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Enacting Sincerity:
Nerval and the Cultural Politics of Imagination

by

Catherine Beryle Talley

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requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
French

in the
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of the
University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Suzanne Guerlac, Chair
Professor Susan Maslan
Professor Robert Kaufman

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Abstract

Enacting Sincerity: Nerval and the Cultural Politics of Imagination

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Catherine Beryle Talley

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Professor Suzanne Guerlac, Chair

This dissertation proposes a new reading of the work of Gérard de Nerval (1808-1855), placing him alongside Walter Benjamin's Baudelaire as an insightful critic of modern life. During the 1840s and 1850s, the literary field in France was increasingly shaped by bourgeois values like sincerity, originality, and authenticity, and by the individualism that they underpinned, restricting authorized forms of writing and of subjectivity. I argue that Nerval's writing constitutes an astute opposition to this transformation of literary subjectivity and the limitations it placed on imaginative experience and practice. Rather than merely reflecting the author's own psychological crises (as is usually claimed), Nerval's writings strategically reinvent the literary text as a site of new forms of collective imaginative practice.

By considering Nerval's work as a journalist, playwright, critic, and travel writer, as well as a poet, I draw out Nerval's engagements with specific institutions and discourses, from censorship and intellectual property law to the national philosophy curriculum and literary criticism journals. From these local engagements emerges a shrewd critical voice that speaks directly and explicitly to the influence of bourgeois culture on the literary field. I argue that, though he is traditionally read as a figure of Romantic isolation and eccentricity, Nerval should rather be understood in relation to figures like George Sand and Maurice Barrès, writers who advocated a renewal of communal ties (albeit from very different political perspectives). Unlike these contemporaries, however, Nerval approaches community as a formal challenge, as well as a theme. He explodes the framework of the individual writing subject through, for example, a pervasive intertextuality that constantly relates his texts to other writing and reading experiences. My project thus rejoins the critical tradition that emphasizes the failure to coincide with oneself as the essential feature of Nerval's writing practice. However, I give this "failure" a productive and strategic value rather than the tragic valence attributed to it by psychoanalytic readings, be they psycho-biographical or post-structuralist. The mobility and porousness of the Nervalian writing subject are a formal innovation that generates a literature of community rather than self-expression.

In Memory of Janette and Tyra Talley

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Prologue

On Reading Nerval

Nerval's most famous poem, "El Desdichado," was first published in 1853, not by its author, but by his sometime friend and collaborator, Alexandre Dumas, père. Dumas included the cryptic sonnet in a column he devoted to Nerval in *Le Mousquetaire*, citing the poem as evidence for his depiction of the younger writer.¹ The depiction was an ambivalent one at best, a sort of smiling jibe at Nerval's eccentricity. The Nerval of Dumas's "Causerie" is "le plus rêveur de tous les poètes" ["the dreamiest of all poets"], a man at the mercy of his wayward imagination ("cette folle du logis" ["that madwoman in the attic"]) who sometimes allows those around him a glimpse of the strange world in which he lives.² "El Desdichado" functions in Dumas's portrait as a kind of trace of what the normal observer can never really see, serving as a souvenir from the distant land of Nerval's mind, that "pays des chimères et des hallucinations" ["land of chimeras and hallucinations"].³

Dumas's "Causerie" emphasizes the indexical function of the sonnet-souvenir, framing the poem with a story in which it serves as another sort of trace:

Jugez-en. Il y a quelques jours, il passe au bureau; nous n'y étions pas, chose rare. Il s'informe de nous, et en nous attendant il prend une plume, du paper, et nous laisse ces vers en manière de carte de visite.

[Judge for yourselves. A few days ago, he comes by the office; we were, exceptionally, not in. He inquires about us, and while he waits for us he takes up a pen, some paper, and leaves us these verses as a calling card.]⁴

This image of the calling card is a telling one, encapsulating the complexities of Dumas's depiction of Nerval. The poem is remarkable, on the one hand, for the carelessness of its casual composition; one can almost imagine Nerval perched on the edge of Dumas's desk scrawling the fourteen lines without even properly seating himself. On the other hand, however, this merely dashed-off poem is intended—both in Dumas's office and in his article—as a meaningful trace of its author. It functions less like a poem (signifying its author by embodying his expressive labor) than like the signature a homemade calling card might bear, emerging effortlessly from the signatory's pen and yet standing in for him absolutely.

¹ "Causerie avec mes lecteurs." Translations are my own except where otherwise noted. I will return to Nerval's response

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

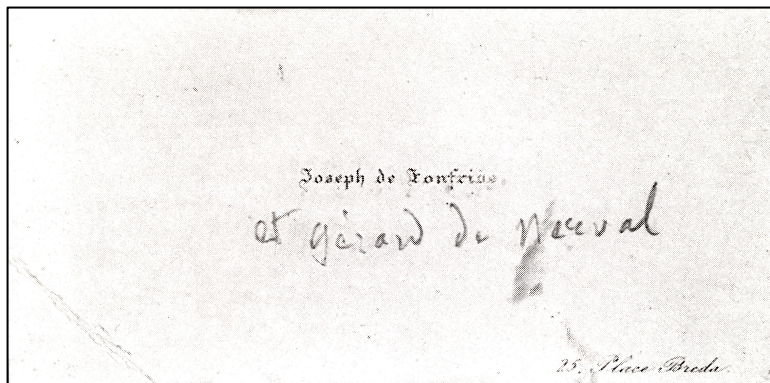
As the paradigm of Nerval's writing, the calling card-sonnet suggests a kind of artlessness that cannot but surprise readers of Nerval. So spontaneous a production appears as merely an emission of its author, a status that seems to belie the beauty and intensity of the writing. And yet that seems to be precisely the crux of matter for Dumas: whatever beauty and intensity, whatever poetry there might be in Nerval's poem (as in his other writing), they are to be traced not to Nerval himself but to the imperious imagination that exceeds and subjugates him. Nerval is but a kind of medium for his own hallucinations. And so it is that Dumas cautions in his "Causerie" against mistaking Nerval for a member of the ranks of professional writers; write though he may, Nerval earns the status of writer here only through the condescension of those more worthy of the title.

The cruelty of such a portrait among friends—exploiting as it did public knowledge of Nerval's recent psychological crises—need hardly be pointed out. Yet the depiction of Nerval in the "Causerie" cannot easily be dismissed on such grounds, for the simple reason that it has been so vigorously echoed by critics in the century and a half since. Setting aside differences in tone, the image of the calling card provides an economical way of thinking the family resemblance among the vast majority of readings of Nerval. In the image of the calling card-sonnet, we can recognize common assumptions about the relationship of writer to writing and about the place of truth that determine the way Nerval has been read.

We might say that the calling card does for Dumas what the symptom has done for so many other critics and scholars, locating the significance of Nerval's writing in a psychic reality that precedes and dominates it, and reducing the practice of literary production to a largely instinctive and almost involuntary self-expression. Rather than formal choices to be understood as constituting a poetics, the complexities of the Nervalian text have been interpreted as traces of a deeper (most often tragic) psychological truth. Nerval's imagination has been understood not as a creative faculty, but as an incurable (if compelling) illness.

*

In the readings that follow, I propose to replace Dumas's emblem of the calling card with another that orients a very different approach to Nerval's writing (figure below). Nerval left this other card in 1843 at the Cairo home of the great engineer Linant de Bellefonds—a visit dutifully made by many French travellers in Egypt, including Gustave Flaubert and Jean-Jacques Ampère, as well as by Nerval and his traveling companion, Egyptologist Joseph Fonfrède.⁵ This might seem to be a far more straightforward *carte de visite* than "El Desdichado," bearing as it does only a pair of names and an address. I would like to suggest, however, that this improvised calling card has much to say about



both the indexical status of the Nervalian text and the sort of subjectivity of which it might be the trace. The treatment of the name here gets to the heart of the nature of the first person we encounter in Nerval's writing.

Nerval's name casually jotted below Fonfrède's brings to mind Nerval scribbling "El Desdichado" in Dumas's office, producing another unconventional

carte de visite. It conjures up another image of him: a man patting his pockets in search of that most basic of social accessories and coming up empty handed, except for a serviceable pencil. And yet the

⁵ Jean-Marie Carré, *Voyageurs et écrivains français en Egypte*, 9.

fact of the card's bearing only a name rather than a poem casts its casualness in a new light. The extemporaneous character of the sonnet seemed to prove that it flowed directly from deep within the psyche of its author, but the improvisation of the penciled name rather troubles the connection between the text and the man to which it supposedly refers. It after all goes against the basic convention of the calling card whereby the man is represented by the name set in print (nearly as good as stone). If Fonfrède's name upholds that promise of stability, Nerval's name announces itself by juxtaposition as a profoundly fleeting trace. The penciled name is liable to smudge and so to *brouiller les pistes* (cover the tracks) of the referential link.

What's more, the names on the card are themselves far less forthright signs than names claim to be. The calling card that conventionally carries the official identity of the bearer here carries instead a pair of names whose status is entirely ambiguous. In the first place, "Fonfride" represents an altered spelling of Fonfrède's name that he seems to have been experimenting with during this period—though inconsistently enough that Nerval could razz him in a letter a year later about the confusion it caused: Fonfride? Fonfriede? Fonfreude?⁶ In the second place, Nerval's name is equivocal here since it is, in fact, not his real name. By 1850, Gérard Labrunie used the name "Gérard de Nerval" for everything but correspondence with his family and his doctor, but when he penciled that name on this *carte de visite* in 1843, he was still using it only intermittently, and it still bore the traces of its first use, in the printed announcement of a never-published novel about a canard (the signature on a hoax about a hoax).⁷ How, then, is the name on the calling card to be understood? Is it an alias, a sobriquet, or a joke?⁸ Even if the future adoption of "Nerval" inflects its significance here, the name can't help but read as an irresistible comical addendum to the newly-minted "Fonfride," inscribing the staid calling card with a pair of made-up names.

The shift in tone evident in such a joke is not the least important of the reorientations this other calling card offers to reading Nerval, putting the lie to the invariably gloomy attitude of the sane toward Nerval-the-madman (regardless of the affect he himself presents). Such a move is not merely tonal, however, but enables a radically different conception of the status of Nerval's work. Taking the joke of the penciled name "seriously" in its humor, or at least in its irreverence, introduces the possibility of conceiving of it as a critical gesture: not symptom but tactic. The immediate passage from text to psychology is halted and the relationship between subject and text appears as a problem that must be explored in the writing itself. The relation between poetics, subjectivity, and the creative impetus of the imagination is restored in all of its complexity.

It is this relation that I propose to explore in the readings that follow. Subjectivity will thus remain as a central theme, but one of which Nerval will be taken as a thinker rather than merely a victim or a medium. The texts will reveal themselves to be both more light-hearted and more serious than they have often been seen: not burdened with the weight of an imminent personal tragedy but now the sites of real productive labor and invention.

⁶ Letter to Joseph de Fonfride, 14 March 1844 in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:920-21. On the ongoing confusion surrounding these two spellings and Nerval's use of both, see Lise Scheier, "« FONFRIDE (DE), voyageur en Orient » in *Seul dans l'orient lointain*, 47-48. Nerval's comical view of the pseudonym is suggested as well by a letter to Gautier from Cairo where he refers to his companion only as "Le Fonfride" (letter of 2 May 1843 in *Œuvres complètes*, 1:1395-97).

⁷ Michel Brix, "Hoax et canards nervaliens," 128-29. I will return to the question of signatures and pseudonyms in Chapter Three.

⁸ Gautier notes Nerval's continual use of pseudonyms, linking them to a dissimulation we no longer associate with the name "Nerval": "Comme Stendhal, il aimait à dissimuler sa personnalité sous différents pseudonymes; quand il se sentait reconnu sous son faux nez, il le jetait et prenait un autre masque et un autre domino" ["Like Stendhal, he liked to hide his personality behind different pseudonyms; when he felt that he had been recognized beneath his disguise, he cast it off and took up another mask and another cape"] (*Histoire du Romantisme*, 115).

Introduction

Aussi l'écrivain comme tel n'est-il pas malade, mais
plutôt médecin, médecin de soi-même et du monde.

[Moreover, the writer as such is not a patient but
rather a physician, the physician of himself and of the
world.]

Deleuze, "La littérature et la vie"¹

Recovering Relations

Nerval is a paradoxical figure in the French literary canon, at once marginal and central. He is not a major writer: he produced neither the monumental body of work of an Honoré de Balzac or an Émile Zola, nor the influential and controversial work of a Charles Baudelaire or a Gustave Flaubert. In a century of *-isms*, he made no grand programmatic statements and fathered no literary movement. He produced no particularly major works, not a novel, not a successful play, not a complete volume of poems. His grand works are ephemeral, like his serialized travel writing, or are collections of shorter, more modest texts. He has no clear role to play in the stories most often told about 19th-century literary history, about the development of major genres.

And yet, Nerval is hardly insignificant to the literary history of 19th-century France. He does in fact have a place in many accounts of the painful aftermath of Romanticism, whether as a belated Romantic or as a proto-Modernist. Perhaps more important, he is a writer's writer, read and commented by authors as different as Maurice Barrès, Marcel Proust, and André Breton. In his own day, Nerval lived at the center of the literary world. If he wasn't one of its stars, he nonetheless had important literary relationships with many of them: he translated Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Heinrich Heine, participated in Victor Hugo's *Cénacle*, collaborated with Dumas, and was a lifelong friend of Théophile Gautier. He was active in every corner of the literary field, not only as the poet and autobiographer readers know best, but also as a translator, playwright, journalist, critic, essayist, travel writer, and would-be diplomat. He is to be found at the edge of the frame of many important literary goings-on, as he was at that most iconic of literary events, the battle of *Hernani*.

Nerval's position is a strange one, then: at the center but never quite in focus. It may be true that, carefully considered, the significance of his literary contributions is not in keeping with the centrality of his position. Perhaps the dispersion of his literary production and reputation among various minor genres accounts for his minor status. But it is not literary factors alone that have

¹ In *Critique et clinique*, 14/*Essays Critical and Clinical*, 3.

contributed to his marginalization. His reputation has in fact never been a primarily literary one, not since his first psychological “crisis” in 1841. Although it would be 1852 before he was hospitalized again for this psychosis (variously categorized as monomania and theomania), his madness immediately became the primary critical fact. While Nerval was still in the *maison de santé* in 1841, Jules Janin published what amounted to an obituary to Nerval’s reason and, as Jean-Luc Steinmetz observes, “Dans cette étude inaugurale, Janin déjà tendait à former une image de Gérard dont il n’est pas dit que la postérité parviendra jamais à se défaire. Nerval est donné comme une présence. L’œuvre semble secondaire.” [“In this inaugural study, Janin was already forming an image of Gérard that, it must be admitted, posterity has never managed to let go of. Nerval is given as a presence. The work seems to be secondary.”]² This apocryphal image of Nerval, reproduced a decade later by Dumas, is one readers still know: *doux Gérard, bon Gérard*, that hapless eccentric. He is known as a “poet,” certainly, but less in the sense of a serious writer than in that of a dreamer, ill-suited for life’s practicalities. He is a figure of irrationality, nostalgia, and melancholy; whatever importance his writing has is as a symptom of this. Nerval’s marginality as a writer can be primarily attributed to this image, so that what has allowed his work to be overshadowed is not its small stature but the outsized proportions given, over and above it, to his psychology.

Steinmetz describes the history of Nerval’s reception among 19th- and early 20th-century writers as one of *non-lecture* (non-reading), in which readers’ ideas and feelings about the man have often replaced serious grappling with what is challenging in the work.³ The same might be said, in a certain sense, of much of the reading that has been done in Nerval studies since. The erudite scholarship and attentive analysis that have proliferated since the late 1940s have nonetheless continued to give absolute primacy to the explanatory power of Nerval’s psychology. Thematic, psychoanalytic, and biographical readings all assume that the coherence of the work might be found in the man’s mind, whether in its structures or in its history.⁴ The frame of reference for studies of Nerval is overwhelmingly personal and the logic of his writing is understood to be symptomatic, even in analyses that are interested in the historicity of literature.⁵ The significance of his work is developed internally to the writing and the psyche that produced it, both presumed to be radically isolated from the “real world” in which Nerval lived. His imagination, whether psychological or textual (two things often assumed to be one and the same), is a foreign land with its own laws, in which he lives alone. The social marginality that attended Nerval’s madness is compounded in this scholarly approach to his writing that removes it from any vital relationship to its historical moment.

This fundamental assumption has significantly shaped the findings of Nerval studies, orienting readers’ approaches to his writing. First and perhaps most obviously, the assumption that the writing is a psychological symptom leads scholars to focus on the forms of his writing in which the psychological element is most evident. They privilege the texts in which readers encounter a first-person narrator who looks like Nerval himself, reading them as autobiography even where they are clearly marked otherwise (as in the case of the *nouvelles* (stories) “Octavie” and *Sylvie*).⁶ This is, perhaps, why readers know Nerval primarily as a lyric poet and a writer of something like *auto-fiction*

² Steinmetz, *Reconnaissances*, 75. See also Janin, “Gérard de Nerval.”

³ Ibid., 98.

⁴ See, for example, the thematic readings of Jean-Pierre Richard, Georges Poulet, and Kurt Scharer; the psychoanalytic readings of Michel Jeanneret and Shoshanna Felman; and the biographical readings of Claude Pichois and Brix.

⁵ See, for example, Paul Bénichou’s *L’école du désenchantement*.

⁶ See, for example, *L’école du désenchantement*, where Bénichou claims that “Octavie,” *Sylvie*, and *Aurélia* do not obey the same logic as the rest of Nerval’s corpus, partaking instead in a redemptive, autobiographical mode. Biographies of Nerval, too, fall into this assumption, often including as biographical episodes drawn from texts that are not explicitly autobiographical, as though there were no meaningful distortion between the œuvre and the man. See Gérard Cogez, *Gérard de Nerval*; and Pichois and Brix, *Gérard de Nerval* and *Dictionnaire de Nerval*.

rather than as a playwright or an essayist. Given the assumption that the truth his writing tells is a truth about his *self*, the most significant texts must be those in which the self is to be found apparently speaking about itself. The figures that appear in these ostensibly personal works—Valois and Italian landscapes, intertwined vines and roses, girls—are sought out in his less personal works, so that the corpus as a whole is given meaning as an echo of the autobiographical.

This logic is sometimes taken a step further, so that the text that most explicitly manifests Nerval's madness is used as a kind of key to understanding everything else. So it is that *Aurélia, ou Le Rêve et la vie* [*Aurélia, or Dream and Life*] is made central to Nerval's corpus, though it was unfinished at the time of his death and its final form was determined by Gautier and his editors.⁷ Recounting the hallucinations Nerval experienced while hospitalized for his crises, *Aurélia* is taken to be the *truest* of his writing, and all of the writing that came before is read for the ways it foreshadows those final revelations and the suicide that interrupted them.⁸ Reading Nerval in this way, scholars generate habitually gloomy interpretations of Nerval. He appears as a man trapped inside his own illness, doomed to repeat the same unsatisfied desires until he can bear it no longer. What charm he has is bittersweet: the twinge of nostalgia and the poetry of longing. This charm does nothing to alleviate the mood of failure that hangs over the work and the man.

From the assumption that Nerval's writing is a psychological symptom there thus follows a set of methods that echoes and reproduces that assumption. Once imagination is taken to be passive, an involuntary state from which he cannot escape (an illness), then his writing becomes a mere expression of that state and takes on the qualities that have been assigned to it. So it is that the habits of reading described above are so closely linked: privileging Nerval's psychological singularity, presuming his isolation, abstracting his works to a single imaginary, and highlighting the tragic dimension of the writing all partake in the same logic. Nerval's subjectivity is restricted to the imagination (exiled from the real) and his poetics is made an index of that confinement. Based on a common assumption (conscious or not), these habits maintain Nerval in the marginal position created for him by the incomprehension of his contemporaries. They are the habits that have made his centrality within the literary field invisible and obscured the relations his works forge with the world around him. They are, then, the habits that must be broken if we want to understand better the complexity of Nerval's minor but central position, and profit from the unique perspectives it opens.

Some recent work in Nerval studies has begun to break these habits and to consider aspects of Nerval's writing that had previously remained hidden, turning away from primarily symptomatic reading. This is perhaps most evident in the wave of studies that give serious consideration to Nerval's occasional writing, as well as to the material conditions under which he wrote, calling attention to the situated and relational nature of the work.⁹ But such a shift is evident, as well, in studies that call into question the abstract unity attributed to Nerval's corpus, instead probing the dynamism and complexity of subjectivity and aesthetics in his writing and questioning the poetic

⁷ This is most evident in Richard's "Géographie magique de Nerval," where he claims that "sous le masque du chroniqueur ou du librettiste se trahit à chaque instant *le vrai Gérard*, celui d'*Aurélia*, des *Chimères* ou du docteur Blanche" [*the real Gérard*, the Gérard of *Aurélia*, the *Chimères*, or Doctor Blanche, is constantly peeking out from beneath the mask of the columnist or librettist"] (18; my emphasis). The same logic underlies Patrick Bray's reading of Nerval's "généalogie fantastique," which gives the hallucinatory document great hermeneutic significance as a prefiguration of the concerns at stake in *Sylvie* and *Aurélia*; see "Lost in the Fold."

⁸ There is occasional controversy about whether Nerval might not have taken his own life, but rather been killed for one reason or another, circulating as he did in dangerous neighborhoods at night.

⁹ Hisashi Mizuno's work makes particularly great strides in this direction; see also Richard Sieburth's translation and introduction of *Les Faux Saulniers*. Brix has also shifted increasingly toward this kind of work with his studies of *Les Faux Saulniers* and of Nerval's journalistic writing.

aims of the work.¹⁰ The most promising recent studies bring these approaches together, reading Nerval (newly liberated from his psychological prison) as a critic of his historical situation, and reading his writing (no longer a passive symptom) as a poetic engagement with that situation.¹¹ Remarkable in all of these studies is the shift in affect evident in their readings of Nerval: behind the lament of hopelessness that has long dominated, one increasingly hears the humor and irony of Nerval's writing, with all their creative and critical productivity.

My work in this project joins these recent studies and aims to further their extension and transformation of the way that Nerval might be read, while turning more definitively away from the imminent tragedy of Nerval's suicide and the constant specter of his madness that often continue to haunt them. This means a further shift in the assumptions with which we approach Nerval. While recent studies have opened up the possibility that the fundamentally personal, subjective problem at the heart of Nerval's writing might be less isolated and less abstract than had previously been assumed, even the most transformative of those studies has ultimately tended to keep that personal problem at the center of their understandings of his writing. I have here attempted to radically displace that psychological problem, as it has most often been understood. I have stripped the problematics of illness and symptom of their primacy, in order to free Nerval's writing from its isolation and get at what it might reveal when read from the perspective of its relationality.

