "I believe that you think that she believes that he thinks that X," and so forth. (28)

To map the nested mental states in this scene, it is best to start with the simplest units. There are several second-order intentionalities here that are crucial to making sense of what happens:

> Diane KNOWS that Madame d'Espard WANTS to know about Diane's relationship.
> Diane KNOWS that Madame d'Espard WANTS to know true love, which she has never felt.
> Diane BELIEVES that Madame d'Espard WANTS to destroy her happiness.

These three second-order intentionalities are the basis for an even longer chain:

> Diane KNOWS that Madame d'Espard BELIEVES that Diane WANTS Madame d'Espard to keep the secret of Diane's sordid past.

Things become even more complicated at the conclusion of their brief conversation. After the princesse reveals her alleged fear that "une parole" (999) could destroy her happiness, the marquise wonders aloud why the princesse would need to beg her very best friend to be loyal, saying "Vous me croyez donc capable de vous jouer un vilain tour?" (999). The second-order intentionality spoken aloud in this question (Diane BELIEVES the marquise IS CAPABLE OF betraying her) is only the tip of the iceberg. But the longer a chain of intentionalities is, the more unstable and untrustworthy the information conveyed becomes, and a question arises here that is not easily answered: *does* the marquise know that Diane believes her to be capable of betrayal?

Their long friendship and rivalry has been marked by the same kind of competition on display in this scene:

> La princesse dominait de toute la tête la marquise, et la marquise reconnaissait intérieurement cette supériorité. Là, peut-être, était le secret de cette amitié. La plus faible se tenait tapie dans son faux attachement pour épier l'heure si longtemps attendue par tous les faibles, de sauter à la gorge des forts, et leur imprimer la marque d'une joyeuse morsure. Diane y voyait clair. Le monde entier était la dupe des câlineries de ces deux amies. (998)

The dramatic irony of this scene rests here, on the fact that the marquise *thinks* her time has finally arrived: this is the princesse's moment of weakness. The chain of nested intentionalities is thus: the marquise DOES NOT KNOW that Diane KNOWS that the marquise WANTS to betray her. Despite knowing that Diane is the better game player of these two "fines couleuvres," the marquise fails to put this knowledge to good use. She asks mockingly if the princesse thinks her capable of betrayal, finally certain that she is one step ahead, unable to see that she is walking into Diane's trap. Readers may smirk at her question, secure in our own knowledge of exactly what has happened in this scene, thanks to the narrator's all-access pass into both characters' heads.

All of these nested intentionalities really contain two further levels: We (the readers) KNOW that the narrator KNOWS that X or Y or Z. It is easier to parse the scene without including these layers, since they turn what was a third-order intentionality (the marquise DOES NOT KNOW that Diane KNOWS that the marquise WANTS to betray her) into a fifth-order intentionality, and "people have marked difficulties processing stories that involve mind-reading above the fourth level" (Zunshine 29).[42] These embedded intentional states are similar to

[42] We reason differently when mental states are involved: "…it is the *content* of the information in question that makes the navigation of multiply embedded data either relatively easy or relatively difficult. Cognitive evolutionary psychologists suggest the following reason for the ease with which we can process long sequences, such as, "A gave rise to B, which resulted in C, which in turn caused D, which led to E, which made possible F, which eventually brought about G, etc.," as opposed to similarly long sequences that require attribution of states of mind, such as, "A wants B to believe that C thinks that D wanted E to consider F's feelings about G." It is likely that cognitive adaptations that underwrite the attribution of states of mind differ in functionally important ways from the adaptations that underwrite reasoning that does not involve such an

embedded stories. Often, the goal of embedding one story within another story is to test the reader's limits or perhaps even to make the reader forget the initial/frame story for purposes of surprise or suspense. But it is in the reader's interest to remember the narrator's role in "Les Secrets," described thus by Angela Moger: "Throughout, the characteristically intrusive Balzacian narrator pushes in, not to supplement, explain, or sponsor the main character, but to undermine her and to alert of every one of her tricks." The narrator does so, Moger argues, to make the reader sympathize with Diane. Diana Festa-McCormick agrees: "The reader's awakened sympathies prevent too harsh a view of Diane's duplicity in her seduction of d'Arthez. Somewhat defiantly, one takes her side, unaware that that is what the author wants" (219). This process—evoking sympathy through unnecessary harshness—is similar to the "reverse psychology" that Diane uses on the marquise, in which she gets the marquise to do what she wants by begging her *not* to do it. As Angela Moger explains, attacks against Diane also prompt sympathy toward her from Daniel. At the dinner party, the marquise's guests attack Diane, which causes Daniel to speak up for her.

This dinner party is the final test of Diane's talents as a storyteller. Most of the dinner party guests have been Diane's lovers. Some of them, notably Rastignac and Blondet, warned D'Arthez early on that the princesse de Cadignan was a dangerous woman, but it was not enough to keep Daniel and Diane apart. Everyone at the table is aware of the same events, for Diane prepared Daniel so that the guests would not tell him anything he did not already know. However, Daniel's perspective on these events differs from the other guests. He speaks up after Maxime de Trailles describes Diane in the following insulting manner: "Chez Diane la dépravation n'est pas un effet, mais une cause ; peut-être doit-elle à cette cause son naturel exquis : elle ne cherche pas, elle n'invente rien ; elle vous offre les recherches les plus raffinées comme une inspiration de l'amour le plus naïf, et il vous est impossible de ne pas la croire" (1002). The particular wording of this insult is interesting because it echoes a thought that Daniel

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attribution, a difference possibly predicated on the respective evolutionary histories of both types of adaptations" (Zunshine, *Why We Read* 29).

had earlier, after hearing the princesse's story: "Nous n'inventons jamais que le vrai" (997) is not so different from "elle n'invente rien" (1002). Maxime's assertion that "il vous est impossible de ne pas la croire" is addressed to the whole table, to this gathering of Diane's former lovers, but it could also be addressed specifically to Daniel. In the eyes of the marquise's guests, Daniel fully and unquestioningly believes whatever Diane has told him. They are her former lovers, and they all fell for it—why wouldn't he?

D'Arthez's response to Maxime de Trailles is preceded, earlier in the conversation, by a moment which makes D'Arthez look like the dupe that the rest of the guests think he is. The marquis d'Esgrignon makes a joke about the princesse, and the narrator informs us that "cette raillerie était excessivement obscure pour d'Arthez" (1002). This is the only glimpse into D'Arthez's state of mind that the narrator provides during this scene. All the other cues are in descriptions of D'Arthez's tone of voice or his face or in the behavior of the other guests. The effect of this misunderstood joke is to make the reader worry, much like D'Arthez's neighbor at the table, Mme de Montcornet, who "reporta ses yeux sur madame d'Espard en lui montrant [d'Arthez] comme pour dire : Il est ensorcelé !" (1002). This look between Mme de Montcornet and Mme d'Espard, much like the joke, passes over D'Arthez's head. Our knowledge of D'Arthez's ignorance of what the other party guests think—three orders of intentionality—heightens the suspense of scene. How will D'Arthez respond to what he perceives as slander against the princesse? Whom will he believe? Deborah Houk Schocket reads this scene as follows:

> So thoroughly under Diane's spell is Daniel that he continues to act as her ideal audience, despite his knowledge of the truth. Daniel proceeds to grant a reality to the princess's performance when he publicly justifies the woman who seduced him; in other words, he supports the version of the princess she created in her 'novel.' (77)

Houk Schocket argues that Diane's "theatricality works to create an other reality—real in the sense of its effectiveness in inspiring belief—that replaces the traditional criteria of true and false; it rejects transcendental guarantees in favor of the self-referential" (78). Like Maryse Laffitte's argument for "affective" emotional truth that is at odds with the facts of the world and can only be communicated through art, Houk Schocket also argues for a truth that is "superior

because it is a form of art" (78), even though it is not verifiable. Loredana Bolzan also argues that oral storytelling is "come un laboratorio che esplori le sofisticate modalità di affermazione del vero" and that Balzac uses it to "sondare tutte le varianti connesse alla categoria verità/menzogna" (35), thus acknowledging multiple types of truth. These concepts of 'truth,' emotional and artistic, that fall outside the traditional true/false binary are useful for understanding the text, perhaps especially the idea that "nous n'inventons jamais que le vrai" (997), but I would like to pause for a moment to examine the question of whether D'Arthez is "under Diane's spell" and whether her theatricality "inspir[es] belief." Daniel does not, strictly speaking, *believe* Diane.

Houk Schocket and Laffitte both position Daniel as being especially susceptible to Diane's story because he is a writer. I fully agree. Daniel is not naive, or possessed of a lesser understanding of the relationship between fiction and reality than Diane, as Dominique Jullien would have it (87). Indeed, like Houk Schocket and Laffitte, I agree that Daniel is unusually perceptive, and that the self-referentiality of the princesse's story is more important to him than the story's relationship with any verifiable facts; this is because the story is a work of fiction and D'Arthez recognizes it as such. This recognition is first suggested by the scene in which the embedded story is told—all of Diane's appeals to his sensibilities as an author and Daniel's long conflation of martyrdom with 'writerliness'—and his response at the dinner party confirms it. His response to those who speak against her is spoken "avec une moqueuse légèreté" (1002), a tone which puts him in a radically different position from his previous one as the man who found a joke "excessivement obscure" (1002). Someone who misses or misunderstands a joke is locked out of the conversation because they know less than their interlocutors; someone who speaks mockingly knows *more*. D'Arthez recognizes the accusations against the princesse and asks of her accusers: "Pourquoi … ne se trouverait-il pas une femme qui s'amusât des hommes, comme les hommes s'amusent des femmes?" (1002). Not only does he speak in a mocking tone, but he uses the verb *s'amuser* twice; D'Arthez is having fun. He questions the importance, rather than the truth, of the accusations. The other at the table see this response as "le sublime de la politique

privée" (1003), for D'Arthez has avenged Diane without defending her. His relationship to the princesse in this scene differs from his relationship to her at the beginning of her seduction, when the narrator twice called him a "dupe" (973, 979): they are now playing the same game. He does not deny the accusations, but he does not simply accept the negative opinions that the other Parisians have of the princesse. D'Arthez is capable of seeing the objective truth of the accusations against the princesse. Allan Pasco agrees, writing that "True, on several occasions d'Arthez was led astray. Still, his performance at the d'Espard gathering makes it clear that he knows all" (431).

D'Arthez never says whether he believes her or the dinner guests. The question is irrelevant. D'Arthez, having recognized the princesse's story as a work of fiction, can no more say whether he believes the princesse's story than he could say if he 'believed' Lucien de Rubempré's unpublished novel in *Illusions perdues*. Fictive utterance, as David Davies writes, does not invite us to believe. It invites us to "make-believe" (62), to use our imaginations. As Fischler writes of Diane's story, "Her act may seem to rely on a lover's faith, on shortness of memory or on willing suspension of disbelief; actually, it depends far more on the opposite: conscious awareness of the craft involved and the effect produced" (264). It is the other guests who are dupes in this case, as they misread the princesse. They see her as a liar and a manipulator, rather than a producer of fiction. Daniel is the only one to adopt this stance of make-belief in reaction to her storytelling performance. So just as Daniel once wished aloud to Lucien, he is "seul à voir" the princesse as she is: a writer and an actress of exceptional quality. D'Arthez loves her not *in spite of* her story, but *because* of it. As the princesse says to the marquise a few pages earlier, "Ah ! Il n'y a que les gens de génie qui sachent aimer" (998).

'La création morale la plus immense et la plus attachante'

In a passage that I quoted earlier, Ross Chambers wrote that "one of the more durable axioms of Western aesthetics has it that the greatest art lies in the concealment of art" (53), which recalls Pliny the Elder's recounting of a contest between Zeuxis and Parrhasius:

> [Parrhasius], it is said, entered into a pictorial contest with Zeuxis, who represented some grapes, painted so naturally that the birds flew towards the spot where the picture was exhibited. Parrhasius, on the other hand, exhibited a curtain, drawn with such singular truthfulness, that Zeuxis, elated with the judgment which had been passed upon his work by the birds, haughtily demanded that the curtain should be drawn aside to let the picture be seen. Upon finding his mistake, with a great degree of ingenuous candour he admitted that he had been surpassed, for that whereas he himself had only deceived the birds, Parrhasius had deceived him, an artist. (Pliny)

If we were to transpose this tale of a painting contest into a contest of literary merit, it would not be so different from "Les Secrets": Daniel is Zeuxis, an established and respected writer, and Diane is Parrhasius, because she manages to entrance Daniel with her story despite his expertise. Like Zeuxis, Daniel may initially mistake Diane's story for a recounting of verifiable facts, but he soon realizes his mistake. His initial mistake makes him respect Diane's art even more. Diane's artistic talent makes her a worthy partner for Daniel.

Once Daniel has passed Diane's final test at the marquise's dinner party, the couple lives happily ever after—almost. Several critics have noted that at the end of the story, the narrator says of Daniel, "Enfin, ses publications sont devenues excessivement rares" (1005). Dominique Jullien reads this "silence" (86) on Daniel's part as a loss, or as the price that Daniel has to pay for his happiness with Diane. Daniel, Jullien argues, no longer needs to do creative work—either writing novels or imagining his female companions to be more perfect than they are—because Diane serves herself up to him as a ready-made fictional character. Christelle Girard also interprets Daniel's decision to stop writing as a loss, saying that he "perd sa créativité littéraire" (49) because he accepts the princesse's fiction fully, without maintaining any distance from it.

But Daniel's relationship is not a loss of creativity. Love is explicitly associated with creation in the text. In one of the first stories that the princesse tells, first to the marquise d'Espard and then to D'Arthez, she recounts the passion that a virtuous young man named Michel Chrestien conceived for her. Michel Chrestien was a friend of D'Arthez's, and the princesse tells the story in order to show D'Arthez how touched she was by Chrestien's admiration. The narrator has this to say about Chrestien's view of relations between men of genius and women:

> Michel Chrestien accordait aux hommes de génie le pouvoir de transformer les plus massives créatures en sylphides, les sottes en femmes d'esprit, les paysannes en marquises : plus une femme était accomplie, plus elle perdait à leurs yeux ; car, selon lui, leur imagination n'avait rien à y faire. Selon lui, l'amour, simple besoin des sens pour les êtres inférieurs, était, pour les êtres supérieurs, la création morale la plus immense et la plus attachante. (964)

Love is also a creation, a work of the imagination. D'Arthez, as a genius, needs to use his imagination to become invested in a woman. In fact, the following passage indicates that he could not be satisfied with a woman if he knew everything about her, for he prefers an "Idéal":

> La bizarre fantaisie de d'Arthez pouvait d'ailleurs être justifiée de bien des manières : peut-être avait-il tout d'abord désespéré de rencontrer ici-bas une femme qui répondît à la délicieuse chimère que tout homme d'esprit rêve et caresse ? peut-être avait-il un cœur trop chatouilleux, trop délicat pour le livrer à une femme du monde ? peut-être aimait-il mieux faire la part à la Nature et garder ses illusions en cultivant son Idéal ? peut-être avait-il écarté l'amour comme incompatible avec ses travaux, avec la régularité d'une vie monacale où la passion eût tout dérangé. (964)

Dominique Jullien argues that this process of idealizing women is only necessary for the lesser women with whom d'Arthez associates before meeting the princesse, and that what the princesse offers d'Arthez is a ready-made character. His work is already done for him. Jullien writes that Daniel is "reduced to the passive position of a listener" (85) in their relationship. Is listening—or reading, or watching, for that matter—really so passive? Is a story simply a product to be consumed? I prefer Paul Hernadi's analogy, cited below:

> The requisite cognitive process involves what Sartre, referring to the reading of novels, called "directed creation": the reader's voluntary granting of his or her mental resources to figments of someone else's imagination. Far from being self-cued daydreaming, such directed creation is a collaborative act […] The notion of co-creation suggests that a literary transaction should be viewed not so much as production leading to consumption, but as seduction leading to consummation—to gratifying intercourse with someone else's imagination. (56)

Hernadi is speaking here specifically of reading, but listening to a story is also a collaborative act. Jonathan Gottschall agrees that reading or listening to a story is not a passive act (*Storytelling* Kindle Location 164) and offers his own analogy for the partnership between the writer and the reader:

> The writer is not, then, an all-powerful architect of our reading experience. The writer guides the way we imagine but does not determine it. A film begins with a writer producing a screenplay. But it is the director who brings the screenplay to life, filling in most of the details. So it is with any story. A writer lays down words, but they are inert.

> They need a catalyst to come to life. The catalyst is the reader's imagination. (*Storytelling* Kindle Location 177-179)

We do not passively receive stories. Imagining a story is work. Readers and listeners participate in stories. Even more so in Daniel's case, since he not only listens to Diane, but also becomes inextricably intertwined with the story when he publicly defends her and then goes on to become her lover. Daniel goes from listener to performer. He and Diane begin their years-long romance when he returns home from the dinner party, having defended her, because that is the moment when she falls in love with him:

> Si elle avait ourdi de si cruels mensonges, elle y avait été poussée par le désir de connaître le véritable amour. Cet amour, elle le sentait poindre dans son cœur, elle aimait d'Arthez ; elle était condamnée à le tromper, car elle voulait rester pour lui l'actrice sublime qui avait joué la comédie à ses yeux. (1004)

Diane's previous acting was more like that of Diderot's *comédien*: she was imitating someone in love without genuinely feeling the emotion herself. Her performance was based on observation and judgment; the narrator described it as "ce manège, froidement convenu mais divinement joué" (985). Ultimately, her performance is so successful that she convinces herself, an idea of Lucienne Frappier-Mazur's that I would like to revisit here: "Non seulement la comédie jouée par Diane de Maufrigneuse est plus vraie que nature, comme il se doit chez une actrice de cette qualité, mais encore cette comédie crée du réel. […] Elle arrive ainsi à créer un sentiment sincère, non seulement chez d'Arthez, mais en elle-même. Là réside le paradoxe : ce sentiment n'est viable qu'au prix d'une répétition indéfinie de la comédie qui l'a fait naître" (88). Artifice creates authenticity.

Diane's performance is not solely described in theatrical terms. In addition to all the references to Diane as an actor, a writer, and a director, there are also references to Diane as both an artist and a work of art, and these references further emphasize the idea that artifice creates authenticity. Jean-Loup Bourget writes about the connections between "Les Secrets" and the myth of Pygmalion, a connection made all the more important by the narrator's descriptions of Diane's poses, which often recall neo-classical statuary (271). It would be remiss to discuss

references to statues in the text without highlighting this clever remark in which the narrator compares Diane to Don Juan:

> Elle avait passé sa vie à s'amuser, elle était un vrai Don Juan femelle, à cette différence près que ce n'est pas à souper qu'elle eût invité la statue de pierre, et certes elle aurait eu raison de la statue. (982)

This comparison to literature's most famous seducer poses Diane not as the statue but as the person who dominates the statue, succeeding in this task even where Don Juan fails. The narrator's suggestion that Diane would have seduced the statue, coupled with the many indications in the text that d'Arthez is her project, allows us to see Diane as both Don Juan and Pygmalion. The network of connections between the Pygmalion myth and "Les Secrets" is richer and more complex than that, since we can also see Daniel as Pygmalion, since he idealizes women into the "délicieuse chimère" of which he dreams (964). This is also what Sarrasine does, imagining the object of his desire as an ideal that does not exist in nature, and in Sarrasine's particular case, sculpting that ideal. *La Comédie humaine* is not short on Pygmalions: Frenhofer also falls in love with the woman depicted in his painting. But as Bourget points out, Diane may be the most successful of any of them. She allows Daniel to think of himself as Pygmalion, but she is both Pygmalion and the statue: "En d'autres termes, [la] stratégie [de Diane] consiste notamment à donner à d'Arthez l'illusion qu'il est le Pygmalion d'une statue […] alors que c'est elle qui modèle d'Arthez au gré de sa fantaisie […] ; simultanément, Diane se prend au jeu et une âme s'éveille en effet dans son corps de statue" (277). Diane sculpts herself. She is both artist and artwork.

'Est-ce un dénouement ?'

So Diane and Daniel both have multiple roles, as objects of desire and as co-creators of this love story. D'Arthez, ultimately complicit in his own seduction and aware of the storytelling strategies that the princesse uses, is capable of living in the story and in the world. D'Arthez, a savvy reader who is able to balance absorption and suspension, can reconcile art and life. He enjoys the princesse's love, knowing that what she told him was fiction. He cannot admit this to

Madame d'Espard's dinner guests, so the dinner party scene remains ambiguous, and he does not tell Diane, so D'Arthez never makes his position explicit in the text. Armine Kotin Mortimer identifies this as one of the "secrets" of the story's title (31). Diane's secrets are thoroughly examined by the narrator, but Daniel's is left for readers to decipher.

The final two sentences of the text highlight this need for the text to be deciphered: "Est-ce un dénouement ? Oui, pour les gens d'esprit ; non, pour ceux qui veulent tout savoir" (1005). Mortimer points out that Balzac added these two sentences in 1844 for the Furne edition:

> Until 1844 the final paragraph faithfully followed terminal conventions: the accounting of the characters' fates, the affective distance, and the switch to the present tense and even the perfect were all typical of realistic closures. The inheritance compensating for the princess' penury is especially clotural. But with the last sentences, which are crucial to the closure, Balzac redirects these closing summaries and subtly orients the story's meaning in a particular way. (28)

These two final sentences have been the subject of much critical commentary, since they do effectively undermine the closure offered by the first version of the ending. By adding these final lines, and offering the possible that this is not, in fact, a dénouement, Balzac opens up the ending instead of closing it off. The narrator cuts off our access, while simultaneously implying that there is more to the story. According to Madeleine Simons, this ending "renverse toutes les prévisions et force le lecteur à s'interroger a posteriori sur le sens du récit" (351). In a sense, one must reread, or at least rethink, the whole story after reading this dénouement, since it contains this model. It's a very ambiguous model, because it asks the reader to choose between "les gens d'esprit" and "ceux qui veulent tout savoir," and it is not entirely clear which of these two is the right choice, if there is a right choice. This model offers us two ways of reading Balzac's text, as there are two way of "reading" the princesse de Cadignan's story: the way that Madame d'Espard's guests read it, and Daniel d'Arthez's reading.

These final lines draw attention to the story *as a story* and asks readers to evaluate our own reaction, just as being confronted with Béatrix's reaction to the embedded story in "Sarrasine" leads us to contemplate the relationship between life and art. "Sarrasine" takes a bleak view of this relationship, since Sarrasine's powerful imagination, passionate nature, and

lack of social sensitivity lead to deception and then death. Béatrix, neither cursed nor blessed with a genius like Sarrasine's, chooses to shutter her heart in order to protect herself from the possible deceptions of both life and art.

In "Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan," written nine years after "Sarrasine," Balzac offers a new option. "Il est délicieux d'être ainsi trompé" (989) by an author or an actress as skilled as the princesse (or Balzac) and "les gens d'esprit" are those who can enjoy the seduction. These witty readers are not completely victims of the seductive power of a text, because they are complicit in it. They consent to the game. D'Arthez accepts the story as a story. He has recognized the princesse's many indications that she is creating and performing a work of art, and thus he is able to take pleasure in her seduction rather than becoming an unwitting dupe. It is possible for those with artistic temperaments and powerful imaginations to live happily in the world, just as it is possible to navigate the complex relationship between life and art, provided we read carefully enough.

CHAPTER THREE: 'Une passion toute romanesque' : Seduction and Illusion in George Sand's "La Marquise," "Metella," and *Isidora*

"Mon Lélio à moi, c'était un être factice" (74), says the titular character of George Sand's 1832 short story "La Marquise," while recounting her tragic youthful love to an anonymous male narrator. Invented, imagined, and idealized lovers populate the three texts treated in this chapter. The marquise falls in love with an actor, while the young male protagonists of "Metella" and *Isidora* fall in love with women before ever truly meeting them. References to artifice and illusion, like the marquise speaking of her beloved "être factice," permeate all three stories and raise questions about illusion and reality and the power of art—theater, oral storytelling, writing—over the imagination.

These texts have received far less scholarly attention than "Sarrasine" and they merit more. Without denying the power of art to produce seductive illusions, Sand's texts critique instead the social reality that bases women's worth on their reputations and treats them as "des êtres secondaires dans la société" (*Isidora* 33). Sparked by art, theater, reading, or oral storytelling, the imagination can offer access to a more just society than the ones to which Sand's female characters are confined, and thus it poses a danger to the established order. The three female protagonists of these texts desire things that society denies them: independence and lasting, loving relationships based on mutual respect. The marquise seeks the fulfillment of her desire through the theater and Isidora seeks her through a performance in the world. Metella tries to hold the attention of her lover by living up to the idealized version of her that he has heard stories about. These strategies all fail. Art and the imagination, however, are not universally condemned. For Sand, there is a right way and a wrong to consume and create art. Isidora is wrong to seduce Jacques with her eloquence performance, but she is not wrong to write about her life in letters to Alice. In the first case, she deceives and hurts both Jacques and herself, but in the second, her self-expression through writing is coupled with efforts to improve the world around her. Characters must keep the real world in mind when they engage with art.

Theatrical performance is a recurring theme in Sand's works and her representations of the theater evolve over the course of her career. "La Marquise" is an early work that focuses explicitly on the individual experience of attending the theater, while later works often focus more on the community created among performers or between the performers and their audience.[43] These communities often have utopian qualities, where society's prejudices and injustices are overcome; while "La Marquise" focuses on the individual audience member's connection with an individual actor rather than a community, the theater still acts as a space where gender and class are no longer rigid, restrictive categories. Olivier Bara calls it an "espace de transgression où l'illusion permet de réaliser le fantasme" (190). The theater is not only a space where we transform society, but also a space where we transform ourselves. Transformation of society and transformation of the self are inextricable for Sand: neither the marquise, nor Metella, nor Isidora is free to be herself within society's unjust constraints on women. So Sand's interest in theatricality goes hand in hand with an interest in identity and the composition of the self.[44]

Identity is a major theme in *Isidora*, an 1845 novel in which Jacques Laurent, a solitary Rousseau-esque writer, falls in love with his elegant Parisian neighbor Julie and a mysterious courtesan Isidora; the two ultimately turn out to be the same woman. *Isidora* is longer than many of the other works in this corpus, but I have chosen to include it because it includes key scenes of oral storytelling and the power of art over the imagination is central to the story: Jacques and Isidora are both writers and readers, and Isidora's work as a courtesan is often compared to that

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[43] For more on theater and community in Sand, see Olivier Bara, "Représentations sandiennes du public de théâtre : la communauté impossible ?" *George Sand - Écritures et Représentations*, Ed. Eric Bordas, Paris: Eurédit, 2004, 183–206. See also Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, "Le Monde du théâtre et le rêve communautaire dans les romans de George Sand," *Romanic Review* 96.3/4 (2005): 409–420. For more on Sand's treatment of theater throughout her career, see Olivier Bara, "L'esthétique théâtrale de la 'fille de Sedaine': un dialogue contradictoire avec le dix-huitième siècle," *George Sand: Intertextualité et Polyphonie I. Palimpsestes, Échanges, Réécritures*. Peter Lang, 2010, 127–143.