I have approached Nerval first and foremost not as a madman, but as a writer producing work in mid-19th-century France and in conversation with that context. In order to do this I have, like Hisashi Mizuno and Richard Sieburth, turned my attention from Nerval's more lyrical and personal writing to the generically complex, serialized works that wear their worldly engagements on their sleeves. I have oriented my approach to Nerval's writing through readings of *Les Faux Saulniers* (*The Salt Smugglers*), *Les Nuits d'octobre* (*October Nights*), and *Les Illuminés* (*The Illuminati*), rather than *Aurélia*. I have reconsidered more ostensibly personal works like *Sylvie* and *Les Chimères* in light of more worldly ones, rather than vice versa, listening for the ways in which broad, apparently abstract reflections refer to local, concrete analyses, and seemingly personal concerns are grounded in history.

I have also sought to draw out Nerval's worldly engagements, both in the texts where they are evident and in the texts where they are subtler. Rather than assuming a personal frame of reference for Nerval's writing, I have looked for the places where he has specific interlocutors or refers to particular cultural and social phenomena. I have found that these moments of engagement entangle his work most often with particularly literary concerns: on the one hand, contemporary shifts in literary aesthetics (the rise of Realism, properly so-called, and the dominance of Romanticism in the theater); and on the other, the range of institutional forces that aimed to shape those aesthetics. Some of these institutions are legal (as with the National Assembly's censorship of the press in *Les Faux Saulniers* or the ongoing debates around intellectual property law that Nerval studied as an aspiring diplomat), and some of them cultural (as with the conservative criticism and pedagogical apparatus addressed in *Les Nuits d'octobre*). I have taken these concerns to be central to the significance of Nerval's writing, which I read in relation to them as a series of tactical responses. Nerval thus becomes a guide through the literary field of the mid-19th century, uniquely elucidating precisely because of the ambivalence of his literary position. My project puts his minor status to work, drawing out as much as possible the oblique and illuminating account of literary history that he offers.

¹⁰ See, for example, Jacques Bony, *L'Esthétique de Nerval*; Philippe Destruel, *L'écriture nervalienne du temps*; and Gabriel Chamarat-Malandain, *Nerval ou l'incendie du théâtre*.

¹¹ Ross Chambers's work on melancholy and in *Loiterature* moves in this direction, though it sometimes treats the writing as a historical symptom; the most striking and exciting case is Keiko Tsujikawa's *Nerval et les limbes de l'histoire*.

Making Nerval's minor status a critical asset has required me to reframe my thinking about his madness—not disregarding it, but changing its hermeneutic status. Rather than looking for illness directly manifested in the writing, I have rather sought the ways in which the experience of psychological crisis and, just as importantly, psychiatric treatment might have shaped Nerval's thinking about the society in which he lived. Psychology and subjectivity have thus continued to be important problematics for this project, transposed in a Foucauldian key rather than a Freudian or Lacanian one. I have sought to draw on Nerval's unusually intimate engagement with subjectivity as a social apparatus in order to uncover what Nerval might reveal about its history and then to theorize how his engagement with that history might have shaped his poetics.

Putting Nerval's minor status to work has also meant finding ways to mine the critical contributions of a writer who is insistently not systematic or programmatic. His work does not declare or explicate its engagements; it is fragmentary and wandering—it has been called “loiterature” and described as “eccentric,” literally off-center or outlying.¹² Yet the apparent lack of tension and application in his writing has emerged in my readings as one of the primary tools in Nerval's critical arsenal: what looks merely errant is often pointedly evasive and exposes the cracks in the ideologies that constrain it, not by naming them, but by slipping through them. In order to understand what is at stake in this evasive criticism, I have had to attempt to theorize what Nerval so adamantly leaves untheorized, to find the coherence in what is so persistently fragmentary. I have tried to do this in a way that takes account of the mobility of Nerval's writing, without unduly fixing this thought that offers unprecedented insights into the period precisely by way of its errancy. The authorial consciousness I attribute to Nerval is one inferred, read between the lines of his writing, and is not meant to create after the fact the authoritative voice that is missing from the texts, but simply to make legible their fleeting, unassuming coherence. My theorizing interventions have been intended, above all, to change the way we read the errancy and fragmentation of Nerval's writing: I have sought to recast this wandering and dodging as an inventive poetics that retains and recreates relationality in an increasingly individualized literature, rather than reading it as a sign of incommunicable esoterism.

Individualism and Its Discontents

The problem of individual isolation that has so deeply shaped Nerval studies is, in fact, a deeply historical problem in mid-19th-century France, and one that profoundly shaped the experience of Nerval's generation. Nerval began his literary career as an adolescent during the late years of the Restoration, breaking onto the literary scene with a well-received translation of Goethe's *Faust* in 1827. However, the vast majority of his writing belongs to the years of increasing social and economic transformation under the July Monarchy, Second Republic, and early Second Empire, during the two decades preceding his death in 1855. The July Revolution made a definitive turn away from any possibility of reviving *ancien régime* social institutions, as Charles X had hoped to do, aided by increasing urbanization that eroded longstanding social solidarities by drawing people away from their native regions, as well as by the movements toward centralization and “Frenchification” that sought to do away with all that constituted the specificity of those regions.

The story is familiar: people were broken free from the complex, local social networks that had previously defined their identities and ordered their lives, and were cast instead into the vast anonymity of market relations. The development of capitalism in France was, it must be noted, far slower than in England, and this period was not yet witness to the kind of large-scale industrialization occurring across the Channel. France in fact retained a primarily agrarian economy until late in the century. Yet the social fabric of France was irrefutably altered during this period:

¹² See Chambers, *Loiterature*; and Daniel Sangsue, *Le récit excentrique*.

artisanal labor struggled to compete as it became subject to the fungibility of expanding markets (aided by improved transportation and communication), and the small communities centered around dying industries were broken up and absorbed into towns and cities, in which the specificity of a neighbor was replaced by the functional identity of worker, manager, owner. Young men seeking to distinguish themselves in the professions or through government service were drawn to Paris for studies and opportunities, where they joined a flood of workers in a ballooning metropolis into which they were aggregated more than integrated. Even being careful not to overplay the effects of a still-incubating industrialization, it is clear that the mid-19th century was a period in which longstanding social solidarities were broken, and a new kind of subject was created: one not identified by its relations, but rather self-contained: the atomized, isolated subject that made up the discrete, interchangeable unit of market relations.¹³ Along with the transformation of subjective experience that so interested Walter Benjamin comes the birth of the modern individual.¹⁴

These are accounts of the mid-19th century that literary scholars and historians know well and that ground many readings of the significance of post-Romantic literature as a form of cultural opposition. The broad strokes of such a history prove helpful in reading Nerval, particularly in the case of *Sylvie*, which can be read as an allegory of the painful break with the past wrought by modernization, as I will show in Chapter Two. And yet to understand what it meant to live and to write during this period, particularly in Nerval's case, we must look beyond these grand narratives of modernization. As descriptions of life in the July Monarchy, Second Republic, and early Second Empire, these narratives need to be supplemented to account for both the slowness of economic development in France and the disjuncture between economic and political liberalism. The transformation of France from an agrarian to an industrialized nation was very much still in process during this period, and so was lived not only as the inexorable creep of "progress" but also as a series of distinguishable changes and acts. What's more, not only market implementation but also market ideology was slow to gain a solid foothold in France. Even under the "Bourgeois Monarchy" of Louis Philippe, political power was primarily held not by the commercial-industrial bourgeoisie, but by the professional and administrative bourgeoisie, which harbored deep ambivalence about commercial values. Despite the government's pro-business policies, the bourgeoisie that collaborated with the nobility to govern France was conservative (both cautious and moralizing) and put off by the naked self-interest of capitalism. The transformation of France during the mid-century was produced both by economic development and by the politics of this ruling class, two forces that often seem wholly contradictory.

While economic liberalism was slowly bearing its fruit in France, then, state politics retained a distinctly authoritarian character. The ruling bourgeoisie, represented during the July Monarchy by Doctrinaire politicians including Pierre Paul Royer-Collard and François Guizot, saw the Revolution of 1789 as historical progress and paid lip service to its values—particularly liberty. They were anything but republicans, however, and argued that protecting freedom required precisely limiting freedom, ensuring that it did not fall into the kind of insurrectionary excess seen in the Revolution. Proponents of liberal monarchy, the Doctrinaires established a very limited electoral base during the July Monarchy by setting high income requirements, thereby ensuring governance of the many by the few. This was the balance that would ensure social order and prevent the chaos of democracy,

¹³ Market relations are precisely relations that cannot be lived as such, as relations between people, because of the illusion through which they appear to be relations between *things*. See Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, Section 1, Chapter 4 on commodity fetishism.

¹⁴ See, for example, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" in *Illuminations*.

ensuring that state power remained in the hands of those men who had demonstrated their moral *capacité* through their economic solidity.¹⁵

The conservative liberalism of the French state in fact remained remarkably consistent throughout the political upheavals of 1848-52. The provisional government of the Second Republic was hardly democratic-socialist, and the eventual republican government favored a conservative conception of the republic as family, property, and religion, immediately beginning to dismantle the radical aspects of the constitution, including the National Workshops.¹⁶ This government was led by the Party of Order, which was in many ways the inheritor of Doctrinaire ideology and whose conservatism would finally outweigh its royalism, bringing many of its members (though not the most notable) around to support Louis Napoléon after his 1851 coup averted further democratic insurgency. The Party of Order unsurprisingly shared the Doctrinaires' concern for maintaining social order over the demands of liberty and *against* socialist claims for equality. Despite the 1848 revolution, then, state power was relatively consistent during the mid-century in its authoritarianism and conservatism, its fear of savage democracy and social upheaval. That upheaval was, among other things, bad for business, and repressive policy ensured that the interests of capital would be protected.

We must take this repressiveness into account when we consider the way that both subjective experience and the literary field were transformed during the mid-19th century, adding to broad narratives of commercialization and fragmentation. The changes associated with modernization during this period were not only an inexorable wave sweeping the nation, but were also encountered as a series of local debates and policies. In addition to the change in structures of experience brought about by urbanization and increasing commercialization, subjectivity was actively shaped by institutions—legal, academic, and critical, as well as, of course, psychiatric. If liberal society was an aggregate rather than a community, the individual took on added importance as the base unit of that aggregate: it was of individuals, conceived of as such (as integral, self-contained, individual selves) that bourgeois society was made. Everything boiled down to individual action and the selves that originated it, and so those selves became increasingly significant objects for government even as they became increasingly anonymous and atomized. In the absence of the intricate legislation of behavior operated by now-defunct social solidarities and hierarchies, French subjects had to be trained to be self-governing.

Maintenance of social order required the creation of very particular kinds of subjects. As in Smith's invisible hand, individuals had to be brought together by some unifying force, and so had to be internally driven by conformity. While exalting the individual, then, conservative social policy also sought to constrain him: he must be free to act, but within limits. The importance of this project of shaping selves can be seen in the centrality of education to the Doctrinaire government of the July Monarchy. Guizot's 1833 law establishing public primary education throughout France, and his colleague Victor Cousin's 1832 reform of the secondary curriculum, together saturated the nation with the ideals of citizenship in the liberal monarchy. Cousin's philosophical and pedagogical apparatus in particular was instrumental in engineering a duality of individualism and conformism suitable to the (male) bourgeois subject. Under Cousin, pedagogy in secondary schools was reshaped to achieve what was, according to Jarrold Seigel, "[t]he fundamental goal of education as [Cousin] conceived it": "to form individuals whose sense of their own reflective independence and autonomy, and their spiritual unity with others, was shaped for them by the pedagogical authority and practice

¹⁵ On the Doctrinaires, see for example Sara Maza's *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie*; though her overarching argument against the existence of the bourgeoisie is a problematic overstatement of the case, she gives a detailed account of liberal politics under the Restoration in Chapter Five, "The Political Birth of the Bourgeoisie, 1815-1830" (131-60).

¹⁶ Peter McPhee, *A Social History of France 1780-1880*, 178.

of the state.”¹⁷ Cousin’s brand of spiritualist philosophy was the cornerstone of the required curriculum for all recipients of the *bac* and so had a platform from which to diffuse the technologies of the self by which it would shape individuals and their relationships to society, as Jan Goldstein has demonstrated.¹⁸

This philosophy, like that of Descartes and Maine de Biran, began with an *a priori*, pre-reflective self and derived everything else (including ontology) through the application of reflection to that self.¹⁹ Individual psychology was the basis for all other knowledge, and introspection was the first act of philosophy.²⁰ The bourgeois subject thus had the pleasure of possessing within himself the fundamental cause and origin of all efficacy.²¹ But this individual, self-possessed in what Seigel calls his “reflective independence and autonomy,” was not unconstrained: his freedom was subject to the impersonal reason that governed Cousin’s spiritualist philosophy.²² In Goldstein’s analysis, “the Cousinian combination of ‘personal will’ and ‘impersonal reason’ flattered the possessor of the moi that he enjoyed a thrilling degree of individuality and efficacy yet at the same time guaranteed that he would not rock the boat.”²³ The bourgeois subject was the free, first cause of his own conformism, deriving (from) himself the strict reason that he enforced, even upon himself.

Bourgeois individualism can thus be thought of as having two poles: the myth of the self-possessed individual and the constraining force of conformism, in the form of reason. The rationalism of this philosophy is explicitly intended, as it is in the thinking of Biran or Alexis de Tocqueville, as a check on the imagination, a faculty liable to run wild and draw the self beyond the bounds of its abilities.²⁴ This imagination is not merely a mental faculty, but is understood to have very real political consequences: imagination is closely associated with freedom, and excesses of the imagination with the excesses of democracy epitomized by the Reign of Terror. Thus we see that the limit on democracy required to guarantee social order is produced not only through direct political means like limitations on electoral rights, but also indirectly through the creation of orderly subjects, as well as ongoing legal and critical interventions to keep the bourgeois subject on the right path. The transformation of subjective experience throughout the mid-19th century was operated in part through the concerted efforts of the state and its proponents. Individuals encountered head on institutions that were designed to mold them, whose intentions might be laid bare and contested. In addition to the familiar narrative of modernization as a great inexorable process that produced opposition as a sort of symptom, the story of cultural transformation during the mid-19th century might thus also be told as a series of skirmishes on the sites where that transformation was newly asserting itself.

Subjectivity, Imagination, Poetics

Scholarship on literature during this period tends to read it in relation to that broader narrative of modernization. On the one hand, the liberal monarchy restored careers open to talent, and as young men were drawn to government service and the professions, literature made more than its fair share of recruits thanks to its comparatively low barriers to entry. At the same time, however, the

¹⁷ Seigel, *The Idea of the Self*, 477.

¹⁸ See, in particular, Chapter Five, “Cousinian Hegemony” in *The Post-Revolutionary Self*.

¹⁹ Seigel, 475.

²⁰ Goldstein, *The Post-Revolutionary Self*, 192.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 180.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Part I, “The problem for which psychology furnishes a solution.” See also Matthew Maguire, *The Conversion of Imagination*, Chapter Six, “Rousseau and Restoration: Imagination and Memory,” and Chapter Seven, “The Gravity of Illusion: Alexis de Tocqueville.”

patronage that had supported men of letters during the Ancien Régime and even the Restoration disappeared, leaving writers to truck their wares on a market where there was now a glut of available talent. In most cases, this meant that the writer was little different from a laborer, wielding his pen as another might wield a hammer, and struggling to piece together a living: the starving artist, dreaming of transcending that condition and achieving the status of a Victor Hugo or an Alexandre Dumas.

Though they most often emerged from the bourgeoisie, these young men made up the labor force of one of the first French industries to be highly commercialized and so found themselves at odds with bourgeois values. The difficulties presented by the logic of the market as such were only compounded by the notoriously conservative taste of mid-19th century bourgeois literary consumers that determined what was saleable literature (closely linked, of course, to the moralizing values that underpinned their identity *as* bourgeois). Even when it was more heterogeneous, and so less constrained by bourgeois conservatism, the literary public demonstrated all of the inertia and conformism of aggregated masses, drawing literature ever downward toward the lowest common denominator. Mass literature, exemplified by the daily press, was thus considered by many to be fallen literature, no longer an art but a mere trade. The possibility of an “authentic” literature that might operate on a logic truly distinct from that of the masses was increasingly seen by high-minded writers to require the isolation of literature from the market. From Gautier’s refusal of decorum and moralism in the preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, to Flaubert’s sendup of uncritical conformity in the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, many assertions of the value of literature in the mid-19th century were grounded in its radical heterogeneity within an increasingly flat, commercial culture. Literature was imagined as a space in which the imagination of the writer need not be constrained by the lack of imagination of the public and a space apart from the reign of bourgeois values—a space of “symbolic resistance” or “opposition”: the refusal of homogenized market culture and the manifestation of values foreign to it.²⁵

Nerval in many ways fits into this narrative of literature and modernization. His career is marked by the jockeying and compromise associated with the literary market. We find him writing for various newspapers of differing political stripes, and sometimes discern the contortions in his texts required to pacify his editors.²⁶ As a playwright, too, we see Nerval struggling to write a commercially successful work, trying out different genres and collaborations in pursuit of a hit he never achieved. And yet we do not find in his writing the same sorts of disavowals of the literary public and market as we find in Gautier or Flaubert. Nerval’s writing echoes the oppositional character of much other modernist literature: his writing manifests a deep irony and suspicion with regard to the values of bourgeois subjectivity—values that sought to confine the self within reasonable bounds.²⁷ These values (authenticity, integrity, originality) are perhaps not obviously insidious, as they seem to affirm the freedom of the individual by isolating it from external forces

²⁵ On “symbolic resistance” and “opposition” in 19th-century French literature, see, respectively, Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse*, and Chambers, *Room for Maneuver*.

²⁶ This can be either aesthetic or explicitly political. Hisashi Mizuno identifies the careful balance of political subversion and caution that allowed Nerval to publish *Les Nuits d'octobre* in the pro-Louis Napoléon *Illustration*, as well as the careful selection of *Sylvie* (a relative outlier in his œuvre) for publication in the spiritualist *Revue des Deux Mondes*. See Mizuno, “Nerval face au réalisme” and “*Sylvie* de Gérard de Nerval et la *Revue des Deux Mondes*.” I will return to this question in Chapter Two.

²⁷ “Modernist” is no doubt an imperfect characterization here. Writers like Gautier and Nerval might be better classed under Paul Bénichou’s rubric of the “school of disenchantment,” or as “second-generation” Romantics along with Baudelaire. Nonetheless, “modernist” accomplishes two useful things here: first, it takes into account the directions in which Gautier and Baudelaire will move and so foregrounds their innovations rather than framing them as a reactive post-script to Romanticism (the sterility of disenchantment, the frustration of the *idéal*); second, it marks a kinship between highly varied literary projects in the second half of the century—Gautier, Baudelaire, Flaubert, Mallarmé—which all struggle to create a literature apart from the debasement of mainstream culture.

that might compromise its autonomy. But they in fact belong to the controlling mechanism of conservative ideology, indicating a vague but powerful boundary around authorized behavior and thought.

Rather than making sweeping condemnations, however, Nerval's writing pays meticulous attention to the ways in which these values made their way into the literary field, reshaping this space apart in the image of the ideal bourgeois subject. As I will explore in Chapter One, for example, *Les Nuits d'octobre* points up the complicity between the moralizing literary criticism of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (promoting unity in the work and integrity in the writer) and the repressive Cousinian pedagogical apparatus. Likewise, my reading of *Lex Faux Saulniers* in Chapter Three draws out the ways in which the legislation of authorial authenticity by the Press Law of 1850 was intricately bound up with the prohibition of fiction and the creation of a narrow range of authorized journalistic writing. In Chapter Four, I draw out the resistance throughout Nerval's œuvre more broadly to the ideal of authorial originality that underpinned proposed extensions of intellectual, and specifically literary, property rights. In all of these readings, Nerval's writing is shown to highlight the close connections between those values that seem to ground the self in itself and restrictions on the imagination, creating a nuanced account of how literature is impoverished by its subjection to bourgeois values. In this way, Nerval's precise engagements with literary institutions provide a microscopic view of the ideological constraints facing literature in the mid-19th century—a view that not only supplements but also deepens more telescopic accounts of the period, revealing how large-scale transformations were enforced and contested on the local level.

What's more, this view adds a concern largely absent from the perspective framed by Gautier, Baudelaire, or Flaubert. Nerval shares with these other writers, more central to the canon of 19th-century French literature, an attention to the destruction of the imaginative subject by modernization and a spirit of poetic innovation in response to that destruction. In Nerval's understanding of that destruction, however, imagination and individualism are articulated in a very different way. In readings of other authors of the period, it is common to observe the resistance they demonstrate toward the impoverishment of imaginative subjectivity and literary creation understood as a byproduct of the nefarious conformity of bourgeois society. The rise of the daily press and mass culture, in particular, are common culprits in accounts of this period, enforcing a discursive anonymity that stands as a barrier to authentic literature. It is this anonymity that writers are often understood to be attacking: a writer like Flaubert, for example, reveals its stupidity through citational irony, among other procedures, while Stéphane Mallarmé refutes it by way of a vindication of radical individuality and originality.²⁸ Baudelaire moves between these two tactics, shifting from the hyperindividualism of his aesthetic elitism in the 1840s—correlate of his dandyism—to the deep irony of the prose poems, embodied in his ever more impeccable impersonation of bourgeois dress.²⁹ Speaking more broadly, scholars often narrate the movement of a whole strain of French literature (particularly poetry) toward aestheticism as a progressive isolation of the authentic, creative subject from the compromising effects of the anonymous mass of bourgeois individuals. To avoid the debasement of banality, writers withdraw (at least theoretically) into the space of literature where they might retain an individuality of another kind.

In Nerval's writing, however, the opposition between bourgeois and aestheticist individualism can only be a false one. The conception of the bourgeois public as a conformist mass is not separated here from the individualistic ideology that enables that conformism, and so the withdrawal into individualism cannot be seen as a viable escape from conformism. The bohemian cannot prevent his absorption into the bourgeoisie and the flattening of his imaginative life through

²⁸ See Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse*.

²⁹ See Richard D. E. Burton, *Baudelaire and the Second Republic*.

a vindication of his own originality.³⁰ The values that would underpin individualistic imaginative autonomy are precisely those that underpin the conformist myth of autonomy (authenticity, integrity, originality), so the writer cannot be “authentically” authentic, on his own terms, nor “truly” original, because the primacy of those values already draws him within the logic of banality he seeks to exclude from the literary field. The writer, when he takes on these values for himself, becomes just an earnest property holder of a different kind (as in intellectual property debates centered around the question of inheritance, as I will discuss in Chapter Four). Put another way, the individualism that atomizes individuals into the units of a banal social aggregate cannot be escaped by a withdrawal into an aesthetic individualism. In attempting to redeem itself against the mass in this way, literature only intensifies the logic of the mass itself.