[44] Deborah Houk Schocket explores seduction and the creation or fragmentation of identities at length in *Modes of Seduction: Sexual Power in Balzac and Sand*. See also Evelyne Ender, "'Une femme qui rêve n'est pas tout à fait une femme': Lélia en rupture d'identité," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 29.3-4 (1990): 226-246.

of an actress. For Sand, as for Balzac, an artistic temperament makes characters more likely to fall prey to the illusions offered by art, which are frequently synonymous with the word "roman" in the text. Finally, like "La Marquise" and "Metella," *Isidora* pays particular attention to the consequences of seduction for women. As a courtesan, Isidora is in a particularly precarious social position; as upper-class women, the marquise and Metella have a different set of problems, but none of them is able to participate freely and fully in society. Ultimately, they all withdraw from society: the marquise becomes reclusive in her old age, Metella leaves Florence for the Swiss countryside, and Isidora leaves Paris for the Italian countryside. None of them end up in the relationships they desire, but all is not lost: the marquise, Metella, and Isidora all achieve some degree of independence once they have left city life.

In *Isidora*, the word "roman" is frequently used to indicate something impossible, absurd, or illusory in the context of love. The word "romanesque" also frequently appears in these texts. Littré gives the following definitions for this term: "Qui a le caractère du roman", "Qui tient du roman, merveilleux, fabuleux", and "Exalté, chimérique, comme les personnages de roman" ("Romanesque"). It is easy to slide from "associated with novels" to "fantastic" or "imaginary." "Imaginary" or "taken straight out of a novel" seem like the most appropriate synonyms for the marquise's use of "romanesque" when she describes her youthful love as "une passion toute intellectuelle, toute romanesque" (58): the love she feels is a creation of her own mind, inspired by illusory love stories. When Olivier confesses to having fallen in love with Metella through stories of her beauty and bravery, despite never having met her, Buondelmonte disdainfully calls Olivier "un peu romanesque" (172); Olivier's fascination with the stories renders him ridiculous, or perhaps the best translation is quixotic.

While these texts acknowledge the illusory nature of the visions of love offered by novels and the theater, Sand does not lay the blame for such illusions on the stories themselves, or on the passionate imaginations of her characters. Instead, it is an unjust society that prevents these ideal forms of love from being realized. But characters can use their drive to create and engage in

art for good: the marquise and Isidora become a storyteller and a writer, respectively, and this allows them to reflect critically on their lives and their places in society.

'Aimer un fantôme de comédie': Theater and Seduction in George Sand's "La Marquise"

In "La Marquise," readers are first introduced to the titular character through the anonymous male narrator. She is in her eighties, and the narrator visits her in her bedroom, where she tells him the story of the great love of her life. The marquise tells this story while seated under a portrait of herself as she was in the eighteenth century, young and beautiful. When she was young, she fell in love with an actor named Lélio. The love story is both strange and tumultuous, as the marquise falls in love with Lélio without ever having met him. Much like for Sarrasine with Zambinella, it is Lélio's presence on stage that sparks the marquise's passion. She keeps her love secret and unreciprocated for some time, attending the theater in disguise. But eventually she is tempted into following Lélio out of the theater and into a café. Seeing him out of character devastates her. The real man is nothing like the characters he plays. But the marquise can only stay away from the theater for so long, and once she returns, she falls in love with Lélio's stage presence all over again. It is at this point, when she is brought to tears by his performance and cries away all of her makeup, that Lélio finally notices her and reciprocates her love. They embark on a three-year affair through the medium of the theater: she goes to his performances and he performs for her, and they never meet outside of this context. The affair ends when they decide to meet in person. Lélio wants to consummate their love, and the marquise refuses, wishing to keep their love in the realm of the ideal. The marquise never knows another passion like the one she felt for Lélio. This concludes her story, and afterward, she asks the young male narrator if he still believes in "la vertu du dix-huitième siècle" (92) and he replies that he suspects the marquise would have slept with Lélio had she not had herself bled the afternoon before meeting him. The marquise then speaks the last line of the story: "Misérables hommes ! … Vous ne comprenez rien à l'histoire du cœur" (92).

In "La Marquise," theatrical illusion allows access to an ideal love that cannot exist in the real world. I will briefly discuss three aspects of illusion in this chapter: what I will term "performance," that is, conveying emotions (whether genuinely felt or not) through one's voice, facial expression, body language, and words; set decoration, or descriptions of space; and costume and makeup. Acting does not only occur on stage in *La Marquise*. Indeed, costume, makeup, and set decoration take on as much importance outside the theater as within it. The marquise does nearly as much disguising herself and performing as Lélio, since she hides her love for him from the jealous vicomte de Larrieux and sneaks into the theater in disguise. Lélio's work as an actor serves an inspiration to the marquise, motivating her to engage in all this deception. The marquise's disguises allow her a freedom to explore herself and her desires that is not available in her daily life as an aristocratic woman. The illusions of the theater are not confined to the space of the theater, a point that is underlined by the effects of the marquise's oral storytelling in the frame story. As she finishes her story, the male narrator remarks how much younger and more beautiful she looks, as though he has conflated the old woman with the portrait of her younger self hanging behind her. The narrator is enthralled. This is a testament to the marquise's storytelling skill.

In his book *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction*, Ross Chambers argues that "literary narrative, as represented by the short story as an 'art tale,' includes as part of its self-reference system specific indications of the narrative situation appropriate to it" (4). In other words, the text offers directions that can guide the reader in their interpretation. These directions often take the form of a character in the text who responds to an embedded narrative; in the case of "La Marquise," the marquise herself, the male narrator, and Lélio are all shown reacting to stories or plays. The marquise and the male narrator interpret the story that she tells very differently: after hearing the story, which the marquise offers as a singular example of ideal love, the narrator ignores its emotional resonance in favor of focusing on the fact that the marquise had herself bled before she last saw Lélio. He attributes the marquise's refusal to sleep with Lélio to her physical weakness rather than to her emotional

resolve. The last line of the text, in which the marquise tells the narrator "vous ne comprenez rien à l'histoire du cœur" (92), could either be a condemnation of the narrator's reading or an amused, ironic retort.

The marquise presents her own behavior in this way: she refuses to sleep with Lélio because sex would bring their love down from the realm of the ideal into the real, physical world, thus defiling it. The marquise has only had meaningless, unpleasant sex in her life. She will not pollute her connection to Lélio with that kind of contact. She denies her physical desire in order to preserve her love. By desiring Lélio as Hippolyte or Rodrigue or Dom Juan, the marquise idealizes him. Indeed, Lélio is "more than just an actor--he is an actor with a special talent for playing Corneille, the paradigm of idealism in classical French drama" (Schor 50). But desire, once consummated, eventually dies out. By refusing to sleep with Lélio, the marquise ensures that their love story remains in the realm of the intangible and the imaginary and the ideal where it began, inspired by Lélio's performances in the theater and then remembered and reawakened by the marquise's own storytelling performance. However, the narrator's doubts in the frame story undermine the marquise's presentation of her motivations as virtuous.

Attending a live theatrical performance is more like listening to a story told aloud than it is like reading a printed text, although all of these experiences require the use of theory of mind. They are also all crucial elements of "La Marquise": storytelling and theatrical performance all occur within the text, and of course, "La Marquise" itself is a printed text, so our access to it is through reading. But it is important to respect the differences in these three media, especially the difference between reading a story and hearing or watching one. Lisa Zunshine makes the following remarks about performance and theory of mind:

> …performance, after all, engages our Theory of Mind in ways markedly different from those practiced by the novel, for it offers no "going behind," in James's parlance, that is, no voiceover explaining the protagonists' states of mind (though in some plays the function of such a voiceover is assumed, to a limited degree, by a Chorus or a narrator figure). Instead, we have to construct those mental states from the observable actions and from what the protagonists choose to report to us (e.g., "Irina: I don't know why I feel so lighthearted today"; "Nina: I am happy!"; "Treplev: I wish you knew how miserable I am!"). Moreover, in the case of the live performance—as opposed, that is, to simply

> reading the text of the play—this exercise of our mind-reading capacity is crucially mediated by the physical presence of actors and thus the wealth of embodied information (or misinformation) about their characters' hidden thoughts and feelings. (*Why We Read Fiction* 23)

Attending a live performance is thus more like listening to oral storytelling than reading, because both the actors and the storyteller can share information through their physical presence. There are some key differences between the two experiences, though. A live performance is done in front of a large audience and thus lacks the intimacy of the kind of storytelling that the marquise is doing in her boudoir with the narrator. The eighteenth-century theatrical performances described in the text would have taken place in a space dedicated solely to performance, with a division between the performers and the audience: a stage, a curtain, and a space for the audience to sit or stand. It is not generally acceptable to interrupt a live performance with commentary or questions or intensely personal emotional reactions like weeping, but these interruptions are far more tolerated in the context of oral storytelling. Such interruptions are a frequent feature of texts with the structure of "La Marquise"—a frame story and an embedded story—and the male narrator does indeed interrupt the marquise at one point. He also comments on her story at the end. Theatrical performance does not generally invite discussion or criticism after the play, or anything other than applause or booing, but oral storytelling does. The male narrator will comment on the marquise's tale, just as Béatrix comments on the tale in "Sarrasine" and Daniel d'Arthez comments on the story told in "Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan." This tradition of commentary by listener-characters goes at least as far back as Boccaccio's *Decameron*. These distinctions between theatrical performance and oral storytelling are especially important in "La Marquise" because they become progressively more blurred as the story goes on.

And there is yet one more layer to keep in mind here: the marquise is recounting her experience at the theater to the male narrator, and the male narrator is telling readers about it in a printed text. Reading a text about the experience of going to the theater is not the same as going to the theater: the marquise's mind-reading is mediated by Lélio's physical presence, but our mind-reading of the marquise is mediated by her words, and then filtered once more through the male narrator's frame story. There are moments when the marquise, in the audience of Lélio's

performances, offers her opinion about his thoughts or feelings, so it is as if his theatrical performance *does* offer a "going behind." The marquise fills in the blanks with her own interpretations. Her interpretations, however, are contained within a chain of intentionalities: the information to keep track of is not simply "the marquise *thinks* that Lélio *feels* a particular way" but "the narrator *thinks* that the marquise *thinks* that Lélio *feels* a particular way." Further complicating the chain of intentionalities are a number of moments in which the narrator and the marquise give us conflicting information. At the beginning of the frame story, he tells us that she is not "fort spirituelle" (45) or possessed of deep understanding of the world. Readers are reminded of this conflict at the end of the frame story when the marquise rejects—whether sincerely or ironically—the male narrator's interpretation of her story. Misinterpretation at any stage of the chain makes all of the information volatile; if the narrator wrongly interprets the marquise, then who is to say that the marquise is not wrongly interpreting Lélio? As with any information presented by a text, savvy readers will draw their own conclusions.

In this section, I will show how Sand establishes a singular emotional connection between the marquise and Lélio. The marquise and Lélio develop a shared understanding, founded on theory of mind, and as the story progresses, we see the marquise learn from Lélio and develop a performance style—and a 'charm'—all her own. The text privileges this emotional connection as rare and genuine, even though it is forged in the theater.

The fact that the marquise has her own particular interpretations of Lélio is frequently highlighted in the story she tells. Lélio is considered "un comédien de mauvais goût" (60) by the public. He is scorned and misunderstood by everyone but the marquise, and the general public's rejection of Lélio makes the marquise more sympathetic to him. The marquise feels as though she was not meant to be an eighteenth-century marquise, and it seems to her that Lélio also belongs to a bygone era: "C'était un homme qui, en fait d'art, n'était pas plus de son siècle qu'en fait de mœurs je n'étais du mien" (60). The marquise is thus uniquely well-suited to be touched by Lélio's performance, and what she loves about him is what everyone else criticizes: his unusual acting, based on deep feeling and expressiveness rather than stylized recitation, is out of

fashion at the time, according to the marquise. This is the marquise's opinion of eighteenth-century acting styles, which perhaps says more about Sand's own preferences as a theater critic in the nineteenth century than it does about actual eighteenth century theater; Shira Malkin points out, in her assessment of Sand's theater criticism, that Sand had a marked preference for a more emotional, expressive style of acting in her own theater criticism (74). The marquise is instantly captivated by Lélio and she feels as though he is performing solely for her, which eventually becomes the case after he notices her. Even though Lélio performs in front of a crowded theater, it is as though he is there only for the marquise. This intimate rapport between a performer and a single audience member makes attending the theater more like listening to a story in the privacy of someone's home, which is what is occurring in the frame story.

The sudden and intense personal connection between audience member and performer is also what occurs in "Sarrasine" when Sarrasine first sees and hears Zambinella on stage, so it is notable that the marquise is also moved by Lélio's voice, which is "plus pénétrante que sonore, une voix nerveuse et accentuée" (61). Sand emphasizes the physicality and the sensuality of the voice with the word "penetrating." Balzac also frequently evokes touch in his descriptions of voices: Zambinella's voice, which is like a touch on Sarrasine's skin, drives Sarrasine into a frenzied, orgasmic state in the theater. The voice is a key element of seduction in the Balzacian texts explored in the previous two chapters, whether in song or in speech, although the exact words that are spoken are often left out of the text in favor of a description of the tone, a tactic that Sand also employs in this scene. The adjective "penetrating" equates the passage of sound into the ears with the physical act of sexual penetration, but what is being exchanged here is more intimate than the physical could ever be. Sex only penetrates the body, after all, while sounds go through the ears and into the mind.

It is not only Lélio's voice that has a special effect on the marquise. She finds Lélio beautiful, while the public finds him too small and frail to represent the tragic heroes he portrays:

> Lélio était petit et grêle ; sa beauté ne consistait pas dans les traits, mais dans la noblesse du front, dans la grâce irrésistible des attitudes, dans l'abandon de la démarche, dans l'expression fière et mélancolique de la physionomie. (61-2)

Lélio's beauty is not physical. It is something ineffable, located more in his performance than his body. From the moment she sees him on stage, the marquise is obsessed. She repeats the word "charme" twice in her description:

> C'est pour lui qu'aurait dû être créé le mot de *charme*, qui s'appliquait à toutes ses paroles, à tous ses regards, à tous ses mouvements. (62, italics in text)
>
> Que vous dirai-je ! Ce fut en effet un *charme* jeté sur moi. (62, italics in text)

Lélio's on-stage presence is magical. Paradoxically, Lélio's personal charm is what allows him to erase himself and become his characters. The marquise believes in him completely when she watches, accepting the theatrical illusion as real: "Je ne savais bientôt plus distinguer l'erreur de la vérité. Lélio n'existait plus pour moi : c'était Rodrigue, c'était Bajazet, c'était Hippolyte" (68). She is totally immersed in the fictional world of these tragedies. Lélio's performance allows the theatrical illusion to blur into reality.

The marquise loves the particular fusion of Lélio and these tragic heroes, rather than the man himself, which becomes abundantly clear when she follows Lélio out of the theater and into a café.

> Quand, à la clarté d'un mauvais lustre enfumé, j'eus jeté les yeux sur Lélio, je crus m'être trompée et avoir suivi un autre que lui. […] Ce n'était plus Hippolyte, c'était Lélio. Le temple était vide et pauvre ; l'oracle était muet ; le dieu s'était fait homme ; pas même homme, comédien. (70)

Stripped of his stage make-up and his costume, outside the carefully lit and decorated theater, Lélio no longer resembles Hippolyte, Bajazet, or Rodrigue. He is only Lélio, older and less attractive than the marquise had thought, "pas même homme, comédien." This moment of seeing the actor off stage, out of costume, also occurs for the first interlocutor in Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien*: when he first sees the actor la Clairon off stage, he cries out "Ah ! mademoiselle, je vous croyais de toute la tête plus grande" (1014). We expect actors to be larger than life—literally, in the case of Diderot's interlocutor. The disappointment of seeing the person instead of the role makes the actor seem smaller, and in Lélio's case, less than human. This moment of disappointment raises the question of what, exactly, constitutes Lélio's charm. His charm seems to exist only when he is on stage playing a role, and even then, it exists only for the

marquise. The other audience members do not like his voice or his face or his acting. Lélio's charm is not located in his person, but in the marquise's perception of him.

However, the disappointing sight of Lélio in the café, in dim light and without make-up, is rejected once the marquise returns to the theater to see Lélio on stage again. The reality of Lélio the man has no value for the marquise, so she pushes it aside in favor of the illusion of Lélio the actor, using exactly the language that people normally use to reject illusions by calling the disappointment "un rêve" (71, 72). On stage, Lélio is still in possession of his charm; her peek behind the curtains, so to speak, has not ruined his performance for her. The marquise realizes at this moment that it is not Lélio himself who is the object of her affection:

> De ce soir seulement je compris l'espèce d'amour qui m'enchaînait à Lélio : c'était une passion toute intellectuelle, toute romanesque. Ce n'était pas lui que j'aimais, mais le héros des anciens jours qu'il savait représenter ; ces types de franchise, de loyauté et de tendresse à jamais perdus revivaient en lui, et je me trouvais avec lui et par lui reportée à une époque de vertus désormais oubliées. […] Lélio n'était pour moi que l'ombre du Cid, que le représentant de l'amour antique et chevaleresque dont on se moquait maintenant en France. Lui, l'homme, l'histrion, je ne le craignais guère, je l'avais vu ; je ne pouvais l'aimer qu'en public. Mon Lélio à moi, c'était un être factice que je ne pouvais plus saisir dès qu'on éloignait le lustre de la Comédie. Il lui fallait l'illusion de la scène, le reflet des quinquets, le fard du costume pour être celui que j'aimais. (74)

The tricks of the theater—the stage decor, the lighting, the make-up, the costume—work to conceal the disappointing reality of Lélio the actor, just as they simultaneously help to reveal him as someone who is capable of channeling Rodrigue or Hippolyte, someone who understands "l'amour antique et chevaleresque" for which the marquise longs. "[L]'illusion de la scène" makes her love possible, because it creates someone—"un être factice," a character—worthy of loving. Despite the fact that she's in love with an illusion, with a man who only exists on stage, the marquise's passion is real. She feels it as strongly, or perhaps more strongly, as she would if she were in love with a flesh-and-blood man. Her passion for Lélio is what allows her to enjoy life, to be lifted out of despair, and "jusqu'à un certain point [cette passion] me faisait femme" (63).

Perhaps ironically, it is the absence of these theatrical accessories that causes Lélio to notice the marquise at last. His performance makes her emotional, and she is unable to hold in her response. She weeps openly and causes all of her make-up to run (73), and that is when Lélio

notices her. She sees him gesture toward her and ask someone about her. From this moment on, it becomes clear to her that Lélio is performing especially for her, and finally her peculiar love is reciprocated. The marquise is overjoyed by these performances, "car à ces heures-là ce n'était pas du comédien, c'était du héros que j'étais aimée" (76). The theater provides the only possibility for this kind of heroic, ideal love affair, which the disappointments of the real world—and, particularly for the marquise, the social mores of the eighteenth-century—render impossible. The marquise cannot love an actor. She cannot even love a man of her own social rank, because no one possesses the "loyauté" and the "tendresse" that she desires (74). These virtues are "oubliées" in her era (74), according to the marquise. She can only love an illusion.

In order to pursue her affair in secret, the marquise becomes an actor herself in some ways. She dresses differently and she also learns to perform. Her whole life becomes like a stage. The physical space of the theater is frequently described, and spaces outside the theater take on a theatrical aspect. Bernard-Griffiths writes that "le progrès de l'intrigue se confond avec un rapprochement de plus en plus poussé de la scène et de l'acteur qui s'y produit" (63). The marquise physically moves closer to the stage—and Lélio—with every subsequent visit to the theater until finally she has a *loge* right in front of the stage. Lélio notices her at that point, thus beginning their mutual affair of the imagination. Bernard-Griffiths argues that the marquise's slow advance through the space of the theater represents the intensification of her love for Lélio (64-5).

Sand describes not only where in the audience the marquise is seated, but also the marquise's secretive and circuitous route to the theater:

> Vers huit heures, je me faisais descendre à la petite église des Carmélites, près le Luxembourg ; je renvoyais ma voiture, et j'étais censée assister à des conférences religieuses qui s'y tenaient à cette heure-là ; mais je ne faisais que traverser l'église et le jardin ; je sortais par une autre rue. (67)

Even before Lélio notices the marquise, she incorporates a kind of theatrical deception into her approach to the theater. She shows up at the church so that everyone will see her there. She walks through the church and its garden, as though on display, crossing a stage. Then she disappears unexpectedly, "par une autre rue," as though through a trap door or behind a curtain.

The marquise uses the space of the city deceptively, to provide the illusion that she is attending church. She uses the space of the theater itself in a similarly deceptive way: while she is attending the theater in secret, she bribes one of the employees to let her watch the plays from a hidden space where no one else can see her (67). This use of space is reminiscent of many "témoin caché" scenes that are common in the plays the marquise herself is watching. There is such a scene, for instance, in act III of *Le Cid*, where Rodrigue hides just out of sight while Chimène confesses to Elvire that she loves him. The marquise first encounters Lélio when he is playing the role of Rodrigue, but she enacts this role in her own way as well.

Sand's emphasis on the physical space of the theater serves to show how the theater overflows its confines. Olivier Bara describes the relationship between the theater and the world like this: "Spectacle de part et d'autre de la rampe : le théâtre vient légitimer la théâtralité du monde, laquelle ne se reflète et ne se mire nulle part mieux qu'au théâtre." ("Représentations sandiennes" 189). While Bara is correct that the stage and the world are both spaces of performance, I would argue that Sand distinguishes between two types of theatricality. The marquise's costume changes on her way into the theater seem innocuous compared to how she has spent the rest of her life forced into playing the roles of wife and mistress, even though she feels nothing for her husband or the vicomte de Larrieux. Society obliges the marquise to play these roles despite her lack of feeling, whereas she is motivated to go to Lélio's performances by genuine desire. Lélio inspires these feelings in the marquise thanks to his acting. Sand opposes Lélio's performance style, scorned by the general public and based on genuine feeling, to the empty theatricality of the rest of the world, in which people imitate emotions that they do not truly feel.

Another way in which the theatricality of the world is emphasized is the focus on the marquise's physical appearance and her costumes. The marquise herself is not physically described by the narrator, but her portrait is described in detail before she tells her story.

> Elle n'avait pas eu une de ces beautés piquantes qui, manquant d'éclat et de régularité, ne pouvaient se passer d'esprit. Une femme ainsi faite en acquérait pour devenir aussi belle que celles qui l'étaient davantage. La marquise, au contraire, avait eu le malheur d'être incontestablement belle. Je n'ai vu d'elle que son portrait, qu'elle avait, comme toutes les

> vieilles femmes, la coquetterie d'étaler dans sa chambre à tous les regards. Elle y était représentée en nymphe chasseresse, avec un corsage de satin imprimé imitant la peau de tigre, des manches de dentelle, un arc de bois de sandal et un croissant de perles qui se jouait sur ses cheveux crêpés. C'était, malgré tout, une admirable peinture, et surtout une admirable femme ; grande, svelte, brune, avec des mains qui, dit-on, avaient fait le désespoir de la princesse de Lamballe. Sans la dentelle, le satin et la poudre, c'eût été vraiment là une de ces nymphes fières et agiles que les mortels apercevaient au fond des forêts ou sur le flanc des montagnes pour en devenir fous d'amour et de regret. (46-7)

This portrait serves as a kind of set decoration for the frame story. It is displayed in the marquise's apartment, where the marquise tells her story to the narrator, thus providing the narrator (and consequently, the reader) with an image of what the marquise once looked like.

The marquise is an eighty-year-old woman in the story's present, but in her youthful portrait, she is represented "en nymphe chasseresse." Artemis, the virginal goddess of hunting, comes to mind, especially because the marquise is depicted with "un arc de bois de sandal." The marquise's costume in the portrait is rather elaborate for hunting, since it is made of satin, lace, and pearls. The narrator mentions these details first in his description, and then offers the opinion that "[s]ans la dentelle, le satin et la poudre,"—without her costume, in other words—the marquise might really have been a nymph, the mere sight of whom would drive mortals mad "d'amour et de regret." This ominous prediction, like the portrait itself, hangs over the telling of the embedded story of lost love.

In addition to this focus on the marquise's physical beauty, there is a great deal of focus on the way she dresses. Before the marquise encounters the love of her life, she is miserable, scorned by other women and uninterested in men. She speaks of her despair in these words: "Moi, malheureuse, qu'avais-je à faire sur la terre ? Rien qu'à me parer, à me montrer et à m'ennuyer" (50). Dressing up and showing herself off are equated with boredom, with a lack of purpose in life. However, the marquise undergoes a radical change after she goes to the theater and sees Lélio on stage, playing Rodrigue from *Le Cid*. She falls in love with him, but knows that she cannot show her affection to a man whose social rank is so much lower than hers. Unable to control her expression while she watches Lélio's performance, the marquise gives up her loge in the theater so as not to reveal her feelings.

However, she continues to attend the theater in secret, which requires an elaborate scheme, complete with multiple disguises. First, she pretends to become "dévote" (62) to give herself the excuse that she is attending church in the evenings in order to pray. In fact, what she is doing is secretly dressing up as a prostitute—"je m'habillais en grisette"—in order to go to the theater without being noticed. Later, she discards this disguise in favor of the safer costume of a student, an "écolier" (63).[45] In her old age, the marquise retrospectively reflects on all these costume changes as "folies," for at this point, her younger self had not even exchanged "un regard" with Lélio (63). But these follies "avaient pour moi tout l'attrait du mystère et toute l'illusion du bonheur" (63). Her costume changes, themselves a form of illusion, are now associated with the illusion of happiness. Prior to encountering Lélio, the marquise associates dressing up with boredom and despair. As her love affair with Lélio progresses, she begins to take pleasure in her own appearance.

The marquise has to give up attending the theater in secret when her lover, the vicomte de Larrieux, becomes suspicious. Instead, she returns to attending the theater publicly, and she begins to dress for the occasion. Her love for Lélio makes her more radiant than ever before, and she takes pride in her appearance. She describes her costume to the narrator at great length, but the most interesting passage is one that hearkens back to the portrait hanging on her apartment wall:

> Je sortais tantôt avec une robe de velours nacarat garnie de grèbe, tantôt avec une tunique de satin blanc, bordée de peau de tigre, quelquefois avec un habit complet de damas lilas lamé d'argent, et des plumes blanches montées en perles. (66)

The elements of the marquise's various outfits here recall what she is wearing in the portrait, which also contains satin and pearls. The marquise's white satin tunic has a tiger skin border, which recalls the tiger-skin print satin that she wears in the portrait. The tiger skin, associated with wildness and passion, is a sharp contrast to the pearls, which are white and delicate and associated with virginity. In the marquise's portrait, she is represented as a "nymphe

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[45] Sand employed this strategy in her own life. See *Histoire de ma vie* in *Œuvres autobiographiques*, Ed. Georges Lubin, II, Paris: Gallimard, 1971.

chasseresse" (46), like Artemis, and the male narrator reflects she might really be such a creature, without her elaborate (and somewhat ridiculous) costume.