The contradiction inherent in aestheticism is not made explicit in this way in Nerval’s writing, but is indirectly drawn out by locating modernization’s destruction of the imagination *not* in the rise of mass culture, but in the production of individuals through the demolition of older forms of social solidarity. While he remains largely silent on the hegemony of the modern literary public and the compromising effects of the market, Nerval returns again and again to the imaginative richness of forms of collective and popular practice that have become outmoded. His oft-observed nostalgia is to be understood in this sense, rather than as purely personal and autobiographical: it is an awareness of the value of cultural forms that nourished the imagination, and of their destruction by modernization. In the most evident manifestation of Nerval’s concern for the cultural past, the urbanization and centralization that eroded the specificity of local and regional cultures during this period is addressed through the figures of the folk song and festival that reappear throughout his “Valois cycle”—the texts written about the region of the first French kings in which both the French nation and Nerval himself spent their infancy.³¹ At the center of Nerval’s interest in young girls singing and elaborate communal rites lies the inscription of these practices within a community, both synchronic and diachronic. The song and the festival draw their imaginative intensity and their cultural value from the way that they embed individual experience in a dense fabric of shared experience, a ground that does not limit but rather enriches subjectivity and imagination.³²

In addition to these traditional cultural forms, Nerval also takes up the rationalization of culture (including the realm of fiction that might seem immune to such transformations) through frequent considerations of forms of popular fiction that do not coincide with the highly commercialized forms of mass culture. The recurring treatments of cultural phenomena like superstition, legend, canard journalism, and freak shows has received astonishingly little scholarly attention, and deserves to be critically examined alongside folk practices, which are decidedly more prevalent in Nerval studies. These forms will be addressed in detail in Chapters One and Three, but I will observe here more generally that their epistemological ambiguity, neither naïve nor quite the manageable fiction of suspension of disbelief, appears as a disappearing form of interpenetration of imagination and life that modern society does not tolerate. The problematic of the fluidity of dream and life that is so frequently analyzed in Nerval studies returns here in an altered form, not as a

³⁰ It is worth noting Nerval’s complex relationship to bohemianism. He was closely associated with bohemian groups of the 1830s, like the *petit cénacle* and the group in the Impasse du Doyenné, but seems always to have been somewhat marginal to many of their practices (including their dandyism). On the other hand, Nerval might be thought of as out-doing their bohemianism, given his lifelong refusal to keep normal hours or reside at a fixed address; indeed, his friends’ fascination with his “eccentricity” throughout his life suggests that he ran counter to social norms in a more profound and unsettling way. See, for instance, Gautier’s *Histoire du romantisme*.

³¹ This cycle centers around apparently autobiographical texts like many of those in *Les Filles du feu* and *Promenades et Souvenirs*, but could also be seen to include texts like *Les Faux Saulniers* and *Les Nuits d’octobre* where the focus is not on personal memory.

³² Nerval’s thinking resonates here with Benjamin’s; I will return to this question in Chapter Two.

question of personal hallucination or reverie, but as a matter of shared cultural forms that play on the vitality of the imagination, irreducible to truth or falsehood.

Through these two sets of cultural forms, Nerval displaces the imaginative integrity that modern literature must recuperate, from the rarefaction of the creative individual to the revival of collective creative practices. So it is that the art *par excellence* for Nerval, the art he uses to figure the mechanisms and potentialities of creative production in general, is not painting as for Baudelaire and Gautier, but theater, that most social of art forms. In addition to his work as a playwright and theater critic, Nerval turned often in his other writing to the dramatic arts: not only in the fascination with the figure of the actress as artist and woman in *Les Filles du feu* and *Pandora*, which I will return to in Chapter Two, but also in the investigations of the theater as a creative space and a social milieu that come to the fore in *Le roman tragique* and Nerval's short-lived editorial project, the journal *Le Monde dramatique*. The quintessential form of imaginative production is to be found in the shared performances and the embodied artifice of theatrical *création* (understood with all of its French ambiguity). The theater as such provides Nerval a site for theorizing the operations of collective creative practice, and finds echoes in a wide range of practices that fascinate him, from disguise and dress up to the theatricality of the aristocracy in the *ancien régime*. A whole range of imaginative practices is thus grounded in the figure of the theater, which stands as the potential modern home to the kinds of collective culture that interest Nerval (though the theater in its contemporary form is hardly satisfactory, as I will show in Chapter Two).

Nerval's interest in the cultural cost of the break with tradition and community places him in an entirely different narrative of literary history than that of the oppositional, modernist writers I have been discussing (Gautier, Baudelaire, Flaubert, Mallarmé), one concerned with disappearing rural and regional values.³³ His investment in the cultural vitality of rural forms of communal life and culture resonates, for example, with George Sand's pastoral utopianism of the late 1840s. In novels like *François le Champi* and *La Mare au diable*, Sand depicted the naivety of rural life with the explicit intention of reawakening the modern reader's aesthetic sensibility, lost through alienation from *la vie primitive* (the primitive life).³⁴ In light of his Valois writings, it also becomes clear why Nerval should have held such significance for someone like Barrès, whose mourning for the loss of the *terroir* (land or, literally, soil) also identified the subjective price of the break with tradition and community.³⁵ Unlike Sand and Barrès, however, Nerval is not interested in the rural as a timeless ideal of naivety and authenticity. The Valois region that is at the center of so much of his writing is not nostalgic, reactionary, or belated; in fact, it does not even stand in clear opposition to Paris as a traditional topos opposed to a modern one, but is a historically dynamic setting in its own right.³⁶ The arrival of

³³ Nerval's concern with local and traditional culture in fact partakes in a widespread and politically important fascination with regionalism throughout the 19th century. See Stéphane Gerson, *Pride of Place*. Gerson's argument makes a fascinating complement to historical work suggesting that rural ties were far from having been destroyed at mid-century. Gérard Noiriel argues, for example, that local ties remained far stronger than is usually supposed even after workers moved to Paris; see *Les Ouvriers dans la société française, XIX^e-XX^e siècle*. Likewise, Eugen Weber discusses in *Peasants into Frenchmen* the ongoing work of modernizing the countryside through the end of the 19th century. The mid-century anxiety about the loss of vernacular cultural ties and the fascination with reviving it are particularly interesting in light of such work, which suggests that such interests were born more of the unevenness of modernization than of a sudden transformation of life.

³⁴ See Sand's prefaces to *François le Champi* and *La Mare au diable*.

³⁵ See, for example, Barrès's 1897 novel *Les Déracinés*, where his thinking about the self and the nation is grounded in links to territory and the dead. See, also, Barrès's discussion of Nerval in his speech upon being received into the Académie Française in 1907.

³⁶ Neither is the Valois a private space, entirely cut off from history; cf. Chambers, *Mélancolie et opposition*, 99; and Bray, "Lost in the Fold," 44. The Valois is neither an a-historical or an anti-modern space, but can rather be seen as a key element to the modernism of Nerval's writing, if we understand modernism as Frederic Jameson defines it in *Postmodernism* as "the result of incomplete modernization" (366).

bourgeois values and mass culture in the Valois happens, as it were, before Nerval's eyes and he is an attentive observer of the cultural transformation that ensues, particularly in *Sylvie*. He not only documents, but also dissects, that gradual transformation, demonstrating as much insight into the operations of modernization as he does grief for the world it destroys. Modernization is not treated only as a loss, as though redemption might require a step back in time, but rather reveals the potential for adaptation and reformulation of collective practice as much as its irrevocable loss.

Also unlike Sand and Barrès, Nerval does not attribute obvious political significance to the collective culture he explores and mourns, be it socialist or nationalist.³⁷ Traditional culture is not merely a theme or a figure in his writing, deployed for extra-literary ends. It does not represent a point of social origin to which readers must be inspired to return, but rather functions as a point of reference for the literary project in which Nerval and his readers are engaged. The problem of the destruction of imaginative practices is for him above all a *poetic* problem to which poetic innovation must respond.

In this sense, Nerval's writing might perhaps be better understood in relation to the hope invested in folksongs and popular poetry as a source of regeneration for literature by writers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Étienne Pivert de Senancour, Mme de Staël, and even the Hugo of the ballades.³⁸ But while Nerval's experiments with the musicality of poetry in the early 1830s shared this kind of literal recuperation of popular formal elements (the primacy of melody over rhyme, for example), his work of the 1840s and 50s draws more indirect inspiration from popular forms.³⁹ The collective practices that interest him are neither nostalgically presented nor faithfully mimicked, but are rather studiously explored: they are analyzed as models whose logic, rather than their mere form, might provide the basis for literary innovation.⁴⁰ The Valois provides the experimental space in which that innovation might be fostered, in which literature might be reconceived as a form of collective imaginative practice. In *Sylvie*, as I will show in Chapter Two, this privileged function of the Valois is evident within the story itself, where the narrator passes through a series of shared performances that begin with traditional practices and test the limits of adaptation and deformation that would still maintain the essential experience—folksong, festival, disguise, role-playing. But the Valois also serves this function poetically in *Les Faux Saulniers* and *Les Nuits d'octobre*, where the passage out of the rule-bound, Parisian discursive space into the Valois allows for radical formal experimentation, which I will discuss in Chapters One and Three.

The inventive poetics that Nerval elaborates in the space of the Valois was created on the model of forms of collective culture that lie at the heart of his writing. Those forms—folk practices like songs and festivals, on the one hand, and popular fictions like superstition and canards, on the other—display two essential features that illuminate the complex operations of subjectivity and imagination in Nerval's writing. First, Nerval draws on forms of imaginative practice in which the subject of experience is at once individual and collective. This is most obvious in the case of the folk

³⁷ The difficulty of identifying Nerval's political commitments is well documented. While there is consensus in the recent scholarship I discussed earlier as to the oppositional nature of Nerval's writing and even behavior, there is exceedingly little evidence as to his politics, *per se*. There is, to begin with, a dearth of explicit, documented political statements or actions; see, for example, Francis Dumont's *Nerval et les bousingots*, which attempts to find coherence in the scattered evidence. Then, too, as Mizuno consistently observes, Nerval published in newspapers and journals of various politics and the degree to which editorial demands shaped his writing cannot be known for certain. It is in the light of this political uncertainty that I have sought the critical and visionary significance of Nerval's writing in nuanced local engagements and their implications without trying to map them onto political positions.

³⁸ On 18th- and 19th-century interest in reviving the folksong, see Bénichou, *Nerval et la chanson folklorique*.

³⁹ Nerval gestures to the connection between his early poetry and his interest in the folksong in *La Bohème galante*, where the structure produces a series: odelettes, musical scores, folksongs.

⁴⁰ In this sense, the reading of Nerval I am proposing shares much with the Jacques Rancière's reading of Mallarmé as reinventing poetry to fill the void left by collective religious and monarchic rites. See *Mallarmé: La politique de la sirène*.

festival, in which the individual's embodied experience of personal participation is doubled by the sense of enacting an experience that belongs to others—not only the other participants but also generations past. Individuals are aware of performing or repeating a practice that exceeds them as individuals, while simultaneously participating on their own behalf, so that the act is ultimately a relational one. The connection established between individual and collective here is, for Nerval, the source of the intensity and imaginative richness these practices offer. In them the imagination draws individual subjectivity outside of itself, but not by transcending the self through the ideal as for someone like Baudelaire. It is rather the possibility of a vivid experience of connection and relationality that provides the density and substance of subjective experience.

The second key feature of the collective cultural forms that Nerval explores engages their participants in fictions that generate a particular kind of belief. Just as these forms allow for a disjunctive conjunction between individual and collective, they demand a combination of lucidity and belief that is crucially *not* suspension of disbelief. In Samuel Taylor Coleridge's model, there is a clear division between the writer who creates the illusion and the readers who consume it; there is a clear division as well between the space of the real and the space of the fiction into which readers enter by bracketing it, by identifying it as a space of illusion in which they will not bring their lucidity to bear. In Nerval's model, these kinds of divisions are not established, and the poles of lucidity and illusion are contained within every participant, in a space entirely contiguous with the "real." Returning to the festival model, we might think of this operation of belief as what differentiates the festival from the theater. In the theater as Denis Diderot, for example, theorizes it, the actor makes the audience feel something, creates an illusion for them, insofar as he himself feels nothing and remains entirely outside the illusion.⁴¹ But in the festival, every participant is at once actor and audience, responsible both for creating the artifice of the illusion and for enjoying the illusion—despite their awareness of it *as* illusion. Lucidity and illusion exist together here, without one overtaking the other: the festival participants are neither unfeeling nor delusional.⁴² The same can be said of the audiences of popular fictions: legends, freak shows, and the like. These forms cannot simply be chalked up to the backwardness or stupidity of people who can't tell reason from superstition, but neither are they fictions in the way of the novel. Rather, they engage an entirely different epistemological attitude, in which contradictory beliefs can be held simultaneously, in which fiction is a mode of the real. In all of these cases, there is no privileged rationalism from which the imagination is a clearly contained exception; these cultural forms rather create experiences in which the imagination coexists with other faculties within the heart of life.

By way of their imbrication of the individual and the collective, as well as lucidity and illusion, the forms of collective imaginative practice that interest Nerval provide a new way of understanding his poetics. Nerval's writing does not, as I've said, correspond to established genres, and particularly to fictional genres—which perhaps explains why scholars are so quick to assume the autobiographical status of his work: if literary form here conforms to no recognizable generic logic, that must be because it conforms so completely to the subjectivity it expresses. But in exploring the folk and popular cultural forms that interest Nerval, it becomes clear that literary form in his writing does indeed correspond to generic logics, though of genres not properly *literary*. Even if he never completed a novel, his is a body of work deeply concerned with the nature of fiction, if fiction is to be understood as a form of imaginative experience associated with a variety of lived and textual practices. That is to say, fiction is a subjective phenomenon in Nerval's writing. That is to say, too, that fiction is not symptomatic. The conjunctive disjunctions of self and other, reality and illusion found throughout his works are not delusional, not traces of a "real" subjective illness. They must be

⁴¹ See Diderot, *Paradoxe sur le comédien*.

⁴² See Rousseau, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, where he criticizes the inauthenticity of theater in favor of the *fête publique*.

understood rather as approximations and adaptations of cultural forms that might save literature from becoming just another domain of the bourgeois individual. Nerval's resistance to a coherent, individual writing subject is not psychotic, but poetic—a historically-situated literary innovation that troubles the operations of literature in order to get beyond an exchange between two individuals, writer and reader. As I will explore further in Chapter Four, the plurality and mobility of the writing subject allow writer and reader to circulate together through its different identities, bringing the imaginative acts of writing and reading much closer together. Writer and reader take up relations like those of festival participants, and literature becomes a collective practice on the model of folk and popular culture. In a radical reversal of the longstanding assumptions of Nerval studies, I will show Nerval's body of work to be entirely opposed to isolation. It does not close in upon itself, creating a private imaginative universe, but rather ceaselessly opens itself up, drawing in other texts and other voices in order to recuperate imagination as a form of collective life.

The chapters that follow demonstrate the profoundly relational nature of Nerval's writing: first, by foregrounding the way the texts are situated in conversation with cultural institutions and transformations; and second, by showing that the poetic difficulty of the texts should not be attributed to a failure of subjectivity, but rather to an opening of subjectivity and a move beyond it. The first in each pair of chapters reads one of Nerval's most obviously occasional texts, helping to draw out the situation and the stakes of the reading of the more canonically "literary" text that follows.

In **Chapter One**, I situate the serial *Les Nuits d'octobre* [*October Nights*] in the mid-19th-century no man's land between Champfleury's Realism and the Idealist aesthetics of conservative critics, two opposed camps that nonetheless unwittingly cooperate to marginalize the imagination. I argue that by pushing empiricism beyond the limits of rationality and employing dream as a mode of ironic argumentation, Nerval vindicates imagination as a literary and a phenomenological mode. In **Chapter Two**, I read *Sylvie, ou Souvenirs du Valois* [*Sylvie, or Memories of the Valois*] in light of Nerval's critique of conservative Idealism, uncovering the historical reflection at the heart of the story. I argue that, through the opposition of the figures of the actress and the peasant girl, the story represents the impasses of modernization, but also reflects on how imaginative forms might transcend those impasses, exploring and performing sincerity as a kind of fictional practice.

In **Chapter Three**, I read *Les Faux Sauniers* [*The Salt Smugglers*] as a critique of the marginalization of both fiction and collective writing practices operated by the July 1850 Press Law, arguing that by presenting a variety of storytelling forms and voices, Nerval asserts the vitality of fiction beyond the limits of the novel and creates a mobile, poly-vocal writing subject always just out of reach of the law. In **Chapter Four**, I consider the poly-vocality of Nerval's poetics in relation to the conceptions of originality at stake in contemporary debates as to the nature of intellectual and literary property. I contend that the practices of textual borrowing, citation, and republication that characterize Nerval's writing (practices not previously theorized) participate in these debates by performing the fundamentally collective nature of literary production. In texts like *Les Illuminés* [*The Illuminati*] and *Les Chimères* [*The Chimeras*], it is through intertextuality, presented openly to readers and invoking a body of shared readerly experience, that Nerval generates a literary practice akin to acting, with both author and readers taking up the text like a role to be played, not to fool anyone, but to create a community of shared performance.

Chapter One

Empiricism Reimagined

Les Nuits d'octobre

Aux yeux de l'imagination, le monde réel languit auprès de ses fictions. On peut sentir que l'imagination devient la maîtresse à l'ennui des choses réelles et présentes. Les fantômes de l'imagination ont un vague, une indécision de formes qui émeut mille fois plus que la netteté et la distinction des perceptions actuelles.

[In the eyes of the imagination, the real world wilts beside its own fictions. Boredom with real, present things signals that the imagination has taken hold. The ghosts of the imagination have a haziness, an indefiniteness of shape that is a thousand times more moving than the clarity and definiteness of actual perceptions.]

Victor Cousin¹

The Ambivalent Realist

In 1852, Nerval published a rambling *feuilleton* (serial) in which he explicitly addressed the question of what kind of writer he aspired to be. The wandering narration of the travel journal cum parody *Les Nuits d'octobre* [*October Nights*] took the readers of *L'Illustration* all over Paris and the Valois in five installments during October and November of that year, and took Nerval through an experiment with literary Realism.² Having (twice) missed his train to Meaux (for what purpose, we know not),

¹ "Du beau et de l'art," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1 September 1845. English citations from *Les Nuits d'octobre* will be quoted from Sieburth's translation, *October Nights*, in *Selected Writings*, 204-44. All other translations are my own, except where otherwise noted.

² Whether the capitalization of this word to refer to the literary school is indeed appropriate for the period in question, when the contours of the category were still somewhat in flux and it was deployed far more as an insult than as a motto, is a question I will bracket. Maintaining the convention of capitalizing "Realism" in the literary context is intended here simply to mark my intent to speak only about this context and not about the broad philosophical tradition of realism. Just what the word "Realism" refers to will be discussed at great length below.

the narrator stops into a café for an absinthe with his *flâneur* friend and stumbles upon a Charles Dickens article in a review he happens to thumb through.³ In the text that follows, he claims to adopt the procedure of this article that belongs to the distinguished English tradition of “observation dénué[e] de tout alliage d’invention romanesque” [“first-hand observation unencumbered by the slightest contrivance of fiction”], pursuing not the dull sentimentality beloved by French readers, but rather a “vrai absolu” [“absolute truth”].⁴ The experiment is short-lived, however, and by the serial’s end, the narrator has proclaimed his renunciation of Realism.

From its initial appeal to Realism’s procedures, to its final claim to have been cured of its Realist ambitions, *Les Nuits d’octobre* presents itself as Nerval’s confrontation with Realism. What is less evident, however, is how such a confrontation is to be interpreted and what relation this text might bear to Nerval’s other writing. Given the ways in which Realism’s referential ambitions are underpinned by a whole set of assumptions about the relationship between writing and the world, the Realist experiment of the *feuilleton* seems to represent the adoption and then rejection of those assumptions. But this literary-philosophical experiment is doubly perplexing with regard to the rest of Nerval’s writing, counter-intuitive both in its adoption of Realism and in its rejection. On the one hand, Nerval is traditionally understood as a writer entirely indifferent to Realism and objective referentiality, preferring instead the strictly personal worlds of imagination and dream. What, then, was he doing undertaking an entire Realist serial? On the other hand, Nerval in fact published a wealth of travel writing during his career, and had spent a great portion of the years leading up to *Les Nuits d’octobre* actively engaged in representing the material world in literature. Why, then, did he stage the local rejection of Realism in this serial? Before the oddities of the text even begin to pile up, its framing cannot help but make readers wonder both why Realism is a subject of explicit interest here and what significance ought to be given to its rejection in the end.

For many scholars, the most sensible way of answering these questions has been to divide the contradictory aspects of Nerval’s writing into different phases of his career. *Les Nuits d’octobre* can then be understood as a turning point in his relationship to Realist writing practices, broadly construed. The serial did, as I’ve noted, come at the end of years of travel writing (a form of writing largely focused on the outside world and what the writer encounters in it), as well as a series of physiologies or character portraits.⁵ The careful social and material observations of the *Voyage en Orient*, *Lorely*, and countless articles, gave way, around 1852, to apparently much more personal, if not always autobiographical, forms of writing. Though Nerval’s narrators continued to travel, they tended to stay close to home and to sites already significant in their memories or imbued with imaginative significance.⁶ The encounter with the world as newness seems to have been replaced by

³ The article in question, “The Key of the Street,” was not actually written by Dickens but by Charles Augustus Sala; because it was unsigned in its original publication in *Household Words*, the editors of the *Revue britannique* wrongly attributed it to Dickens when they published it in translation. Since these circumstances were unknown at the time, I will follow the 1852 readers of the article, and of *Les Nuits d’octobre*, in taking Dickens as my point of reference in situating this text. See Virginia K. Lamb, “Nerval, Dickens et ... Sala.”

⁴ *Les Nuits d’octobre* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:311-51, 314/*Selected Writings*, 205.

⁵ Though the esoterism of *Les Illuminés* [*The Illuminati*] might obscure their relationship to Realism, we must remember that these character studies participate in a trend to which Champfleury’s *Les Excentriques* [*The Eccentrics*] also belong. Precisely in their selection of marginal figures (taken from life, rather than invented) depicted in great detail, these kinds of studies were understood as Realist in their ambitions. Nerval’s travel writing is much more obviously Realist in many of its tendencies, especially in its emphasis on contemporary society rather than history; see Jean-Marie Carré, *Voyageurs et écrivains français en Égypte*. Mizuno also provides an interesting perspective on Nerval’s travel writing as Realist in the vein of Flemish and Dutch painting; see “Nerval, écrivain de la vie moderne, et la peinture flamande et hollandaise.”

⁶ We see the beginnings of this tendency in the narrator’s travels through the Valois in *Les Faux Sauniers* (see Chapter Three); it becomes ever more pronounced as the focus on the Valois, Vienna, and Naples is intensified in *Les Filles du Feu*, *Pandora*, and *Promenades et Souvenirs* in 1853 and 1854. See Chapter Two.

repeated encounters with the self, as Nerval increasingly emphasized memory after 1852 and so made the autobiographical a more apparently significant dimension of his writing.⁷ The rigorous external referentiality of his great corpus of travel narratives seems to have come to self-consciousness in *Les Nuits d'octobre*, only to be abandoned in subsequent works.⁸ Realism's place in *Les Nuits d'octobre* has thus been of key hermeneutic significance for linking Nerval's diverse writing practices in one coherent narrative, structured by an opposition between writing-the-world and writing-the-self.⁹

This story that *Les Nuits d'octobre* helps to tell about the development of Nerval's œuvre is not only a story of literary form, however. It is solidly grounded in the assumption that Nerval's writing expresses his mental state and so it is also a story of his mental illness. For many scholars, the Realist orientation toward objective reality and the more personal or imaginative orientation are only the external forms of an internal experience of a healthy or unhealthy relationship of self to world. There is near unanimity among scholars in assuming that the necessity of the opposition between writing-the-world and writing-the-self emerges from the inexorable opposition between sanity and madness; there is agreement, too, that the trajectory of Nerval's career expresses his movement toward perdition, and that the writing-the-self he does in the end is the symptom of the madness that took his life.

Where that critical unanimity breaks down is in determining how those necessary oppositions map onto each other and what characterizes the fatal writing-of-self—determinations that depend on the understanding of Nerval's madness that a scholar brings to the text. The two most common diagnoses directly oppose each other, the first identifying a dangerous narcissism that traps Nerval within his own self, where the second identifies a dangerous porousness that erodes the integrity of the self.¹⁰ The significance of Realism (sometimes redemptive, sometimes perilous), and of its eventual rejection, depends entirely on whether scholars understand the force that destroys Nerval's sanity as centripetal or centrifugal, contracting or exploding the self. According to Michel Jeanneret, for example, the Realism of *Les Nuits d'octobre* operates a dispossession of the self: by submitting itself to empirical disorder, the subject gives up attributing meaning to the world and also gives up its own identity.¹¹ In Jeanneret's reading, the Realist experiment is thus an aggravation of Nerval's madness understood as a disintegration or a shattering of the self. Bruno Tritsmans offers the inverse interpretation of the *feuilleton*, arguing that it is the turn *away* from Realism that signals the demise of Nerval's sanity: “la liquidation du projet initial par laquelle le récit s'achève est, en somme,

⁷ Though this common account of Nerval's trajectory as a writer is useful for pinpointing the significance of this particular moment in his career, I will ultimately argue that this increasing emphasis on the first person after 1852 does not, in fact, represent a turn toward the autobiographical and an increasing enclosure in the self; instead, I will want to read it as a process of experimentation in integrating the world into writing without opposing it to the self of a writing subjectivity.

⁸ Mizuno's study of *réalisme* in *Les Nuits d'octobre* proceeds along these lines; his preliminary parsing of some of the specificities and stakes of Realism in the early 1850s is very valuable and has contributed to my situating of Nerval's text; however Mizuno ultimately delivers a highly personal reading that minimizes the importance of the broader cultural milieu in favor of reconciling *Les Nuits d'octobre* with a particular understanding of the writing Nerval was to do for the last few years of his life. See Mizuno, “Nerval face au réalisme. *Les Nuits d'octobre* et l'esthétique nervalienne.”

⁹ See, for example, Cellier, *Gérard de Nerval: l'homme et l'œuvre*; and Chambers, *Gérard de Nerval et la poétique du voyage*.

¹⁰ The self-evidence with which either of these problems (narcissism or loss of self) may be invoked as the central interpretive tool in Nerval studies sometimes creates a strange confusion; in Michiko Asahina's study of *Les Nuits d'octobre* and *Aurélia*, for example, Nerval is first punished for the incoherent dispersion of his subjectivity (linked to Realism and his brand of *flânerie*), and then subject to madness characterized by confinement within a closed subjectivity. The dynamic of illness and punishment/cure is so confidently assumed as to function even if that requires radically shifting the definition of his illness from one reading to another. See Asahina, “Nerval: la ville et l'errance.”

¹¹ See “L'écriture et ses ruses” in *La Lettre perdue*. As I will show later in this chapter, Jeanneret's conceptions of imagination and subjectivity closely mirror those of spiritualist philosophy and psychology during the mid-19th century.

le constat de l'impossibilité d'échapper au rétrécissement, à la cristallisation des préoccupations de Nerval autour de la problématique de moi" ["the liquidation of the initial project with which the story ends is, essentially, an admission of the impossibility of escaping the constriction, the crystallization of Nerval's preoccupations around the problematic of the self"].¹² If Nerval's downfall is narcissism, then it is the turn away from the world, represented by the abandonment of Realism, that aggravates his madness.

In these readings, the complex gesture of adopting and then rejecting Realism that Nerval makes in *Les Nuits d'octobre* is bent to the purposes of psychological arguments that remain external to the serial. Realism is treated as an abstraction (an outward turn, toward the world), opposed to some other abstraction of dream or imagination (an inward turn, toward the self). Understanding the story is thus merely a matter of glossing the shift from one abstraction to the other so that it maps onto whatever duality drives a preexisting narrative of Nerval's career and life.¹³ In projecting psychological or existential stakes onto the Realist conceit, such readings fail to read it well, either in its textual complexity or in its historical specificity.¹⁴ The conjugation of writing the self and writing the world in *Les Nuits d'octobre* is not nearly as simple as the binary of adopting and rejecting the conceit would suggest: Nerval treats the form in which he writes with a great deal of nuance and irony here, as he will do in *Sylvie* and *Les Faux Saulniers*. Nerval himself described *Les Nuits d'octobre*, "[l]e seul article que j'aie écrit dans le genre réaliste" ["the only article I have ever written in the *realist* genre"], as "une sorte d'imitation satirique de Dickens" ["a sort of satirical imitation of Dickens"], claiming both to write in the Realist genre and to satirize it.¹⁵ Reading the Realism of *Les Nuits d'octobre* requires, then, both a careful attention to the satirical complexity of the writing, and a reflection on the stakes of such a satire—its significance as a critical engagement with an established genre and the writers associated with it. However, neither, the form of the writing nor its engagement with the literary field can be understood simply by taking the narrator at his word, and so we must pause over each in turn.

Tensions and Digressions

The encounter with Realism in *Les Nuits d'octobre* is an extremely complicated one that includes an adoption and rejection of Realist constraints—but not only that. On the one hand, the explicit engagement with Realism is invoked throughout the *feuilleton* and seems to be the text's central concern. The text begins with two missed trains and an encounter with a Dickens article that frames the writing that will follow as an experiment in recreating the strict Realism of the English school. And indeed, the first three installments give an unflinching (or at least unrelenting) view of the lowly nightlife of Paris, from homeless men sleeping in sections of gas pipe, to public balls and seedy cafés. The narrator and his *flâneur* friend pass through the lower reaches of Parisian society and encounter the range of social types and milieus to be found there: flower sellers and rag-pickers, laborers and vagabonds, students and *grisettes* show up in cafés, bars, public balls, and singing clubs.

¹² "Impasses Narratives dans *Les Nuits d'Octobre* de Gérard de Nerval," 163.

¹³ Just one example of this, among many, is Chambers's reading in *Gérard de Nerval et la poétique du voyage*, in which *Les Nuits d'octobre* is submitted to the singular duality of dream and reality that Chambers sees behind all Nerval's writing; the terms of this duality are so abstracted in their generalization, however, that the role of literal dreams in *Les Nuits d'octobre* can be given only allegorical significance with regard to an overarching conception of dream as synonymous with madness (or, at least, interchangeable with anything that could be an antonym for reality).

¹⁴ Richard's study of Nerval in *Poésie et profondeur* is a prime example of this emphasis on the structure of Nerval's consciousness rather than the literary field in which he was engaged; see "Géographie magique de Nerval." However, this orientation is far from being limited to thematic approaches: it is, rather, a point of near unanimity among scholars. Recent readings by Chambers and Mizuno pursue much more historically grounded studies, but always retaining a certain level of abstraction in their historical terms, in order to refer them back to existing psychological frameworks.

¹⁵ Letter to Ludovic Picard, January 30, 1853 in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:799.

The movement between these sites is not organized in the text by any overarching argument or predominating plot; there is a loose thematic of the search for a nocturnal meal, but this does not keep the narrator's wanderings from being largely random, so that what is seen takes center stage.¹⁶ Emphasizing the empirical over the distorting intervention of idealized literary types and plots, in addition to sharing Realism's interest in studies of popular mores, *Les Nuits d'octobre* thus seems to represent a foray into Realism—the same kind of short-lived attempt at a conventional genre as Nerval's unfinished historical novel, *Le Marquis de Fayolle*.¹⁷ Taking the narrator at his word (though we should know the dangers of this by now), we might see the encounter with Dickens as the culmination of Nerval's own referential writing practices in an aborted attempt at Realism proper.

On the other hand, however, the status of Realism in the *feuilleton* is complicated by more than its eventual abandonment. The text's explicit Realist ambitions are problematized early and often, in part by the many installments that do *not* feature Parisian scenes depicted under a Dickensian banner, and in part by the elements of even those Parisian scenes that are not reducible to a study of manners. From the outset, the Realist aspirations of the text are only articulated in the suspension of an apparently more primary project, the journey to Meaux that is deferred by the missed trains. Though the travel writing of that intended journey seems to share the empirical focus of the Realism at stake in *Les Nuits d'octobre*, the motivation of travel writing by the logic of an itinerary contrasts with the aimless wandering of Nerval's narrator.¹⁸ If the serial adopts a Realist project, then, it does so only within the space opened up by postponing a project of a different kind, and the discovery and imitation of the Dickens article are, strictly speaking, only filling time (and columns) until the travel (and travel writing) can commence. As we will see time and again, we must be suspicious of what Nerval's narrators slip into the text in the guise of digression, and wonder whether digression will ever give way to the thing it supposedly defers. But in *Les Nuits d'octobre*, the narrator does eventually return to his initial itinerary, and so the significance of Realism here cannot be thought without reference to the travel (writing) from which it emerges and which it finally transforms.

What's more, the suspended journey to Meaux that might have structured the *feuilleton* is not, by any means, the only challenge to the serial's Realist claims. The Dickensian conceit of the Parisian installments of *Les Nuits d'octobre* is doubled with a Dantean, distinctly non-Realist one. Just as the narrator is guided through the practice of Realist writing by Dickens, so, too, is he guided through his initiation into nocturnal Paris by the friend who makes him miss his train the second time. The establishments they visit are described as purgatory and hell, and when the narrator grows squeamish, his friend quotes Virgil's encouragement to Dante: “« Sois fort et hardi : on ne descend ici que par de tels escaliers »” [“Be bold and think not of retreat/This way must serve us for the downward stair”].¹⁹ These invocations of the idealized structure of Dante's hell, with its orderly rings and clear moral classifications, are distinctly at odds with the text's naked observation supposedly modeled on Dickens. The material world is invaded by the symbolic.²⁰ This effect is only intensified by the other cultural allusions made throughout the Parisian installments (to Cicero, Diderot, Homer, and Mozart, among others), which constantly draw the narrator's experiences back

¹⁶ For more on food and Nerval's interest in the real, see Henri Bonnet, “Le ventre de Paris dans *Les Nuits d'octobre*.”

¹⁷ Unfinished, published in *feuilleton* in *Le Temps* from March to December, 1849. Michel Lévy published the novel, finished by Édouard Georges, in 1856. *Œuvres complètes*, 1:1133-1257.

¹⁸ I will return below to the significance of aimlessness in defining the Realism at stake here; for the present, I will simply observe the disorderliness of the narrator's path through Paris, and the lack of any planned itinerary. I will also return to the Meaux itinerary to see whether the expectation of order implied by a planned journey is borne out.

¹⁹ *Les Nuits d'octobre* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:328/*Selected Writings*, 220.

²⁰ See Chamarat-Malandain, “Dante et Diderot dans *Les Nuits d'Octobre*” in *Nerval, réalisme et invention*.

into his own intellectual life to give them meaning through association, rather than letting the empirical stand on its own.²¹

This is not to say, however, that the Dantean is allowed to get more traction than the Dickensian, for Nerval keeps this conceit, too, messy and incomplete. Though the narrator's early invocation of Francesca da Rimini in association with the couples he encounters ("souriants ou plaintifs" ["lightsome" or "winsome"]) places him precisely in the second circle of hell, he goes on to emphasize the ambiguity of that lustful space: "L'adultère, le crime et la faiblesse se coudoient, sans se reconnaître, à travers ces ombres trompeuses" ["adultery, crime and frailty all intermingle in this crowd of elusive shades"].²² The meticulous sorting of offenders into rings is challenged by the disorderly multiplicity of supposedly like sinners, suggesting that the descent into hell will not proceed along a direct path through clearly defined moral spaces. And indeed, this suggestion is quickly affirmed when the narrator's guide advises him to buck up for the rest of his initiation: "« ce n'est pas là l'enfer : c'est tout au plus le purgatoire. Allons plus loin »" ["This is not Hell: this is at most Purgatory. Let's forge onwards"].²³ The narrator's perception of his initiation into Hell is quite different from his guide's, so that when he thinks he has passed the second ring, he has not yet even entered hell. It comes as little surprise, then, when his initiation does not end at the center of hell—or, perhaps, in hell at all. The narrator assures his readers that the café Paul Niquet (his last stop), with its drunken rag-pickers and amateur philosopher, is not a place beyond redemption, wondering why no one intervenes to help these people escape "ce vestibule du purgatoire d'où il serait peut-être facile de sauver quelques âmes..." ["the antechambers of Purgatory from which it might yet be possible to save a few souls..."].²⁴ The evident irony of this statement does not stop it from dampening the effect of the Dantean conceit, and so when the narrator goes on to say, "Le soleil commence à percer le vitrage supérieur de la salle, la porte s'éclaire. Je m'élançe de cet enfer" ["The sun is beginning to slant through the windows near the ceiling; light is filtering through the door. I scurry out of this Hell"] his use of the word *enfer* has lost its Dantean specificity.²⁵ No longer a structured moral and narrative space, the hell at stake here is only a place of banal disorder and suffering.²⁶

The first installments of the *feuilleton* are caught, then, between two tendencies: one toward a mode of empirical observation where no organizing principle disturbs the representation of what is encountered; and another toward an overarching structure that situates each moment of the real within an ideal, allegorical system. Each facet undoes the other, with the constant pull toward transcendence via cultural reference shattering the self-conscious immanence of the Realist representation, while the disorderliness of the empirical refuses the meaning that the ideal Dantean order would attribute to it. This interference is never resolved within the Parisian installments of *Les Nuits d'octobre*, so that the mutual destruction of these two literary conceits seems to leave the text scattered with shards of different ambitions that cannot be pieced together into anything coherent.²⁷ This strenuous resistance to closure surpasses even what we will observe in *Les Faux Saulniers*, where

²¹ Tritsmans's treatment of the ironic effect of cultural allusions in *Les Nuits d'octobre* offers many insights, though I do not share his understanding of this irony as masking the pain of a lack of established cultural values; see "La Descente aux enfers dans 'Les Nuits d'Octobre' de Gérard de Nerval."

²² *Les Nuits d'octobre* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:326/*Selected Writings*, 218.

²³ *Ibid.*, 328/220.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 335/227.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ See Tritsmans, "La Descente aux enfers dans 'Les Nuits d'Octobre' de Gérard de Nerval," 221.

²⁷ Coming to terms with the great irresolution of these competing conceits is an essential part of accounting for the experience of reading *Les Nuits d'octobre*. Despite their many insights, it is the decision to privilege the Realist and the Dantean, respectively, that makes the readings of Mizuno and Sieburth feel so incomplete; see Mizuno, "Nerval face au réalisme;" and Sieburth, "Introductory Note" to *October Nights* in *Selected Writings*.

deferral is placed front and center: the suspension of the journey to Meaux (*Les Nuits d'octobre*'s ostensible subject) is doubled by an irresolvable opposition between two contradictory literary tendencies.

In its complexity, the text's deployment of the three literary conceits of travel, Realism, and allegory does not immediately establish a clear *parti pris* in relation to Realism. In these first three installments, none of the generic claims dominates the text and so Nerval's literary allegiances are anything but clear. We might think of this first, Parisian part of the *feuilleton* as putting forth a problematic, setting two discourses against each other in a confined textual space and letting their conflicts play out. It is not until the second part of the text (the two Valois installments in which the travel conceit is revived) that Nerval makes an intervention into the field he has sketched out. Understanding the significance and the nuance of that intervention requires understanding what is at stake in his depiction of the literary field as an opposition between the two poetics epitomized by the Dickensian and the Dantean. *Les Nuits d'octobre*, like so much of Nerval's writing, is a text that responded explicitly to the literary field in which it was written, and its terms (including "Realism") are drawn from that field with all of their concrete historical content—content we must recover. Just as *Sylvie*'s Idealism will have to be read in the context of its historical and institutional significance, so Nerval's encounter with Realism in *Les Nuits d'octobre* cannot be read as abstractly philosophical or autonomously aesthetic. Nerval's aesthetic choices in *Les Nuits d'octobre*, as elsewhere, are self-consciously political and polemical, situating Nerval's reflection on the relationships between self, world, and writing in relation to the way those elements were conjugated in the debates surrounding Realism during this period.

Realism and Its Opponents

Elucidating Nerval's representation of the literary field via Dickens and Dante requires linking these figures to the historically specific literary discourses they are used to represent. First and foremost, this means breaking with the conceptions of Realism, both formal and historical, that have become commonplaces of modern literary studies. Realism is one of the most well established (if multi-faceted) categories of literary scholarship, and though it is much critiqued, one can nonetheless invoke it with some confidence that it will be understood without being defined.²⁸ The word commonly stands, on the one hand, for a mode of writing that emphasizes empirical observation of the everyday and so relies on certain mimetic procedures, and on the other hand, for a set of 19th-century novels that epitomize those procedures. That set of works is generally agreed upon, though the works themselves are quite disparate: they include most of the novels in Balzac's *La Comédie Humaine* [*The Human Comedy*], Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le noir* [*The Red and the Black*], Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, and the novels of the Goncourts so famously mocked by Proust. They sometimes include, as well, the late-century Naturalist novels that are both Realism's fullest realization and a move beyond it in their concerted positivism: Zola's *Rougon-Macquart* series, and some of Guy de Maupassant's novels and stories. These works associated with Realism as a historical school are central to the canon of French literature, particularly as it is taught in the U.S., and the lines of a conflict between the referentiality of the novel and the self-reflexivity of poetry are so well drawn that it can be

²⁸ Indeed, a notion of the Realist novel with its third person omniscient narrator and emphasis on empirical social observation has been hardened by long use and by the various theoretical projects that have taken it as their starting point. Georg Lukács's notorious *Theory of the Novel* of course comes immediately to mind, but the genealogy of studies predicated on a fixed conception of Realism is a long one. Whether we look at a thinker like Jean-Paul Sartre, who makes Realism a mode of nearly pure linguistic referentiality in *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*, or one like Roland Barthes, who argues in "L'effet de réel" that there is an excess of reference in Realism that goes beyond the purely mimetic, what remains constant is a sense that there is a culturally agreed-upon object that can be invoked without much work of definition.

difficult to think the 19th century without them (even if they are invoked only to be critiqued). The mimetic procedures associated with Realism more broadly are also fixtures of literary studies, in which they are often invoked for the naivety of their referential claims. As the literary genre most emblematic of unproblematic reference, Realism is itself one of the least problematized referents in literary studies, banal in its obviousness, and so most often invoked to mark a work's deviation from it. However, this putative conception of Realism can only be an obstacle to understanding the literary field in which Nerval intervened in *Les Nuits d'octobre*. A monolithic conception of the Realist paradigm, either as a referential discourse or as a historical school, belies precisely the transformations and ambiguities that shaped it and that are at stake in Nerval's *feuilleton*.²⁹ Above all, such a conception belies the fact that Realism existed first, and for nearly two decades, not as a banner to be carried but as an accusation to be hurled. As such, its significance lay not in the aesthetic values it affirmed (not in its pretensions to objective referentiality), but in those it was seen to transgress: before it was a literary school, it was what some critics saw as the antithesis of literature.³⁰

This negative sense of the word "Realism" was pioneered in the early 1830s by the critics of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, a cultural institution whose crucial importance has been largely forgotten, since the aesthetic it promoted has not fared as well as those it rejected.³¹ The *Revue* served, from its inception in 1829, as the aesthetic mouthpiece of the liberal bourgeoisie, following more or less the same ideological trajectory during the July Monarchy as the Doctrinaire politicians Guizot and Cousin. In the early 1830s, the conservatism of these liberals and their aesthetic expression in the *Revue* were still moderate: in the face of Romanticism, the critics of the *Revue* did not advocate a reactionary classical aesthetic, but rather sought merely to distinguish between a good and a bad Romanticism. The Romanticism they promoted was the Idealist strain of Alfred de Vigny, Alfred de Musset, and George Sand, which corresponded to the constant and unanimous set of literary values that the *Revue* affirmed up to the Second Empire: an ideal of beauty whose spiritual dimension had to be protected from the distractions of the material.³² This beauty entailed coherence and a unity of purpose, to which the imagination contributed as the intervention of the intellect in the creative process, taking the chaos of material phenomena and arranging it to accomplish a unified purpose. The *Revue*'s conception of the imagination was as an ordering function: not a wild proliferation of unconstrained possibilities, but the deployment of the world's disorder to express a single idea. George Sand's early writing was emblematic of this aesthetic, as explained by critic Gustave Planche in an 1833 review of *Lélia*: "tous les caractères de *Lélia* sont des symboles philosophiques, et

²⁹ *Les Nuits d'octobre* was published in 1852, before the consolidation of the Realist movement we know and the retroactive inclusion of early 19th-century writers within it. At this moment (before the advent of either Flaubert's modernist aestheticism or Zola's positivism), the writers we now think of as Realists—writers like Balzac and Stendhal—were not known as Realists but were rather still associated with Romanticism. The claims of Realism as a literary movement were being made in 1852 by Champfleury, a writer whose theorizations and implementations of Realism no longer figure in the literary canon. I will return below to a more detailed discussion of Champfleury's Realism.

³⁰ In trying to think the history of Realism without primarily referencing the current conception of the Realist novel, the studies of Bernard Weinberg, Thaddeus Ernest Du Val Jr., and Wilbur H. Oda are invaluable, however outdated. More than any more recent work I have encountered, these three studies emphasize an exhaustive account of how the notion of Realism was formulated first and foremost in a critical context, rather than by the writers who would eventually claim it or be claimed by it. See Weinberg, *French Realism: The Critical Reaction, 1830-1870*; Du Val, *The Subject of Realism in the Revue des Deux Mondes*; and Oda, *The Subject of Réalisme in the Revue de Paris (1829-1858)*.

³¹ There is some disagreement about the first use of the term *réaliste/réalisme*, but it seems to have appeared in both the *Revue des Deux Mondes*—where it would continue to be an important enemy of critics like Hippolyte Fourtoul and Gustave Planche—and *La Presse* in 1833 or 1834. See Du Val, *The Subject of Realism in the Revue des Deux Mondes*, Gengembre, *Le réalisme*, and Bafaro, *Le roman réaliste et naturaliste*. For more on the idealist aesthetic of the *Revue*, see Chapter Two.