The marquise is again compared to a figure from mythology near the end of the embedded story, when she goes to meet Lélio outside the theater for the second and last time. She does not wear a tiger skin. Weak from being bled and full of anxiety that this second meeting might be as disappointing as the first, the marquise dons "le plus simple et le plus chaste de mes habits," "aucun ornement" and no rouge (84) for her meeting. Her chamber maid tells her that she looks more beautiful than ever. Totally unadorned, the marquise is now most like the "nymphe" (46) that male narrator imagined she could be if only she would discard the frivolous costume in her portrait. Her singular accoutrement is a veil that covers her face in order to protect her identity while she travels through the city.

The marquise meets Lélio in a *petite maison*, not in the theater. But the private boudoir where they meet is described like a set. "La présence de la théâtralité, dans la nouvelle de 1832, est si forte qu'elle annexe au théâtre même les lieux qui paraissaient pouvoir lui échapper" (Bernard-Griffiths 65). The *petite maison* is dark, because the marquise goes at midnight, and this darkness is emphasized multiple times in her description: a valet directs her through "un sombre jardin" toward "un pavillon enseveli dans l'ombre et le silence," and then he opens the door to "un appartement obscur et profond," which is lit by a single "rayon de lumière" (85). The darkness and the silence of the space make it like an empty theater, and the single ray of light seems like deliberate decoration. The valet leaves the marquise at this point. Alone and anxious, she makes her way through the apartment to a boudoir, which, in contrast to the darkness of the rest of the space, is entirely decorated in white. The walls are of "stuc blanc comme la neige," decorated with mirrors framed in "argent mat" (86). The furniture is upholstered in "velours blanc" and decorated with pearls (86). The space is lit from above but the light is filtered through "feuilles d'albâtre" so that it looks like "[la clarté] de la lune" (86). There is a single decoration in the room:

> Une seule statue de marbre blanc en décorait le milieu ; elle était antique, et représentait Isis voilée, avec un doigt sur ses lèvres. Les glaces qui nous reflétaient, elle et moi, pâles

> et vêtues de blanc, et chastement drapées toutes deux, me faisaient illusion au point qu'il me fallait remuer pour distinguer sa forme de la mienne. (87)

The marquise and Isis are both dressed simply in white and both veiled, and they look so much alike that the marquise has to move in order to dispel the "illusion" that she and Isis are one and the same. Isis is often associated with Artemis, the virginal goddess of the hunt evoked by the marquise's portrait. The marquise's white dress, veil, and the adverb "chastement" also evoke virginity.[46] The marquise, having recently been bled, is quite pale herself, and the effect of all this white in the darkness of the room is ghostly; she is as much a "fantôme de comédie" (74) as Lélio.

The marquise fears that she will be disappointed when Lélio arrives, but she is wrong. In this beautiful setting, lit as if by moonlight, "Lélio était beau comme les anges ; il n'avait pas pris le temps d'ôter son costume de théâtre : c'était le plus élégant que je lui eusse vu. […] C'était dans ce costume qu'il venait de jouer le rôle de don Juan du *Festin de Pierre*" (87). Lélio appears young and beautiful to the marquise because he is still in costume. He is dressed as don Juan, having just come from the theater, where he would have been dragged to Hell by a marble statue in the final scenes of Molière's play. In this scene, Lélio encounters another statue in the form of the marquise. They are both moved by the sight of each other, and they play out a dramatic little scene. The marquise addresses him as "Mon cher Lélio, mon grand Rodrigue, mon beau don Juan !" (88-9), complicating the issue of his identity by simultaneously recognizing him as Lélio and calling him the names of two roles that he has played. Considering how the marquise superimposes Lélio's theatrical roles on his real-world identity, it is not so surprising that she wonders "Hélas ! S'abusait-il lui-même ? Jouait-il la comédie?" (89) after Lélio makes a passionate confession of love to her.

The marquise's questioning of Lélio's sincerity at this crucial point causes the male narrator to interrupt her. It has been quite some time since he intervened, so the embedded story may have totally eclipsed the frame story for some readers. "Je ne le crois certainement pas" (89)

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[46] Isis is not a virgin goddess in Egyptian mythology but she later became associated not only with Artemis but also with the Virgin Mary.

he interjects. The marquise, unlike the narrator, leaves her own question unanswered. She is more at ease with the doubt that arises from this overlapping of illusion and reality. As Scott Carpenter writes about the narrator's interruption, "Du coup, les rôles sont inversés, et le narrateur qui, au début de la nouvelle, accusait la marquise de naïveté, s'avère plus innocent ; seulement la marquise se permet une double lecture de la situation" (757).

The male narrator also takes a moment to point out here that the marquise's storytelling renders her younger and more beautiful: "Elle semblait rajeunir en parlant et dépouiller ses cent ans, comme la fée Urgèle" (89). The fairy Urgèle is a character who first appears as an old woman and then transforms herself into a younger woman (Collegium musicum), an inherently deceptive creature. Telling the story makes the marquise seem younger, more like the portrait that hangs on the wall behind her, and perhaps more like the statue in the final scene of her story.

Like sculpture and painting, a story also has the ability to preserve a moment in time. George Sand was an art critic and an amateur artist and she wrote about this aspect of the visual arts in *Histoire de ma vie*:

> Je contemplais, j'étais dominée, j'étais transportée dans un monde nouveau. [...] L'univers se révélait à moi. Je voyais à la fois dans le présent et dans le passé. [...] Il me semblait avoir conquis je ne sais quel trésor d'infini dont j'avais ignoré l'existence. (*Œuvres autobiographiques* 106-7)

Art can overcome time. When we look at a painting, it is possible to see the present and the past at the same time. This is exactly what happens when the male narrator looks at the marquise and her portrait. Janine Gallant explores the rich relationship between literature and the visual arts in George Sand, especially the power of portraits. She is analyzing a description of a portrait in *Indiana* in this passage, but it could easily apply to "La Marquise":

> Dès son premier roman, Sand exploite donc déjà à fond le 'pouvoir d'illusion' dont est investi le portrait peint d'après Édouard Pommier qui développe 'l'idée que le portrait n'est pas seulement signe de reconnaissance, mais *présence* même de son modèle auquel il se substitue'. Le portrait, comme le dit Louis Marin, se présente en fait comme une 'espèce représentative' d'une puissance indéniable. Ce n'est qu'un peu plus tard que ces pouvoirs du portrait deviendront véritablement l'apanage du récit fantastique. (Gallant 268)

"La Marquise" is not a "récit fantastique," but there is a kind of magic in it, evident in Lélio's "charme" and the marquise's storytelling making her like "la fée Urgèle" (89). The portrait plays a part in this magic. Through storytelling, the marquise brings her younger self back to life. Just as art can overcome the passage of time, it can break other boundaries, too. Marie-José Victoria writes here about the "permeability" that art makes possible:

> Sand, avec une remarquable maîtrise, joue de tout cela, créant les conditions d'un monde et d'un moment rares, où tout semble permis : les lois du temps défiées, le cloisonnement des êtres et des genres aboli, une perméabilité et un état fusionnel que seul l'art théâtral et, en filigrane, musical, autorise. (Victoria 43)

Victoria is right that theater, music and storytelling can abolish boundaries, but it is worth pointing out that the visual arts also possess some of these powers. The portrait of the marquise defies the laws of time, as Victoria puts it, and the permeability of life and art is symbolized, in the climactic scene of the story, by the marble statue of Isis.

George Sand frequently compares her characters to statues, especially the protagonist of her novel *Lélia*, but each of these comparisons plays a slightly different role in the text, as Janine Gallant points out (271). When the marquise enters the moonlit room dressed in white and then, upon seeing a mirror, mistakes the marble statue for herself, she literally mistakes art for life. This symbolic mix-up fosters further transformations, which Isabelle Hoog Naginski describes thus in the preface:

> Fiction à l'intérieur de la fiction: Isis, la déesse orientale, remplace ici la statue du commandeur, le 'deus ex machina' vengeur de l'histoire traditionnelle. Sand manifeste ici sa maîtrise dans la subversion des critères littéraires établis. Le costume que porte Lélio démontre le décalage entre le masque et l'homme, entre l'apparence banale et la réalité cachée. (38)

Don Juan, the seducer *par excellence*, is brought to his knees before a symbol of virginity. And while Lélio might be able to embody Don Juan when he is on stage, at least in the marquise's eyes, we know that the rest of the world does not see him as such: as an actor, he is derided for being too full of feeling and lacking the declamatory style that was preferred at the time. Lélio may have "charme" on stage, but he is not Don Juan. He begs the marquise to consummate their love, and she wavers for an instant before refusing him. She associates the physical act of love

with her husband and the vicomte de Larrieux, and she feels that they have defiled her, and she does not want her love for Lélio to be tainted by that.

That is the marquise's last request of Lélio: they will not consummate their love, and they will never see each other again. "Restez pur dans mon cœur et dans ma mémoire" (90), she tells him, and thus she avoids any disappointment that might follow the consummation of their love. Unconsummated, their desire can never be extinguished. Lélio and her strange affair with him become crystallized into a memory, the very memory she is recounting to the narrator.

In the final scene of the marquise's story, she leaves Lélio sitting at the foot of the statue of Isis where he is "encore beau, encore jeune" (91). But it does not last. The marquise, like Orpheus or Lot's wife, cannot resist one final look. Unlike the unchanged statue of Isis, Lélio is no longer beautiful:

> Le désespoir l'avait brisé. Il était redevenu vieux, décomposé, effrayant. […] Ce n'était plus que Lélio, l'ombre d'un amant et d'un prince. (92)

The marquise's affair is over. Lélio is no longer a tragic hero, but an aging actor. This last, tragic look at Lélio recalls the final scene of *Dom Juan*, in which the marble statue drags him into Hell. The loss of the illusion is a kind of death. The marquise's love story is tragic, but it is also pure. Her love for Lélio remains in the realm of theater, of illusion, of story, which is the only realm in which it can exist. She cannot bring her ideal love down into this "plate et ignoble réalité" (83) by consummating it, so it stays in the untouchable realm of the ideal.

While this may be the end of the marquise's story, it is not the end of the story all told. There is still the conclusion of the frame story, and in order to analyze it, we should first return to the beginning. The first few pages of the frame story introduce us to the marquise herself, and the narrator often describes her in terms of how she defies expectations or differs from other women. The very first sentence of the text is "La marquise de R… n'était pas fort spirituelle, quoiqu'il soit reçu en littérature que toutes les vieilles femmes doivent pétiller d'esprit" (45). The narrator describes the marquise by what she is not. She is not witty, despite the cliché that all old women must be witty. The narrator continues his description in the negative, expanding on the marquise's exceptional nature:

> Elle n'avait pas non plus cette excessive délicatesse d'expression, cette pénétration exquise, ce tact merveilleux qui distinguent, à ce qu'on dit, les femmes qui ont beaucoup vécu. Elle était, au contraire, étourdie, brusque, franche, quelquefois même cynique. Elle détruisait absolument toutes les idées que je m'étais faites d'une marquise du bon temps. Et pourtant elle était bien marquise, et elle avait vu la cour de Louis XV… (45)

The marquise is only ever identified by her title, so she cannot *not* be a marquise, and yet everything about her runs contrary to the narrator's expectations of "une marquise du bon temps" (45). She is not witty or well-spoken or tactful but brusque, frank and cynical. The marquise symbolizes the grandeur of the past—"elle était bien marquise, et elle avait vu la cour de Louis XV"—and simultaneously undermines the narrator's received ideas about pre-Revolutionary France. This tension between expectation and reality spans the whole text. The marquise offers to tell the narrator of her affair, and at first glance this offer conforms to his idea of an eighteenth-century marquise. But the affair is not sexual, which contradicts his cliché ideas about eighteenth-century noblewomen. Ultimately, these received ideas are as much illusions as the illusions offered by the theater, and they are perhaps more dangerous.

The marquise herself also struggles with received ideas. Her loveless marriage disappoints her, and she only begins her subsequent affair with the vicomte de Larrieux to conform to the other aristocrats' expectations. She feels isolated and out of place. She naively expected to find love with her husband or Larrieux, but she does not. Love seems not to exist, until she discovers it in the theater. Because of her experience with Lélio, the marquise learns the value of art. Art allows us access to the ideal. For the marquise, love is not possible in her restrictive and unequal society, except through the medium of the theater. She cherishes her discovery, but upon sharing it with the narrator, she is yet again disappointed by a man. Like the marquise's late husband and the vicomte de Larrieux, the male narrator is not sensitive enough to understand the marquise's story in the way that she wants him to, which is especially ironic given that he opens the text by describing her as lacking "cette pénétration exquise" (45).

Even before the end of the frame story, when the marquise chastises the narrator for his interpretation of her story, the narrator's authority is in doubt. He contradicts himself in his first description of the marquise. The display of the portrait is one way in which the marquise is "comme toutes les vieilles femmes," according to the narrator, since she has not been able to let

go of this reminder of her former beauty. This reminder of her similarity to other women comes on the heels of another reminder of her difference, signaled by the second use of "au contraire" in the opening paragraphs: "La marquise, au contraire, avait eu le malheur d'être incontestablement belle." The narrator's two uses of "au contraire" and his assertion that the marquise is "comme toutes les vieilles femmes" pull his opinion in opposite directions. Massardier-Kenney astutely points out that the narrator's simultaneous refutation of and reliance on public opinion about women undermines his authority:

> …la valeur du jugement que le narrateur porte sur la marquise se trouve mise en question par les références contradictoires à l'opinion publique qui catalogue "toutes les vieilles femmes". S'il réfute le bien-fondé du "on dit" pour les qualités de la marquise, il ne peut logiquement s'y référer pour expliquer la coquetterie de celle-ci. L'auteur sape donc dès le départ l'autorité masculine du narrateur. (29)

The narrator's authority is thus in doubt from the very beginning of the text, as is his presentation of the marquise as "étourdie" (45). According to Cecilia Fernandez, the marquise's voice is "imprisoned within the framework of a male narrator," but "the narrative device becomes a political tool that Sand employs, in rebellion against the patriarchal society, to subvert the power of male authority" (163). David Powell, writing about Sand's use of male narrators in *Isidora*, proposes that "Sand fait ainsi du lecteur masculin son complice" (34), a technique which works in a longer text like *Isidora* but is less effective in a short story like "La Marquise," where readers hardly know the male narrator. Unlike Jacques in *Isidora*, the male narrator of "La Marquise" is not at all developed, so there is no reason to sympathize with him. Instead, his harsh description of the marquise as a doddering old woman may cause readers to sympathize with her instead.

When the marquise finishes, she smiles and asks the narrator "Eh-bien ! Croirez-vous désormais à la vertu du dix-huitième siècle?" (92). The narrator replies that he has no desire to doubt it, but that if he was less touched by her story, he would say that she had been very sensible to have herself bled that day, implying that if she had not been so physically weak, she would have slept with Lélio. The marquise speaks the last line of the story: "Misérables hommes ! … Vous ne comprenez rien à l'histoire du cœur" (92). Fernandez reads this line as "the

Marquise confront[ing] him about his lack of depth" (163) and that the narrator's focus on inconsequential details of her story, rather than the deep emotional issue at stake, "reinforces her opening premise about men's lack of sensitivity" (164). The marquise tells her "histoire du cœur," where the heart is a metaphor for the problems of love, but the male narrator hears a "histoire du cœur," in which he focuses on the fact that the marquise had herself bled.

This final line highlights the question of how we, as readers, are meant to understand the story. The male narrator is briefly enthralled, even to the point of seeing the marquise become younger and more beautiful as though she physically embodies her character. He feels the kind of absorption that the marquise feels in the theater. Then, once the tale is told, when the marquise asks him if he still believes in "la vertu du dix-huitième siècle" (92), he responds by talking about the marquise having herself bled and thus not sleeping with Lélio. He offers a perspective on her story that focuses on the physical rather than the emotional or the ideal. He understands desire as physical, while for her it is located in the emotions and the imagination. The marquise focuses on her choice to preserve her desire in the realm of the ideal by not consummating it, but the narrator sees her unconsummated relationship as an accident rather than a choice. Where "virtue" fits into this discussion is murky. The marquise does ask her question about virtue "en souriant" (92), so perhaps that is a tacit acknowledgement of what the narrator says aloud: she might have slept with Lélio in different circumstances.

The marquise shows through her story that she has found a way to live with both the disappointing reality and the idealized version of Lélio. Scott Carpenter argues that "La Marquise" can be read as George Sand's idealist response to Balzac's "Sarrasine." The texts share many elements, including falling in love with a performer, but for Sarrasine, the revelation of la Zambinella's real identity only causes destruction and despair. As Carpenter writes, "la marquise comprend l'écart entre l'être et le paraître et, à la différence des réalistes, elle choisit l'illusion, et ceci en toute connaissance de cause" (757). Marie-José Victoria agrees: "Sand affirme que l'on peut sans folie, sans schizophrénie, ne pas 'revenir' de l'art, en faire le tout de sa vie, et y trouver ce que la vie peut-être n'a pas donné : l'amour" (44). The marquise is a savvy

reader, aware of both the illusion and the reality, and able to enjoy one without losing track of the other.

She is not the foolish old woman that the male narrator describes in the first few pages of the text. Indeed, the marquise is not only a savvy reader but also a skilled storyteller. Not only does she charm the male narrator with her story, appearing more beautiful as she tells it, but she also involves him so deeply in the story that he cries out at climactic moment—a successful seduction indeed. The marquise then wrests control of the narration from him, literally having the last word.

'Ne me dites pas que c'est un conte fait à plaisir': Storytelling and Seduction in "Metella"

In "La Marquise," the marquise falls in love with Lélio as he is on stage. In *Isidora*, Jacques falls in love with Julie and Isidora separately, without realizing that they are the same woman. In "Metella," the young hero Olivier falls in love with Lady Metella Mowbray before he ever meets her. It is her reputation that attracts his interest. Metella is introduced into her own story as a story—she is not a real woman, but a larger-than-life character in all of the stories that Olivier has heard, which he eagerly repeats to a traveler he encounters along the road. In "Metella," as in "La Marquise" and *Isidora*, we see how permeable the boundary between "person" and "character" can be. Olivier is seduced by Lady Mowbray the character, and at first, when he meets Metella the real person, he is disappointed. Much like when the marquise sees Lélio off stage and out of costume for the first time and he does not live up to her expectations, Metella is older and less beautiful than Olivier thought she would be, based on the stories. But he is still drawn to her, and he eventually falls in love with Metella rather than Lady Mowbray.

Much like for the marquise and Isidora, Lady Mowbray's reputation is at stake throughout this story. "La Marquise" begins with the male narrator's portrait of the marquise, which is later revealed to be inaccurate when the marquise takes control of her own story; similarly, "Metella" begins with two men talking about Lady Metella Mowbray, and their account is of questionable accuracy. These two men will compete over Metella in a love triangle

in the first section of the text, and in the second section of the text, Metella will compete against another woman in a new triangular arrangement. The whole text turns around this focal point of characters' knowledge and perception of other characters, so the lens of theory of mind is an essential tool for understanding it. Janis Glasgow points out that Sand uses the gap between how characters appear and how they really are as a source of comedy and also more serious emotional matters:

> George Sand cherche à saisir les moments psychologiques où la réalité intérieure d'un personnage entre en opposition avec les apparences qu'il essaie si difficilement de sauver. En tentant de dépeindre le décalage entre l'être et le paraître d'un personnage, entre ce qu'il dit et ce qu'il fait, elle réussit à faire alterner des moments de légèreté et de comique avec des considérations plus sérieuses. Balzac, au contraire, a tendance à rester presque toujours sérieux. (35)

The gap between characters' appearances and their true feelings is certainly a source of lighthearted or comic moments in the text, but it is equally often a source of anguish. We all know intimately the difficulty of concealing our feelings, whether for mere politeness or for some more serious purpose, because it is essential to social interaction. "Metella" resonates because of Sand's careful examination of the relationships between her characters. Her omniscient narrator wryly observes what they think of themselves and each other, so readers can appreciate the myriad misinterpretations that populate the story. While "Metella" does demonstrate the power that comes with accurately perceiving and predicting the intentions and desires of others, Sand ultimately values knowledge of oneself over knowledge of others.

"Metella" begins with a carriage accident. The comte Buondelmonte's carriage breaks down and a young Swiss noble named Olivier offers him a ride into Florence. The two men get along quite well, and after drinking too much wine, Olivier begins to tell Buondelmonte stories about Lady Mowbray. Olivier has never met Lady Mowbray but he is in love with her. He also does not know that Buondelmonte is her lover. According to the story that Olivier hears of her youth, Lady Mowbray is a frivolous flirt. The victim of gossip in her native England, she escapes to re-establish herself in Italy, where she decides to live as she pleases. However, it turns out that she does not know her own heart: she falls for one man and one man only, and they spend the

next ten years together. This man is the comte Buondelmonte, and his ten years of happiness with Metella become the stuff of legend, eventually reaching young Olivier. The first half of "Metella" details the rivalry between Buondelmonte and Olivier over Metella. Buondelmonte no longer truly loves Metella as he did when she was younger and the most desirable woman in Florence, but Olivier's arrival and his interest in Metella spark one last flare of jealousy in Buondelmonte, who is loathe to give up his mistress to another man. For his part, Olivier falls in love with the Metella of the stories, and despite his initial disappointment upon meeting the real woman, she wins him over as well. Buondelmonte abandons Metella and Olivier takes his place. In the second half of "Metella," a new triangle arises. Metella and Olivier are happily sharing their lives in her villa in Switzerland when Metella's young niece Sarah falls ill and needs to convalesce in the country side. The arrival of a younger woman causes Metella to worry that Olivier will abandon her, just as Buondelmonte did. Olivier and Sarah do develop feelings for each other, but rather than abandon Metella to take up with Sarah, Olivier leaves both of them in Switzerland and never returns. The original 1833 version of "Metella" ends at this point—the tragic last line is "Sarah ne sut jamais pourquoi" (233)—but the version cited here includes the ending paragraph added by Sand in 1851, in which Sarah and Metella recover from the loss of Olivier.[47] Sarah marries another man and Metella comes to terms with growing older.

"Metella" has been frequently and rightly compared to Balzac's 1832 short story "La Femme abandonnée," which its first half shares an extremely similar plot: Gaston de Nueil falls in love with Claire de Beauséant before ever meeting her, through stories of her beauty and charm.[48] Claire, at the beginning of the story, has left Paris for the provinces, since she has been abandoned by her lover and condemned by society. She resists Gaston's initial advances, worried

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[47] "Metella" was first published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, October 15, 1833 (Glasgow 25). I will by citing the edition edited by Ève Sourian. See George Sand, "Metella," *Nouvelles*, Ed. Ève Sourian, Paris: Des femmes, 1986.

[48] "La Femme abandonnée" was originally published in the *Revue de Paris*, September 9 and 16, 1832 (Glasgow 9). For a more detailed comparison of the two stories and a discussion of Balzac and Sand's relationship, see Janis Glasgow, *Une Esthétique de comparaison: Balzac et George Sand: La Femme abandonnée et Metella*, Paris: A.-G. Nizet, 1977.

that she is too old for him and that he will abandon her just as her first lover did, but eventually she succumbs to his charms. They retreat to Switzerland together and live happily for several years. However, Gaston's family pressures him into marrying a younger woman, and he does eventually abandon Claire. Then, unable to live with himself after giving up the love of his life, he commits suicide (Balzac 168). The ending of "La Femme abandonnée" differs radically from that of "Metella." Indeed, the second half of "Metella" departs from "La Femme abandonnée," and while both female protagonists end up abandoned for a second time, Sand's story ends in a far less dramatic fashion than Balzac's, since there is no suicide.

Janis Glasgow, in her study of the two short stories, frames "Metella" as a response to "La Femme abandonnée":

> Ne voulait-elle pas montrer qu'une femme avait plus d'options dans la vie que Mme de Beauséant dans *La Femme abandonnée* ? George Sand croyait qu'elle pouvait, elle aussi, dépeindre une femme avec un passé, mais ce serait une femme douée du courage de vivre sa vie (et en public, si elle le voulait), une femme libre-penseur, capable de ne pas se retirer du monde après la fin d'une aventure amoureuse. (30)

Metella does withdraw from society, but she does so in a less severe way that Mme de Beauséant. After Olivier's departure, Metella raises her niece Sarah in their villa in Switzerland. She is no longer a fixture of aristocratic Florentine society as she once was, but neither does she live in total isolation. It is instructive to think of "Metella" as a response to "La Femme abandonnée," and putting the two texts side by side serves to highlight their differences. There is a much greater focus on Metella in "Metella," whereas "La Femme abandonnée" concentrates more on Gaston de Nueil. Glasgow also points out that George Sand focuses more on the characters' interior emotional states rather than their actions: "Par la finesse de ses observations psychologiques, Sand fait parfois transparaître des profondeurs intérieures qui sont absentes chez Balzac" (36). The text is rich in dialogue and introspection but poor in events. The story contains two love triangles—Olivier, Buondelmonte, and Metella in the first half of the story and Olivier, Metella, and Sarah in the second half—and the majority of the text is devoted to scenes like the one I will analyze momentarily where Olivier meets Buondelmonte, in which two characters

reveal their intentions and desires to the reader through gestures, intonations, and asides from the narrator, without necessarily revealing anything to their interlocutor.

"Metella" also resembles "Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan," especially since "Les Secrets" focuses on a female protagonist. There is the plot of a woman with a bad reputation profiting from a change of scenery—or regime, in the princesse de Cadignan's case—in order to re-establish herself. But Diane de Cadignan purposefully seeks a man to fall in love with, while Metella Mowbray falls in love despite herself, both times. Buondelmonte and Olivier both charm her, even though she resolves not to love them.

In "Metella," as in "La Marquise" and *Isidora*, Sand dramatizes refusal, self-sacrifice, and exile. The marquise refuses to sleep with Lélio and he leaves forever; their love is preserved and the marquise lives on in a kind of self-imposed exile, isolated from society by her advanced age. Isidora refuses Jacques and exiles herself to Italy, where she founds a small utopian community and finds peace on her own terms. Metella plans to sacrifice her love for Olivier so that her niece Sarah can be happy, but instead, Olivier sacrifices his own love, exiling himself and never returning. "Metella" differs from the other two texts in this regard, since it is a male character who refuses love. Normally, in George Sand's œuvre, the power to say no belongs to women. Women exercise their autonomy and agency through refusal. Metella has planned to sacrifice her own happiness by allowing Olivier and Sarah to be together, but she is never granted the chance to refuse Olivier, since he abandons them both. Still, even without refusing Olivier's love, Metella arrives at a kind of happiness at the end of her story. She has been abandoned, but she is, for the first time, independent. She is free to determine her own identity, rather than having her lover or society impose an identity upon her. Instead of being a character in Olivier's stories, she is her own woman, while Olivier and Buondelmonte have both disappeared completely from her life.