³² Du Val, 27.

représentent, sous une forme idéale et complète, un sentiment particulier, développé isolément, à l'exclusion des sentimens [sic] qui pourraient le contrarier, le rétrécir, en diminuer l'éclat et la portée" ["all the characters in *Lélia* are philosophical symbols and represent, in an ideal and complete form, a particular feeling developed in isolation, freed of feelings that might contradict it, constrict it, diminish its brilliance and its reach"].³³ In Planche's account, the beauty and strength of Sand's writing come from the way in which all details, all emotions resonate in harmony, to the exclusion of anything that might confuse the chord. This is the aesthetic that stands behind the Dantean allegory in *Les Nuits d'octobre*, one in which the idea to be expressed in the work transcends the material.

Realism, then, was the name given in the early 1830s to the bad strain of Romanticism that transgressed this Idealism. It was applied to writers like Hugo, Dumas, and Balzac, and referred to the perceived excess of materialism in their novels and plays, the undue and unredeemed emphasis on accurate detail.³⁴ Even the relatively Idealist Hugo of the 1820s had admired a form of writing entirely unlike Sand's carefully unified narrative, a writing in which "l'action imaginaire se déroule en tableaux vrais et variés, comme se déroulent les événements réels de la vie" ["the imaginary action unfolds, like the real events of life, in real and varied tableaux"].³⁵ Whereas the Hugo of *Notre Dame de Paris*, for example, used intricately textured descriptions to contribute to, rather than distract from "l'idée unique de l'ouvrage" ["the singular idea of the work"], the critics of the *Revue* remained convinced that the material and the ideal were at odds.³⁶ They thus used "Realism" to denote the anarchy that lies outside the realm of art in which imagination makes its arrangements in the interest of beauty alone. This Realism was not yet the realism of Dickens, however; it was not the affirmative project of representing the real that Nerval takes up in *Les Nuits d'octobre*. To understand this flipside of the Idealist-Realist opposition in the serial, we must follow the history of the *Revue* into the early 1850s, when an affirmative Realism finally emerged.

The critics of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* continued throughout the July Monarchy to define their conservative Idealist aesthetic in opposition to an aesthetic that transgressed it. Cousin himself rearticulated the *Revue's* aesthetic program in 1845 in an article "Du Beau et de l'art" ["On Beauty and Art"] where he insisted that the intervention of the harmonizing imagination was essential for the creation of a work of art: mere imitation of the world without sufficient transformation by the imagination was doomed to fall short of the aesthetic ideal.³⁷ As the years passed, however, the language and the stakes of the charge of transgression of that ideal changed. As the danger posed by democratic elements grew, so did the *Revue's* commitment to order as the fundamental characteristic of beauty. The outside of literature became associated not simply with the materialism of Realism, but with the materialist disorder of what the *Revue* came to call *fantaisisme*. Not to be confused with the fantastic but rather related to *fantaisie* or fancy, the accusation of *fantaisisme* contained the unredeemed materiality of Realism but with an emphasis on the lack of organization this exhibits. The epithet denoted, as explained in an 1852 article, form as the pure contingency of the material rather than the coherence of an idea:

[Le fantaisisme] marche ou plutôt se précipite de faits en faits, d'observations en observations ; il dédaigne l'argument et nous laisse le soin de chercher en vertu de

³³ Gustave Planche, "Lélia, de George Sand," *Revue des Deux Mondes* 2, (July-September 1833): 353-68, 353. Sand published exclusively in the *Revue* between 1832 and 1842, when she and its editor, François Buloz, had a falling out over the publication of *Horace*, her novel about the June 1832 insurrection.

³⁴ Du Val, 17 and 29.

³⁵ "Sur Walter Scott. A propos de Quentin Durward," in *Œuvres complètes. Philosophie I. 1819-1834. Littérature et philosophie mêlées*, 245-57, 251.

³⁶ Ibid. See also the Preface to *Cromwell* in *Œuvres Complètes. Drame I. Cromwell*, 5-75.

³⁷ *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1 September 1845. Cited in Du Val, 18.

quelle analogie telle pensée succède à telle autre, par quelle déduction l'écrivain a été amené à faire suivre *ex abrupto* d'un axiome burlesque une discussion sérieuse ; d'un trait d'ironie un chapitre sentimental.

[Fantaisisme wanders or rather hurtles itself from fact to fact, from observation to observation; it disdains argument and leaves us with the trouble of searching for the analogy by virtue of which one thought succeeds another, the deduction that led the writer to follow up a burlesque axiom *ex abrupto* with a serious discussion, an ironic quip with a sentimental chapter.]³⁸

As the overthrow of the liberal social order became a palpable possibility, the conservatives of the *Revue* grew increasingly obsessed with order as an aesthetic value: the lack of structure and argumentation of *fantaisiste* writing, in which the mind wandered seemingly at random, partook of the same chaos that threatened the social and political body.³⁹

Redefining their “materialist” opponents as *fantaisistes* allowed the critics of the *Revue* to condemn a much broader range of dangerous writers: instead of their earlier emphasis on Realist detail in novels and plays, the critics now took aim at a wide variety of young writers who were seen to favor material over spiritual concerns. The self-reflexivity of Gautier’s art for art’s sake and the referentiality of the school of sincerity led by the novelist Champfleury were brought together in a surprising juxtaposition under the catchall *fantaisiste* that signaled their indifference to morality as the driving force of literature, their “oubli des choses morales” [“disregard for moral issues”].⁴⁰ An article on “Les Fantaisistes” published during the same autumn as *Les Nuits d’octobre* demonstrates the critical assimilation of different literary projects: “La poésie de M. Théophile Gautier et de son école est toute naturaliste, elle ne professe que le culte des choses de la création, elle ne remonte point du monde visible à Dieu” [“The poetry of M. Théophile Gautier and his school is entirely naturalist, professing only the worship of the stuff of creation, never ascending from the visible world to God”].⁴¹ Naturalism here is synonymous with *fantaisisme* and art for art’s sake, so that the whole literary generation is taken as one school; in the volatile days of the Second Republic and early Second Empire, the various ways that young writers threatened beauty did not matter nearly as much as the common threat they all posed to the moral and religious basis of the social order.

It is in this climate that an affirmation of Realism and its materialist literary values emerged, championed by Champfleury. But this affirmation was crucially not symmetrical to the charge of anarchistic *fantaisisme* that the *Revue* had launched; it did not affirm precisely the same values that the *Revue* criticized. Champfleury’s Realism, which appears in *Les Nuits d’octobre* in the guise of Dickens, did not defend the broad range of condemned writing practices, including those of Gautier and Nerval. It was, instead, another rejection of them, coming this time from within the supposed “school” of *fantaisisme*. Champfleury had been part of that motley, *fantaisiste* generation of writers,

³⁸ Alfred Crampon, “Les Fantaisistes,” *Revue des Deux Mondes* 16, (October-December 1852): 584.

³⁹ This idea of the slack mind flitting from one idea to another is consistent with the common use of “fantaisiste” during the period, as noted in the *Grand Larousse encyclopédique du XIX^e siècle*: “‘Fantaisiste. adj. ... Is said of an artist or a writer who refuses to submit to the rules and is guided only by his own fancy [fantaisie].” Pierre Larousse, *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIX^e siècle*, 1872, 15 vols., reprint, Slatkine, Geneva, 1982, vol. 8, part 1, 92. It is worth noting that *fantaisie* is distinctly *not* what the *Revue des Deux Mondes* critics are getting at when they talk about imagination: while fantasy implies a passive, receptive orientation of the mind to the world, imagination as understood by the *Revue* is an active faculty by which the mind submits the world to its design. This distinction between passive and active faculties played a central part in Cousin’s eclectic spiritualist philosophy, a fact whose importance will become apparent with regard to the second part of *Les Nuits d’octobre*.

⁴⁰ Charles de Mazade, “Chronique de la quinzaine,” *Revue des Deux Mondes* 15, (July-September 1852): 612-26.

⁴¹ Crampon, 593.

participating in the eclectic and eccentric bohemian writing of the July Monarchy. After 1848, however, he turned against that eccentricity to advocate, under the banner of Realism, a dryer novelistic practice emphasizing sincerity above all else.⁴² Champfleury's conception of Realism refused the distorting intervention of the imagination in favor of an unadulterated observation, a truthful recording of sensation that he called sincerity.⁴³ This sincerity was certainly opposed to the Idealism of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, but it was also opposed to the imaginative writing of the other authors the *Revue* dismissed as *fantaisistes*. In Champfleury's Realism, the writer's role was limited to the act of observation, and his temperament to his way of seeing; the imagination did not intervene with any metaphysical distortions.⁴⁴ The aggressively brute positivism of this Realist project had nothing in common with the writers who had previously been called Realist by the *Revue* (writers, like Hugo, for whom materialist detail had been in service of the metaphysical idea of the work). Neither did it share the same materialism as the other *fantaisistes* who, though they may not have valued mainstream morality, were far from indifferent to aesthetic ideals that transcended imitation. Champfleury created for the first time, and on behalf of his aesthetic alone, an opposition in which "Le réalisme [était] référé au matérialisme et au positivisme tandis que le romantisme [était] assimilé à l'idéalisme, à l'imagination" ["Realism was referred to materialism and positivism while Romanticism was assimilated to idealism and the imagination"].⁴⁵

Champfleury's articulation of Realism thus set up a dissymmetry in the literary field, which *Les Nuits d'octobre* represents in the encounter between Dante and Dickens: conservative Idealism opposed itself to the broad materialist disorder of *fantaisisme*, while Champfleury's Realism opposed itself to all forms of aesthetic distortion. The imaginative disorder of *fantaisisme* (and of what had been called Realism in the 1830s) was thus opposed by both sides of that opposition. In the Idealist-Realist opposition that was operative in the early 1850s and that drives the first part of *Les Nuits d'octobre*, *fantaisisme* appeared as a kind of no-man's-land: a space of non-idealist imagination and non-positivism materialism. This kind of *fantaisisme* is precisely the remainder that is left when Dickens and Dante cancel each other out. Neither a mind merely observing the world nor an imagination bent on transcending it, the notion of *fantaisisme* suggests an occluded third possibility of the disorderly, productive movement of an imagination engaged with the world. If neither of the literary forms explicitly claimed in *Les Nuits d'octobre* seems to describe Nerval's writing, this third form that the other two conspire to exclude certainly does. The first installments of the serial open a space for this excluded form, with the simultaneous "imitation satirique Dickens" ["satirical imitation of Dickens"] and implied satirical imitation of Dante causing a collapse of the literary field structured by their opposition. Only once this opening is created can the text venture, as it does in the last three installments, onto its own terrain of the Valois and of travel writing. The travel conceit returns, not as another form of Realism, but as materialism unbound by rationality, imagination unbound by the ideal.

⁴² See Champfleury, *Le Réalisme*.

⁴³ Pichois, *Le romantisme II*, 254.

⁴⁴ Weinberg, 146; Bourdenet, 24.

⁴⁵ Bourdenet, 20. This distinction was, of course, never as absolute as this, as Bourdenet himself notes. Not only was Realism a clear inheritor of the Romantic tradition, but even Champfleury did not succumb to the banality implied by his own adamantly Realist doctrine. He retained a preference for unknown and strange subjects and although he distanced himself from the *école fantaisiste*, he simultaneously tried to use the many features their writing shared with his to draw the writers of that school under the banner of Realism. In this sense, Champfleury's innovation was almost as much one of classification as one of content—a reconfiguration of the literary field rather than a radical reimagining of literary form.

Irrational Materialism and Disorderly Imagination

After a night spent wandering Paris waiting for the morning train, the narrator of *Les Nuits d'octobre* finally goes on his way at the end of the fourth installment: as the sun rises over Les Halles and the market begins to buzz with morning activity, he heads off for the train station and puts an end to his Parisian explorations. He seems in this moment to re-launch the suspended journey structure of the text, definitively taking up travel writing in place of the other two conceits. Rather than the randomness of material phenomena or the careful organization of an idea, this return to travel seems to promise an itinerary through the real as the guiding principle of the text. But Nerval's use of travel writing here, as elsewhere, is idiosyncratic, and keeps the *feuilleton* from taking on an established generic form. This comes across most clearly in the bizarre itinerary of the narrator's Valois travels. The Parisian installments begin, as I have discussed, with several false starts: an unfamiliar railroad timetable that puts the narrator at the station at the wrong time and an encounter with a friend that makes him miss his train a second time. He refuses to return home and begin again the next day ("Je serais obligé d'expliquer pourquoi j'ai manqué deux fois les omnibus" ["I would find myself having to explain why I twice missed the bus"]), and so has a night to kill in Paris.⁴⁶ When seven o'clock finds him meeting his morning train, then, it looks as though he is back on track after some aberrant wandering—but in fact the path the narrator is on is nearly as chaotic as the one that had him crisscrossing Paris all night.

We know the narrator is going to Meaux, but that is not his final destination. He is on his way to an otter hunt on the banks of the Oise River, straight to the north of Paris. Why, then, take the Strausbourg line northeast to Meaux rather than taking the Northern Railway directly to Creil? Quite simply, the narrator claims, because the new Northern Railway takes such an indirect route that he might as well follow an itinerary of his own devising. That itinerary turns out to be no direct than the slight bend in the rail line, however:

En prenant par Meaux, je rencontrerai l'omnibus de Dammartin ; je traverserai à pied les bois d'Ermenonville, et, suivant les bords de la Nonette, je parviendrai, après trois heures de marche, à Senlis où je rencontrerai l'omnibus de Creil. De là, j'aurai le plaisir de revenir à Paris par *le plus long*, —c'est-à-dire par le chemin de fer du Nord.

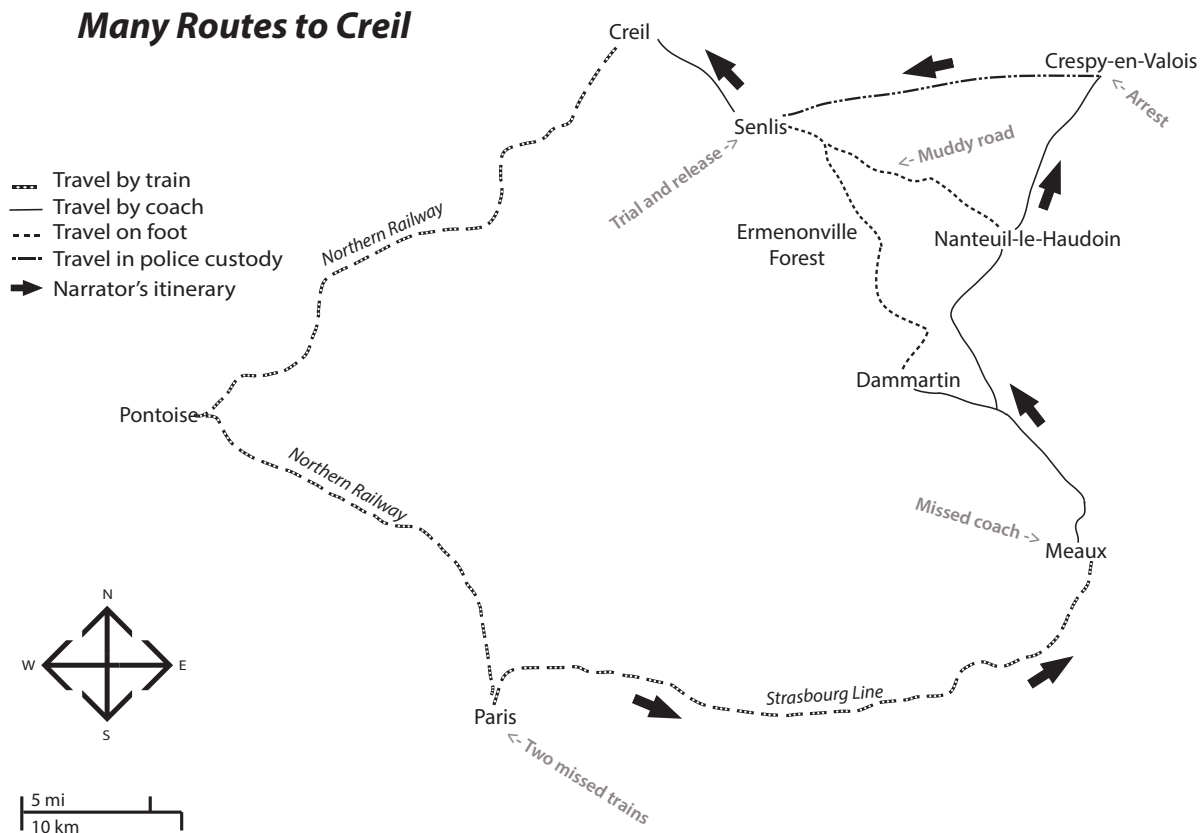
[If I set out from Meaux, I'll catch the coach to Dammartin; then I'll cross the forest of Ermenonville on foot and, following the banks of the Nonette, I'll walk the three hours it takes to get to Senlis, where I'll hop on a coach to Creil. From Creil, I shall have the pleasure of returning to Paris by rail via the longest *detour*—that is, via the Northern Line.]⁴⁷

What's more, the narrator does not manage to carry off his convoluted itinerary: he misses the Dammartin omnibus in Meaux and is forced to regroup. He takes a coach to Nanteuil-le-Haudoin, but then finds that the rainy weather makes walking through the forest impossible, and so he is forced to take a wild detour north to Crespy-en-Valois to meet up with a coach that will take him to the Oise (see map below). The coherence the travel itinerary seems to promise in these Valois installments is adamantly withheld through the constant adjustment of the narrator's route, which

⁴⁶ *Les Nuits d'octobre* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:317/*Selected Writings*, 207.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 345/237.

diverges further and further from the straight line from point A to point B, without, for all that, taking up any other logic—simply submitting itself to contingency.⁴⁸



The eccentricity of this itinerary is the clearest indication that the travel writing of *Les Nuits d'octobre* operates on its own unique terms. We can also understand the *feuilleton's* unconventionality with reference to Nerval's travel writing more broadly, however. In written accounts of his voyages throughout Northern Europe, Germany, Italy, North Africa, and the Middle East, Nerval demonstrates an unusual combination of interests, drawing attention to the strangeness and irreducibility of the material phenomena of the real.⁴⁹ His attention rests largely within the material world, delighting in descriptions of the sites and practices around which the people he observes build their lives. The things he sees are rarely taken as occasions for abstract or personal reflection: they are encountered on their own terms.⁵⁰ Nerval is attracted in particular to the phenomena that

⁴⁸ Sangsue's study of eccentric writers makes a very compelling account of this aspect of Nerval's writing. See *Le récit excentrique*.

⁴⁹ See *Voyage en Orient* in *Œuvres complètes*, 2:171-881; *Lorely* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:1-231.

⁵⁰ Nerval's travel writing is notably not that of a Chateaubriand, taking the world encountered as an occasion for reflection quite apart from the world itself; it stands apart even from that of Hugo or Lamartine, both of whom are far more likely to take material phenomena as the starting point for flights of imagination or memory. Cf. Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*; Hugo, *Le Rhin*; Lamartine, *Voyage en Orient*.

most challenge coherent global interpretation, moving between them in a wandering that delights in considering each practice, each site, in its particularity without striving toward the general.⁵¹

This attention to the material refuses not only an overarching ideal, but also the explanatory power of positivist empiricism. It is, for example, the statue of Erasmus rumored to turn the pages of its own book when the town clock strikes that piques his curiosity on a visit to Holland (much to the chagrin of the inhabitants of Dordrecht, who, he says, fear that the observation makes them look silly and superstitious).⁵² Human experience of the material phenomena of the real is fascinating because it challenges any unifying explanation, including even reason, and calls on the imagination for partial, mobile explanations.⁵³ As we will see again in *Les Faux Saulniers*, the omnipresence of popular fictions and superstitions within people's experience of the world means that the common sense rationality of empirical observation (think Champfleury's *sincérité*) has no monopoly on the real in Nerval's writing. He rejects a scientific reasoning that simply excludes what it cannot explain and uses skepticism to flatten the world to the thinness of its own method: "La science moderne, fondée sur l'incrédulité et sur la fausse logique des matérialistes, a toujours nié les créations anormales et les a reléguées dans le domaine de la fable" ["Modern science, founded in unbelief and the materialists' false logic, has always denied abnormal creations and relegated them to the realm of tall tales"].⁵⁴ Nerval adamantly refuses to marginalize what seems to be mere *fable*, giving importance to dream, imagination, and the mystical. Yet none of these apparently metaphysical phenomena is allowed to overtake the others and the material to serve as a singular ideal. Nerval's travel writing provides a model of *fantaisisme* in action: material and imaginative at once. His is not the hybridity of Hugo in which material detail intensified the representation of the ideal, but similarly finds itself excluded by an opposition between Realism as the genre of materialism and Idealist Romanticism as the genre of imagination.

So it is that the two primary phenomena of the travel installments in *Les Nuits d'octobre* are precisely those that most flagrantly refuse to be attributed exclusively to either the world or the imagination—those that make sense only within the loose interpretive dynamic of *fantaisisme*. On the one hand, the narrator encounters a marvel, i.e. a phenomenon within the real that calls on the imagination for its interpretation. On the other hand, he has dreams, i.e. experiences of the transformations that the imagination performs on the sense data of the world. Alongside the expected elements of travel writing in the Valois installments (descriptions of the train ride, the cafes, the local cats, the mayor's house) come these profoundly strange scenes, in which the narrator turns his attention to phenomena that demonstrate a unique encounter between the imaginative and perceptive faculties.

The most important waking experience of the narrator's travels in the Valois takes place in Meaux, where he encounters a freak show displaying a human attraction: the *femme mérinos*. This

⁵¹ See for example, Nerval's interest, in *Lorely* and the *Voyage en Orient*, in folk beliefs that are cheerfully noted without being explained.

⁵² *Lorely* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:203 and 222-23.

⁵³ This conception of the imagination as mobile and indifferent to global coherence offers a new perspective on Nerval's supposed spiritual syncretism (as manifest in the *Voyage en Orient* and *Les Chimères*). His interest in the various religions he encounters in his travels and his readings, traversing time and space, is often attributed to a desire to create a unified personal mysticism. While this way of thinking about his diverse engagements with belief does get at the evasive and ultimately emancipatory way that Nerval moves between established positions, it often leads to a reduction of that movement to the attempt at creating a stable identity, a single spiritual touchstone that can then be uncovered through an act of critical interpretation. By thinking about the imagination in Nerval's work as fundamentally disorderly and multiple, we can rethink this syncretism without reducing it to an esoteric Idealism, in a way that maintains its interest in difference. See Chapter Four.

⁵⁴ "L'Évêque de mer" in *Œuvres complètes*, 1: 1275.

woman, who is performing with a small troupe of musicians and dancers, becomes a source of fascination for the narrator. He encounters her first in writing, in an advertisement:

Par permission de M. le Maire (de Meaux)
MERVEILLE SURPRENANTE
Tout ce que la nature offre de plus bizarre :
UNE TRES JOLIE FEMME
Ayant pour chevelure une belle
TOISON DE MÉRINOS
Couleur marron.

[BY PERMISSION OF HIS HONOUR THE MAYOR (of Meaux)
WONDER OF WONDERS
One of the most bizarre occurrences in Nature:
A WOMAN OF GREAT BEAUTY
With a head of chestnut hair
That is in fact
THE FLEECE OF A MERINO]⁵⁵

This “merveille,” this “phénomène,” as the poster goes on to describe her, is presented as one of those phenomena that push the limits of rational explanation. This is, as I have discussed, a sort of phenomenon that never fails to attract Nerval’s narrators and so it is no surprise that the narrator of *Les Nuits d’octobre* attends the show that very night. The performance itself is not, however, immediately described.

Instead, in the first Valois installment the narrator merely recounts have seen the poster—the one part of the show that is factually verifiable and poses no challenges to reason. In seeming anticipation of the skepticism his readers might feel faced with the *femme mérinos*, he insists only on the veracity of his claim to have seen the poster, appending the following note: “Tout dans ces récits étant véritable, l’auteur a déposé l’affiche aux bureaux de *L’Illustration*, où elle est visible” [“Everything in this narrative being true, the author has deposited this poster at the office of *L’Illustration*, where it is on view”].⁵⁶ The note seems to be a concession to his earlier claims of Realism, an assurance that this story, too, lives up to the standard of truth set by Dickens. In invoking the Realist conceit of the first half of the *feuilleton* here, however, the narrator notably reduces its reach by attaching it to the simple question of the poster’s reality. At stake is not the unbelievable phenomenon of the wooly-haired woman, but merely the poster that claims to be an index of that phenomenon. The truth claims of material observation here are drastically reduced in an ironic capitulation to readers’ expectation of Realist sincerity: what can be definitively, empirically proven about the *femme mérinos* is that her performance was advertised. Beyond that, the discussion must continue in other terms.

Rather than an unproblematic situation in which seeing is believing, the performance of the *femme mérinos* will be treated as emblematic of an experience of contradiction between observation and reason, between what is seen and what common sense allows. It is an occasion on which the narrator can’t (or perhaps shouldn’t) believe his eyes (a *woman* cannot, after all, have the hair of a *sheep*), and so it allows Nerval to ponder what stock should be put in such a problematic sensory experience. On the one hand, readers are aware before the performance is even described that it has

⁵⁵ *Les Nuits d’octobre* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:336/*October Nights*, 228.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 337/229.

a profound impact on the narrator: its effect on his psyche is alluded to in the account of a dream that intervenes between the narrator's descriptions of the poster and his account of the show itself. (I will return to the dream shortly.) The *femme mérinos* and her fellow performers clearly get under the narrator's skin. On the other hand, however, the narrator acutely observes in his account of the performance the faults that reason might find in it. He adopts a particularly skeptical attitude toward the claims the three principal performers make about their origins. They evoke an elaborate exoticism for their show by attributing to themselves three different homelands—a key element of the attraction even as presented on the poster, where the audience is promised “*Des danses de caractère, espagnoles et italiennes*” [“Colorful dances, notably Spanish and Italian”].⁵⁷ M. Montaldo, the master of ceremonies, claims to be from Turin; his dancer is billed as Spanish; and the *femme mérinos* is identified as a native of Venice. The narrator does not take these mixed origins (what he is meant to believe about the performers) for granted, but rather evaluates them constantly against his observations. He questions M. Montaldo's pronunciation of the Italian aria he sings, and remarks the Venetian's idioms, deciding that while she might be from the region north of Venice, the other two are most likely from Savoy or even Auvergne.

The narrator's attitude toward the freak show is clearly not one of blind belief: he does not demonstrate a propensity for delusion, but rather acknowledges with characteristic irony the factors that contradict the effect the performers are trying to create. And yet they do make an effect, as evidenced by the dream. Reason is not absent here, but it does not debunk the experience of the freak show. The narrator's analysis of the illusion rather seems to leave his affective experience of it intact. If the question at issue here is the one answered by the poster (“Is this phenomenon real?”), his relationship to the freak show seems contradictory: he is at once aware that it is an illusion and somehow indifferent to that fact. But the question posed with regard to the *femme mérinos* is importantly *not*, “Is she real?” or “Is the claim of the merino hair true?” but “Do you believe in her?” Rather than the epistemological status of the phenomenon, the narrator is concerned here with an experience of belief. Reason may reject what the senses perceive (the strangeness of the material phenomenon), but that perception retains its significance. As in the popular fictions we will encounter in *Les Faux Saulniers*, belief here need not exclude the common sense that would contradict it; it is not a matter of belief in its strongest sense, precluding all other interpretations—a stance that would in this case seem to be delusional.⁵⁸ It is rather a matter of maintaining the possibility of multiple, contradictory relationships to the phenomenon and so being able to engage with the irrational richness of the experience. Rather than a concern for the truth of his (and the performers') representation, Nerval's narrator here privileges a concern with how the imagination encounters the world and invests it with belief.

Thus his answer to the critic's question, “« est-ce que l'on croit à cette femme aux cheveux de mérinos ? »” [“To begin with, do you think anybody would believe the part about the woman with the merino hair?”] is affirmative: “« Je suis forcé d'y croire »” [“I have no choice but to believe it”].⁵⁹ The *femme mérinos* is no longer attested to only by the poster announcing her, which the narrator admits doesn't really prove her reality. No, now he has his own experience of seeing her to justify his belief:

Les doigts sont effilés, les pieds petits, les attaches fines ; elle a les yeux presque rouges et la douceur d'un mouton, — sa voix même semble un bêlement accentué. Les cheveux, si l'on peut appeler cela des cheveux, résisteraient à tous les efforts du

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ See my discussion of Veyne and de Certeau in Chapter Three, 27-31.

⁵⁹ *Les Nuits d'octobre* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:342/*Selected Writings*, 235.

peigne. C'est un amas de cordelettes comme celles que se font les Nubiennes en les imprégnant de beurre.

[Her fingers are finely tapered, her feet are petite, her wrists and ankles slender; her eyes are almost red and have that meek look of sheep – even her voice seems to have something bleating to it. Her hair, if you can call it that, would frustrate any comb. It's a tangle of small cords, not unlike the butter-soaked braids worn by Nubian women.]⁶⁰

The promised phenomenon, the sheep's hair, is borne out by his senses, which find so much of the sheep in this mysterious woman. There is, of course, the seed of a purely rational explanation here in the comparison to the dreadlocks of the Nubians. The narrator even goes on to develop this line of reasoning. She is too pale, he decides, and her hair too light for her to be Nubian herself, but racial mixing somewhere far down her bloodline could easily account for her woolly hair: “je pense qu'il y a eu croisement ;—un nègre,—Othello peut-être, se sera allié au type vénitien, et après plusieurs générations, ce produit local se sera révélé” [“I think there must have been some sort of cross-breeding: a Negro—perhaps Othello himself—must have married some Venetian, thus creating this local variant several generations down the line.”].⁶¹ The narrator refuses, however, to let solid reasoning make the freak show banal: if heredity provides a logical explanation for the *femme mérinos*, the bloodline is traced all the way back to a pseudo-mythical past, in the union of Othello and the exemplar of Venetian beauty. The freak show produces an effect on the narrator that pushes against his ability to rationalize it, and so we see his imagination at work creating interpretations that honor his experience of belief. The irrational phenomenon of the *femme mérinos* thus demonstrates the incapacity of Realist conventions to account for the narrator's experience when faced with her. The closed circuit that Realism tries to establish between observation and reason, permitting a pure sincerity in what is represented, is relentlessly invaded here by the imagination. The marvelous material phenomenon of the freak show troubles an opposition between world and imagination, showing how intertwined they are in experience.

As I have said, this experience of wonder that falls outside of a Realist paradigm shares the travel installments of *Les Nuits d'octobre* with another unexpected element: the representation of dreams.⁶² Just as the treatment of the *femme mérinos* opened the world of empirical observation onto the imagination and the irrational, the use of dreams provides a conception of the imagination that partakes of the disorder of the material. The narrator's dreams here are not carefully ordered allegorical spaces, but function through a wild proliferation of associations that start from the contingent data of sensation. In recounting his first dream, for example, the narrator describes traversing an inescapable, Escher-esque labyrinth of stairways and corridors, as hammers beat on his brain—hammers that he notes are likely transformations of the mill hammers he observed on the way back to his hotel from the freak show. From this classic case of dreamwork, the narrator goes on to provide an example of the unconstrained associative energy of his dreams. Using citations

⁶⁰ Ibid., 344/236.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² My reading of dreams in *Les Nuits d'octobre* differs considerably from those of scholars like Susan Dunn or Jeanneret. Rather than understanding these dreams to be expressions of Nerval's unconscious, subject to psychoanalytic readings that emphasize his supposed feelings of guilt about his abnormal experience of subjectivity, I read them as authorial creations, constituting a critical engagement with the dominant philosophical ideologies of the 1840s. Just as reading the *je* of Nerval's texts as biographical shuts down opportunities for interpretation, so does understanding these dreams as symptomatic limit the import of the text in ways that the constant reference to ongoing cultural debates makes inappropriate. In this sense, my reading once again rejoins Mizuno's work; see “Nerval. La ville et l'errance.”

retained from plays he has seen or read, the narrator moves from the freak show performers to the popular entertainer Bilboquet from the vaudeville play *Les Saltimbanques* [*The Acrobats*], and the conman disguised as a popular entertainer in the melodrama *Robert Macaire*.⁶³ His mental stores of experience, old and new alike, are strung together in this dream sequence through the hazards of association. The imaginative potential of dreams is not to reduce disorder through organization, but to generate it. Through the narrator's dreams, Nerval introduces a conception of the imagination not as the unity of an idea, but as the productive disordering of experiences of the real. Writing the imaginative experience of the dream here cannot be separated from the messiness of material phenomena any more than writing the encounter with the phenomenon of the freak show could be separated from the irrationality of the imagination.

The travel installments of *Les Nuits d'octobre* use these two limit experiences of freak show and dream to elaborate a literary space that exists outside of an opposition between writing-the-world and writing-the-imagination, outside of an opposition between Realism and an Idealist literary aesthetic. It is precisely in the name of this excluded space that the narrator renounces not only Realism, but also the Idealism that opposes it. Opening the installment where he describes the merino woman, Nerval writes,

... Je m'arrête. — Le métier de *réaliste* est trop dur à faire. La lecture d'un article de Charles Dickens est pourtant la source de ces divagations !... Une voix grave me rappelle à moi-même.

Je viens de tirer de dessous plusieurs journaux parisiens et *marnois* un certain feuilleton d'où l'anathème s'exhale avec raison sur les imaginations bizarres qui constituent aujourd'hui l'*école du vrai*.

[... I'll stop here. — It's far too difficult to go on playing the part of a realist. And yet it was the chance reading of a piece of Dickens that set me off on these divagations! ... A solemn voice is calling me back to my senses.

I have just sifted through a pile of Parisian and Marnois newspapers, only to come across an article containing an entirely justified philippic against those bizarre imaginings that today go under the name of the *école du vrai*, or True-to-Life School.]⁶⁴

A sort of bookend to the conceit whereby a chance encounter with Dickens supposedly turns the narrator into a would-be Realist, we have another chance encounter, this time with an anti-Realist *feuilleton* (which must run along the lines of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, if that is not actually the publication in question). Here we finally find the narrator explicitly inhabiting the opposition between Realism and its Idealist critics that was implied in the relationship between Dickens and Dante in the first installments. The position he takes via this parroted critique of Realism is a complicated one: the point of anti-Realist anathema that the narrator borrows from the critic here is precisely a reference to the kind of writing that *neither* of those literary aesthetics allows for—“bizarre imaginings.” If the rest of the Valois installments argue for a critique of Realism, it is precisely a critique of Realism's inability to deal with the truly strange, with what really calls on the imagination—something that the beautiful unity of writing preferred by the Idealist critic does no better. Nerval cites an Idealist critique of Realism, but uses it to highlight the fact that Realism has no more place for the strange or disorderly imagination than Idealism does; the two-pronged irony of the narrator's reference to the critical *feuilleton* here thus operates in a single rhetorical gesture the

⁶³ *Les Nuits d'octobre* in *Œuvres complètes*, 337 / *Selected Writings*, 229.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 342/234.

reciprocal destruction that took place in the Parisian installments. By letting Idealism and Realism cancel each other out, he effectively clears the Valois installments of all but a *fantaisisme* that neither one of those aesthetics allows for, a *fantaisisme* that inextricably binds writing-the-world and writing-the-imagination.

Digressive Subjectivity

Les Nuits d'octobre stages a battle between Realist and Idealist literary aesthetics. Instead of coming down on one side or the other, however, the *feuilleton* offers an alternative that exists in precisely the space they conspire to exclude. When the narrator takes his final leave of Realism at the end of the text, it is not in favor of what might be seen as Realism's opposite. His ironic summary—"Voilà l'histoire fidèle de trois nuits d'octobre, qui m'ont corrigé des excès d'un réalisme trop absolu ; j'ai du moins tout lieu de l'espérer" ["This is the faithful history of the three October nights that cured me of my exaggerated notions of absolute realism – at least I have every reason to believe I have recovered"]—makes a joke at Realism's expense ("I sure *hope* I'm done with it!") while also mocking the moralizing discourse of the critics who characterize it as a personal failing.⁶⁵ In response to our initial question of what sense might be made of Nerval's engagement with Realism in *Les Nuits d'octobre*, we seem to have a clear (if ironic) answer. The encounter with Realism enables a subtle and hilarious critique of its limitations, as well as those of its foremost aesthetic competitor, and allows Nerval to position himself against them both.

Our initial question about the status of Realism in *Les Nuits d'octobre* was, however, surrounded by a whole set of other questions about the place this gesture toward Realism occupied in Nerval's literary career. In the context of his œuvre, Realism seems to be opposed to the personal writing of his late work, which is often described as a kind of proto-autofiction, and so *Les Nuits d'octobre* seems to have something to say about the turn toward writing-the-self. As I have discussed, scholarly approaches to this question have tended to correlate this turn with a psychological one: the final, irrevocable turn toward madness. This is to say that scholars have tended to bring to the question of writing-the-self their own, preexisting conceptions of the self to be written (usually psychoanalytic, be they Freudian or Lacanian). But just as we have been able to give historically specific content to the Realism (writing-the-world) at stake in *Les Nuits d'octobre*, so, too, can we look to Nerval's text to provide historical terms for thinking about both the writing and the self of this question of writing-the-self.

Indeed, each established literary aesthetic at stake in the *feuilleton* implies its own conception of the self. Nerval's positioning himself against these two forms of writing can thus also be understood as positioning himself against these two forms of subjectivity. Underlying the opposition between Realism and Idealist Romanticism in the mid-nineteenth century was an opposition between materialist and spiritualist philosophies and their understandings of the self.⁶⁶ A physiological current of psychological thinking, descended from the materialism and sensationalism of the *idéologues* did battle, throughout the century, with a spiritualist current that exclusively bore the name of psychology.⁶⁷ As Goldstein argues in *The Post-Revolutionary Self*, the stakes of this conflict were nothing less than the moral and political stability of the French nation and its citizens. On the

⁶⁵ Ibid., 351/243.

⁶⁶ Goldstein's work has been invaluable to my readings of this element of Nerval's text, providing a clear and fascinating picture of the complex configurations of psychology, philosophy, and politics in the nineteenth century. This allows for a very different kind of psychological reading of Nerval, one that treats psychology as a historically-situated discourse that has clear relationships to power. This insight is obviously Foucault's, first and foremost, but Goldstein's work on the nineteenth century reveals the specific philosophical and political stakes of changing conceptions of the self. See *Console and Classify* and *The Post-Revolutionary Self*.

⁶⁷ *Console and Classify*, 245.

one hand, physiology presented a composite self, made up of numerous faculties that work together without being governed by any unified entity that might properly be called The Self.⁶⁸ It was this lack of a unified self, opponents of physiology claimed, that had been responsible for the upheavals and moral failings following the 1789 Revolution: with no responsible core, there is no possibility of moral action or accountability.⁶⁹ Particularly following the demise of the corporatist structures that ordered society and selves in the *ancien régime*, what was needed to ensure social order was precisely a strong sense of self.⁷⁰ Spiritualist philosophy with its grounding in psychology (associated most famously with Cousin) emerged in response to precisely this need.⁷¹ Cousin's "eclectic spiritualism" started from a self-constituted, *a priori* self and derived everything else from there.⁷² In opposition to sensationalism's anarchic multiple self, subject to the same materialism as the world, Cousin put forward a self from which all of philosophy emerged—a self whose accountability could underpin social order.

Though in Cousin's philosophy everything, including ontology, was to be discovered by the self through introspection, the results of that introspection were not as various as the selves producing them.⁷³ Goldstein argues, in fact, that this psychological approach served as a guarantor of moral and social order: "the Cousinian combination of 'personal will' and 'impersonal reason' flattered the possessor of the moi that he enjoyed a thrilling degree of individuality and efficacy yet at the same time guaranteed that he would not rock the boat."⁷⁴ By way of the regulation of common sense, the self appears here as an agent of an order that exceeds it—a configuration that should sound familiar to us, for it meets up with the principles of literary aesthetics put forward by the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. We must not forget that it was Cousin himself who wrote what can be seen as the aesthetic manifesto of that journal, "Du Beau et de l'art," where he argued that imagination should act as a unifying force, bringing the work of art into harmony with its idea. Beneath an Idealist literary aesthetic meant to protect against chaos and ugliness, then, lay a spiritualist philosophy meant to protect against upheaval and immorality. The epithet *réaliste* rhymed with that of *idéologue*: in both an aesthetic and a psychological sphere, Cousin and his fellows sought to combat the insidious effects of materialism and its contingency. Their spiritualism and Idealism were the philosophical and the aesthetic correlates of their Doctrinaire politics, which maintained the July Monarchy by advocating the achievement of social order through a *juste milieu* between popular democracy and absolutism, and continued to guide the conservatism of the Party of Order after the 1848 revolution.⁷⁵

The question of the composition of the subject is thus everywhere implied in *Les Nuits d'octobre* in the struggle between Champfleury's sincere, undistorted faculties of observation and the *Revue des Deux Mondes*'s overarching, organizing imagination, between the conception of the writing subject as a recorder of perception and the conception of the writing subject as a creator of harmony. This question also makes two explicit appearances in the dreams the narrator recounts during the Valois installments. In those dreams, Nerval draws these two discourses of the self onto

⁶⁸ *The Post-Revolutionary Self*, Chapter Three: Is There a Self in this Mental Apparatus?

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁷⁰ *The Post-Revolutionary Self*, 157.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 158-61.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ We see, then, that the opposition between Realism and the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in the first part of the serial is an asymmetrical one in another sense, with the *Revue* representing the ruling bourgeois order that associated 'materialist' writing with the constant risk of revolution.

his own terrain and ironizes their ways of relating both to the self and to its writing.⁷⁶ I have already mentioned the first of these dreams, in which the mill hammers become hammers striking the narrator's brain. The associative logic that governs that first dream is the object of reproach, within the dream itself. The hammers and labyrinth seem from the first to be a punishment for crimes we cannot yet identify: "Serait-ce la peine à laquelle je serais condamné pour mes fautes ?" ["Is this the punishment for all my sins?"].⁷⁷ It is in response to this initial sense of punishment that the narrator initiates his string of associations with the freak show. The dramatic characters Bilboquet and Robert Macaire are cited to speak on behalf of the narrator himself, so that he himself enters the chain of entertainers his associative mind is following. This work of association and substitution (his failure to keep things straight) becomes the first apparent crime in the dream, and the narrator responds to the criticism he anticipates: "Bon ! Je confonds à présent Bilboquet avec Macaire. Mais ce n'est pas une raison pour qu'on me casse la tête avec des foulons" ["Oh, here I go confusing Bilboquet with Macaire. But that still doesn't justify pounding my head to smithereens with a millstone"].⁷⁸ The independent identities of these two characters are not the only things at stake in the confusion the narrator is guilty of here: arriving at them in the first place required passing through a confusion of his own identity with that of the performers he saw at the freak show. Thus in this first dream sequence, the narrator finds himself under attack for the porosity of his self, represented by the citations. This crime, his third and final citation insists, is greatly out of proportion with the gravity of the judgment being brought against him: "Voilà bien du tapage pour ... Bien peu de chose" ["Much ado ... About nothing"].⁷⁹

This first part of the dream suggests a self under attack for its lack of integrity, for the confusion it suffers. In the dream's second sequence, the hammers pass into the hands of little gnomes, tiny workmen intent on putting the narrator's consciousness to rights. The gnomes proffer a strange discourse in order to justify their project, blending elements of physiology and psychology, concretizing transcendental abstractions and setting them side by side with precise anatomical vocabulary. They observe just the sort of problem that the narrator seemed to anticipate in the first part, identifying in his mind a conflict between self and non-self: "Le *moi* et le *non moi* de Fichte se livrent un terrible combat dans cet esprit plein d'objectivité" ["Fichte's *I* and *Not-I* are locked in a deadly struggle within this ever-so-objective mind."]⁸⁰ The non-self ought, through its difference, to simply mark the limit of the self while in fact originating from the very same subject, of which it is just another expression.⁸¹ But here, rather than being subordinate to the self, the non-self is going head to head with it. Indeed, the purported "objectivity" of the narrator's mind seems not to refer to a capacity for unbiased observation, but to a propensity toward giving free reign to what ought to be dominated.⁸² More specifically, the gnomes worry about the presence in his mind of ideas regarding the *femme mérinos*, who they fear has invaded some secret compartment of his brain. He did not adequately protect himself from her and from the claims made about her by her fellow performer:

⁷⁶ The tendency to read these dreams as "authentic" expressions of Nerval's psyche (as real dreams), rather than as authorial inventions, has led to a near absolute lack of acknowledgment, let alone interpretation, of the abundance of references to Cousin in these dreams.

⁷⁷ *Les Nuits d'octobre* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:337-338/*Selected Writings*, 229.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 338/229.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 339/230.

⁸¹ Alexander M. Schlutz discusses the role Fichte gives to imagination in reconciling the self and non-self, the subjective and the objective. We heard an echo of this unifying function of the imagination, which allows the irrationality of nature to be assimilated into the rational self, in the Idealism of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* critics. See "The Highest Point of Philosophy: Fichte's Reimagining of the Kantian System" in *Mind's World*, 140-61.

⁸² Nerval draws on the full ambiguity of the word *objectivité* here, using it in a sense that must allude as well to the charge of *matérialisme* made against so-called Realist writers.

“notre Parisien est encore jeune... Il ne s’est pas assez méfié du *boniment*” [“our Parisian is still a little green... He took the *patter* too literally”].⁸³ His willingness to take this irrational phenomenon seriously, rather than to neutralize its power by seeing it as mere patter, has invited disorder into his mind and threatened the integrity of his subjectivity.