Metella must be free from both Buondelmonte and Olivier in order to determine her own identity. Even though Olivier's relationship with her evolves into something more complex, his initial impression of Metella as a legendary beauty haunts their relationship. Sarah, who

resembles the beautiful and larger-than-life Metella of the stories, presents an insurmountable obstacle to their love. In Part I of the text, Olivier comes to love Metella even though she is not exactly the legendary heroine he expected, but in Part II of the text, Sarah's presence is too much. I will examine several scenes from Olivier and Metella's relationship to show how her reputation initially hinders him from knowing her. It is much the same for Metella's other lover, Buondelmonte, who also loves her reputation more than the woman herself. In Part I, it seems as though Olivier is the superior lover, since he comes to love Metella for herself instead of her reputation. But Part II proves that Olivier's desire is ultimately as unreliable as Buondelmonte's. For Olivier, Metella can compete with her fictional self, but not with Sarah. Having been seduced by the legend, Olivier can only briefly be satisfied by the real woman.

We first learn of Olivier's interest in Metella in the opening scene, when Olivier picks up Buondelmonte after his carriage accident and offers him a ride into Florence. The two men begin to talk, and they warm to each other quickly, although the comte never offers Olivier his name. When Olivier discovers that Buondelmonte is Florentine and returning home, he asks if Buondelmonte knows whether a certain Lady Mowbray will be in the city. Buondelmonte says yes, then asks how Olivier knows Lady Mowbray. Olivier says he does not, but that he would like to.

Olivier talks to the comte at length about Lady Mowbray, beginning with "On dit que c'est la femme la plus aimable de l'Europe" (166). Olivier has heard much of the lady's reputation, and "on dit" is a commonly repeated phrase in this section. Olivier is at least twice removed from the source of everything that he knows, as we discover when he goes into more detail: "--On dit... continua Olivier, dont la vue était un peu troublée, bah ! elle l'a dit elle-même en confiance, à Aix, à une de ses amies intimes, qui l'a répété à tous les buveurs d'eau..." (168). Lady Mowbray is a character to Olivier, and the "romanesque" nature of his infatuation is made explicit in this passage:

> —Est-ce la première fois qu'un homme serait devenu amoureux d'une femme sans l'avoir vue ?

> —Non, parbleu ! dit Buondelmonte. J'ai lu plus de trente romans, j'ai vu plus de vingt pièces de théâtre qui commençaient ainsi ; et croyez-moi, la vie ressemble plus souvent à un roman qu'un roman ne ressemble à la vie. (167-8)

As well as in a moment when Buondelmonte informs him "Vous êtes un peu romanesque" (172). That Olivier, who is drunk as he recounts these stories, is so enamored of Lady Mowbray comes as no surprise when he finally gets around to telling a story about her. In the story, Lady Mowbray and her lover are in their carriage when they are overtaken by brigands. Her lover gets out to fight them, but one of the brigands grabs him. Lady Mowbray steals a gun from one of the brigands and shoots the one who has accosted her lover, thus saving both of them. She is as brave as she is beautiful. The story is dashing, and Buondelmonte confirms that it is "aussi belle que vraie" (173), and indeed, that Olivier does not possess all the details: Lady Mowbray not only wrested a gun from the leader of the brigands and shot him in the face, but also tended to the driver's wounds after the incident. Buondelmonte cannot seem to stop himself from contributing to this story, even though he is ostensibly trying to hide his connection with Lady Mowbray. He recalls the detail of "[s]es belles mains, souillées de sang" (174).

Buondelmonte, in adding these details, gets carried away. He feels a moment of absorption in the story, which is also a memory for him. Buondelmonte's other moments of great investment in this scene of conversation and storytelling are all connected to Lady Mowbray's reputation, and thus his own; he is not caught up in the romance of the stories, as Olivier is. Especially when he is judging Olivier, Buondelmonte keeps an attitude of suspension. Olivier, on the other hand, is both drunk and "un peu romanesque" (172), and thus easily absorbed in the stories.

Olivier wants to all the stories to be true, so that he can meet the real Lady Mowbray, and yet he also does not want to know if the stories are merely stories: "Maintenant que je vous ai raconté cette histoire telle qu'on me l'a donnée, dites-moi, vous qui êtes de Florence, si elle est vraie de tout point... Et cependant, si elle ne l'est pas, ne me dites pas que c'est un conte fait à plaisir ; il est trop beau pour que je sois désabusé sans regret !" (170). His desire to meet Lady Mowbray conflicts with his fear of meeting her. Olivier worries about meeting her not because

he fears that she would not live up to her reputation, but because he already feels unworthy of her:

> --...mais vous devez comprendre et connaître, monsieur, cette espèce de répugnance craintive que nous éprouvons tous à nous approcher des personnes qui ont le plus excité de loin nos sympathies et notre admiration.
> --Parce que nous craignons de les trouver au-dessous de ce que nous en avons attendu, dit le comte.
> --Oh ! mon Dieu ! non, reprit vivement Olivier, ce n'est pas cela. Quant à moi, c'est parce que je me sens peu digne d'inspirer tout ce que j'éprouve, et, en outre, malhabile à l'exprimer. (166)

Olivier is having no difficulty expressing his feelings about Lady Mowbray to the count. He is, however, missing a number of signals that indicate the count's own feelings during their conversation. Lisa Blair writes that "it becomes progressively more apparent that the Count hardly enjoys Olivier's prattle" (49), but this does not fully capture Buondelmonte's attitude during this conversation. If he were really tired of Olivier talking about Metella, he could stop asking questions. But the count is in fact anxious to hear what Olivier has heard about Metella. He asks for clarifications—"Comment dites-vous ?" and "Que dit-on, monsieur ?" (167)—and when Olivier strays too far from his point, Buondelmonte interrupts: "Mais qu'est-ce donc qu'elle a dit ? s'écria le comte en coupant avec impatience un fruit et un peu son doigt" (168). Buondelmonte is an impatient listener, crying out and accidentally cutting himself, because he *really* wants to know what Olivier has to say. Olivier is too drunk to catch this indication, or any of several others, that Buondelmonte is very invested in his story. Just as it takes Olivier a long time to meander toward his point, he is frustratingly slow to realize that Buondelmonte is in fact Metella's lover. The suspense of the passage hinges on both Olivier's failure to conclude his stories about Metella and the dramatic irony of Olivier not recognizing that he is, in fact, speaking to Metella's lover.

Buondelmonte is so invested in the hearsay about Metella because he himself has been losing interest in her as she ages. He was in love with her because she was the most beautiful woman in Florence when she was younger, and her reputation bolstered his own. As Metella ages, fewer and fewer people remark on her beauty or her character, so her reputation shrinks

and Buondelmonte loves her less. When Buondelmonte encounters Olivier, he is eager to be told how beautiful and desirable Metella is, but he is also anxious and jealous, since another man is interested in his mistress. Indeed, when Olivier first asks him if he knows lady Mowbray, the comte says yes, "avec un léger tressaillement" (165). This is yet another non-verbal cue that Buondelmonte is invested in the conversation and has something to hide, a signal that Olivier misses but that readers will likely note. Buondelmonte wants to know what Metella's reputation is, and where possible he wants to improve it, hence his contributions to Olivier's retelling of the encounter with the brigands. Buondelmonte wants Metella to live up to her reputation, even if it means that Olivier will be more interested in her, and he becomes defensive when Olivier suggests that Metella must be much older now than she was in the stories:

> Qu'importe son âge ! dit le comte avec impatience. Une femme n'a jamais que l'âge qu'elle paraît avoir, et tout le monde vous l'a dit : lady Mowbray est toujours belle. On vous l'a dit, n'est-ce pas ?
> —On me l'a dit partout, à Aix, à Berne, à Gênes ; dans tous les lieux où elle a passé. (171)

According to Buondelmonte, Metella is only as old as society thinks she is. Buondelmonte is also relying on "on dit" here, mentioning both "tout le monde" and "on vous l'a dit." The "n'est-ce pas" at the end mocks Olivier's reliance on gossip, but it's also bitter. Buondelmonte knows firsthand that Metella is getting older, but he wishes he could rely on public opinion instead. Blair points out that "the Count sees Metella in a positive way only when another man presents himself, purposefully or not, as a rival for her affections" (49). Buondelmonte loves Metella as a character, as a status symbol, rather than as a human woman. This becomes increasingly obvious in his dealings with Olivier. Buondelmonte tries to shore up Metella's reputation wherever he sees it falling, as when Olivier realizes that Metella must be older now than she is in the stories. Her reputation is more important to him than her feelings for him, or even than his feelings for her. Buondelmonte's own reputation, and his vanity, are at stake. He worries about Metella's reputation because it affects his own social status.

Buondelmonte's jealousy keeps him from ever being happy with Metella, since he can only love her as long as other men find her desirable, but he also feels threatened when other

men find her desirable. He stays with Metella long after he has stopped loving her, simply because he cannot bear to give her up to Olivier. If Olivier desires her, then she must be worth keeping.

Buondelmonte's extended conversation with Olivier about the woman they both desire simmers with sexual tension. It is worth pointing out that the first part of this conversation takes place in the private, enclosed space of Olivier's room at an inn on the way to Florence. Buondelmonte tries to take his leave of Olivier when they arrive at the inn, but Olivier insists that they stay together for the duration of their voyage and he orders dinner for the two of them, where he then proceeds to drink too much while they talk about Lady Mowbray. During the conversation, Olivier's drunken fumbling frustrates the count, who variously trembles and cries out in response. Then there is a brief lull in the conversation because Olivier dozes off. Buondelmonte, still awake, observes him: "Olivier avait la tête penchée en avant, le coude dans son assiette, et l'ombre de ses cils, abaissés par un doux assoupissement, se dessinait sur ses joues, que la chaleur généreuse du vin colorait d'un rose plus vif qu'à l'ordinaire" (172). Observing someone while they sleep, especially while sharing a room at an inn, is usually reserved for more intimate relationships. This description is curiously intimate, since Buondelmonte takes note of Olivier's lashes and the blush on his cheeks.

Olivier and Buondelmonte's relationship continues to be the focus of part one even after they arrive in Florence. The dynamic changes, though, because once Olivier is no longer drunk, he proves to be Buondelmonte's equal in observing human behavior. The narrator makes note of Olivier's powers of perception a number of times. After he and Buondelmonte go their separate ways in Florence, Buondelmonte finds Olivier at his hotel one day later. Buondelmonte is ostensibly seeking Olivier to invite him over as gratitude for Olivier's help, but his motive is double, because he also wants to embarrass Olivier in front of lady Mowbray as retribution for Olivier having talked about his mistress for such a long time. Buondelmonte barges into Olivier's room without being invited and surprises Olivier while he is doing his toilette. The unannounced entrance and the unexpected invitation to dine with Buondelmonte and Metella are

meant to set Olivier off-kilter, and the narrator makes each man's motives clear. The scene is full of third-order intentionalities: "Olivier s'aperçut que le comte cherchait dans ses yeux à deviner l'effet de cette nouvelle" (176). Olivier knows that the count thinks Olivier is naive. The count's first impression of Olivier, after all, is of a drunkard who cannot read social cues and who takes hours to realize that Buondelmonte is lady Mowbray's lover. So Olivier plays with the count by feigning naïveté and accepting the invitation, at which point the count thinks he has successfully tricked Olivier. Readers are averted that this is not the case:

> Les manières cordiales et franches de Buondelmonte ne se démentirent point. Seulement, comme le jeune étranger, tout en se hâtant, donnait des soins minutieux à sa toilette, le comte ne put réprimer un sourire qu'Olivier saisit au fond de la glace devant laquelle il nouait sa cravate.
>
> —Si nous faisons une guerre d'embûches, pensa-t-il, c'est fort bien ; avançons. (177)

Olivier's back is to the count, so the count assumes that Olivier cannot see him, and he fails to repress his smile of triumph. But Olivier is facing a mirror, so he does perceive the count's smile. The narrator then allows us a peek into Olivier's thoughts, and we see that he is one step ahead of Buondelmonte. Their "guerre d'embûches" continues throughout the first section of the text, and the narrator lingers a particularly long time over Olivier's first glance of Metella.

When Metella first appears in the flesh, the narrator gives a long description of her beauty, but dedicates even more time to Olivier's reaction. The narrator rhetorically casts aside his own portrait of Metella by repeating the word "malgré" three times when he shifts from describing Metella herself to describing Olivier's reaction: "mais, malgré cette perfection, malgré ces triomphes, malgré la parure exquise qui faisait ressortir tous ses avantages, le premier regard qu'Olivier jeta sur elle lui dévoila le secret tourment du comte de Buondelmonte : Metella n'était plus jeune…" (179). The repetition emphasizes the importance of Olivier's reaction to Metella over Metella herself. It is Olivier who gazes and who judges, and "malgré" everything about Metella, he can compare her to a perfect image in his imagination "[e]n un clin d'oeil, en une pensée" (179). The immediacy of Olivier's judgment is referred to even a third time by the narrator: "Quant à Olivier, ce fut l'affaire d'un instant" (179). Ironically, the narrator dwells on this instant for far more words than he spent on Metella's beauty itself. Because Metella is not as

beautiful as he expected her to be, and because this lack is apparent in a single instant—in a single thought—it is this disappointment which becomes the focus of the passage. It occupies Olivier's thoughts, and subsequently, the count's: "Ce regard fut prompt ; mais il n'échappa point au comte et lui fit involontairement mordre sa lèvre inférieure" (179). This exterior sign of the count's discomfort goes unnoticed by the other characters, but the involuntary nature of this reaction recalls the count's earlier irrepressible smile and clearly establishes him as being at a disadvantage with regard to Olivier.

Indeed, Olivier appears to have mastered the situation by reading Buondelmonte and Metella's unspoken cues, but the narrator offers readers a glimpse of the future to let us know what Olivier does not know: "Dès ce moment, il fut tout à fait à son aise, car il comprit ce qui se passait entre eux, et il s'inquiéta peu de ce qui pouvait se passer en lui-même ; il était encore trop tôt" (181). This foreshadowing shows us that while Olivier may have read Buondelmonte and Metella's minds with ease, he has failed to examine his own feelings. He is more aware of others than he is of himself. It is this weakness that allows the count to manipulate Olivier in the weeks to come.

The count is of two minds about Olivier and Metella. On one hand, the count no longer loves Metella, but he is too cowardly to leave her, so he wishes that she would set him free to pursue other women. He can perhaps arrange for this to happen by setting Olivier and Metella up together. On the other hand, the count notices that Metella appears younger and more beautiful when she is the object of his affectionate attention or Olivier's. The count can no longer give that attention to Metella himself, but his interest in her increases when Olivier charms her. The count behaves in a contradictory manner throughout the first part of the story, from the moment he meets Olivier and feels the need to wax poetic about lady Mowbray's beauty and bravery. He continually arranges situations in which Olivier and Metella will be alone together, going so far as to advise Metella on what dress and coiffure to wear to a ball where he knows Olivier will be present (188). This requires the count to think about what Olivier will find appealing as well as what will be successful at the ball; public opinion is determined, in the text, according to what

high-class women think of each others' appearances and stylistic choices. The count thus puts himself in Olivier's place and in the place of Metella's peers in order to advise her on what to wear. It is not surprising that he is so easily able to do this, since the count keeps careful track of Metella's position in society to see whether it is helping or harming his own status. The count thought Olivier was naive for having fallen in love with Metella's legend without ever having met her, but Buondelmonte makes the same mistake. He is also more attached to the concept of Metella—the most beautiful woman in Florence—than Metella herself.

The count had previously made sure of Olivier's presence at this ball by visiting him in his bedroom at night while he was preparing his toilette, the second such unannounced visit. Indeed, the count and Olivier end up in close quarters alone together for three major scenes, and the narrator spends the bulk of part one describing each man's interior state and reactions to his rival, so there is a much greater degree of intimacy between Olivier and Buondelmonte than between Metella and either man. The count behaves strangely while in Olivier's private quarters, pacing restlessly and then asking Olivier to come see lady Mowbray as often as possible, then leaving quickly "comme un homme qui vient de commettre un crime" (188). The count's "crime" is that he is encouraging Olivier to go see Metella, even though she is in a relationship with another man. But since that man is Buondelmonte, the so-called crime would be victimless.

During the sequence of events where the count plays matchmaker, he appears to be the superior mind-reader, manipulating Olivier and Metella into falling in love. But the strange triangular relationship place each of these three characters in the position of seducer and seduced by turn. In a way, the count seduces both Olivier and Metella, although he encourages them to enter into a relationship with each other rather than with himself. The two scenes immediately before the ball not only reflect each other in the structure of the text, but they also both contain mirrors, since Buondelmonte interrupts Olivier's toilette and advises Metella on her hair and makeup. Buondelmonte uses his knowledge of each of them to make sure they charm each other. He makes sure that they end up together at the ball and suggests that Olivier talk to Metella about

Goethe, whose works Metella loves (191). His suggestions succeed, and Olivier and Metella begin to fall in love.

What the count fails to predict are his own feelings. He knows Olivier and Metella well enough to make sure they charm each other, but he is blindsided by his own jealousy when they enjoy each other's company. The count's jealousy arises in a moment when he is outside Metella's palace and can see Metella and Olivier's silhouettes on a balcony, and he hears two *bourgeois* discussing the silhouettes. They mention how beautiful Metella still is and how foolish the count is to let another man spend time with her (192-3). The count's sudden jealousy makes him agitated, and he goes inside to interrupt Metella and Olivier. The count's power stems from knowing Olivier and Metella, and his weakness stems from not knowing himself.

As the count's position of power transforms into a position of weakness, Olivier is with Metella, coming to his own understanding of the situation: Olivier "avait pénétré facilement son chagrin [le chagrin de Metella], et il en voyait la cause" (193). Metella is unhappy with Buondelmonte because she can tell that he no longer loves her, and Olivier reads her well enough to understand that. Olivier's reading of Metella is not only easy, it is also described using the verb "pénétré," which is exactly what the count does not want.

To add insult to injury, once the count appears inside, Metella is able to read him: she knows he is jealous and she enjoys his jealousy. This is one of the first times that the narrator allows readers a glimpse into Metella's thoughts about the rivalry between Buondelmonte and Olivier. Our previous glimpses of Metella's thoughts are limited to her fears about her increasing age and decreasing beauty and her confusion about Buondelmonte and Olivier's confusing and contradictory behavior around her. Given how much time is devoted to the two men's thoughts about each other and about Metella, Metella does not seem like a very savvy reader of minds. But when she recognizes and revels in Buondelmonte's jealousy, it is clear that she has moments of clarity. Since she is the object of Olivier and Buondelmonte's rivalry rather than a competitor, she fails to perceive a great deal of what the two men notice about each other. When Metella is forced into a rivalry of her own in part two, she will prove to be very perceptive. But in part one,

Metella's power in the triangular relationship derives from her beauty. She is not a seducer in the same calculating sense that Buondelmonte is. Olivier, too, learns to dissimulate his true feelings and predict other people's behavior when it is required of him. But Metella's power over both men comes from her beauty and her reputation, two things that are almost entirely outside of her control. She is not yet a good enough reader of minds to take charge of the situation, which becomes clear when Metella's attempt to let Buondelmonte go is thwarted by her misunderstanding of the situation. She tells him "je vous rends votre liberté" (195), and then he gets upset. Metella mistakes Buondelmonte's outburst as a sign that he still loves her, rather than a sign that he is incapable of abdicating his place next to her as long as another man desires her. She immediately begs his forgiveness, and so Buondelmonte stays and their unhappy relationship continues.

It is Olivier who finally sees a way out. Several weeks pass, and then at last "Olivier comprit le caractère du comte et sa situation d'esprit. Il vit qu'il disputerait le cœur de Metella tant qu'il aurait un rival ; il s'éloigna et alla passer quelque temps à Rome" (198). Olivier understands both the count and Metella so well that he sees that the only solution to their problem is for him to disappear for awhile. Olivier's absence does the trick and when he returns, Buondelmonte and Metella have separated and the triangle is broken. Olivier and Metella leave Florence separately but meet up in Milan, where they try to negotiate what their new relationship will be. Metella, still wounded from the count falling out of love with her, does not want a sexual or romantic relationship with Olivier because she fears that he too will fall out of love with her as she continues to age. She offers him maternal love instead, and Olivier interrupts her to say that he respects her desires, while also implying that he will wait as long as it takes. The two of them go to Geneva and spend five years happy together, and that is where part two begins.

Metella spends the first half of the story in competition with Olivier and Buondelmonte's ideas of her younger self, and then after a brief moment of happiness, she is forced back into competition by the arrival of Sarah, her young niece who looks just like she used to. Pascale Auraix-Jonchière points out that Sarah ends up replacing Metella in particular ways:

> De même faut-il revenir en arrière pour mieux mesurer la portée de la substitution qui s'opère quand «un jour Sarah témoigna le regret de ne plus monter à cheval. Lady Mowbray, indisposée depuis quelque temps, ne pouvait plus supporter cette fatigue». À l'ouverture de la nouvelle en effet Olivier évoque avec délectation l'image de celle qu'il croit aimer avant même que de la rencontrer: «On m'a pourtant assuré à Aix […] qu'elle galopait au bord des précipices sur un vigoureux cheval», apanage de bien des héroïnes sandiennes. ("La Femme au miroir" 140)

Sarah is Metella's double. Metella, who spent part one as the object of Olivier and Buondelmonte's rivalry, now has a rival of her own. In part one, Metella's internal state was mostly laid bare by the narrator when she was lamenting her own lost youth and beauty, but in part two, the narrator spends far more time illuminating Metella's thoughts about Olivier, who is in a strange way both her son and her lover, and Sarah, her niece and rival.

While Olivier was able to learn to love Metella despite his infatuation with her legend, he is not prepared for Sarah. The narrator warns, in part one, that Olivier is unable to predict that he himself will fall for Metella: "il s'inquiéta peu de ce qui pouvait se passer en lui-même ; il était encore trop tôt" (181). This same lack of self-knowledge returns in part two, when Olivier first does not realize that he will fall for Sarah and then, once he begins to like her, is unable to prevent himself from developing more intense feelings. Olivier's power in the first part of the story derived from being able to read both Metella and Buondelmonte, but in the second part of the story, he fails to know both his own mind and Metella's.

Metella is in a paradoxical position of power and weakness throughout the second part of the story. She has power over Olivier and Sarah, being able to read them both, but her knowledge cannot prevent the two of them from falling in love. Metella is trapped because she fears revealing her own feelings: "Ce que lady Mowbray voulait éviter par-dessus tout, c'était de laisser voir ses craintes à Olivier" (209). Her desire to hide her own feelings from both of them, but especially Olivier, is her weakness, because in order to hide her true feelings, she encourages Olivier and Sarah to become friends and to spend more time together. Metella's position here mirrors that of Buondelmonte in the first part of the story, except that Buondelmonte *wanted* Metella and Olivier to spend time together, whereas Metella merely wants to hide her own feelings. When Olivier and Sarah spend time together, Metella suffers.

She understands Olivier and Sarah better than they understand themselves, but it brings her no comfort. During an incident where Olivier gets wounded after dueling a man who looked lecherously at Sarah, when Olivier reveals his wound and Sarah faints at the sight, the narrator says: “Cette excessive sensibilité parut naturelle à Olivier dans une personne d’une complexion aussi délicate ; mais lady Mowbray y fit une attention plus marquée” (210). Olivier, who was previously a more perceptive reader than either Metella or Buondelmonte, misreads Sarah’s reaction, but Metella understands exactly what it means.

Metella confirms her own suspicions about Sarah’s feelings when she catches Sarah writing a letter to a friend from the convent. Sarah tries to hide the letter from Metella, but Metella has already seen her. Indeed, Metella hardly even needs to read the letter, having read Sarah herself. In the previous few scenes, there are a number of moments where the narrator details Metella’s observations of Sarah, which she occasionally makes from a distance or even from behind a curtain, but sometimes simply across the dinner table: “Elle remarqua pendant le dîner que Sarah avait pleuré” (216). Metella knows that Sarah is suffering because of her love for Olivier, so the contents of the letter are no surprise to her. However, they are interesting for two reasons.

First, Sarah’s feelings for Olivier are inspired by how tenderly he treats Metella: "Je ne sais pas ce qui se passa en moi lorsqu'il entra à demi dans la calèche pour baiser les mains de ma tante ; il le fit avec tant de tendresse, que je me sentis tout émue, et que je compris tout de suite la bonté de son cœur" (219). This echoes the first part of the story, where Olivier’s first interest in Metella is inspired by stories about Metella and Buondelmonte, and then Buondelmonte’s interest in Metella is rekindled by the love he sees blossoming between Metella and Olivier. Sarah is naive, like Olivier once was, and so her reaction mirrors his youthful fascination with the stories. She is not jealous, but infatuated. Like Olivier hearing the stories of Metella and Buondelmonte and then mentally placing himself in the role of Metella’s lover, Sarah is touched by Olivier kissing Metella’s hands because she can imagine herself in the role of Metella. Witnessing his tenderness toward Metella, Sarah is able to read Olivier, but she is too

preoccupied with placing herself in Metella's role to read her aunt and realize that Metella's feelings toward Olivier are not entirely maternal. Unlike in the first half of the story, when all three characters realize that they are trapped in a love triangle, Sarah never perceives the triangle. She never fully understands Metella's relationship with Olivier.

The second reason that Sarah's letter is of interest is that she writes that Olivier has admitted to her that although he likes her now, he disliked Sarah before he knew her. "Comment peut-on haïr une personne qu'on n'a jamais vue et qui ne vous a fait aucun mal ?" (219), wonders Sarah, unaware that Olivier has a marked tendency to judge people before meeting them. Sarah's question also demonstrates, yet again, that she has not deciphered Olivier and Metella's relationship. Olivier resents Sarah before she arrives because he knows she will interrupt the intimacy he has shared with Metella for five years, but Sarah is too naive to reach that conclusion.

Sarah is the most naive of the three characters, but Olivier also remains dangerously un-self-aware. In her letter, Sarah wonders if love might be "involontaire" (219), and it seems as though this is the case for both Sarah and Olivier. Neither of them intends to fall in love, but they are both young and beautiful and it simply happens to them. Olivier hardly even notices it: "L'âme de ce jeune homme était si bonne et si ardente, qu'il ne savait pas se rendre compte de ce qu'il éprouvait" (230). Olivier does not understand his own feelings, just like in part one when he fails to predict his own love for Metella. He succeeded in part one because he could read both Buondelmonte and Metella, but in part two, he not only fails to read Sarah's burgeoning infatuation with him, but he also fails to read himself.

Metella knows what Olivier is feeling: "En effet, lady Mowbray connaissait trop bien toutes les nuances de son caractère, tous les plis de son visage, pour n'avoir pas pénétré, avant lui-même peut-être, ce qu'il éprouvait auprès de Sarah" (230). Metella can look at Olivier's exterior—his expression, "les plis de son visage"—and "penetrate" his interior, knowing his feelings before he does. So Metella knows both Olivier and Sarah's feelings better than either of them. This knowledge brings her no happiness, as she is still powerless to stop Olivier and Sarah

from falling in love and forgetting about her. Indeed, Metella erases herself by hiding behind curtains or watching Olivier and Sarah from high windows when they are outside. Because she fears revealing her own mind, she inadvertently pushes them together.

When Olivier finally leaves, Metella reads his body language and expression before she reads the letter that he hands her:

> Il vint à l'entrée du salon prendre congé des dames : Sarah, dont il baisa la main pour la première fois de sa vie, fut si troublée, qu'elle n'osa pas même lever les yeux sur lui ; Metella, au contraire, l'observait attentivement ; il était fort pâle, et calme comme un homme qui accomplit courageusement un devoir rigoureux. (231)
> Her observation of Olivier allows her to know the contents of his letter before reading it.

Metella only has to touch the paper to understand that the end has come: "Alors elle mit une main sur son cœur, pressa le billet de l'autre, et comprit que tout était fini pour elle" (231). Olivier leaves both women and never returns. Metella's instantaneous comprehension of the situation stands in stark contrast to Sarah. Sarah cannot even look at Olivier when he kisses her hand, even though her first inkling of desire for him sparked from the moment when she saw him kiss Metella's hand. Sarah's inability to look at Olivier is contrasted with Metella's attentive observation, just as Metella's knowledge of Olivier's intentions is contrasted with the narrator's brief comment on Sarah's reaction to his depature: "Sarah ne sut jamais pourquoi" (233).

We might suppose from the emphasis put on Metella's knowledge and Sarah's ignorance that the two women cope with Olivier's absence in very different ways, but that is not the case. They both suffer but ultimately survive being abandoned. Sarah goes on to fall in love with and marry another man. So Metella's keen mind-reading of Olivier and Sarah has very little effect on the outcome, since she and Sarah share similar experiences after Olivier leaves. Metella does end up alone, but her solitude is not framed as a tragedy. In the end, Metella's abandonment is not entirely unhappy. She has undergone a transformation over the course of the story. We are first introduced to her as a character in Olivier's fantasies, almost a figure of legend, next to whom the real, flesh-and-blood Metella pales in comparison. The greater the disparity between Metella and her reputation, the less Buondelmonte loves her, so this disparity is the cause of her first abandonment. A similar disparity is also the cause of her second abandonment: Metella lives

alongside Sarah, who looks just a like a younger version of herself, and the comparison is not flattering. Olivier does develop feelings for Sarah, and when he cannot resist his feelings, he abandons both women rather than betray Metella. However, Metella survives both abandonments, and by the end of the text, she is no longer defined by outside forces like she was at the beginning.

Lisa Blair describes Metella's situation at the beginning of the text like this: "Metella defines herself and is defined by others, by her reflection in the mirror, real and non-real. It is this Metella that is loved or not loved. That is, her identity does not come from within but rather from without. She is not allowed to provide her own self-concept" (53). However, by the end of the text, Metella "finally accepts who she is without external influences" (Blair 105). Blair views this as progress, but many critics read the ending of "Metella" in bleaker terms:

> Métella est condamnée par son âge, malgré tous ses efforts. Elle devient étrangère à Olivier en dépit d'elle-même. […] si elle choisit son premier exil, le départ d'Olivier lui est imposé. La victoire se transforme ici en défaite. (Witkin 367)

Witkin sees the end of the story as a defeat. But Metella is still alive at the end of the story, unlike Claire de Beauséant, the heroine of Balzac's "La Femme abandonnée." Janis Glasgow, in her comparison of "Metella" and "La Femme abandonnée," summarizes the endings this way: "la nouvelle de Balzac présente l'univers moral d'un homme traditionnaliste, tandis que l'ouvrage de George Sand représente l'univers moral ouvert d'une femme désabusée, mais émancipée et libérale" (46). Not only is Metella alive, but she is freed from both illusions and social constraints, able to live out the remainder of her life at peace in the countryside. Jeannine Guichardet agrees that the ending of "Metella" presents "une voie intermédiaire résolument du côté de la vie. Une vie qui continue au delà d'un abandon finalement accepté, assumé dans la souffrance et l'espoir d'une sérénité retrouvée" (207) and identifies this ending as coherent with the rest of Sand's work, since it demonstrates "cette confiance dans la vie 'quand même' qui est celle de George Sand et de ses héroïnes au long de son œuvre" (207).

It is worth mentioning here again that George Sand did change the ending of "Metella," adding a paragraph to the end in 1851, although both Blair and Witkin are citing the 1986

collection of *Nouvelles* edited by Ève Sourian, as am I, and this edition includes the "happier" version of the ending. In the original 1833 version, the last line of the text is "Sarah ne sut jamais pourquoi" (233). In the 1851 version, there is one more paragraph, in which Sarah forgets Olivier after awhile and marries another man. Metella accepts her age and even regains a kind of beauty, described thusly: "on sentait encore l'émotion qui se fait dans l'âme à la vue d'un ciel pur, harmonieux et placide que le soleil vient d'abandonner" (233). This last sentence is particularly interesting given the use of the verb "abandonner," since not only have Metella and Sarah been abandoned in the story, but also George Sand was likely responding to Balzac's "La Femme abandonnée" with this text. Jeannine Guichardet points out a crucial difference in the titles of the two *nouvelles*: "La Femme abandonnée" presents an archetype, whereas "Metella" presents an individual (199-200). Throughout the course of the story, we have seen Metella defined by others, until finally she is abandoned and allowed to define herself, and in this last sentence, the use of the verb "abandonner" subverts our expectation that all abandonments must be tragic. Metella's acceptance of her age, a form of self-knowledge, is described in terms of its effect on others. The description begins with "on sentait encore," and the narrator describes Metella as she appears to others, rather than describing Metella's interior state. She knows herself so well that this knowledge radiates out of her and makes observers feel as though they are looking at a pure, harmonious, and placid sky. In this way, Sand values self-knowledge over knowledge of others. Knowing other people has its worth, and we see Olivier benefit temporarily from his understanding of both Metella and Buondelmonte. But ultimately, knowing oneself is more important. Until the end of the text, Metella derives not only her happiness but also her identity from her relationships with men. If Buondelmonte loves her, she is beautiful, and if he does not, she is old and ugly and sickly. In her relationship with Olivier, her happiness depends on him. But other people are unreliable, so the only sure bet is for Metella to know and accept herself. The final image presents an abandoned woman who is more beautiful because she has been left alone: the sky is "pur, harmonieux et placide" because it is nothing but sky. The sun is nowhere in sight.

'Non, je ne vous raconterai rien … mais je tâcherai de me faire connaître': Revealing and Concealing Feelings in *Isidora*

Isidora is the longest work in my corpus, neither a short story nor a novella, but an unusual novel.[49] I have chosen to include it for several reasons. The first two-thirds of the novel concern Isidora's seduction of the writer Jacques Laurent, which she accomplishes through two different personas, the virtuous Julie and the bold courtesan Isidora. Like Sarrasine and Daniel d'Arthez, the Balzacian protagonists examined in previous chapters of this study, Jacques Laurent is a sensitive artistic type who has little experience with women. His work as a writer is inextricable from his social naïveté, and both of those things make him susceptible to Julie-Isidora's advances. While *Isidora* is not a work of short fiction, Sand does employ the narrative device of an embedded story. In the middle section of the novel, Jacques and Isidora both become acquainted with a noblewoman named Alice and then subsequently embroiled in a love triangle, and during these events, Jacques and Isidora recount the events of the first section of the novel—Julie-Isidora's first seduction of Jacques—to Alice in very different ways. *Isidora* is of interest both because of its content and its form: the first third of the novel is told through Jacques's journal entries, the middle third through an extradiegetic narrator, and the final third through a combination of Jacques's journal entries and Isidora's letters. The shifts in point of view, the questions of sincerity and identity, and the seduction and love triangle plots make this text fertile ground for examination through cognitive criticism.

Isidora's unusual fragmentary structure goes hand-in-hand with its genesis, explained here by Pierre Reboul:

> Destinée au *Diable à Paris*, terminée le 2 novembre 1844, alors qu'un contrat liait Sand au *Constitutionnel* et lui interdisait de publier ailleurs roman ou nouvelle, la première partie, intitulée en conséquence *Journal d'un Solitaire*, parut dans la *Revue Indépendante* les 25 mars et 10 avril 1845, ainsi que le début de la seconde partie, qui diffère tout à fait. Première partie : des bribes de journal ; seconde : un récit, à compte d'auteur. La fin de la seconde partie parut les 10 et 25 mai et, le 10 juin, une courte troisième, composée, de

[49] George Sand, *Isidora*, Ed. Ève Sourian, Paris: Des femmes, 1980.

> nouveau, du journal de Jacques, à quoi s'ajoute une lettre d'Isidora. Il fallut gonfler, pour la publication en volume : après avoir envisagé de faire et faire faire une préface, Sand ajouta trois lettres d'Isidora. (Reboul 587)

Annabelle Rea, in her article examining the manuscript of *Isidora*, adds that when Sand initially offered "Journal d'un solitaire à Paris" to Pierre-Jules Hetzel, the editor of *Le Diable à Paris*, Sand wrote to him that she did not want to call "Journal" a *nouvelle*, saying that it had "ni le titre ni l'apparence" of a short story, in order to sidestep the conditions of her contract with the *Constitutionnel*, which specified that she could not publish a "roman" or a "nouvelle" anywhere else ("Isidora: ce que dit le manuscrit" 279). Ultimately, Sand did not publish "Journal d'un solitaire à Paris" in *Le Diable à Paris*. Contractual language aside, readers could be forgiven for mistaking the first third of the novel for a short story. The "Journal" focuses on just two characters and has a rather spare plot: Jacques arrives in Paris, meets Julie, then meets Isidora, and in the climactic twist, discovers that they are the same woman. Indeed, even when considered in full, *Isidora* is economical in terms of characters and events, especially compared to the massive realist novels with which it is contemporary. The economy of plot is a conscious choice, acknowledged by the narrator at the end of the second part: "Je ne me suis pas promis d'écrire des événements, mais une histoire intime" (195). *Isidora*'s lean plot, small cast of characters, and focus on finding a way to live and love in an unjust society are all characteristic of a genre that Margaret Cohen describes as the "sentimental social novel" in her book *The Sentimental Education of the Novel*.[50] *Isidora*'s status as "une histoire intime" gives it common ground with "La Marquise" and "Metella."

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[50] For more on Sand's relationship with the sentimental novel, see Margaret Cohen, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel*, Princeton University Press, 2002. For more on Sand's relationship with the sentimental novel and other women writers, see Dominique Laporte, "'Ne m'appelez donc jamais femme auteur': Deconstruction et refus du roman sentimental chez George Sand," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 29.3&4 (2001): 247–255. See also Brigitte Diaz, "Des dangers de la publication : George Sand face aux femmes qui écrivent," *Histoire(s) et enchantements: Hommages offerts à Simone Bernard-Griffiths*, Ed. Pascale Auraix-Jonchière et al., Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2009, 159–172. See also José Luis Diaz, "'M. Buloz paiera à Mme Dudevant...': George Sand face à l'idée et au fait de la publication pour les femmes auteurs," *Histoire(s) et enchantements: Hommages offerts à Simone*

The novel's unusual structure perhaps explains why *Isidora* has not excited much interest among critics until recently. It is not widely read outside the academy and was out of print for much of the twentieth century. Pierre Reboul's article was published in 1976. Since then, critics' attitudes toward the text have shifted and many critics name Isidora's structure as what attracted them to the text. David Powell, Natalie Buchet Rogers, Pascale Auraix-Jonchière and Aimée Boutin all study the novel's structure from different angles in their articles. I will return to their arguments over the course of this section, but first I would like to examine the Notice that was added to the text in 1853, which has also been the subject of some critical discussion.

Here it is in its entirety:

> NOTICE
> A Paris, 1845. C'était une très belle personne, extraordinairement intelligente, et qui vint plusieurs fois *verser son cœur à mes pieds*, disait-elle. Je vis parfaitement qu'elle *posait* devant moi et ne pensait pas un mot de ce qu'elle disait la plupart du temps. Elle eût pu être ce qu'elle n'était pas. Aussi n'est-ce pas elle que j'ai dépeinte dans *Isidora*.
> GEORGE SAND
> Nohant, 17 janvier 1853 (35, italics in text)

Pascale Auraix-Jonchière states that the woman referred to in the Notice is probably Alphonsine Plessis, the "dame aux camélias" who was also the model for Alexandre Dumas's novel of the same name, which was published after *Isidora* and may have been influenced by it ("Intertextualité" 291). Auraix-Jonchière argues that the Notice's rejection of this real-life model is a sign that readers should understand the text through its literary allusions, the most obvious being Rousseau's *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*. But more importantly for my purposes, the Notice is a commentary on sincerity, analyzed here by Aimée Boutin:

> Le pacte entre auteur et lecteur est pour le moins ambigu dans la notice ajoutée au roman en 1853, dans laquelle Sand évoque une 'très belle personne' qui 'eût pu être ce qu'elle n'était pas'. Le lecteur ne sait pas s'il faut croire Sand quand elle affirme que cette personne, dont elle reconnaît le manque de sincérité, n'est pas Isidora. La question de la sincérité est donc posée d'emblée au seuil du roman. (185)

Boutin rightly identifies sincerity as one of the novel's main concerns, and she also rightly identifies the Notice as a source of doubt rather than an affirmation. Deborah Houk Schocket

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Bernard-Griffiths, Ed. Pascale Auraix-Jonchière et al., Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2009, 137–157.

reads Sand's Notice as "underscor[ing] her heroine's sincerity […] by describing an unnamed woman she met in Paris as the type of seductress on which she did *not* model Isidora" (*Modes of Seduction* 94, italics in original). But why mention this woman at all, if she has no bearing on the novel? It feels like protesting too much for Sand to go out of her way to associate this unnamed woman and Isidora, going so far as to preface the entire novel with this Notice, and then dismiss the association in a sentence. Given the ample evidence of Isidora's ability to "être ce qu'elle n'[est] pas" in the novel, the claim that Sand did not base her character on this unnamed woman rings a little hollow. In the Notice, Sand raises the possibility that Isidora might be based on a real person and she also raises the specter of insincerity. As Boutin points out, using Lionel Trilling's definition of sincerity as "the congruence between avowal and actual feeling" (Trilling 2), sincerity is not an absolute value, but a notion that is linked to social identity and judgment by others (Boutin 184). The question of sincerity is therefore inextricable from theory of mind.

The very notion of sincerity implies a consciousness of our ability to be insincere, that is, to say things that we do not genuinely believe or to do things for some hidden purpose. Accordingly, Sand's Notice contains a second-order intentionality: "Je vis parfaitement qu'elle *posait* devant moi et ne pensait pas un mot de ce qu'elle disait la plupart du temps" (35, italics in text). Sand grants herself the power to distinguish when this woman's words align with her thoughts and when they don't, and according to her, the woman is insincere "la plupart du temps." This is curious, given that earlier Sand reports that the woman had come to her in order to "*verser son cœur à mes pieds*, disait-elle" (35, italics in text). The use of italics and the use of "disait-elle" indicate that these are the woman's own words. If her stated purpose is to pour her heart out to Sand, why be insincere? Doesn't pouring one's heart out necessarily involve sincerity? The conflict invoked by the Notice will recur in the novel itself, as Isidora's desire to make sincere connections with other people wars with her socially acquired skill set of seducing and manipulating others. The language of the Notice will also recur: in the sentence "Elle eût pu être ce qu'elle n'était pas" (35), Sand uses the past subjunctive "eût pu" to indicate a

counterfactual possibility, and later in the novel Sand relies on this tense in a number of moments where Isidora or another character's sincerity is in question.

Jacques Laurent, the Rousseau-esque philosopher and writer whose diaries comprise the first third of the novel, also uses the past subjunctive for one of his first encounters with Isidora. At that point, he thinks of her as his admirably well-mannered noble neighbor Julie, and he writes: "la conversation s'est engagée entre elle et moi, si naturellement, si facilement, qu'on eût dit que nous étions d'anciennes connaissances" (66). Jacques is drawn to Julie because of her conversation, and he feels that they already know each other. Julie seems to him the ideal woman: "Il me semblait que je contemplais un fait miraculeux. Une femme opulente et belle, reniant les faux biens et parlant comme une sainte !" (67). Again, in this description, we see Jacques's emphasis on Julie's speech. He is first drawn to her through her conversation and he is further charmed by Julie "parlant comme une sainte." Jacques is twenty-five years old and by his own admission, he has no experience with women. Julie is the first one he has ever spent any time with. Crucially, they know all the same books, and that shared experience presents another opportunity for Julie to win over Jacques. (We later learn that Isidora has not, in fact, read these books. She has learned about them through conversation, so while she is cultured, she is "imperfectly so" ("Rebirth" 146). However, Jacques is unaware of this nuance.) Jacques cannot resist comparing her to the heroine of *La Nouvelle Heloïse* and he writes of "ma rencontre romanesque et providentielle avec l'admirable Julie" (71), framing their experience in terms of a novel. Rousseau is a constant reference in their conversations.[51] Julie talks to Jacques at length about Rousseau's failure to understand women (68), which Jacques hopes to fix in his own writing. His ambition obviously outpaces his experience, given that his project is to define women and he has so far only met Julie.

[51] For more on Sand's relationship with Rousseau's work, see Aline Alquier, "Isidora ou la Nouvelle Julie," *Les Amis de George Sand* 7 (1986): 19–24, and Christine Planté, "George Sand, fils de Jean-Jacques," *George Sand: intertextualité et polyphonie I. Palimpsestes, échanges, réécritures*, Ed. Nigel Harkness and Jacinta Wright, Bern: Peter Lang, 2011, 23–46.

At this point in the text, readers only know Julie through Jacques's worshipful presentation of her in his journal, but even so, it is possible to get a sense of Jacques's naïveté and Julie's worldliness. She might have renounced worldly goods in favor of spending time in her garden with her books, but she possesses the manners and education of someone who has spent time with upper-class Parisians. She hints that she may have suffered, but never goes into detail. Jacques never presses her for details:

> Je n'ai songé à m'informer ni de sa position à l'égard du monde, ni des circonstances de sa vie privée, ni même du nom qu'elle porte ; je sais seulement qu'elle s'appelle Julie, comme l'amante de Saint-Preux. Que m'importe tout le reste, tout ce qui n'est pas vraiment elle-même ? (70)

Jacques feels instantly certain that he "conna[ît] son âme" (70), hence his lack of curiosity about Julie's name, title, and private life. In light of Jacques's discovery that Julie is really Isidora, his assertion that "je sais seulement qu'elle s'appelle Julie" becomes sadly ironic. If Jacques is so easily duped on the subject of Isidora's name, how can we trust him when he says he knows her soul?

Jacques does not recognize Julie-Isidora when he meets a woman in a domino mask who is waiting to enter the Opéra ball, even though this woman knows a surprising amount about his relationship with Julie.[52] The woman claims to be an "amie intime" of Julie's (74), and savvy readers may note that she possesses something in common with Julie: "une sorte d'éloquence fiévreuse" (77). Jacques distinguishes between Julie's eloquence and Isidora's, but he is entranced by both women's voices and their conversational styles. Indeed, he is not comfortable with Isidora until she launches into an impassioned speech about society:

> Toute son âme, tout son être, semblaient être passés dans cette parole ardente, et cette voix feinte, qu'elle maintenait avec art pour ne pas se faire reconnaître, cette voix de masque qui m'avait blessé le tympan d'abord, prenait pour moi des inflexions étranges, quelque chose d'incisif, de pénétrant, qui agissait sur mes nerfs, si ce n'est sur mon âme. (79)

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[52] For an excellent analysis of this scene and a history of the Opéra ball, see Annabelle Rea, "Babylone et Eden : ville et nature dans Isidora," *Ville, campagne et nature dans l'œuvre de George Sand*, Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2002, 167–181.

Jacques recognizes that her voice is "feinte" as part of her disguise, but there is enough genuine feeling behind her words that he is nevertheless touched. Isidora's whole soul is in her voice and it penetrates Jacques, affecting him both bodily and spiritually. Despite being so strongly affected, he does not recognize Julie. Isidora has masked both her face and her voice, but what prevents Jacques from recognizing her as Julie is not her disguise. Jacques is so naive and ignorant about women that he cannot reconcile Julie and Isidora as one person. He cannot imagine the virtuous Julie behaving like Isidora. So even when touched by her "éloquence fiévreuse" and her "parole ardente," this speech that contains her whole soul, it never occurs to Jacques that Isidora and Julie are one and the same. He is truly surprised by the revelation, when it comes.

Even as Jacques discovers Isidora's double identity, both he and Isidora keep Julie separate in their minds. Isidora tells him "Julie n'a pas joué de rôle devant vous" (88). Jacques continues to address her as "Julie," even saying the curiously contradictory: "Non, Julie, tu ne sais pas mentir" (91). Jacques rationalizes what has happened to him by treating the two personas as separate. He imagines that Isidora has lied, thus absolving Julie of any deception. Later, when Jacques tells the story of his encounter with Julie-Isidora to Alice, he will explain it thus: "Ces deux femmes sont en elle : Dieu a fait la première, la société a fait la seconde" (129). Society forced Isidora to trade on her beauty in order to lift herself out of poverty, but even while prostituting herself, she was still pure inside, someone who wanted to do good in the world. Eve Sourian notes, in her preface to *Isidora*, that George Sand uses this device to embody the virgin-whore dichotomy, "la double nature de la femme" (11), within one character.[53] In Sand's earlier work *Lélia*, this dichotomy is represented by two characters: the cold, aristocratic, pure Lélia and her prostitute sister Pulchérie. In *Isidora*, the angel and the demon are two sides of the same woman. Sourian notes that there are other pure-hearted prostitutes in nineteenth-century

[53] For further analysis of Julie-Isidora's Biblical and literary doubles, see Pascale Auraix-Jonchière, "Intertextualité et parole oraculaire dans Isidora," *George Sand: intertextualité et polyphonie I. Palimpsestes, échanges, réécritures*, Ed. Nigel Harkness and Jacinta Wright, Bern: Peter Lang, 2011, 291–302.

literature, such as Esther in Balzac's *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, but that Sand breaks with tradition because Isidora is not purified by a man's love, nor is the oppressive society ultimately triumphant (15).

It seems, in the first third of the novel, as though *Isidora* will be a more typical story about a pure-hearted courtesan who is saved by the young man who loves her. It is not only Jacques who feels an instant connection with Isidora. The feeling is mutual. Jacques understands Isidora, and she recognized this when she met him as Julie, which is why she opened up to him: "Je vous connais à peine, m'a-t-elle dit, et pourtant je vous parle comme je ne pourrais et je ne voudrais parler à aucune autre personne, parce que je sens que vous seul comprenez ce que je pense" (68). So if Jacques knows her soul, then Isidora also knows his. Aimée Boutin notes the use of the verb "penser" in this passage (190). Thinking is private and personal, as opposed to speaking, which is public and can be deceptive. Boutin goes on to specify that Isidora's eloquence "lui sert davantage de masque que le domino qu'elle porte au bal de l'Opéra" (191). Jacques is occasionally led astray by Isidora's way with words, but it is, in fact, Jacques's naïveté that allows them to connect in a way that goes beyond language. Annabelle Rea refers to Jacques as a "green-world lover," that is to say a young man not yet entrenched in the patriarchy, which is underlined by Jacques Laurent's two first names and his recent arrival in Paris from the countryside ("Rebirth" 143). Because Jacques does not know much about the world, he is more likely to be able to see Julie in Isidora than any other man. Jacques and Isidora's relationship is founded on seeing the potential in each other. They love the idea of what they might become. Jacques want to be a Rousseau-like philosopher who understands women, and he thinks Isidora will allow him to achieve that. Isidora wants to be loved and respected as a woman who is both Julie and Isidora: a whole, complex person, not a prostitute or an angel.

However, Jacques fails Isidora at the end of the first third of the novel, because he cannot offer her the equal relationship she seeks. Throughout his diary entries, Jacques has idealized Julie and put her on a pedestal. He even compares his feelings for Isidora, once he has "met" her, to the feelings that he would have upon seeing a holy relic that had fallen into the mud (84). He

wants to pick up the relic, clean it off, and put it back on its pedestal. Jacques is still not seeing Isidora as a person. Isidora rejects his attempts to forgive her and subsequently purify her, telling him, "Le pardon est un reproche muet" (84). His forgiveness would grant him power over her, if she were to accept it. In the corrupt society in which they live, love can never be an equal relationship. Isidora, in her own words, dominates and humiliates her lover the comte de S, just as any relationship she might have with Jacques would involves him dominating and humiliating her (92). Rather than allow that to happen, Isidora leaves for Italy with the comte de S.

Three years later, in "Alice," the middle section of the novel, Jacques and Isidora meet again at the home of Alice, a noble widow and Isidora's lover's sister. The first section of the novel was told through Jacques's fragmented diary entries, so readers were limited to Jacques's perspective. But this section of the novel has an extradiegetic, omniscient narrator. The narrator offers glimpses into the thoughts of all three major characters in this section as they end up embroiled in a love triangle. In the three years that have passed since Isidora departed for Italy with her lover, Jacques has become the tutor of a young noble boy, the son of the widowed Alice. In the meantime, Isidora's lover, the comte de S, married Isidora just before he died, conferring a title upon her, as well as his wealth. Alice, the comte's sister, has welcomed Isidora into her family, despite the misgivings of all her relatives.

Alice is the opposite of Isidora, a cool blonde with "aucune ambition de paraître" (98). Isidora, we know, is not only extremely ambitious, but her rise in society was made possible by her beauty and her fiery eloquence, a talent that goes hand in hand with her desire to "paraître." So in this middle section of the novel, Sand juxtaposes what Sourian calls "la double nature de la femme" (11) by contrasting Alice and Isidora, rather than Isidora and her alter ego Julie. Alice's beauty is described thus by the narrator: "Au premier abord, cette beauté avait un caractère peut-être trop chaste et trop grave pour qu'il y eût moyen de mettre, comme on dit, un roman sur cette figure-là" (97). Alice is not described in terms of her facial features or other physical characteristics, but in terms of what other people think of her. There are no "romans" on her face: her beauty is *unreadable*. No one can tell what she is thinking from looking at her:

"Quelques observateurs l'étudiaient, cherchant à découvrir un secret de femme sous cette réserve inexplicable ; mais ils y perdaient leur science" (98). This first description of Alice already contrasts starkly with what we know of Isidora, who made a career out of her beauty and her eloquence and her ability to "paraître." Isidora, as a courtesan, seduced men by allowing them to read exactly what they wanted on her face. Isidora's chameleon-like ability to fashion herself into what her lovers wanted is associated with *seeming*, deception and dissimilation. However, Alice's ability to remain unreadable is also a kind of dissimilation. She is not an open book. She has secrets. The narrator notes that sometimes her lips are pressed together "comme si elles refoulaient une pensée ardente" (98). Isidora performs for her lovers, allowing herself to be read, allowing them access. Alice is unreadable and inaccessible. Both women are hemmed in by social constraints and prevented from being themselves.