The cure for this disorder is to be brought about by the tiny workmen, toiling to tidy up the narrator’s mind: “Travaillons, frères, travaillons ;—la boîte osseuse se nettoie.— Le compartiment de la mémoire embrasse déjà une certaine série de faits.—La causalité, oui, la causalité,—le ramènera au sentiment de sa subjectivité” [“Let’s get down to work, brothers. The cranial cavity is looking a bit cleaner. The chamber of memory is already stocked with a certain series of events. Causality,—yes, causality,—will bring him back to an awareness of his subjectivity”].⁸⁴ The container of his skull is reorganized, beginning with the memory in which events must be put in order by causality. Following on the explicit reference to Fichte (“le *moi* et le *non moi*”), we find here what must be understood as a reference to Cousin, for whom causality, alongside substance, was one of the two laws of thought, allowing for the passage from psychology to ontology.⁸⁵ For the self to do its job in grounding philosophy, it had to hold to the inexorable laws of causality—not the arbitrary logic of association. The need to reestablish causality in the narrator’s brain can be understood as a need to reorder the relationship between self and world in order to return to the self its primacy: “La causalité, oui la causalité,—le ramènera au sentiment de sa subjectivité,” his all-important subjectivity. The gnomes have thus cracked open the narrator’s skull in the name of the dominant Cousinian ideology, remaking his subjectivity as he sleeps according to a particular institutional conception of the self and the proper relation between the internal and the external.

As I’ve said, Cousin is not the only target of Nerval’s irony here, and the dream does not end before he takes another jab at the physiological alternative. The highly concrete and detailed anatomical descriptions attributed to the gnomes cannot help but make the discourse of physiology sound as silly as that of spiritualism: “Nettoyons d’abord le sinciput et l’occiput ;—que le sang circule plus clair à travers les centres nerveux qui s’épanouissent au-dessus des vertèbres” [“Let’s first clean out the sinciput and the occiput—so that the blood will flow more freely between the nerve centers that spread above the spine”].⁸⁶ Whether it be the flow of causality or the flow of blood that is at fault in the gnome’s diagnosis, the discourses they use to diagnose the narrator’s supposed illness are the butt of the joke here. Both physiology and psychology become the specialties of talking gnomes. The dream demonstrates these doctrines’ capacity for ruthless repression (brainwashing at its most literal), while using the dream’s absurdity to refuse them the power they claim. The narrator vindicates himself, on waking, through the humor of a two-part citation:

Pascal a dit :
« Les hommes sont fous, si nécessairement fous, que ce serait être fou par
une autre sorte que de n’être pas fou. »
La Rochefoucauld a ajouté :
« C’est une grande folie de vouloir être sage tout seul. »
Ces maximes sont consolantes.

⁸³ *Les Nuits d’octobre* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:339/*Selected Writings*, 230.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 339/231.

⁸⁵ Causality is obviously also an important principle for empiricism.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 339/230.

[Pascal once said:
 'Men are mad, so ineluctably mad that not to be mad would merely be
 another form of madness.'
 To which La Rochefoucauld added:
 'To consider oneself the only wise man is the greatest folly of all.']⁸⁷

In response to the philosophical discourses that define selfhood, Nerval puts forward literature's long-standing refusal to obey or even to value those definitions. Writing about the self, even Pascal and La Rochefoucauld embraced its improper functioning.

This first dream thus establishes a motif of crime and punishment around the narrator's selfhood. The self is subject to material and spiritual dysfunction for which he must be disciplined and rehabilitated. The two dominant psychiatric discourses appear as regulators of the self, asserting their conceptions of its proper constitution in relation to the world. The abstraction of this risk of censure in the narrator's first dream finds a concrete reflection in a run-in he has with the authorities in the day between his two dreams. The morning after the performance in Meaux, he intends to set out for Dammartin, but misses the omnibus (of course). He manages to catch another headed in more or less the same direction, only to find on his arrival that rainy weather makes it impossible to cut through the forest of Ermenonville as planned. His already meandering course is thus further disrupted by a jaunt in the opposite direction of his destination in pursuit of a connection in Crespy-en-Valois, to the northeast. It is there that his irrational itinerary comes under the scrutiny of a gendarme, who is already concerned by the narrator's lack of papers (which he forgot in Meaux). With no proof of identity, the narrator also cannot make a clear account of himself and what he is doing there (in Crespy on the way from Meaux to Creil) and so finds himself under arrest. The absence of a proper self, denoted by the absence of his papers, is confirmed by his disorderly way of moving through the world. Government bureaucracy confirms the diagnosis already made by the gnomes, and the narrator spends the night in prison.

It is there that he has the second and final dream of *Les Nuits d'octobre*, in which discourses of the self and literary aesthetics converge. The associations of dreamwork are in evidence again here, as the juridical consequences the narrator faces for failing to identify himself properly are transformed into the institutional consequences of his erratic writing practice, and the juridical apparatus he faces is transformed from a legal to an academic one. The narrator finds himself faced with a tribunal that reminds him of the Sorbonne jury for his baccalaureate, made up of avatars of Guizot, Cousin, and the literary critic Désiré Nisard. The significance of these authority figures can be linked to Nerval's scholastic biography, but far exceeds this personal reference; more important than Cousin's and Guizot's affiliation with the university in the final years of the Restoration, when Nerval himself was a student there, is their meteoric rise under the July Monarchy and the astonishing cultural authority they together represent, particularly in the field of education where spiritualist philosophy was aggressively propagated.⁸⁸ Though he had been made Inspector General of Higher Education in the spring of 1852, Nisard bore this authority primarily in the literary field, where he was an outspoken critic of Romantics like Hugo and Dumas. The jury that confronts the narrator in this dream thus represents the whole compound of philosophical and aesthetic values I have sketched out around Cousin and the *Revue des Deux Mondes*.⁸⁹ The stakes of their judgment of

⁸⁷ Ibid., 340/232.

⁸⁸ See John I. Brooks, *The Eclectic Legacy*.

⁸⁹ The state power at stake in the dream is still that of the July Monarchy, under which both Guizot and Cousin held great authority, though it could be argued that the philosophical and aesthetic values of order at stake here were complicit in the Second Empire, as well; we might attribute this untimeliness of the authorities represented here to their formative influence on Nerval's own development, since they ruled France culturally as well as politically during most of

the narrator are anything but academic, however: “J’allais subir une condamnation capital” [“I was to face conviction for a capital offence”].⁹⁰ Though the charges pertain to the narrator’s writing, the consequences will be of the utmost gravity, as if to show the intractability of the opposition between our narrator and the conservative cultural representatives he faces.

The charges put forth are in no way surprising in the context of the *feuilleton*, but the astonishing nature of the proceedings makes them worth looking at in detail:

Sur une table étaient étendus plusieurs numéros de *magazines* anglais et américains, une foule de livraisons illustrées à *four* et à *six pences*, où apparaissaient vaguement les noms d’Edgar Poë, de Dickens, d’Ainsworth, etc., et trois figures pâles et maigres se dressaient à droite du tribunal, drapés de thèses en latin imprimées sur satin, où je crus distinguer ces noms : *Sapientia*, *Ethica*, *Grammatica*.— Les trois spectres accusateurs me jetaient ces mots méprisants :

« *Fantaisiste ! réaliste ! essayiste !!* »

[Several issues of British and American *magazines* lay exhibited upon a table, in addition to a pile of *four-* and *sixpenny* illustrated supplements that here and there featured the names of Edgar Poe, Dickens, Ainsworth, etc. Three pale and emaciated figures sat to the right of the tribunal, draped in theses composed in Latin on satin bands on which I thought I made out the words: *Sapientia*, *Ethica*, *Grammatica*. These three avenging spectres were hurling imprecations at me:

« *Fantaisiste ! réaliste ! essayiste !!* »]⁹¹

The tribunal is called to order with the evidence splayed out in front of it: those issues of English and American journals full of quintessentially *fantaisiste* writing, derived from the British tradition of *essayisme*.⁹² The narrator is charged in part with the crime he claimed to be committing in the first part of *Les Nuits d’octobre*, that of *réalisme*—but as we have seen, the *réalisme* of which one might be accused is not the same one that might be affirmatively claimed in 1852. *Réalisme* is accompanied here by *fantaisisme* and *essayisme*, which, as we have seen, serve to indicate a terrain not exhausted by the empiricist conception of Realism championed by Champfleury. The *réalisme* at stake here is one that takes in Poe as well as Dickens, to retain the possibility of imaginative disorder and strange phenomena (perhaps attributable *essayisme* and *fantaisisme*, respectively). These three charges are related, but each develops a different aspect of the personal and social stakes of non-Idealist literary production, as a juror likened to the *Revue des Deux Mondes* critic Henri Patin illustrates: “« Du *réalisme* au crime il n’y a qu’un pas ; car le crime est essentiellement réaliste. Le *fantaisisme* conduit tout droit à l’adoration des monstres. L’*essayisme* amène ce faux esprit à pourrir sur la paille humide des cachots.

his adult life; we might also attribute it to the relative newness of the repressive Second Empire—or, most likely, to the very repressive policies of that regime, which would have made it impossible to attack the current government directly. On the politics of *L’Illustration* and their potentially restrictive influence on Nerval’s writing, see Mizuno, “Nerval face au réalisme.”

⁹⁰ *Les Nuits d’octobre* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:348/*Selected Writings*, 241 (translation modified).

⁹¹ Ibid. The three Latin figures here represent *science* (or philosophy), *ethics*, and *philology*.

⁹² Larousse explains the *essayiste* thus: “Nom donné aux auteurs d’essais, et particulièrement aux écrivains anglais qui rédigent dans les revues et les journaux des chroniques scientifiques, religieuses ou artistiques.” The *essayiste* is not to be confused with the journalist(ic), however “l’objet que poursuit l’*essayiste* est la critique, tandis que le journaliste se propose surtout de renseigner.” Most important for my purposes here, however, is how similar *essayisme* seems to be to the *fantaisisme* I have already discussed: “Un *essayiste*, au fond, est un homme qui ne prend pas une thèse convenue, mais qui aime à laisser flotter sa pensée sur tous les sujets qui l’intéressent,” (think Montaigne, Chateaubriand, or Jean-Paul Richter). (Larousse, vol. 7, part 2, 947.)

[>]” [“It’s but a very small step from *realism* to crime; for crime is, by its very nature, realistic. *Fantaisisme* inevitably leads to the worship of monsters. *Essayisme* has landed this wayward mind on a rotting pallet in a dungeon.[’]’].⁹³ These various dangers (immorality, ugliness, waywardness) are ones to which Nerval’s narrator seems already to have succumbed in the various stages of the *feuilleton*: exploring the Parisian underworld, admiring the *femme mérimos*, and now getting arrested for being off course.

The accusation here is a literary one—a list of genres in which the narrator is accused of writing. But it is more than that. As we have seen, and as the Patin criticism demonstrates, these genres are closely linked to the composition of the self who writes them. Orderly writing requires orderly writers, and texts organized by a moral idea require writers organized by an *a priori* self. In this sense, the charges pursued by the dream tribunal have everything to do with those pursued by the police: failure to properly identify oneself, to have the kind of self that can be properly identified in its coherence. When the narrator pleads guilty in his dream, it might seem then that he pleads, too, to this fundamental failing of the self. But this dream, like the first, is permeated with irony, and the narrator’s confession is no exception:

Je jure de renoncer à ces œuvres maudites par la Sorbonne et par l’Institut [de France] ; je n’écrirai plus que de l’histoire, de la philosophie, de la philologie et de la statistique... On semble en douter... eh bien ! je ferai des romans vertueux et champêtres, je viserai aux prix de poésie, de morale, je ferai des livres contre l’esclavage et pour les enfants, des poèmes didactiques... Des tragédies !—des tragédies !

[I hereby promise to forswear all books outlawed by the Sorbonne and the Institute. Henceforth I shall only write works of history, philosophy, philology and statistics ... You seem to doubt my word ... Well, I’ll do even better: I shall write pastoral or morally uplifting novels, I shall compete for the official prizes awarded to poetry and edifying literature. I shall write books against slavery, books for children, didactic verse ... And tragedies—yes, especially tragedies!]⁹⁴

Social, psychological, and literary order demand particular forms of writing, and the narrator vows to convert to them, in all their diverse banality. He begins with academic genres like history and philology where strictly linear arguments might be made, but facing the tribunal’s skepticism, he offers alternatives: books asserting irrefutable moral positions (books *against* slavery and *for* children, he puns). Within this realm of authorized writing, even the more properly literary genres exist only within the sphere of the moral, as in the apposition of “prizes awarded to poetry and edifying literature.” Virtuous novels and didactic poems are the only fictional forms available, if not for that most conservative of genres, tragedy. This list of genres that might be approved of by the Idealist aesthetics of the jury is a catalogue of sterile forms, and the prospect of the narrator’s tragedies sends even those ghostly academicians themselves floating off into oblivion with mournful cries.

The options for acceptable non-Realist (non-*fantaisiste*) literary production are laid out in this dream in all of their dullness. The powers-that-be refuse forms of writing that do not demonstrate order and unity of idea and of self, but not even they seem to want to read the literature they authorize. They are forced to surrender in the face of tragedy, and the narrator’s dream ends without any sentence being handed down. Nerval’s irony in the face of his narrator’s accusers continues into

⁹³ *Les Nuits d’octobre* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:348-349/*Selected Writings*, 241.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 349/241.

the next day's events, when the narrator sarcastically notes that academic knowledge is good, at least, for entertaining gendarmes. This ironic admission of the usefulness of approved genres in interacting with the forces of social order belies the way in which the forces of order are in this instance unwitting conspirators in the narrator's guilty vagabondage: in transporting him to appear before a judge in Senlis, the gendarmes in fact continue the narrator's wandering itinerary and deliver him, through yet another illogical turn, right where he wants to go. The police do much more to aid the narrator's disorder (the crime for which they picked him up in the first place) than he does to accommodate them with orderly thinking.

In his waking encounter with the police and the dreamed encounters with cultural authorities, the narrator of *Les Nuits d'octobre* is not nearly as submissive as he might appear to be. The fundamental conflict between his own practices of writing and living and those literary and philosophical discourses is made evident by the repeated motif of crime and judgment, but the *feuilleton* consistently rejects the judging authorities even while staging their claims to power over both writing and writing subjects. The narrator's self and his writing of it are adamantly *not* what either Champfleury or Cousin would like them to be, and he only ironically apologizes for that fact. The self at work here is too porous, as the gnomes attest, but also too imaginative, and so stands in opposition to both the control of organization and the transparency of sincerity. It offers itself instead as a kind of wild curiosity—a receptive ground onto which association draws a great variety of materials out of which any number of unpredictable things can be made. This self is not the unified one that might express itself or the purely observant one that might depict what it sees, but is rather a creative one that takes in the world without reserve and transforms it: a *fantaisiste* self. Behind the necessary co-articulation of writing-the-world and writing-the-imagination in *fantaisisme* is a self that does not lie only in its relationship to one of those things but that is the site of their encounter.

Les Nuits d'octobre thus suggests that Nerval's transition from travel writing to the more apparently autobiographical texts of the 1850s cannot be understood as a transition from writing-the-world to writing-the-self: the two were never separate. There is, as I have already discussed, nothing like a simply empirical project in his travel writing, which is marked by an idiosyncratic interest in strange phenomena and the way they engage the imagination and provoke associations. Likewise, there is nothing in his late work as simple as "personal" writing. After all, the writing self as it is explored in *Les Nuits d'octobre* is not the *moi* of autobiography but a mechanism of receiving and transforming the *non moi*—not an entity, we might say, but the mobility of its own wandering. This writing subject sheds new light on the ones we encounter in texts like *Sylvie, ou Souvenirs du Valois* that have been read autobiographically. The writing-the-self that a story like *Sylvie* seems to undertake has to be reconsidered to account for this porousness of the self to the non-self, and the appearance of subjective integrity that such a story presents has to be reexamined in light of the repressive dimension of that integrity. What kind of subject and what kind of writing we encounter in a text are, as we have seen in *Les Nuits d'octobre*, not abstract aesthetic questions, but historical and even polemical ones. In turning to *Sylvie* in Chapter Two, then, I will read the story in terms of both the epochal shifts and the local critical maneuverings that provide the context for its publication, restoring the profound imbrication of writing-the-self and writing-the-world in Nerval's work, and drawing out the fictional mechanisms through which he imagined the porousness of *moi* and *non-moi* to function.

Chapter Two

History Play

Sylvie

Ces vieux airs, d'un français si pur, raniment les
puissances d'illusion que nous transmirent nos pères.

[These old tunes, in such pristine French, revive the
powers of illusion passed down to us by our fathers.]

Maurice Barrès¹

The Mists of Idealism

In 1853, Nerval published what would become his most beloved work, *Sylvie, ou Souvenirs du Valois* [*Sylvie, or Memories of the Valois*]. The story appeared that summer in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, where readers were already familiar with Nerval's travel writing and his historical portraits.² With its wistful, lyrical prose, however, *Sylvie* introduced readers to a different Nerval, the poet of bittersweet nostalgia. Here, in a hazy story of dream and memory, the narrator recalls three women he loved as a young man, and elaborates a dense landscape of childhood memories on which those loves play out. We meet the young man-protagonist in the Parisian theater where he nightly performs his unrequited love for an actress, only to catch him quickly slipping off to the countryside where he spent his childhood, to reunite with the peasant girl he loved in his youth. Into the protagonist's nighttime carriage ride through the Valois in search of his lost love, the narrator weaves a series of memories that recall that love and introduce another—for the daughter of local aristocrats, whom he saw only a handful of times before she entered a convent. *Sylvie* unfolds as the dense intertwining of these three unhappy love stories—for the actress Aurélie, the peasant Sylvie, and the nun Adrienne—with the landscapes and traditions of the Valois region that cradled not only Nerval's infancy but also that of the French nation.

After the episodic travel writer and the eccentric historian, then, the readers of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* encountered in *Sylvie* Nerval the melancholic poet. And in the sweet longing that

¹ "Discours de réception." English citations from *Sylvie* will be quoted from Sieburth's translation in *Selected Writings*, modified as needed. All other translations are my own, except where otherwise noted.

² "Sylvie," *Les Filles du feu* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:537-79. The Pléiade edition includes the version of "Sylvie" published in *Les Filles du feu* in 1854; that is the version that will be cited here, modified according to the Pléiade's notes regarding the variations in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*.

pervades the story and its enchanting descriptions of the Valois, *Sylvie* made that melancholy charming. Rural episodes that Nerval had treated the year before in the autobiographical fragments of *La Bohème galante* reappear here, transformed by their integration into a story deeply rooted in the 18th-century pastoral tradition.³ Traces of that tradition traverse the story, not only in its delicate portrayal of country life, but also in direct references to Jean-Antoine Watteau and his *fêtes galantes*, and, above all, to Rousseau. The sequence of the narrator's memories centers on a series of traditional festivals that allude (both implicitly and explicitly) to Watteau's paintings, but it is folksongs, so prized by Rousseau for their naïve sincerity, that resound throughout the text, serving as an ephemeral point of reference in one memory after another.⁴ In this way, the entire Valois is imbued with the promise of a transparent relation to the world, and the story becomes an idyll of forests, girls, and songs.⁵

The Valois of *Sylvie* is imbued, too, with a melancholy brought on by the disappointment of that promise of transparency and the disappearance of that idyll. After recalling so many sweet memories of his childhood in the countryside and of the folk songs and festivals that punctuated it, the protagonist finds that he cannot regain the ideal all those memories have expressed. If Adrienne, the young nun fleetingly glimpsed, awakened his desire all those years ago, it is a desire that cannot be satisfied by the peasant or the actress. The nun is gone, and cannot be recaptured in either of the other young women, making *Sylvie* an elegy as much as an idyll. And indeed, in the last chapter, the narrator comments on the bittersweet lessons of his fruitless search for the impossible. "Telles sont les chimères," he writes, "qui charment et égarent au matin de la vie. [...] Les illusions tombent l'une après l'autre, comme les écorces d'un fruit, et le fruit, c'est l'expérience. Sa saveur est amère ; elle a pourtant quelque chose d'âcre qui fortifie" ["Such are the chimeras that beguile and misguide us in the morning of life. [...] Illusions fall away one after another like the husks of a fruit, and that fruit is experience. It is bitter to the taste, but there is fortitude to be found in gall"].⁶ For all its beauty and fascination, the story of the Valois that *Sylvie* recounts is finally one of disillusionment, sealed with the final revelation of Adrienne's early death.

The idyllic Nerval of *Sylvie* was appreciated by contemporary readers, as he has been by so many readers since, for the pale beauty of his writing. Gautier praised his style as "pur" ["pure"] and "limpide" ["limpid"], describing the story as "un marbre grec légèrement teinté de pastel" ["a statue lightly tinted with pastels"].⁷ This is the same style that Maurice Barrès eulogized half a century later, when he insisted that Nerval had captured in *Sylvie* the "mélancolie tendre et chantante" ["tender, melodious melancholy"] that resonated through the Valois mist, the songs that were the voice of France itself.⁸ The "purity" and "limpidity" of *Sylvie* contribute not only to its idyllic quality, however, but also to its elegiac quality, a mournfulness that (however beautiful) has been for readers a source of concern as much as of admiration. They have seemed (particularly to 20th-century scholars) to signal a troublesome Idealism, one that goes too far and so is doomed to disappointment, a Rousseausitic vision of the Valois as a dreamed-of space of transparency and

³ In his essay on Nerval, Marcel Proust criticizes 19th-century critic Sainte-Beuve for reading Nerval this way, as a holdover from an 18th-century aesthetic. See *Contre Sainte-Beuve*.

⁴ When *Sylvie* was republished in the 1854 collection *Les Filles du feu*, Nerval appended to it an article on the "Chansons et légendes du Valois" ["Songs and Legends of the Valois"] (*Les Filles du feu* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:569-79).

⁵ When I speak of Rousseau, I do not pretend to make claims about the philosopher's actual views, but rather about the way that they had been assimilated by the mid-19th century into a Rousseauism that was already a cliché. I will refer to "Rousseauism" when appropriate, but even the name Rousseau will be meant to refer not to the man but to the idea.

⁶ "Sylvie," *Les Filles du feu* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:567/*Selected Writings*, 176.

⁷ Quoted in Jean-Luc Steinmetz, *Reconnaisances*, 78.

⁸ "Discours de réception."

immediacy.⁹ In returning to the Valois, the melancholic poet chases after an impossible unification of real and ideal. Whether his inevitable failure signals his inability to come to terms with the real (his madness), or the impasses of Romanticism itself, the idealization of the Valois has seemed to many to be pathological—a dream, in the worst sense of the word.