Alice represses her emotions throughout this section of the novel, and her repression takes more and more of a physical and emotional toll on her. In an early scene, one of Alice's cousins turns out to be the man who saw Isidora and Jacques Laurent at the Opéra ball three years ago. This cousin, Adhémar, tells Alice that Isidora's last lover is someone Alice knows, and then Jacques Laurent, the tutor for Alice's son, enters the room. The narrator shifts between revealing the interior thoughts of each character in this scene and describing their exteriors as they would appear to an observer. Alice is contrasted to a heroine in a play:

> Alice, se sentant sous le regard méchant de son cousin, ne fit pas comme les héroïnes de théâtre, qui ont pour le public des *a parte*, des exclamations et des tressaillements si confidentiels, que tous les personnages de la pièce sont fort complaisants de n'y pas prendre garde. Elle se conduisit comme on se conduit dans le monde et dans la vie, même sans avoir besoin d'être fort habile. Elle demeura impassible, accueillit le précepteur de son fils avec bienveillance, et, après quelques mots affectueusement polis, elle prit son enfant sur ses genoux pour les caresser à son aise. (109)

As Lisa Zunshine writes "[theater] offers no 'going behind'" (*Why We Read Fiction* 23), except in voice-overs or, as the narrator of *Isidora* notes here, in *a parte*. But the narrator also mentions, with understated sarcasm, that the other characters on stage are "fort complaisants" not to listen to remarks made *a parte*. This reference to the theater serves two purposes: it reminds readers that they are in a privileged position, being in the confidence of the omniscient narrator and thus

having access to all the characters' internal monologues. Alice does not need to tremble or exclaim her feelings aloud for readers to know that she is deeply troubled; she can be dignified and polite, and thus only readers will know her feelings, which remain invisible to Jacques, even though he is with her. The second purpose of the narrator's remarks here is that we see that Alice *is* acting, but not in an exciting way that is fit for the stage. Alice "se conduisit comme on se conduit dans le monde et dans la vie," performing a mildly unpleasant but necessary role in which she does not express her true feelings. This kind of quotidian acting—the repression of emotions—does not require Alice to be "fort habile," so it differs from how Isidora conducts herself in two ways. Isidora is perhaps more like one of the "héroïnes de théâtre" that the narrator mentions, because her appeal is partly rooted in her passionate nature—she can be read by others. Certainly much of her success is due to the fact that she is "fort habile," since her late husband believed she was in love with him, even though she later reveals that she was not (155). Isidora, careful mind-reader that she is, guesses what men want from her and then transforms herself. Alice keeps things inside and remains "impassible."

This difference between Alice and Isidora plays out in an unexpected way in their first meeting. In the beginning of the scene, both women feel afraid, but they hide it from each other, and given how well the preceding pages establish all the reasons they have to be rivals, readers might expect their encounter to go badly. Since the scene starts with both women hiding their feelings, a misunderstanding seems probable. Then Isidora brings Alice a letter from Isidora's late husband. The seal on the letter is unbroken, so Alice knows Isidora has not read it, which she finds encouraging. Alice reads the letter in silence, and learns from it that her brother loved Isidora and felt she was worthy of his title and his wealth, and also that her brother wanted her to love Isidora like a sister. The contents of the letter encourage Alice, so she presents the letter to Isidora to read, "voulant observer quelle impression cette lecture produirait sur son impénétrable physionomie" (138). Without being told, Isidora immediately understands Alice's intention to read her face; she lifts her mourning veil so that Alice can watch her expression as she reads the letter. The letter is no longer the message; the text in need of deciphering is Isidora herself.

Isidora displays surprise at the contents of the letter, demonstrating a second time that she has not read it, and Alice is touched to see her sister-in-law become emotional. Crucially, Isidora first reveals her emotions in a private, non-theatrical way: "Des tressaillements involontaires trahirent son angoisse" (139). Isidora's trembling is involontary, and her anguish is *betrayed* rather than displayed. Her minimally apparent distress over her late husband strikes Alice as cold and unfeeling. A moment later, as Isidora tries to leave, she stumbles, falls back into her chair and lets slip "une sorte de cri, un sanglot sans larmes" (139) and it is this wordless sound—an exclamation that makes no use of Isidora's famous eloquence—that convinces Alice that Isidora's pain is real. Because of this moment, Alice offers to become Isidora's friend. Isidora, who has not had any female friendship in twenty years, is touched by the offer. These two women, who have every reason to become rivals, seem ready to become friends.

But then Jacques enters the room, a hidden witness to the scene, and a reminder to readers that it will not be so easy for Alice and Isidora to befriend each other. The love triangle in *Isidora* recalls the two love triangles in "Metella," because all three plots dramatize characters not knowing that their love is reciprocated, and all three plots are resolved by one character coming to understand the predicament through reading the others and then leaving or otherwise removing themselves from the equation. In *Isidora*, what is unexpected is that Isidora herself, positioned as the superior mind-reader, is not the one who resolves the situation.

When Isidora first arrives at Alice's, Jacques and Alice have grown to love each other. Even though their love is mutual, they have not discovered that they feel the same way about each other. Jacques is not a savvy mind-reader, but Alice has previously been shown to be capable. It is love that blinds them. The narrator describes their ignorance positively:

> Ils ne se devinèrent donc pas l'un l'autre, et malheur aux âmes altières qui appelleraient niaiserie la sainte naïveté de leur amour ! […] Rarement deux âmes également éprises se rencontrent dans les romans plus ou moins complets dont la vie est traversée. C'est pourquoi celui-ci pourra paraître invraisemblable à beaucoup de gens. C'est pourtant une histoire vraie, malgré la vérité d'une foule d'histoires qui pourraient en combattre victorieusement la probabilité. (121)

Alice and Jacques should not be mocked for their failure to realize their love is reciprocal. The naïveté of their love is "sainte," and rare. Neither of them dares to think the other might feel the same, since Jacques thinks the aristocratic Alice is above him, and Alice thinks Jacques is in love with Isidora. The narrator acknowledges that their situation is unusual, nigh unheard of, but its singularity is held up as proof. This tactic is common enough; many of the other narrators in works in this study also employ it, and it is the basis for the truism "truth is stranger than fiction." But what is worth examining here is that the narrator describes Jacques and Isidora's relationship as "une histoire," among not only "une foule d'histoires" but also "les romans plus ou moins complets dont la vie est traversée." Relationships are categorized as stories; stories are a way to understand and explain human behavior. There is a distinction to be made between the words "histoire" and "roman," which do not seem all that different in this passage, but in the larger context of *Isidora*, the word "roman" is consistently used to evoke the fanciful, the improbable, and the emotional. Natalie Buchet Rogers has studied the use of the word "roman" in the novel,[54] from which she draws some insightful conclusions about the fragmented structure of the novel that I will discuss later.

At the moment, I will add a few observations about the resonance of "roman" with *Isidora*. Sometimes "roman" is used to indicate a character's interior life, thoughts, and desires, such as when the narrator says that Alice's beauty is "trop chaste et trop grave pour qu'il y eût moyen de mettre, comme on dit, un roman sur cette figure-là" (97) or when Isidora tells Jacques that his love for Julie constitutes the love of her life: "c'est mon rêve, c'est mon roman de jeune fille" (155), linking the personal, emotional, interior world of dreams with young women's novels. These two instances trade on the strong association between novels and the mind, as opposed to the the narrator's use of "romans plus ou moins complets" in the passage quoted above, which associates novels with "histoires," be they "vraie[s]" or "invraisemblable[s]," reports, hearsay, and the construction of narratives, of sequences of events in time. The

[54] See Natalie Buchet Rogers, "Aux limites du genre : séduction et écriture dans Isidora," *George Sand, Pratiques et imaginaires de l'écriture*, Ed. Brigitte Diaz and Isabelle Hoog Naginski, Caen: Presses universitaires de Caen, 2006, 187–199.

separation of these two categories is not neat, since the "romans" in the quoted passage above are still love stories, and thus connected to the world of feelings, desires, and intentions. Even if the "romans" in question were not love stories, our deep-rooted interest in reports and hearsay about other people—narratives—is inextricable from our nature as social animals, users of theory of mind. We like to know what other people are doing and feeling.

When Isidora and Jacques are finally alone together, having left Alice at her home to go to sleep, Isidora broaches the subject of Jacques's feelings for Alice, and vice versa. She thinks they are in love. Jacques, who is indeed in love with Alice but who does not know that Alice loves him, denies Isidora's statements and demands, "Quel démon vous pousse à bâtir un roman extravagant, impossible ?" (150). Here, the word "roman" is both a narrative—the story that Jacques and Alice are mutually in love, and have, perhaps, been sleeping together—and a reference to Jacques's interior life as well as Alice's. With this word choice, Jacques denies the narrative of an affair between them and his own secret affections. But he protests too much. The roman is not only "extravagant," but "impossible." Had he stopped with "extravagant," his denial might have rung true, but there is, in fact, nothing "impossible" about an affair, or merely affection, developing between Jacques and Alice.

Isidora, the narrator affirms, "avait deviné juste" (150) but she does not know that by speaking her hypothesis aloud, "elle mettait la main sur des plaies vives" (150). But Jacques's reaction tells her as much, and Isidora effectively reminds him that she is the superior mind-reader of the two of them: "Vous n'êtes pas habile, Jacques ; vous ne savez pas que les femmes comme moi sont impossibles à tromper sur ce point" (150-1).

Jacques may reject Isidora's idea about him and Alice as "un roman extravagant, impossible," but this exchange with Isidora precedes another kind of novel, since Isidora then tells him "le roman infernal de ma destinée" (156). Life is threaded through with "romans plus ou moins complets," much like *Isidora* itself is threaded through with the story of Jacques and Isidora's first encounter and Isidora's past. Isidora retells her life twice in the middle section of the novel, once to Jacques and once to Alice, and these retellings are as different as night and

day. When Isidora tells her life story to Jacques, she is acting and using a great deal of artistry, and the narrator remarks that "La pâle traduction que nous venons de donner des paroles d'Isidora ne saurait donner une idée de son éloquence naturelle" (156). As Isidora recounts to Jacques how much she languished in his absence, she is so eloquent and so riveting that Jacques falls under her "charme" (157) and begins to forget his love for Alice. "Charme" is also the word used to convey the near-magical seductive powers of the actor Lélio in "La Marquise." In both cases, for Lélio and Isidora, "charme" seems to reside in some combination of physical beauty, verbal eloquence, tone of voice, and expression: "Tout était vrai dans l'expression d'Isidora ; sa voix sonore, son regard humide, son sein agité" (158).

The narrator's choice of "vrai" to describe what we know is a performance on Isidora's part—her imagination has carried her "loin du domaine de la réalité" (159) and she did not miss Jacques as much as she claims—is striking. Aimée Boutin describes this passage as Isidora's "théâtralisation de sa passion," wherein "elle représente des émotions vraies et sincères, pourtant en désaccord avec son for intérieur" (191). Hence the narrator's puzzling remark: "Et pourtant, hélas ! tout ce qu'elle venait de lui dire était-il bien vrai ? Sincère, oui ; mais véridique, non" (158). I disagree with Boutin that the emotions *are* "en désaccord avec son for intérieur," but I would agree that prior to Isidora's performance, they *were*; the problem is chronological. Isidora has not longed for Jacques for three years in the way she describes. Indeed, her feelings over the last three years are described as a "roman" by the narrator, and thus associated with the fictional, the fantastic, and the imaginary: "En revoyant Jacques, elle retrouva toute la poétique et brûlante énergie du roman qu'elle avait caressé en secret dans sa pensée depuis trois ans" (158). Isidora has been telling herself a "roman" of her love for Jacques, even if she has not really felt any genuine pain at his absence. The narrator even specifies that Jacques has suffered a great deal more than her, living out a "roman" of his own: "C'était bien plutôt lui qui eût pu, s'il eût été disposé à se vanter de sa fidélité, raconter à Isidora qu'il avait langui et souffert pour elle durant presque toute cette absence, et ce roman de son cœur eût été beaucoup plus authentique que celui qu'elle venait de faire sortir de son propre cerveau" (159). Jacques's "roman" is from his heart,

and Isidora's is from her brain, or, earlier, "caressé en secret dans sa pensée." His is more authentic, and yet the narrator assures us that Isidora's recounting of the past three years of her life is "sincère."

It is Isidora's passion that makes her words sincere, even if they are not truthful. She feels everything she is describing to Jacques in the moment of performance, even if she did not truly suffer from her love for him over the past three years. Isidora convinces herself with her own performance: "Dans l'excitation nerveuse qu'elle éprouvait, elle pouvait, sans efforts et sans fausseté, parcourir tous les tons, et s'identifier, à la manière des grands artistes, avec toutes les nuances de son improvisation brûlante" (160). The "grands artistes" of this passage also feel their performances very deeply. Isabelle Michelot, in a sensitive analysis of George Sand's essays and novels about acting, points out that George Sand takes the opposite position from that espoused by Diderot in his *Paradoxe sur le comédien*. Diderot argued that the greatest actors recreate the exterior signs of emotion, but do not base their performances on their own genuine feelings, relying instead on observation, judgment, and emotion. Sand, according to Michelot, "prend parti en faveur de l'identification du comédien et son rôle, contre la distance prônée par le théoricien" (159). Michelot goes on to add a nuance to this argument, stating that in many of Sand's novels about theater, "L'espace de la scène deviendrait le lieu de la sincérité de l'être, de son expression véritable, et non plus celui du rôle" (160).[55] Given Sand's preference for a style of acting in which performers genuinely feel the emotions that they portray, the narrator's remark that Isidora is "sincère, mais non véridique" could be a positive comment, but for the fact that readers know Alice and Jacques's pure, naive love is at stake.

Deborah Houk Schocket writes of this passage that Isidora's total identification with her performance stands in contrast to the princesse de Cadignan's similarly seductive retelling of her past, in which she explains how society has misunderstood her (94). It is true that the princesse de Cadignan's position is more cynical at the outset, in that she is conscious of her own

[55] There are certainly premonitions of this attitude in "La Marquise," where the theater makes possible an ideal form of love that cannot exist in a deceitful and unequal society, and Michelot studies this idea in Sand's later novels focusing on actors such as *Le Château des désertes*.

performance. She is more like the type of actor described by Diderot in the *Paradoxe*. But Diane ultimately convinces herself of her own feelings through the power of her performance. She *achieves* sincerity. Isidora achieves sincerity, too. It happens more quickly for Isidora than for Diane, but her performance nevertheless constitutes a moment of transformation. In that moment, Isidora fully and genuinely feels what she is telling Jacques, so she manages to be sincere—her avowal is in accordance with her feelings—but not truthful, since she discards the past three years in her performance. And when the performance is over, Isidora herself recognizes that she was not truthful, that she exaggerated her passion to Jacques; she confesses as much when she recounts her history, including the previous evening's seduction of Jacques, to Alice (184).

Isidora, possessed of a passionate nature, a powerful imagination, and a knack for performance, gets easily carried away. But she is also self-aware, capable of recognizing moments when her performance does not line up with the facts, and of recognizing her tendency to get carried away. Isidora is as fragmented as the text of *Isidora*, and she is aware of her own multifaceted nature. She understands, once the fervor of performance is gone, that she has not been truthful with Jacques. She longs to be both "sincère" and "véridique," to be a whole person, pure heart and scandalous history included. Society cannot comprehend the existence of such a complex woman; Isidora initially copes with these unjust social strictures by splitting herself into Isidora and Julie. At one point in their reunion Jacques tells her that Julie is dead. Isidora reacts violently to this statement, switching from the use of *vous* to the use of *tu* in their conversation. It would be better if Julie were dead and forgotten, she says, but instead, her soul is inside Isidora: "Vraiment je suis un tombeau où on a enfermé une personne vivante" (152). Isidora does not conceptualize her fragmentation as a statue of Janus, one person with two faces; instead she is an outside and inside, one person imprisoned within another. Annabelle Rea explores this notion of imprisonment, noting that we first encounter Julie in a space that is doubly enclosed, a greenhouse inside a walled garden ("Babylone et Eden" 173). Julie is Eve before the apple, and

Isidora is Eve cast out of the garden.[56] Just as Eve's knowledge of good and evil causes her to be cast out of the garden, Isidora's knowledge of her own nature causes her to suffer.

Isidora acknowledges her tendency to get carried away while storytelling, and the seductive power of her eloquence, when she tells her life story to Alice. Initially, Alice recoils in fear "involontairement" at Isidora's offer (174). Alice knows that Isidora's life story will contain things she does not want to hear, and furthermore, Alice knows Isidora's reputation as a seducer. But Isidora, gifted mind-reader that she is, understands Alice's gesture of resistance, and explains: "Non, je ne vous raconterai rien ; je ne le pourrais pas non plus ; mais je tâcherai de me faire connaître, en parlant au hasard" (174). Despite Isidora's attempt to placate Alice's fears, the narrator describes her storytelling thus: "elle dévoila, avec son éloquence animée, ce triste roman" (183). But this time, Isidora does not use her eloquence to sway Alice's views. She does not get carried away by her own performance. She takes a more distant, detached view of what she recounts. In the passage quoted above, "roman" functions in the sense of a narrative composed of events and also in the sense of Isidora's feelings, desires, and imaginings, which she treats as inextricable from the events. Isidora also thinks of her "roman" not merely as a series of events that happened to her, but as her own work: "j'ai gâté mon roman en voulant le reprendre et le dénouer" (184), she says, as though she is the author, solely responsible for and utterly in control of the events of her life. This moment is perhaps the first step toward Isidora's eventual turn toward writing.

Displaying a keen self-awareness, Isidora tells Alice what happened and what she wishes had happened, and she states that Jacques believed her because she believed herself (184), leading to one of the most complex networks of intersecting intentional states in the text. Alice

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[56] For more on the association of Isidora with religious and mythological figures like Eve, Isis, and Lilith, see Annabelle Rea, "Babylone et Eden : ville et nature dans Isidora," *Ville, campagne et nature dans l'œuvre de George Sand*, Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2002, 167–181. See also Pascale Auraix-Jonchière, "Intertextualité et parole oraculaire dans Isidora," *George Sand: intertextualité et polyphonie I. Palimpsestes, échanges, réécritures*, Ed. Nigel Harkness and Jacinta Wright, Bern: Peter Lang, 2011, 291–302. See also Annabelle Rea, "Isidora: ce que dit le manuscrit," *George Sand: intertextualité et polyphonie I. Palimpsestes, échanges, réécritures*, Ed. Nigel Harkness and Jacinta Wright, Bern: Peter Lang, 2011, 277–289.

believes that Isidora *believes* that Jacques *believed* her because Isidora *believed* herself. Not only that, but Alice believes that Jacques loves Isidora, though she now knows that Isidora does not love Jacques as much as she claimed to. Isidora, on the other hand, does not know that Alice loves Jacques, and despite her earlier intuition on the subject, Isidora has been convinced that Jacques does not love Alice, since she was able to seduce him.

Fittingly, the second section of the novel ends with several theory-of-mind based reversals. Isidora very nearly guesses that Alice is in love with Jacques (194), but cannot accept that Alice would behave so warmly toward her if that were the case. Isidora and Alice are too different for Isidora to comprehend Alice's intentions, thus even though Isidora normally excels at reading and manipulating people, she fails in this case. Initially, it is Alice who attempts to solve the untenable situation by removing herself from the triangle. She sees that Isidora and Jacques could love each other, so she hides her own feelings and pushes the two of them together. Alice is a foil for Isidora, and she takes action not by expressing her feelings but by repressing them. But concealing one's emotions is also a performance, and Alice's solution is not sustainable for any of the three characters. Alice's repression of her feelings takes a physical toll on her (189), Isidora does not really love Jacques, and Jacques remains torn between the two women.

The last third of the novel is composed of journal entries from Jacques and letters from Isidora, with the letters comprising the final pages of the book. Readers are first presented with Jacques's torment over his feelings for Isidora and Alice, and then Jacques's journal entries are replaced by Isidora's letters. In her first letter, she explains to Alice that she has enclosed the pages of Jacques's journal so that Alice will understand how much Jacques loves her. As for herself, Isidora is giving up on love. Isidora's next four letters are dated ten years after the first letter, and they show her in a much different state. She is in Lombardy, in the countryside, and she has adopted a daughter and is constructing a village to house poor families. She is creating her own little utopia.

These letters are Isidora's first foray into the world of written expression as opposed to oral. Her natural eloquence has previously been associated with her gift for seduction and manipulation. Isidora's writing, however, is associated with finally finding a space in the world where she can unite the disparate parts of herself. She writes that she has become "un autre moi" (219), and Annabelle Rea refers to this as a "rebirth" ("The Mid-Life Rebirth Journey"). In addition to writing, Isidora has also taken up embroidery, which Buchet Rogers connects to the myth of Philomela and Procne, since Philomela is able to communicate the story of her rape through her embroidery, even after her tongue has been cut out (197). Just as Philomela tells her own past through embroidery so that she can finally heal, Isidora learns to embroider and to write in order to take control of her own story. She also rejects speech in one of her letters: "Quand l'échange de la parole n'est pas nécessaire il est rarement utile. J'en suis venue à croire que tous les discours humains ne sont que vanité, temps perdu, corruption du sentiment et de la pensée" (228). Rejecting conversation as vanity and a waste of time is a far cry from the courtesan with feverish eloquence, but it is part and parcel of Isidora's rejection of everything that reminds her of her past, including makeup and luxuries (232). Annabelle Rea associates Isidora's turn from an oral culture to a written one with her late-in-life renewal of her education; previously Isidora was only familiar with great works of literature through conversation, but as a mature woman, she reads them herself ("Écrire" 52, "Rebirth" 146). Writing her life story in letters to Alice allows Isidora to unify the two sides of her being and find peace.

Annabelle Rea argues that because readers have access to Isidora's letters but not to their corresponding replies from Alice, it is as if we become the intended recipient of the letters: "George Sand encourage le lecteur à devenir ainsi lui-même le destinataire des lettres d'Isidora et ainsi à s'investir davantage dans le texte" ("Écrire" 53). This fits nicely with David Powell's argument that the use of male narrators in the first two-thirds of the novel is a way for Sand to make the masculine reader her "complice" (34), before progressively reducing the presence of male narrators to nothing. The novel comes to a close with Isidora's letters to Alice, so Sand

gives the last word to Isidora, which puts *Isidora* in line with both "La Marquise" and "Metella," where the final scenes focus on the female protagonists.

The novel pivots around the question of defining women, since it begins with Jacques Laurent's journals chronicling his philosophical inquiries and his meeting with Julie-Isidora. He does not know women but he hopes to. Julie seems to be the answer to his prayers, a thoughtful and virtuous woman worthy of his love, but then Julie turns out to be a persona adopted by Isidora. And, complicating the question of how to define women, Isidora herself says "je suis une énigme pour moi-même" (182), which is a common sentiment among nineteenth-century heroines of the era. Evelyne Ender notes that a Balzacian heroine says almost exactly the same words in *Le Rendez-vous* (243). However, even more common than having the heroine express that she is a mystery even to herself is to have the heroine's identity questioned and defined by the male characters who surround here. In an article on identity in George Sand's novel *Lélia*, Ender elaborates:

> Or il n'est pas surprenant que dans ce texte du dix-neuvième siècle, la question d'une identité féminine ne puisse s'énoncer autrement qu'à la deuxième ou la troisième personne – sous la forme de "qui es-tu, Lélia?" ou de "qui est-elle?". Ceci correspond à une configuration historique et idéologique que Shoshana Felman a brillamment mise en évidence dans sa lecture de deux récits de Balzac, *Adieu* et de *La Fille aux yeux d'or*: dès lors qu'il s'agit d'identité sexuelle, la femme n'est pas celle qui parle, mais celle dont on parle. (228)

Jacques attempts to do exactly this in *Isidora*. It is his project to define women as a whole, but Julie-Isidora becomes his focus because she is the only woman he knows. However, Jacques is too naive to complete his project. The incomplete status of Jacques's project is announced by the narrator at the beginning of part one. The journal pages are notes for "un ouvrage philosophique que Jacques Laurent n'a pas encore terminé et qu'il ne terminera pas peut-être" (39), and the narrator also offer this judgmental remark: "Beaucoup des manuscrits de Jacques Laurent avaient déjà servi à faire les sacs pour le raisin, et c'était peut-être la première fois qu'ils étaient bons à quelque chose" (39). Jacques eventually disappears from the novel altogether. Indeed, the narrator notes that Jacques's journal appears to have been "brusquement abandonné" (210), but this is, of course, because Isidora has mailed it to Alice (211). Jacques's writing is taken away

from him by one woman and sent to another, and the final pages of the novel are comprised of correspondence from Isidora to Alice. The novel itself thus becomes, in contrast to the Rousseau-esque treatise on women that Jacques Laurent dreamed of writing, "un traité de femme sur l'impossibilité de cerner la nature de la femme parce que trop variée" (Rea "Écrire" 39). *Isidora*, through its fragmented and polyphonic structure, is able to offer multiple portraits of women in all their complexity. Alice and Isidora's relationship with each other is ultimately more important than their relationships with Jacques. It is through Isidora's written correspondence with Alice, her nurturing relationship with her adopted daughter, and her work in the village in Lombardy that Isidora comes to solve her own enigma and know herself.[57]

Conclusion

The marquise, Metella, and Isidora all end up with some degree of independence. But such independence cannot be found in the urban societies of Paris and Florence, fraught with gender and class divisions, and it cannot be achieved within a romantic relationship with a man. However, Metella and Isidora both find that while their relationships with men end in loneliness and disappointment, friendship with women is rewarding. And there is a note of hope for romance at the end of *Isidora*, since Isidora's adopted daughter and Alice's son meet and develop a close friendship. Perhaps within the utopian society of Isidora's country estate, their friendship can blossom into the type of love that the marquise, Metella, and Isidora never experience: equal, respectful, and lasting.

Withdrawal from society is one way for women to achieve independence, and another is to take control of their own stories, which the marquise and Isidora both do. Telling or writing stories is not inherently deceptive and wrong. Indeed, both the marquise and Isidora use their positions to reflect on and criticize the unequal societies that prevented them from finding love

[57] Annabelle Rea suggests that Isidora writing the story of her own life is a precursor to George Sand writing *Histoire de ma vie*. See Annabelle Rea, "Isidora: An Enabling Exercise for Histoire de Ma Vie?" *Le Chantier de George Sand : George Sand et L'étranger*, Ed. Anna Szabó and Tivadar Gorilovics, Debrecen: Kossuth Lajos Tudomáyegyetem, 1993, 155–61.

or living fully and freely. In these three texts, we see that there are unhealthy and even dangerous ways to engage with art, as when the marquise is heartbroken the first time she sees Lélio outside the theater, or as when Isidora uses her passionate eloquence to seduce Jacques, deceiving him and herself in the process. But there are positive ways to engage with art as well, since art can allow us to imagine a better world.

CHAPTER FOUR: 'Bien des cœurs me comprendront': Reading the Mind and the Heart in Gérard de Nerval's *Sylvie*

Sylvie is an 1853 novella by Gérard de Nerval that is either very easy or very difficult to summarize.[58] The easy summary goes like this: a nameless narrator, who bears some autobiographical resemblance to Gérard de Nerval, reminisces about the three women he has loved and tries to rekindle a romance with two of them, with limited success. But this summary does not capture why Umberto Eco called *Sylvie* "one of the greatest books ever written" (11) or why Marcel Proust called it "le rêve d'un rêve" (237). Eco and Proust were both drawn to *Sylvie*'s hazy atmosphere, created by the narrator's manipulation of past and present, memory and dreams. My use of the word "atmosphere" here is inspired by Proust, who described the text as having an "atmosphère bleuâtre et pourprée" (242) and compares that atmosphere to a morning mist, but as Umberto Eco points out, the descriptions of the countryside in Sylvie might mention mist, but they themselves are not vague or hazy. They are precise. It is the descriptions of time that are misted (Eco 29). This is because everything is filtered through the narrator's memory and his perspective on the present.

I will examine the ways in which *Sylvie* engages readers' theory of mind. *Sylvie*, because it involves the narrator examining his own perceptions, is a particularly rich text for this. Both Umberto Eco and Ross Chambers have written about the relationship between the text of Sylvie and its reader, and I will refer to both of them in this chapter, especially Chambers. Chambers argues that the text presents "models of reading" (*Story and Situation* 29)—characters reacting to stories or allusions to literature in the text—that act as indications of how we, as readers, are meant to respond to the text. Eco also uses the term "model reader," but for him, this term refers to "a sort of ideal type whom the text not only foresees as a collaborator but also tries to create"

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[58] *Sylvie* was originally published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* on August 15, 1853, and then it later appeared in *Les Filles du Feu* followed by an appendix called "Chansons et légendes du Valois." Citations refer to the Pléiade edition unless specified otherwise. Gérard de Nerval, "Sylvie," *Œuvres complètes*, Ed. Jean Guillaume and Claude Pichois, III, Gallimard, 537–579, Bibliothèque de La Pléiade.

(6), in contrast to the empirical reader, any real individual who reads the text. Eco and Chambers both see in the text a kind of how-to guide, although they cite different passages as guidance for readers. Neither Eco nor Chambers refers to cognition, so my work will diverge from theirs. In discussing *Sylvie*, I will also refer to cognitive critic Blakey Vermeule's ideas of "absorption," being immersed in the imagined world of a text, and "suspension," knowing that a text is fiction and thus holding it at a distance. Vermeule treats these two experiences in the context of reading fiction, but I will also apply them to the narrator's experience as a theater-goer.

Chambers points out that it is customary, when discussing *Sylvie*, to distinguish between the "I" of the hero and the "I" of the narrator, who are separated by time and experience (*Story and Situation* 97). Critics also generally accept that the narrator and his younger self are fictionalized versions of Gérard de Nerval; Georges Poulet calls the narrator and the hero "un Gérard plus parfait" (14), and Eco cleverly calls the narrator "Je-rard" (14).[59] There was an early period of criticism of the novella in which *Sylvie* was treated as a kind of sweet pastoral memoir, an autobiographical work that played fast and loose with the facts (Castex, "Indications préliminaires" 10-11, Fairlie 87-8).[60] Bony points out that readers in 1853 might simply have accepted the text as "parfaitement autobiographiqu[e]," being accustomed to Nerval's travel writing (53). While *Sylvie* is certainly not perfectly autobiographical, being far more fiction than memoir, neither is it entirely divorced from Nerval's life. Still, for clarity, I have adopted Chambers's technique of referring to the "hero" and the "narrator" wherever it is possible to distinguish them, rather than using "Gérard."

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[59] For more on *Sylvie* and autobiography, see Jacques Bony, "Sylvie, Aurélia : aux frontières de l'autobiographie," *Le Rêve et la vie*, Paris: Société d'édition d'enseignement supérieur, 1986, 53–65.

[60] For a brief overview of scholarship on *Sylvie*, see Henri Bonnet, *"Sylvie" de Nerval : étude de l' œuvre*, Hachette, 1996. Alison Fairlie also discusses previous generations of criticism, and Léon Cellier categorizes the major works by type. See Alison Fairlie, "An Approach to Nerval," *Studies in Modern French Literature*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961, 87–103. See also Léon Cellier, *De "Sylvie" à Aurélia: structure close et structure ouverte*, Paris: Lettres modernes, 1971.

The narrator recounts the hero's youthful folly, which has made him into the narrator. At key moments, especially at the end of the text, the mature narrator pauses to philosophize about the fruits of his experience. The whole text is thus implicitly constructed around a second-order intentionality: *I did not know then what I know now*. However, the narrator reveals his hard-won wisdom over the course of the text, rather than stating it outright. He thus organizes the text in a way that forces readers to relive his own youthful ignorance. The organization of *Sylvie* gives the text its hazy atmosphere.

The narrator forces the reader to relive the narrator's own past, thus drawing the reader into his madness, leading the reader astray—seducing the reader, that is. Ironically, the hero fails to seduce Sylvie or Adrienne, and he only briefly succeeds with the actress Aurélie. The hero's failures with these three women are due to his inability to "read" them correctly. His focus is always too inward; he is absorbed by his own thoughts. His obsession with Aurélie and Adrienne prevents him from connecting with Sylvie. He also cannot reconcile the Sylvie of the present with the one of his memories and dreams. He treats all three women as ideals rather than human beings, as such, he is unable to perceive what they want and unable to express himself fully around them. Successful seduction hinges on good mind-reading; the seducer must perceive what their intended wants, and then offer them some version of their desires. The hero proves unable to do this, but made wiser by the hero's failures, the narrator becomes a good mind-reader. In offering the reader an intimate but carefully constructed portrait of his own consciousness, he draws us into his own experience and elicits our sympathies. "Bien des cœurs me comprendront" (567), he writes at the end of his account, a statement that functions both as an assertion of his own capabilities and an invitation for the reader to find herself among those who understand.

The narrator seems to disparage his own writing skills in the moment before this, since the full passage reads:

> Telles sont les chimères qui charment et égarent au matin de la vie. J'ai essayé de les fixer sans beaucoup d'ordre, mais bien des cœurs me comprendront. Les illusions tombent l'une après l'autre, comme les écorces d'un fruit, et le fruit, c'est l'expérience. (567)

But despite the narrator's protestations that he has presented his "chimères" "sans beaucoup d'ordre," the organization of the novella is a deliberate choice. It follows the logic of memory and dreams: the narrator's memory is sparked by certain sights on his journey back to the Valois, so his geographic journey is entwined with a journey back through his past. The transitions from present to past are purposefully subtle, which gives the text its dreamlike quality. Past and present blur together easily in dreams. This dreamlike quality can obscure that the text of *Sylvie* is meticulously organized into a series of triptychs and diptychs, switching between the three women and between past and present in a predictable pattern, which Léon Cellier demonstrated convincingly.[61] The novella's structure might seem chaotic, but it is in fact carefully constructed and quite complex. If "bien des cœurs" understand the narrator, it is not the result of an accident.

A more complex summary of the novella should reflect its "tangle of flashbacks and flashforwards" (Eco 32), so that is what I will attempt to provide here. *Sylvie* is divided into fourteen chapters. The first one, "I. Nuit perdue," begins in the present, in Paris, with the narrator exiting a theater after having watched his favorite actress perform. He is in love with the actress, and has been for a year now, but he has not approached her. He looks at a newspaper and realizes that his investments have made him rich, which might make it possible for him to woo the actress, but he rejects this idea. Then, his eye is caught by an article about a provincial festival in Loisy, which awakens in him a memory of his youth. In the second chapter, "II. Adrienne," the narrator cannot sleep; he is consumed with memories of this provincial festival. Long ago, he once attended this festival with Sylvie, a sweet country girl who was his childhood friend, but while they were dancing in a circle, his eye was caught by Adrienne, a beautiful blonde. Adrienne used to live in the chateau near Loisy and she was allowed to mingle with the local people at the time of the festival. She sang and danced with the narrator, who forgot all about Sylvie while in her presence. When he returned to Sylvie, she was upset with his behavior.

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[61] See Léon Cellier, *De "Sylvie" à Aurélia: structure close et structure ouverte*, Paris: Lettres modernes, 1971. For more on the structure of *Sylvie*, see Patrick M. Bray, "Lost in the Fold: Space and Subjectivity in Gérard de Nerval's 'Généalogie' and Sylvie," *French Forum* 31.2 (2006): 35–51.

Adrienne seemed to him a "mirage" (542) and he learned the next year that she was sent to a convent. In "III. Résolution," in the present, the narrator realizes that he loves the actress because she looks like Adrienne, and he begins to wonder if they might be the same person. Then he thinks of Sylvie again. He goes to the Valois for two reasons: to find Sylvie and to find out if the actress and Adrienne are one and the same. As the narrator leaves Paris by carriage, he begins to reminisce further about his time in the Valois.

The next few chapters cover the narrator's memories of the Valois, including a visit to Sylvie's great-aunt's house where he and Sylvie dressed up in her relatives' wedding clothes and a memory of a theatrical performance where the narrator thought he saw Adrienne, at that point a nun, participating in a religious play in the role of holy spirit. In the present, the narrator's carriage arrives and he walks to Loisy. He gets to the ball just before dawn and finds Sylvie and tries to tell her how he feels, but they are interrupted by Sylvie's brother. The narrator then takes a solitary walk to his uncle's house, and the next day he sees Sylvie again. They take a walk and he tries to tell her how he feels again, how he is haunted by the question of whether the actress is Adrienne, and how he wants Sylvie to save him. He fails to express himself. Later, he learns that Sylvie is going to marry another childhood friend, and he returns to Paris to try again with the actress, Aurélie. In "XIII. Aurélie," a great deal of time is condensed into very little text: the narrator tries again with Aurélie, and they even go to the Valois together, but she recognizes that he loves her only for her resemblance to Adrienne, and she ends their affair. In the final chapter, "XIV. Dernier Feuillet," the narrator reflects on his past. He has remained friendly with Sylvie, and he has also learned from her that Adrienne died at the convent in 1832, and thus could not possibly be Aurélie.

The hero struggles to connect with all three women. His attachment to the past, to his own memories, prevents him from reading Sylvie and Aurélie in the present. His imagined, idealized versions of Sylvie, Aurélie, and Adrienne cloud his perception. The hero cannot understand the women he loves, but the narrator, made wiser by his experience, is able to form a friendship with Sylvie. It is not the romantic connection he sought as a young man, but it is a

lasting relationship, founded on a fuller recognition of Sylvie as a person. In "XIV. Dernier Feuillet," the narrator and Sylvie read a book together, sharing an emotional experience.

Ideals and Rivals

The first description of any of three women in the text is that of Aurélie, the actress, in the first chapter, and it sets the tone for the narrator's relationships with women. When the narrator first discusses Aurélie, he does not give her name, only her profession. She is an actress. This is curiously flattening and categorical description, but it fits with the narrator's overall attitude toward Aurélie. Even his physical description of her fails to give a precise idea of what she looks like: she is "belle comme le jour, pâle comme la nuit" (537). The actress is a symbol. He specifies that he has not informed himself about her real life in any way, even though he has been watching her perform for a year, because he fears disturbing the "miroir magique" (538). Indeed, he explains his ignorance by saying that he has not paid any more attention to her life than he would have to rumors of the princesse de Trébizonde, a fictional character (538). Aurélie, still nameless at this point in the text, is not a real person to the narrator.

This also explains the narrator's lack of contact with Aurélie. He keeps his distance from her in order to preserve his obsession, and he claims that this is characteristic of his generation: "Vue de près, la femme réelle révoltait notre ingénuité ; il fallait qu'elle apparût reine ou déesse, et surtout n'en pas approcher" (539). But it is also, as his failures will reveal over the course of *Sylvie*, particular to him. Other men of the narrator's generation manage to succeed with women. Indeed, only a moment after making this proclamation about his generation, the narrator shifts from the universal to the specific: when a potential rival questions him about his intentions toward the actress, he responds, "C'est une image que je poursuis, rien d'autre" (539), switching from "nous" to "je." Aurélie, in this first description, is a magic mirror, a queen, a goddess, and an image. These comparisons flatten her into a mirror or an image, or distance her until she becomes an unattainable queen or a goddess. Later in the chapter, when the narrator learns from the newspaper that his investments have made him rich, he briefly considers using his new

wealth to court the actress—to realize his dream—but he immediately rejects the idea that he could "toucher du doigt [s]on idéal" (540). Queens and goddesses are often idealized and made into images, representations of women that can be admired or worshipped from afar but that do not change, or act, or feel.

The narrator also says that he learned about actresses from an uncle who had had many affairs in the eighteenth century, and that his uncle warned him "que les actrices n'étaient pas des femmes, et que la nature avait oublié de leur faire un cœur" (538). He has grown up with the idea that actresses are not women because they are heartless. This same uncle associates actresses with their portraits in ivory or on posters for plays, thus reinforcing the idea that actresses are images. The narrator is right to identify the idea of the heartless actress with the eighteenth century, and Ross Chambers specifically links it with Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, in which Diderot proposes that the best actors are those who imitate the exterior signs of emotions that they do not genuinely feel. These actors are thus empty inside. Chambers comments that "Le propre du mythe de l'actrice sera désormais, en effet ... d'exclure la nature, la chair, la femme réelle" (*L'Ange et l'automate* 7). Aurélie is heartless, in the narrator's perception. She is not a woman, but an image—a thing with no interior.

If Aurélie possesses no interior, she cannot be read; the surface of the "miroir magique" (538) can only reflect back to the narrator what he projects onto it. The narrator's error in this instance is not simply mind-*mis*reading, or an inaccurate interpretation of Aurélie's mental state, but something more profound. The cognitive science term for an inability to recognize other people as possessing interior lives is "mindblindness" (Savarese and Zunshine 22). The narrator is not generally mindblind, since he is easily able to attribute a mental state to the rival he encounters in chapter one. His trouble is specific to the women he loves and idealizes.

This first description of the actress and her lack of interior stands in stark contrast to the narrator's probing descriptions of his own consciousness. He understands his repeated visits to the theater as motivated by an obsession with the actress, and when a newspaper article about a

provincial festival in Loisy awakens a memory of his youth, he leads readers deep into his own memory.

The first memory that the narrator shares is his experience at a provincial festival. He goes to the festival with Sylvie, but he is drawn away from Sylvie by an encounter with Adrienne. Adrienne is an aristocratic girl who rarely mingles with the common people, but at this festival, she is permitted to dance and sing with them. The narrator gives her a flower crown, and then she runs back into the chateau. He thinks of her as a "mirage" (542), another kind of image, insubstantial and fleeting. The hero frequently thinks of Adrienne in these terms—a mirage, an apparition. She looms large in the narrator's memory, but his encounters with her are few. He does not see her again at the next year's provincial festival, but instead learns that she has been sent to a convent. Thus, early on in the narrator's life, Adrienne becomes distant and inaccessible, and he has only a memory of her. This memory, according to the narrator, is the "germe" (543) for his obsession with the actress, since he thinks the actress resembles Adrienne.

The hero also remembers having seen Adrienne perform in a passion play once at Châalis, which, for him, is another thread connecting Adrienne and Aurélie. Adrienne plays the role of an angel, and the hero experiences a kind of religious ecstasy in the audience. The performance is "comme un mystère des anciens temps" and Adrienne is "transfigurée" by her costume (553). There are traces of suspension—recognition of the play as a play—in the description of the performance, like the mention of Adrienne's cardboard halo. But not even that mundane detail can counteract the powerful absorption that the hero feels while watching the play: "Le nimbe de carton doré qui ceignait sa tête angélique nous paraissait bien naturellement un cercle de lumière" (553). Adrienne's angelic qualities emanate from her body, rather than the costume. Her head is "angélique," so she is able to make the cardboard halo seem "naturellement" like a circle of light. Then Adrienne sings, linking this encounter with their previous one at the festival, and the hero is enchanted. Her voice is even more powerful than it had been: "Sa voix avait gagné en force et en étendue" (553). The memory becomes dreamlike for him: "En me retraçant ces détails, j'en suis à me demander s'ils sont réels ou bien si je les ai

rêvés" (553). Adrienne is the most unreal and mirage-like of the three women in the text, and this memory of a theatrical performance is so powerfully seductive that it haunts his whole relationship with Aurélie.

The memories of Adrienne shed new light on his obsession with Aurélie. This chain of memories resembles a chain of intentionalities, but the only mind being explored is that of the narrator-hero: the narrator *remembers* how the hero *felt* at the play at Châalis, and at Châalis, the hero is also remembering how he felt at the provincial festival, and then the narrator *relives* that same feeling when he sees Aurélie. The narrator is very sensitive to his own perceptions, but insensitive to those of the women he loves. Thus far in the text, he has treated both Aurélie and Adrienne as images or apparitions, and he has largely ignored Sylvie, to whom I will return shortly.

The narrator-hero, by his own admission, is unable to treat women he loves as people. The men in the text fare better, but only slightly. In "I. Nuit perdue," the narrator-hero encounters another young man who might be a potential rival for the actress's affections. Perceiving this young man as a potential rival requires the hero to grant him agency—to understand that his actions are motivated by feelings and desires. This young man appears in the text for only a few paragraphs, far less than the actress, and yet he is not an apparition. He is a person. Indeed, when the narrator-hero thinks of approaching the actress, it is the rival's reaction he considers, rather than the actress's: "Que dirait maintenant, pensais-je, le jeune homme de tout à l'heure, si j'allais prendre sa place près de la femme qu'il a laissée seule ?…" (540).

The hero ultimately dismisses his potential rival in "I. Nuit perdue," as he will dismiss his other rivals later in the text—to his chagrin, in later cases. But this wrong assessment of his rivals is secondary; what matters is that the hero is able to conceive of these young men as possessing an interior life that resembles his own. Perhaps this is because the resemblance is so strong; rather than seeing these young men as people who differ from him and who *might* want what he wants, with depths he cannot perceive, the hero sees them as his doubles. The hero understands other men in this limited way, but his understanding of women is even more limited

by his obsessive, inward focus on his ideas of them. But as he grows older and becomes the narrator, he learns. He comes to treat people whose desires might not resemble his own—that is to say, everyone, but most especially the women of the text—as more than images or ideas.

Sylvie and Secrets

In contrast to the narrator's treatment of Aurélie and Adrienne as images or heartless creatures, one of the first things he says of Sylvie is "Elle existe, elle, bonne et pure de cœur sans doute" (543). At last, a real woman, a woman with substance, a woman with a heart! However, this more generous view of Sylvie is almost instantly undermined by the narrator's present-tense reflection: "Elle m'attend encore… Qui l'aurait épousée ? elle est si pauvre !" (543). He thinks of Sylvie as untouched by change, even though years have passed since he saw her. She is still poor and still waiting for him. As Georges Poulet points out, Sylvie, too, is a memory (40). She is multiple memories, in fact. The hero, in addition to his obsession with unifying Aurélie and Adrienne, will have to reconcile his memories of Sylvie with Sylvie herself.

Sylvie, being real and substantial, changes. In the narrator's next memory, he offers up evidence of this: "Je ne pus m'empêcher de lui dire combien je la trouvais différente d'elle-même" (546). In context, he insists on Sylvie's difference from her past self in order to "couvrir ainsi mon ancienne et rapide infidélité" (546), that is to say, the fact that last time he and Sylvie were at a provincial festival together, he left her to go kiss Adrienne. The hero's kiss with Sylvie in the memory in "IV. Un Voyage à Cythère" is meant to "cover" and also to "erase" that previous memory, as the narrator describes it: "Je compris que j'effaçais ainsi le souvenir d'un autre temps" (546). That qualification "je compris que" introduces an element of uncertainty into the sentence, because the narrator-hero is offering his interpretation of Sylvie's behavior. He *thinks* that she is also remembering his kiss with Adrienne and thus allowing him to redeem himself, but given that he abandoned Sylvie in order to kiss Adrienne in the first place, he has not proven terribly sensitive to her feelings in the past. It is the narrator-hero's hope that his infidelity will be "erased" from Sylvie's memory, or perhaps merely "covered" by this new kiss.

But his own recall of both events is clear. This idea that one memory can fully replace another is a strangely flat conception of memory, as if the memory were a stack of pages, one of which could be torn out or erased. The narrator knows the depths of his own memory, and how a newspaper article can dredge up things he has not remembered in a long time, but here he seems to refuse Sylvie's memory that same complexity. Or, more precisely, he *hopes* that Sylvie's memory works differently from his own, even as he privately acknowledges, in his own shift from "erase" to "cover," how unlikely that is. The narrator-hero's metaphors for the workings of memory also suggest that he comprehends Sylvie not as a fully complex person who grows and changes—and who exists when he is not there to observe her—but as a series of discrete images. Georges Poulet points out that the characters of *Sylvie* do not seem to live continuously, but appear and disappear according to aesthetic whim (18).

There is, however, a progression over the course of the text, as the narrator-hero comes to accept Sylvie as a real person who exists independently of his idea of her. Many critics have commented on how Sylvie changes with the times (Bray 50, Gipson 240). She used to sing folk songs and now she refuses the hero's requests that she sing them again, saying "on ne chante plus cela" (560); instead, she sings contemporary opera. The isolation of the Valois no longer protects it from the reach of the modern world, and the region's traditional folk culture is disappearing, only to be replaced by the music and literature that is currently en vogue in Paris.[62] The narrator used to tell Sylvie about Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, which she had never heard of, but now she reads it herself. She used to make lace, and then she became a glovemaker (559), and at the end of the story, she is married and running a bakery with her husband, no longer a peasant but a *bourgeoise*. Even on a smaller scale, Sylvie shows signs of the passage of time—after the ball at Loisy, her hair is coming loose and the flowers she's wearing are wilted (554). Poulet argues that it is through contact with Sylvie that the hero comes to know and accept reality (63). Indeed, Sylvie is the most notable change between the narrator-hero's memories and

[62] For more on this subject, see Jennifer Gipson, "Literature and the Death of Folklore: In and around Nerval's Sylvie," *The Romanic Review* 1-2 (2011): 235.

the present in the Valois, but she is not the only thing that changes. The narrator begins to take note of how time creeps in at the edges. The narrator-hero returns to Montagny to visit his uncle's house and initially, he reports that "Tout semblait dans le même état qu'autrefois" (556), but not quite—the dog is stuffed.

It is only after reconnecting with Sylvie that the hero can send a letter to Aurélie, which Poulet describes thusly: "il fait maintenant acte d'existence personnelle et reconnaît du même coup l'existence personnelle de la destinataire" (68). This is certainly a marked step forward from the hero at the beginning of the story, who recoiled at the thought of touching his ideal. In his analysis, Poulet pauses her to discuss Nerval's relationship with the actress Jenny Colon, which I would also like to highlight in order to add a comment about mind-reading.

The real Nerval loved an actress from afar, much like his protagonist. Previous generations of scholars focused on Nerval's biography and its resemblances to the hero of *Sylvie* to the exclusion of other aspects of the text, and though that error has since been corrected, there is no need to dismiss references to Nerval's life entirely. Nerval did, after all, deliberately chose to write a text that echoed his own life. Georges Poulet points out a particularly interesting line from Nerval's correspondence with Jenny Colon: "j'aurais su mieux calculer ma marche, étudier votre caractère et trouver à la longue les secrets que vous me cachez" (*Lettres* 117). Of this excerpt, Poulet writes: "Toute l'histoire brève de ses relations avec Aurélie est là ; dans ce désir d'étudier son caractère, afin de percer le secret qu'elle lui cache. Car l'être réel, à la différence de l'être rêvé, est une âme qui se dissimule, et l'individualité enclôt toujours un secret" (74). Nerval's longing to study Jenny Colon's character, to uncover her secrets, is founded on theory of mind. Unlike his young protagonist, Nerval knows that she is a person with thoughts and feelings that are unknown to him, and he is tormented by her "secrets." He wants to know her completely. This desire is as impossible as the hero's desire to unite Aurélie and Adrienne into one; indeed, for Poulet, the two desires are the same. The hero wants Adrienne to be the "secret" that Aurélie holds inside, because he wants her secret to be something that he already possesses (75).

Sylvie has secrets of her own. The hero believes she might be capable of freeing him of his obsession with Aurélie and Adrienne, either because she herself will become the sole object of his affection, or because she will confirm or deny his belief. Either option requires the hero to know Sylvie better, or at the very least to ask her a few questions outright. But the hero continually fails to express himself with Sylvie, perhaps because he wants to prolong his dream. I will return to his various attempts at confession in the next section.

Sylvie knows the answer, and the hero suspects that she knows. This is a second-order intentionality, and it can be paired with the second-order intentionality that underlies the narration: I (the hero) *did not know* then what I (the narrator) *know* now. Combined, they form a third-order intentionality. The narrator *knows* that Sylvie *knows* what the hero *does not know*: Adrienne is dead, and thus she cannot be Aurélie. The key to the hero's obsession, the secret at the heart of the text, is covered by these three layers. Whalen, Zunshine, and Holquist have shown in a cognitive study that three levels of "embedment," their term for the embedding of mental perspectives, is a "sweet spot" for readers, because it is challenging but not impossibly so (Whalen et al.). Regarding levels of perspective embedding, in a passage that is germane to *Sylvie*, the authors clarify:

> Each level of embedment can have a single actor or different actors ("I thought I knew" vs. "Jane thought I knew"), but there is a sense in which an actor is added even when it is the same person. The "I" of "I thought I knew" has to take two perspectives, and perspectives can really only be taken by people. Because the perspectives are different, there is a sense in which the actors must be different, even if they inhabit the same body. (Whalen et al.)

This is a thorny philosophical question, but the article's position aligns with what Eco and Chambers have said about *Sylvie*: the narrator's perspective differs from the hero's. The text's complexity is part of its appeal. The narrator could simply have mentioned, in describing his first meeting with Adrienne, that he later learned that she died in 1832, but he chooses not to. He preserves the mystery. In arranging the order of the scenes, he purposefully reproduces his own younger self's ignorance in the reader, in the same way that he reproduces his younger self's inability to "read" the three women. Eco and Chambers both identify this narrative strategy as

forcing the reader to enter the hero's illusion in order to then come out of it, and Chambers specifically identifies this illusion with the "theater" that is mentioned in the first sentence: "Je sortais d'un théâtre…" (*Sylvie* 537). It is thus a kind of rite of passage for the reader. For Chambers, the theme of the theater—associated with the provincial festivals because they both involve costumes—progressively deteriorates over the course of the text, since the theater is vulnerable to contact with the real world, and this contact is represented by Sylvie (*Story and Situation* 111-113). Just as Georges Poulet identifies Sylvie as the catalyst for the hero recognizing Aurélie as a person, Chambers identifies Sylvie as the catalyst for the hero becoming the narrator and freeing himself of his illusions. Sylvie is the one who answers his question, who solves the riddle of Adrienne and Aurélie, and thus simplifies the third-order intentionality.

Confession and Seduction

In this discussion, I will examine two scenes between the hero and Sylvie, as well as a scene between the hero and Aurélie. In the first scene, the hero is inspired to confess his obsession to Sylvie, but they are interrupted before they can resolve anything. In the second, the hero briefly considers attempting to seduce Sylvie, but decides against it. In the third scene, the hero at last tells Aurélie of his obsession with Adrienne, provoking the end of their relationship. Ross Chambers identifies these moments in the text as times when the hero "je" becomes a narrator, which the "je" always does to gain the sympathy of a feminine narratee ("Narration" 24). I will focus particularly on the hero's inability to express himself and how it is inextricable from his inability to read both Sylvie and Aurélie.

Literal reading, in addition to mind reading, is also at stake in these encounters. Rousseau's presence hovers over the hero and Sylvie during this first scene, as the two of them leave the Loisy ball and the hero complains to Sylvie that she no longer loves him. Sylvie sighs and tells him that after he told her about *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, she read it herself. She paraphrases the preface: "Toute jeune fille qui lira ce livre est perdue" (555). She also reminds the hero of the time when they went to her great aunt's house and dressed up in traditional eighteenth-century

wedding clothes, and says that they looked just like one of the engravings in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, and adds "…pour moi vous étiez Saint-Preux, et je me retrouvais dans Julie" (555). Had the hero returned at this moment, she might have fallen in love with him, but instead he was in Italy, and then in Paris, where Sylvie feels sure that he found women more beautiful than her. Instead of returning, the hero left Sylvie alone to read Rousseau; she changed in his absence, becoming "perdue" in a different sense than the one intended by Rousseau's preface.

The mention of Paris, and the women that the narrator might have seen there, leads to a silence in the conversation. The hero is unable to respond to Sylvie's question. It is this silence that provokes the hero's first attempt at a confession:

> "—Et à Paris ? dit-elle. —À Paris…"
> Je secouai la tête sans répondre.
> Tout à coup je pensai à l'image vaine qui m'avait égaré si longtemps.
> "Sylvie, dis-je, arrêtons-nous ici, le voulez-vous ?"
> Je me jetai à ses pieds ; je confessai en pleurant à chaudes larmes mes irrésolutions, mes caprices ; j'évoquai le spectre funeste qui traversait ma vie.
> "Sauvez-moi ! ajoutai-je, je reviens à vous pour toujours."
> Elle tourna vers moi ses regards attendris… (555)

The conversation both begins and ends with an ellipsis: the hero's trailing-off "À Paris…" and Sylvie's tender expression. The first ellipsis represents something the hero is unable to say, and the second represents something the narrator is unable to describe. Sylvie and the hero are immediately interrupted by her brother's exit from the ball, so any further response from Sylvie goes unspoken. But the confession itself is unspoken: the narrator does not mention Aurélie or Adrienne's name, but refers obliquely to "l'image vaine," "le spectre funeste," and his own "irrésolutions" and "caprices." Because this confession is reported largely in indirect discourse, the hero's exact words are obscured from readers. Readers are not permitted to know what the hero said, and no one, including the hero himself, is permitted to know how Sylvie would have responded, beyond her "regards attendris."

The hero wants Sylvie to save him, that is to say, to rid him of the "spectre funeste" that haunts him. She can do this by telling him what happened to Adrienne, but the hero will have to ask her for the answer. It is unclear from the description of his confession whether he does. The

hero is caught between wanting to know the answer and fearing that the answer will disappoint him. Fittingly, a visit to the park at Ermenonville, where the hero passes Rousseau's tomb and the Temple de la Philosophie, follows the first confession scene. This temple was left purposefully unfinished, but Nerval elides that fact in his description (Guillaume and Pichois 1225). This temple, half-overgrown with plants, inspires the narrator to reflect on how the temple itself may fall but "la soif de connaître restera éternelle, mobile de toute force et de toute activité !" (557). The narrator does not explicitly connect this eternal thirst for knowledge to his own personal quest to solve the Aurélie-Adrienne mystery, but it is certainly the motivating force behind his return to the Valois. However, in the case of his personal mystery, the thirst for knowledge is not eternal. It will last only until he asks Sylvie or anyone else about Adrienne, but that would require him to express himself clearly.

The hero is troubled by what Sylvie might know in more ways than one. The second time he tries to explain himself to her, he says: "…j'essayai de parler des choses que j'avais dans le cœur, mais, je ne sais pourquoi, je ne trouvais que des expressions vulgaires, ou bien tout à coup quelque phrase pompeuse de roman, — que Sylvie pouvait avoir lue" (561). Here, the hero's doubts center on the words he might use to express his feelings. He fears using "des expressions vulgaires" or "quelque phrase pompeuse de roman." He is especially worried that if he did quote a novel, intentionally or not, Sylvie might recognize his borrowing. Her reading concerns him. It is not only *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Immediately before this passage, Sylvie demonstrates her knowledge of both Walter Scott and modern opera, surprising and disappointing the hero. He does not know what she knows. He had asked her to sing a traditional folk song and she had refused. Sylvie does not perform according to his whim, and she changes in his absence.

Sylvie refuses to conform to the hero's memory of her, and she continues to know things that he does not, whether those things are signs of modern culture or old community gossip. When he finally asks her outright "Qu'est devenue la religieuse ?", she gives the ambiguous answer "cela a mal tourné" (561). This is the first confirmation in the text that Sylvie definitely

knows what the hero wants to know. Furthermore, she knows that he wants to know, and she does not want to tell him.

Let us return for a moment to the third-order intentionality that structures the text: the narrator *knows* that Sylvie *knows* that the hero *does not know* that Adrienne is dead. Similarly, the narrator knows that Sylvie knows that the hero *does not know* that Sylvie is promised to another in marriage. In light of this, Léon Cellier writes that "Sylvie joue avec le héros comme une chatte avec sa proie" (26). But we could accuse the narrator of the same, given that he possesses all the same knowledge as Sylvie. However, by his own admission, the narrator leads the reader through *Sylvie* in order to convey his own experience of learning this knowledge. Sylvie's reasons for not being more explicit are unclear.

When she refuses to elaborate on her answer, the hero speculates that Sylvie doesn't understand what *he* is feeling:

> Les femmes sentent-elles vraiment que telle ou telle parole passe sur les lèvres sans sortir du cœur ? On ne le croirait pas, à les voir si facilement abusées, à se rendre compte des choix qu'elles font le plus souvent : il y a des hommes qui jouent si bien la comédie de l'amour ! Je n'ai jamais pu m'y faire, quoique sachant que certaines acceptent sciemment d'être trompées. (561-2)

The irony of this passage is that the motivations behind Sylvie's actions—indeed, he generalizes to include *all* women—remain opaque to the hero. He doubts that women can feel when words pass men's lips without coming from their hearts, but by the same token, he is unable to read Sylvie. He reflects on men who seduce women—"qui jouent si bien la comédie de l'amour"—without recognizing that women might toy with men in the same way. This reflection is posed as a concern for Sylvie, who might not recognize that she is being duped, but it is not Sylvie who is in danger of falling for an illusion. The hero recognizes his own inability to seduce women, which is connected to his inability to grant Sylvie a fully complex inner life. He cannot let go of his memories of Sylvie, which prevent him from seeing her clearly in the present.

It is not surprising that the hero cannot seduce Sylvie, since "la comédie de l'amour" would require him to express sentiments he did not truly feels, and he struggles to express himself in conversation even when his goal is to share his genuine feelings. But having practiced

confessing the truth to Sylvie, the hero is more easily able to discuss it with Aurélie. It only takes one scene, rather than two, for the hero to tell Aurélie the whole story. Rather predictably, Aurélie is unhappy to hear that the hero does not like her for herself, but instead for her resemblance to some long-lost childhood love. She responds to his confession by denying his hope that she is secretly Adrienne:

> "Vous ne m'aimez pas ! Vous attendez que je vous dise: 'La comédienne est la même que la religieuse'; vous cherchez un drame, voilà tout, et le dénouement vous échappe. Allez, je ne vous crois plus !" (566)

Her words are "un éclair" (566) and the hero suddenly realizes that what he has been feeling is not love, but instead "ces enthousiasmes bizarres" (566). This revelation about his own feelings permits him to have one about Aurélie's feelings: that night, while watching her on stage, he realizes that Aurélie loves the lead actor (567), whom he had previously dismissed as no threat to his own ambitions.

For Ross Chambers, the problem in these scenes is that the hero has chosen the wrong model for his storytelling. With Sylvie, he follows the model of novels like *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and with Aurélie, he follows a comic model, and Chambers classifies both as "seductive narratives." Seductive narratives try to produce an impossible identification of reality and illusion, and these scenes in the text, with their interruptions and refusals, show them to be false (*Story and Situation* 99-100). However, Chambers identifies one model of storytelling in the text that is not meant to seduce, and it is that of the narrator's uncle, who tells of his affaires with eighteenth-century actresses:

> These were not stories designed to seduce: in taking for their subject matter a romance-filled past, as the narrator "I"'s story must also do, they were attempting to teach a lesson, to convey what the narrator will later refer to, in his own case, as the "fruit" of his abandoned illusions, his "experience." (*Story and Situation* 101)

So the narrator follows this model in telling *Sylvie*. In the next section, I will examine the lessons that the narrator conveys.

Between and Beyond Words: reading the heart

Sylvie is the story of success beyond seduction. The hero does not succeed with any of the three women—he may sleep with Aurélie, but their relationship does not last—and this is in part because he cannot connect with them. His obsession with his memories prevents him from expressing himself. The narrator, on the other hand, has learned to express all the fruits of his experience—his nostalgia, his feeling of loss, his disillusionment—in writing. In fact, he expresses himself so successfully in writing that he is confident he can achieve an understanding of "hearts" that goes beyond words. Near the end of the text, the narrator takes a moment to reflect on his project: "Telles sont les chimères qui charment et égarent au matin de la vie. J'ai essayé de les fixer sans beaucoup d'ordre, mais bien des cœurs me comprendront. Les illusions tombent l'une après l'autre, comme les écorces d'un fruit, et le fruit, c'est l'expérience" (567).

Here, the narrator's confidence that "bien des cœurs me comprendront" stands in contrast with the earlier moment when the hero tried to confess his feelings to Sylvie. Indeed, the verb "essayer" appears in both passages: "…j'essayai de parler des choses que j'avais dans le cœur" (561). The hero's inability to express himself has been transformed into the narrator's certainty that, regardless of whether his "chimères" are fixed in order, he will be understood. In the earlier passage, when the hero doubts himself, his doubts center on the words he might use to express his feelings. He might just as easily have doubted his medium: conversation. The hero struggles to express himself in speech, whereas the narrator succeeds in writing.

In either speech or writing, attempts to make other people understand you are necessarily founded on theory of mind; when the narrator says "bien des cœurs me comprendront" (567), he is counting on the capacity of these "cœurs"—the metonymy makes it clear that he is recognizing their interiority—to understand his emotions. Even more than that, these "cœurs" are such sensitive mind-readers—we might call them heart-readers—that they will understand the narrator's feelings regardless of the order in which he presents his memories. Their understanding is not limited by the order of the memories; indeed, the dreamlike jumps between past and present may make the text more comprehensible to them. This understanding between hearts seems to surpass language. Proust wrote that Sylvie's most singular and special quality

was that the text managed to convey something beyond itself, “quelque chose de vague et d’obsédant comme le souvenir” (242). To paraphrase, for Proust, Sylvie expresses something inexpressible. That something is not in the words, but between the words, “comme la brume d’un matin de Chantilly” (242). Proust connects his inexpressible, between-the-words something with memory.

Part of what goes beyond words in Sylvie is not merely the content of the memories themselves but the feeling of being drawn into a memory—by a newspaper article or the sight of a place from one’s childhood—and also the feeling of being drawn from one memory to another. The narrator shares this experience through his narrative strategy. The narrator’s self-deprecating claims about how he has tried to fix his memory in this text, without much order, is a bit of narratorial sleight-of-hand. As many critics have established, the narrator is not presenting his memories haphazardly, but has carefully arranged them for maximum emotional effect. Ross Chambers points out that the narrator does this as an invitation to the reader to judge the error that the narrator made when he was the hero (“Narration” 26). The narrator’s manipulation of time draws reader into his way of perceiving the world. He assumes that his readers possess memories, and that their memories function in the same way that his does.

As a young man, he could not grant the objects of his desire interiority or rational agency. He wanted them to be images or ideals, and tellingly, he thought of actresses as women without hearts. The hero becomes the narrator by coming to an understanding of women, and this understanding—this recognition that women, too, have hearts—is symbolized by the scene in “XIV. Dernier Feuillet” in which the narrator and Sylvie read the same book. According to Ross Chambers, this image of the narrator and Sylvie reading a book together is "la mise en abyme de la relation que le texte de Sylvie entend établir entre son narrateur et le narrataire compréhensif, entre moi et les nombreux 'cœurs' qui doivent 'comprendre'" (“Narration” 37).

That “beyond the words” feeling in Sylvie is evoked through several strategies. The first, as I have just discussed, is the narrator’s organization of the story as a meandering walk down memory lane. The second is the presence of gaps in the text. Rae Beth Gordon, in her study of

lace as a metaphor for textual production in Sylvie, rightly points out the profusion of ellipses and dashes that mark holes and gaps in the text:

> The structure of lace may be compared with the Nervalian text from several points of view: transparency; continual repetition of the same themes; the interweaving of themes, characters, and sounds; and the way several aspects of the text are knotted together. And, finally, it would be impossible to overemphasize the importance of holes and gaps in the construction of the narrative and of lace. These 'holes' are often signaled by dashes or by three points of ellipsis. Memory gaps as well as fissures in the fabric of time abound in *Sylvie*. (59)

Gordon also draws a connection between lace and song: "The convergence of embroidery and of vocal ornamentation mirrors the aspect of the text that Nerval calls 'trop perlé.' Each time that singing is represented, the writer emphasizes vocal ornament. [...] Nerval valorizes melisma, timbre, and trill" (R. B. Gordon 65-6). Like lace, folk song is a traditional cultural art form, and the songs contain repeating patterns and also "holes." If the ellipses and dashes represent textual "holes," then they are also silences. In addition to the numerous sentences that trail off or get interrupted, there are also deliberate silences, like Sylvie's refusal to sing folk songs: "On ne chante plus cela" (560).

Unfinished sentences, interruptions, and refusals produce uncertainty, so it is fair to include the narrator's explicitly stated uncertainties in this category of "gaps." The narrator doubts his own memory. His doubt is at the root of his obsession with Aurélie and Adrienne. One of the major episodes of doubt in Sylvie comes in "VII. Châalis," which is discussed earlier in this chapter; after seeing Adrienne play the role of an angel in a passion play, the narrator wonders if he has dreamed the details of the scene (553). And then, reinforcing his own doubts after having recounted the story, the narrator looks at the abbey of Châalis and wonders: "Mais l'apparition d'Adrienne est-elle aussi vraie que ces détails et que l'existence incontestable de l'abbaye de Châalis ?" (553). This episode of doubt is at the root of the hero's obsession with Aurélie and Adrienne. It is significant that the hero's dream-memory of Adrienne features her as an actress, which is Aurélie's profession. In this dreamlike memory, the hero cannot speak to or interact with Adrienne, since she is on stage. There is a physical distance between them. The hero is also distant from Adrienne socially, since she is a noble who becomes a nun, and then

later, he is distant from her in time. All that remains of her is his memory—two memories specifically, one of a kiss and another of this theatrical performance—and his memory is both intangible and unreliable. There is no way to relive these moments or to "fix" them in time, except for the imperfect record provided by writing. The narrator weaves his doubts into the description by emphasizing the gap between himself and Adrienne, the gap between past and present, and the gap between memory and reality.

Physical presence is a key aspect of the hero's experiences at the theater, whether he is yearning to "toucher du doigt" the ideal Aurélie (540), or talking about how he sat near the door, behind a large seated group of people when he saw Adrienne sing at Châalis (553). In both descriptions of his experience at the theater, he emphasizes his distance from Aurélie and Adrienne. This distance is abridged in more intimate oral storytelling settings. When the hero is alone with Sylvie, he is literally closer to her. But there is still a figurative distance between them: either she refuses to tell the story or sing the song that he wants, or he fails to express himself to her in conversation.

The hero longs for the intimacy of being Sylvie's private audience. Her singing and storytelling made him feel something that he cannot recapture. He also longs for her to talk to him of their childhood. These intimate, ephemeral experiences—two people alone together in the same space, listening to each other's voices—are the best way to get to know another person. The hero wants to know Sylvie, in the same way that Nerval wanted to know Jenny Colon's "secrets." He wants to close the distance between them.

There is always a distance. We cannot know each other's secrets, not fully. But we can come close. The narrator and Sylvie read the same book at the end of the text, an activity that brings them literally and figuratively close together. Here, at last, is the shared experience of a work of art for which the hero longed. Ross Chambers even suggests that the book in question might be *Sylvie* itself (119), which would be appropriate, since *Sylvie* is the narrator's offering up of his own secrets.

It is the story of how the narrator fails to know Aurélie and Adrienne, and comes to know Sylvie after it is too late to marry her, but in sharing the "fruit" of his experience, he communicates his secret in perhaps the only way possible: through writing. As the hero, he struggles to express himself in speech, but as the narrator, he can organize his text in a way that produces an understanding of hearts.

CONCLUSION

When friends and relatives ask me what my work is about, after my initial answer—it examines the seductive power of art over the imagination in a selection of mid-nineteenth-century short fiction by Balzac, Sand, and Nerval—they almost always ask the same question: "Does it work?" That is to say, is telling someone a story a good way to seduce them? For that matter, are the other arts an effective seduction tactic? Sadly for friends or readers hoping for helpful hints, the stories I have examined here are less of a how-to guide and more of an exploration of how unpredictable and individualized our experiences of art—and seduction—can be, despite their universal underpinnings. Let me expand on that here.

We might have expected a more resounding "yes" answer to this "Does it work?" question, because writers would have a stake in demonstrating the power of their craft—or, analogously, other arts—over the imagination. These texts do depict the seductive power of the arts, but they do so by showing how differently people are affected. The texts with scenes in theaters demonstrate this point most clearly, since no one else in the audience is seduced—at least not to the same degree—as Sarrasine, the marquise, or even the narrator of *Sylvie*. Zambinella's performance is appreciated by the other audience members, but only Sarrasine is so thoroughly taken in. The marquise, on the other hand, is the only person who even likes Lélio's performance. It is clear in *Sylvie* that other people adore Aurélie, since the narrator has romantic rivals for her affections, but his rivals are not affected in the same way that he is affected; they do not spend a year attending the theater every night, mesmerized but unable to act on their feelings. These seduced characters have a different experience of the same performance, and the difference is due to two main factors: their imaginations and their mind-reading abilities.

There is overlap between these two factors: cognitively speaking, "imagination" is the ability to run the mind's inference systems decoupled from reality, and mind-reading also relies on decoupling. When we speculate about what other people are thinking, we use our imagination. But we also use our imagination to envision things other than minds.

I have used theory of mind to show the richness of perspectives in these texts: the most successful seducers are the most subtle mind-readers, able to tailor their seductions to their intended target, and the easiest targets are those who are most prone to misread others. A powerful imagination can easily overwhelm its owner, especially if it is coupled with passion, as is the case for Sarrasine. Love and attraction frequently render characters unable to read clearly, making them vulnerable to blunders. Even characters who have moments of clear perception about other people, like Alice in *Isidora*, often become naive when they fall in love. Alice's moments of clearest perception happen when she is assessing whether Isidora is her rival, and rivalry often motivates careful mind-reading. The narrator of *Sylvie*, who spends much of the text confusing one adored woman for another in a dreamlike haze of memory, understands perfectly clearly when he is confronted with a romantic rival.

It is not that the savvier mind-readers in these texts lack imagination, but that they are better grounded in reality. They are more accurate observers. Often, the better a character is at deciphering others, the more indecipherable that character becomes; the princesse de Cadignan, for example, is "une de ces femmes impénétrables" (969). Diane de Cadignan, like the other seductive characters in these texts, has excellent control over her face, voice, and body, and she can display emotions other than the ones she feels. In addition to concealing or revealing precisely as much of their inner state as they want to, seductive characters are also able to project an aura of understanding other characters. In *Isidora*, Julie-Isidora forges her initial connection with Jacques by making him feel like she is the only one in the world who understands him, and vice versa. Like these seductive characters, the texts themselves strike a balance between being "impenetrable" and being decipherable, sometimes concealing their mysteries until the very end, and sometimes offering guidance and clarity in the form of interventions from their narrators. The tension in stories about seduction springs from these situations in which one character knows markedly less than the others, or, conversely, when the narration shows the reader a glimpse through the eyes of a character who knows markedly more. Theory of mind is the cognitive mechanism that makes dramatic irony possible.

Cognitive approaches to literature have a lot to offer, especially in their capacity to let us "zoom out" and situate works of literature within the context of human history as a whole and to look at our work through the perspectives of other disciplines. However, there is much we do not yet know about cognition, and cognitive literary approaches are best used as one approach among many. Blakey Vermeule, in a tongue-in-cheek article called "Professor Emily Casaubon Studies the Emotions," puts it this way:

> She found neuroscience and its social science cognates thrilling--a world of new knowledge opening up in real time--but she had severe doubts about its explanatory powers in culture, especially because neuroscience was being touted in all corners as the key to all mythologies. (1486)

No one approach will ever be Casaubon's "key to all mythologies." Doubt and skepticism are necessary with any method, and in writing about these texts, there have been many instances in which I have found it more fruitful to closely examine the language used, or to refer to other literary scholars, than to found my analysis on theory of mind. Theory of mind is an excellent tool for highlighting the complexity of viewpoints in embedded stories, and it is especially good for peeling back the layers of scenes of confrontation, manipulation, or rivalry, of which there are many in this corpus. But we cannot use it to situate a text in its historical moment, or to take apart a paragraph of ekphrasis. It it one tool among many. There is always a danger, in using criticism that is founded on current science, that future research may overturn it. Our knowledge of the brain is incomplete. But we also know more than we ever have before, and the questions that cognitive theory poses about the workings of our minds and how and why we make literature are too exciting to ignore.

I began this dissertation by discussing the anxiety that new forms and genres of art can unleash, citing the indictment of *Madame Bovary* and the critic Alfred Nettement as some nineteenth-century examples of critics warning readers about the seductive power of fiction. These critics fear that reading fiction, especially for women, may disrupt the status quo by giving women ideas beyond their station or inspiring desire. The seduction that these critics fear, in the case of reading, is what Blakey Vermeule calls "absorption," or immersion in the imagined

world of the text, untempered by "suspension," the knowledge that the text is fiction and must be kept at a distance (*Literary Characters* 248).

Both absorption and suspension are integral to reading fiction, and, I would argue, to aesthetic experience as a whole. Brian Boyd, in his definition of art, called art "an attempt to engage attention" (*Origin* 148). When our attention is engaged fully, we feel absorption. The texts in my corpus describe characters who experience absorption in music and theater, like Sarrasine, Zambinella, and the marquise. Béatrix de Rochefide and the narrator of "La Marquise" are both fascinated by paintings, and then, like many other characters in this corpus, by oral storytelling. These characters offer positive or negative models of reading—or, more generally, models of how to respond to aesthetic experience—and many of them struggle to find a balance between absorption and suspension.

Seduction relies on absorption; Balzac, Sand, and Nerval frequently use metaphors that reach beyond reality to describe the seductive power of art. All three authors refer to magic or the supernatural. Sand writes of "charme" ("La Marquise" 62, *Isidora* 157), while Balzac refers to "une puissance presque diabolique" ("Sarrasine" 1061), and Nerval speaks of the actress Aurélie as a "miroir magique" (*Sylvie* 538). Nerval also associates absorbing aesthetic experiences with religious ecstasy and with dreams: Adrienne's theatrical performance is "comme un mystère des anciens temps" and she is "transfigurée" by her costume (*Sylvie* 553). Later, the narrator is not sure if these details are real or if he dreamed them (553).

However, the experience of total absorption is usually temporary. Most of the characters in my corpus ultimately find their way back to a balance between absorption and suspension, although sometimes this involves a painful moment of disillusionment. Of the characters who are seduced, Sarrasine is the only one who is truly ruined. He dies before he can recover from his revelation. The marquise and the narrator of *Sylvie* are disillusioned, but they ultimately find a way to live with their experience. This is true for George Sand's other protagonists, Metella and Isidora, as well. For Metella, and for Béatrix in "Sarrasine," they cope with disillusionment through distancing themselves from the world. For Metella, the distance is literal; she lives out

the rest of her life in her country home. For Béatrix, the distance is figurative, as she will not allow anyone else to know her.

The marquise also distances herself from society, but she has another coping mechanism in the form of storytelling. As she tells her story to the narrator, she gets to relive it, and it rejuvenates her. Telling the story gives her the sense of agency that society denied her. Writing is another solution to the problem of being seduced and disillusioned, and it is a tactic that both Isidora and the narrator of *Sylvie* adopt. For both Isidora and the narrator of *Sylvie*, writing makes possible a kind of communication and connection that had never been possible before.

Daniel d'Arthez, on the other hand, stops writing entirely. But he and the princesse de Cadignan manage to escape their story quite happily. Their love is creative work, which they perform together. "Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan," in underlining Daniel's complicity in his own seduction, also highlights the collaborative nature of the relationship between text and reader. "Les Secrets," through its ambiguous last two lines, invites re-reading.

The other texts in my corpus also invite re-reading, although they use different strategies to achieve this end. Confronted with the reactions of listener-characters to an embedded story, readers must evaluate their own reactions. Texts that reveal secrets, like Zambinella's status as a castrato in "Sarrasine," invite readers to return to the beginning of the text to look for clues. In this way, all these works insist on a more involved role for the reader, who is not a passive recipient of the imagined world of the text but an active co-creator. As Balzac wrote in *Physiologie du mariage*, "Lire, c'est créer peut-être à deux" (128). Looking at literature through the lens of cognition brings to the fore the mental work that goes into reading, or reacting to any work of art, and texts that depict characters doing this mental work are fertile ground for further research. I have studied a selection of them in this dissertation, but this approach could be applied to other texts. *La Comédie humaine*, with its wealth of characters, has many other mind-readers and seducers. "Étude de femme," a 1831 short story in which the marquise de Listomère falls in love with Rastignac after receiving a love letter of his by mistake, is one other example of a work that explores the power of art over the imagination. There is also another short story by

George Sand, "Pauline" (1841) that features an actress caught up in a love triangle. The authors in this corpus are not the only ones who have treated this subject: Baudelaire's one work of prose short fiction, "La Fanfarlo" (1847), recounts the seduction of a dancer by a writer through his newspaper articles that criticize her performances. I chose to focus on short fiction in this dissertation because so much short fiction employs a frame story and an embedded story, a structure which lends itself to examination using theory of mind. Short fiction, with a few exceptions like "Sarrasine" and *Sylvie*, also often slips through the cracks and does not receive the attention it deserves. But because of its length, good short fiction can offer readers a brief but intense moment of absorption, which is often followed immediately by a more reflective moment at the story's closure. The frame story structure, at its closing, both reminds readers of the need to balance absorption with suspension, and also invites re-reading. But this question of absorption and suspension applies to all genres of fiction, and it would be interesting to see it explored in novels. Are novels more absorbing than short fiction? Given their greater commercial appeal in the contemporary market, we might guess so. But how and why would that be? Looking at these other works of short fiction or expanding the field of research to include novels could provide more insight into the grand questions of not only why and how we tell stories, but also how they spark and shape our imaginations.

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