For these readers, one of the primary manifestations of this Idealist pathology is its effect on time. The plot of *Sylvie* is, without doubt, complex and even confusing, folding time back on itself again and again, as it passes through familiar landscapes. Readers can never be sure whether they've been here before, or whether that “before” hasn't yet ended.¹⁰ More important for many scholars, however, are the temporal implications of the story's impetus more broadly. In wanting to return to the Valois and to (a) lost love(s), the protagonist is accused of wanting to negate time, to achieve a simultaneity and identity represented by the unchanging repetition of the traditional song or festival that links the modern present to the feudal past.¹¹ What's more, the loves themselves are subject to this same logic of identity. The apparently complex romantic plot, with lovers in all directions, is instead understood as a series of repetitions in which the protagonist's three loves manifest a single (always unsatisfied) desire. The slippage from the actress to the peasant girl, and the suspicion that the protagonist's interest in both is underpinned by an obsession with the nun, suggest that these are variations on a theme, imperfect approximations of something that remains out of reach because Adrienne was lost to the convent and then to death, or because she was never the desired origin but just another avatar.¹² *Sylvie* is thus cast as a story about the impossible desire to abolish difference and to do away with time—to transcend history (personal or otherwise) in attaining the ideal. This impossibility is commonly understood in recent readings as the source of the story's melancholy.¹³ Nerval's protagonist (or Nerval himself, for those prone to autobiographical readings) is at odds with reality and with history, because he is at odds with the very dynamism of time. In its Idealism, it seems, *Sylvie* is at the heart of Nerval's reputation as a mere *dreamer*: his imaginings may be charming, but they are hopeless, and so the story is one of ineffectuality and failure.

In thinking about Nerval's Idealism in *Sylvie*, however, we must return to where we started: to August 1853 and the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, which first published the story. The journal was, as we saw in Chapter One, far from hospitable to the writing of Nerval and his fellow ex-bohemians, whom *Revue* critics lumped together under the rubric of *fantaisisme*: writers not sufficiently concerned with beauty and the ideal. Given the great prestige of the *Revue*, it is easy to imagine the benefits that publishing there might offer to a writer like Nerval, even if he was not likeminded. It is harder to imagine, however, why the journal might open its pages to a writer so foreign to its aesthetic project. True, this was not Nerval's first appearance in the journal, but his earlier pieces for the *Revue* (serialized installments of the *Voyage en Orient* in 1846-47, and a portrait of Rétif de la Bretonne in 1850) corresponded easily to forms of travel and historical writing commonly published there. Much of the writing Nerval had been doing since 1850, on the other hand, was much less easily classified, prone to hybridity and digression that would find no sympathy with the editors of the *Revue*.

⁹ See, for instance, Poulet, “Sylvie ou la pensée de Nerval” in *Trois essais de mythologie romantique*; Sarah Kofman, *Nerval ou le charme de la répétition, lecture de « Sylvie »*; and Bénichou, “Nerval” in *L'école du désenchantement*.

¹⁰ On the complexity of temporality in *Sylvie*, see Umberto Eco, “The Woods of Loisy” in *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*.

¹¹ See, for example, Destruel, “Obsessions: L'écriture de soi” in *L'écriture nervalienne du temps*; Jean-Nicolas Illouz, “Sylvie” in *Nerval. Le rêveur en prose*; and Bray, “Lost in the Fold.”

¹² This way of reading the female characters in *Sylvie* is incredibly common among Nerval scholars, if not entirely taken for granted, and so the examples are far too numerous to list here. For some scholars the unattainable origin is an essential or ideal woman (even the goddess Isis); see, for example, Brix, *Les déesses absentes*. For others, particularly those psychoanalytically inclined, the absence that lies at the origin of the series is the mother Nerval hardly knew; see for instance Felman, *La Folie et la chose littéraire*; Bettina Knapp, *Gérard de Nerval*; and Kristeva, *Soleil Noir*; but also Kofman, who resists strictly psychoanalytic readings.

¹³ See, for example, Chambers, “Suicide without Pistols” in *The Writing of Melancholy*.

Serialized texts like *Les Faux Saulniers* and *Les Nuits d'octobre* could never have appeared in the *Revue*'s pages, and yet *Sylvie* seems to resonate in so many ways with the kind of Idealism the *Revue* propagated. It seems to have been cherry-picked for the journal.

The orthodox account in Nerval studies of why *Sylvie* differs so greatly from Nerval's earlier writing is that the story represents a more advanced point in his progress toward the heart of his true, autobiographical problematic.¹⁴ Mizuno, however, proposes a very different way of understanding this stylistic divergence. Rather than seeing it as a more advanced stage in a teleological process toward the expression of Nerval's personal truth, Mizuno reads the Idealism of *Sylvie* as an occasional feature, an adaptation engineered to win editorial approval for the story at a time when Nerval had turned away from the theater and was looking to brand himself as a prose writer.¹⁵ In Mizuno's reading, the story's apparent naivety and Rousseauism must be regarded with a certain degree of suspicion as to whether they represent Nerval's own views. Nerval was, after all, a serious reader of Rousseau, with more sophisticated ideas about the philosopher than the kind of simplistic Idealism he invokes in *Sylvie*.¹⁶ What's more, Nerval takes a certain ironic distance from Rousseauism—an irony I will return to in discussing the story's "Dernier Feuillet." For Gabrielle Chamarat-Malandain and Jacques Bony, Nerval's irony signals the narrator's self-ironization, a kind of bitter acknowledgment of the foolishness of his younger self.¹⁷ But it must also be read as the author's irony with regard to the tactic he has adopted, his refusal to completely identify with the Idealism he employs to get *Sylvie* past the censors, as it were. That Idealism was, after all, quite different from the significance Rousseau had had earlier in the century. While early Romantic sensibility was associated with a new, post-Revolutionary social order and implied possibility and freedom, by midcentury its ideological significance had changed. As I discussed in the introduction, by 1853, that sensibility was associated with a strict Idealism (of which the *Revue des Deux Mondes* was a major proponent) and the maintenance of a status quo of authoritarian state and cultural power. *Sylvie*'s irony with regard to Rousseau thus appears as an acknowledgment of the great disjuncture between Rousseau's philosophy of freedom and its repressive appropriation, between the Rousseau who might have interested Nerval and the Rousseau he was obliged to invoke in the *Revue*.¹⁸

This line of Mizuno's thinking can be productively followed a step beyond his own arguments. Rather than simply allowing Nerval a certain distance from the official moral of his story, I will read the text in search of the ways in which it insinuates unsanctioned forms and ideas into this apparently custom-tailored text. I will look not only for disavowal of the story's explicit aims, but also for ideas and values that are surreptitiously affirmed. This is not to dismiss the pastoral beauty of *Sylvie*: a reader can think nothing else about the story without first reflecting on its mournful poetry, now idyll, now elegy. Nor is it to suggest that the story's beauty and any enjoyment of it are inauthentic ideological alibis that we must cast off to find its true meaning. The virtuosity with which Nerval works in an Idealist idiom that is not his own and pushes it to its pathological

¹⁴ Jacques Bony, for instance, interprets Nerval's career as a progression toward first person, confessional writing; see *Le Récit nervalien*.

¹⁵ "Sylvie de Gérard de Nerval et la *Revue des Deux Mondes*," 216-19.

¹⁶ Monique Streiff-Moretti, *Le Rousseau de Gérard de Nerval*, 116-17. While Streiff-Moretti insists that Nerval likely did not think the idealist myth he propagated (a myth originated by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre) was an accurate assessment of Rousseau, she nonetheless understands that idealism as being authentically Nerval's own, whereas I will argue that Nerval's simplistic invocation of Rousseau is a way of disavowing an idealism that is not his own.

¹⁷ Chamarat-Malandain, *Nerval, réalisme et invention*, 83; and Bony, *L'Esthétique de Nerval*, 144.

¹⁸ We might also hear in it the echo of other ways that he takes distance from the apparent sincerity (almost to the point of autobiography) of the story, including his use of the actress/nun conceit of George Sand and Jules Sandeau's 1831 novel *Rose et Blanche*. By essentially rewriting this previous pastoral novel, a tale of young men engaged in impossible romances with young women who circulate between stage and convent, *Sylvie* is no longer simply pastoral but perhaps pastoral *to the second degree*, which immediately troubles its ostensible transparency and naivety.

limits is not simply a diversion, but the story's most significant gesture. What I am arguing is rather that *Sylvie* enables multiple readings (some that would have been appreciated by the editors of the *Revue* and others that had to pass under the radar), and that understanding the story means theorizing the relationship between those multiple readings. We must read both the apparent Idealism and the underlying currents of irony and artifice that push against it, in order to see how *Sylvie* gets beyond an opposition between what is apparent and what is essential, how it plays the role of sincerity in order to call sincerity itself into question. By making the invocation of authenticity itself a performance, the story stages a mode of fiction that transcends authenticity and inauthenticity, both.

Mystifying Idealism

Sylvie manages to perform Idealism without being identifiable with it because of the other stories it simultaneously tells. The text creates multiple, simultaneous readings through its use of precisely the element its pastoralism seems to reject: time. Time is, we must recall, the enemy of *Sylvie*'s Idealism: it creates difference where the protagonist seeks identity, distance where he seeks immediacy. It is the medium of the real that the protagonist tries to transcend in search of the ideal, and that the narrator disrupts by organizing memories based on resemblances rather than chronology. And yet as a literary device, the disorientation of time in *Sylvie* functions much more to draw attention to time and to reflect upon it than it does to erase or eclipse it. Though the story might seem to offer resemblance as an alternative narrative logic to chronology, in practice the effect of the complexity of the plot is to enlist readers in the arduous task of restoring its order, restoring time. As Proust observed, the reader of *Sylvie* "est obligé à tout moment de tourner les pages qui précèdent pour voir où on se trouve, si c'est présent ou rappel du passé" ["is constantly obliged to turn the preceding pages to see where he is, whether it is the present or a recollection of the past"].¹⁹ The story cannot do without chronology, and readers feel it, feel "obliged" to piece together the temporal logic that seems to be missing. Umberto Eco picks up on Proust's reading to note that, though readers struggle and often fail in their attempts to situate themselves in the chronology of the story, that chronology nonetheless demands to be sorted out. It does not, Eco argues, want us to "fall ill, like Labrunie [Nerval's family name]—incapable of distinguishing dreams, memories, and reality," but rather "to feel that the periods of time [are] blurred and to understand how he managed to blend them."²⁰ To parse that blurring, readers must attend as much to the differences that reveal how each memory is situated in time as to the similarities through which the series is associated.²¹ The invisibility that time might enjoy in a story that moves steadily forward, where it might be taken for granted, is revoked by *Sylvie*'s insistence on time as a formal problem. As a formal feature, the temporal disorientation of the story thus serves far more to thematize the passage of time than to transcend it.

In this way, time allows itself to be read through the disorienting, Idealist series of memories in *Sylvie*—or rather, it demands to be read against the Idealism of that series. This temporality that the story harbors goes beyond narrative time, however, beyond the protagonist's travels and romances: reordered and reconsidered, the chronology of the story introduces a reflection on history itself. Against its apparent Idealism, *Sylvie* offers a kind of allegory of history, unfolding the implications of contemporary social and economic transformation. What's more, it creates this account of dynamism out of precisely the figures that might seem to embody repetition and

¹⁹ *Contre Sainte-Beuve*.

²⁰ "The Woods of Loisy," *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*, 37 and 38.

²¹ I will return in Chapter Four to the functioning of repetition and seriality in Nerval's poetics; *Sylvie* is unique, however, in the centrality of historical situation as an axis of difference.

stagnation in the story: the female characters. It is certainly true that there is continuity in the protagonist's desire for the three women, a single desire motivating his engagement with each of them. However, the fact of a coherent logic to the series does not imply that the women have no specific content, that, as Michel Brix argues, they simply "se superpose et renvoient, par un jeu complexe de miroirs et d'analogies" ["are superimposed on one another and refer to one another, in a complex game of mirrors and analogies"], or that "La femme n'est pas aimée pour elle-même, mais parce qu'elle évoque une autre figure féminine" ["A woman is not loved for herself, but because she evokes another feminine face"].²² To read the women this way, to see the story treating them as mere mediations of each other, requires abstracting each of them to a face, a voice; it requires removing from them all of their personal and historical specificity. This is, of course, what Brix would argue that the *story* does, but this unsituating belongs to the reading rather than to *Sylvie*.

In the context of the story, each woman is attributed distinct values and correlates: the actress Aurélie is associated with Parisian modernity and the artifice of the theater; the nun Adrienne is associated with the long history of feudal tradition; and the peasant girl Sylvie is associated with the naïve continuation of that tradition. The story gives historical specificity to each of the women, as well as to the circumstances of the protagonist's encounters with them, and so does not allow for them to be flattened into a repetitive series. If there is an iterative dimension to the romantic plot (the protagonist trying and failing with one woman after another), it is not because it is a repetition of a desire impossible to satisfy, a desire to overcome difference itself by gaining access to one woman through another. What thwarts the protagonist and fuels his engagement with the series of women is rather the obstacle presented by a specific historical moment. This historical moment is one we know well, a period of modernization, during which modern, capitalist values replaced older social forms, and the anonymity of modern life eclipsed rural communities. When we look beneath the tangled links of resemblance between the women of *Sylvie*, what we find is a story of their transformation, so that when the protagonist loses each woman, his loss is driven not by the impossibility of his desire but by the divergence of his values from hers.

The protagonist begins in Paris, in thrall to Aurélie, but does not approach her because of what he presumes to be her venality. He does not want a love that can be bought, but something purer, and so he follows his memories to the villages and girls of his youth, epitomized by Adrienne and Sylvie. The opposition between the venality of Paris and the virtue of the countryside that Nerval establishes in the story's opening is certainly not a new one, and there is nothing in the opposition itself that necessarily refers to this historical moment rather than any other. And yet, the specific terms in which he sets up the opposition do seem to insist on its historical specificity. What allows the protagonist to even consider engaging Aurélie's affections with money is his good luck on the financial markets, the recognition and rising value of the foreign stocks he inherited: "Dans les débris de mon opulence se trouvait une somme assez forte en titres étrangers. Le bruit avait couru que, négligés longtemps, ils allaient être reconnus. C'est ce qui venait d'avoir lieu à la suite d'un changement de ministère. Les fonds se trouvaient déjà cotés très haut ; je redevenais riche" ["Among the various assets that had not yet slipped through my fingers, there was a fairly substantial batch of foreign securities. There had been a rumour that these securities, which had long been deemed worthless, were about to be formally recognized—and indeed, after a government reshuffle, this is precisely what had just taken place. Their market value had already risen considerably; I was a rich man again!"].²³ In the suddenness of this change of bourgeois fortune and the impersonal mechanisms to which it is owed (not to the familial act of bequeathal, but to the anonymous functioning of the market), this opening Parisian scene distinctly belongs to the mid-19th century.

²² *Les Déeses absentes*, 238.

²³ "Sylvie," *Les Filles du feu* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:539-40/*Selected Writings*, 147.

The Parisian culture the protagonist abandons to return to the Valois is not an idealized but a historical one.

The Valois to which he returns initially appears as the ideal of naivety that might be opposed to Parisian corruption. As we've seen, in its close association with its feudal history, the Valois seems an idealized space outside of time. This is what Adrienne seems to embody in *Sylvie*: an unchanging order, impervious to history. She is inaccessible in the story, once she enters the convent, and so the protagonist shifts his attention to Sylvie, apparently as a kind of substitute, another representative of the same feudal ideal. The loss of Sylvie, however, is very unlike the loss of Adrienne, which happens off-stage, so to speak, and is never fully explained. Sylvie, on the contrary, is lost in a very specific and profoundly historical way, one that evokes the new economic and social reality of the July Monarchy. When the protagonist finally arrives in the village to reunite with his youthful love, he finds her much changed. The Sylvie of his youth was the daughter of peasants who carried on Valois traditions in her pleasures as well as in her work. This "fée éternelle des légendes" ["the fairy of legend blessed with eternal youth"] was not only an enthusiastic participant in village festivals but also a skilled lacemaker, trained in an age-old craft in the Valois region (which includes Chantilly).²⁴

The Sylvie he finds on his return, however, is very different. She is a "fée industrielle" ["industrious fairy"] who has given up lace to make gloves for a manufacturer in the town.²⁵ If Sylvie is a disappointment, then, it is not simply because she has been marked by the passage of time in some abstract way; it is because she has succumbed to a very particular historical transformation and lost her connection to traditional society. "[G]râce à ses talents d'ouvrière," the narrator notes, "je comprenais assez que Sylvie n'était plus une paysanne" ["I realized well enough that thanks to her skills as a worker, Sylvie was no longer a peasant"].²⁶ In her transformation from artisan to pieceworker, Sylvie has adopted a practicality appropriate to the new economic and social order. Indeed, she goes on to marry not the wistful protagonist but an ambitious peasant who plans to become a baker, and ends up the wife of a *petit commerçant* (shopkeeper). Her progress may not represent the most spectacular trajectory of modernization, but her (inevitable) passage from peasant to bourgeoisie is at the heart of the disappointment *Sylvie* recounts.²⁷

When the protagonist returns to Paris and to Aurélie, this passage is reiterated in relation to a different woman who represents a different culture destroyed by bourgeois values. At the beginning of the story, the actress is already suspected of the stereotypical venality the protagonist's uncle warns him about. This venality is not distinctly modern or bourgeois, however; that the actress might be mercenary in her relations with men, reveling in the spectacular wealth she might extract from them, is nothing new. But this kind of venality is importantly not what destroys their relationship when the protagonist finally gets close to Aurélie; the death knell for their romance rather sounds because Aurélie reveals her desire for the kind of practical support offered by a bourgeois husband who would be not a patron but a business partner. While her decadence might have been compatible with the culture of the theater she represents, her pragmatism is not: she is just another bourgeoisie trying to manage her career. I will return later to this image of the actress as entrepreneur, but for now we need only observe that the decisive break in both of the protagonist's relationships in *Sylvie* comes at the moment when the woman demonstrates her commitment to that most modern of values: utility. It is not an ideal identity that eludes the narrator here, but real ways of living that have been eradicated by the new economic and social order.

²⁴ Ibid., 550/159.

²⁵ Ibid., 560/168.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ It is for this reason that Monique Streiff-Moretti describes Sylvie's ideological significance in the story as that of "La femme et le quotidien, la femme et l'argent, le "bon sens" contre l'idéal"; see *Le Rousseau de Gérard de Nerval*, 379.

The story of loss and disappointment that the narrator traces in *Sylvie* is thus not simply personal and spiritual, but also historical. What he mourns is not an impossibility, but rather forms of life that used to exist (that he himself experienced) and that are being blotted out. With this reflection on the ravages of history, *Sylvie* pushes against its apparent Idealism, grounding its melancholy in a recognition of real historical transformation. But we must be careful not to oversimplify this allegory, pitting the modernity of the women against the nostalgia of the protagonist. If the story were centered only on the disappointments of the changing Valois and Sylvie's willingness to go along with them, it might easily be read as an elegy for rural culture—but the actress is no less a source of hope, and then of disappointment, for the protagonist. He is not disillusioned by her from the start, because she is a Parisian actress and not a girl from the countryside, but becomes disillusioned only later when he comes to understand that she relates in the same way as Sylvie does to the new economic and social order. *Sylvie* is thus an allegory of modernization in which country and city, tradition and art, authenticity and inauthenticity, are not the poles of before and after. The transformation that thwarts the protagonist affects both Sylvie and Aurélie, both tradition and theater. This is because the loss that is dramatized in *Sylvie* is not a fall from naivety to artifice, but the abandonment of collective practices, be they traditional or dramatic, that are simultaneously naïve and artificial. What is mourned here is a conjugation of authenticity and inauthenticity, reality and illusion, that is far more complex than the naivety the story seems to espouse in its idealism.

Tradition and Fiction

What is mourned in *Sylvie* is a loss of cultural practices, but not in the way the story's apparent pastoralism would have us expect. The women that the protagonist loses in the story are all strongly identified with the performances they shared with him: Adrienne with folksongs, Sylvie with festivals, and Aurélie with the theater. If the protagonist turns away from both peasant girl and actress at the moment each affirms her own bourgeois identity, it is because, in affirming the primary importance of utility (Sylvie's practicality), she turns away from the cultural forms she shared with him. Those are forms, as I've said, that bring together their participants in an imaginative practice that bridges reality and illusion. Apparently authentic traditional practices and apparently inauthentic theatrical practices converge in *Sylvie* in a complex but unified conception of collective fictional practice that is far-removed from the Rousseauian naivety of the folksong. This mode of practice is elaborated first and foremost through the narrator's memories of Valois festivals, but the terms in which he celebrates those festivals and mourns their loss are the same terms in which he praises certain forms of dramatic practice and critiques others.

The festival is the first folk practice to appear in the story, in the first of the two memories that send the protagonist back to the Valois and to Sylvie. After a night at the theater, he sees an item in the newspaper about the yearly *Fête du Bouquet provincial*, and though the account of the festival is sparse ("Demain, les archers de Senlis doivent rendre le bouquet à ceux de Loisy" ["Tomorrow the archers of Senlis will present the bouquet to the archers of Loisy"]), the mere mention of its unchanging procedures suffices to awaken in the protagonist a very vivid memory of the festival:

Le cor et le tambour résonnaient au loin dans les hameaux et dans les bois ; les jeunes filles tressaient des guirlandes et assortissaient, en chantant, des bouquets ornés de rubans.—Un lourd chariot, traîné par des bœufs, recevait ces présents sur son passage, et nous, enfants de ces contrées, nous formions le cortège avec nos arcs et nos flèches, nous décorant du titre de chevaliers,—sans savoir alors que nous ne faisons que répéter d'âge en âge une fête druidique survivant aux monarchies et aux

religions nouvelles.

[The far-off sounds of drum and horn was drifting through the hamlets and woods; the young girls were weaving garlands and tying ribbons around bouquets, singing all the while. A heavy wagon, drawn by oxen, was receiving these offerings as it passed; and we, the children of these parts, were escorting it with our bows and arrows, imagining ourselves knights of old—unaware that we were merely repeating from age to age a Druidic festival that had survived all subsequent monarchies and forms of religion.]²⁸

From the mention of the *fête* in the present emerges the fullness of the protagonist's memory—not of one festival, one year, but of the festival's repetition, described in the imperfect. The festival is repeated (rehearsed) year after year, and has meaning for the protagonist only insofar as it is repeated. The significance of this repetition is importantly not predicated on its young participants' consciousness of the druidic rite that serves as its origin. The festival is repetitive and conservative ("survivant aux monarchies et aux religions nouvelles"), as well as "naïve" ("sans savoir alors"), creating its effect on its participants through a naturalized, unthinking repetition of a traditional form.

The festival here comes very near the folksong as Rousseau understood it, working its magic through the unconscious effects of repetition. In his *Dictionnaire de musique*, Rousseau discusses Swiss folksongs, explaining the source of their affective force that was so great and so aroused the homesickness of the Swiss guards that the French king made it a capital offense to play them. According to Rousseau, there is no feature of the songs' form, no musical element, that can account for their tremendous effects. They gain their power instead from the unconscious force of habit and repetition: "Ces effets, qui n'ont aucun lieu sur les étrangers, ne viennent que de l'habitude, des souvenirs, de mille circonstances qui, [...] leur rappelant [aux gardes] leur pays, leurs anciens plaisirs, leur jeunesse, et toutes leurs façons de vivre, excitent en eux une douleur amère d'avoir perdu tout cela" ["These effects, which do not befall foreigners, come only from habit, from memory, from a thousand circumstances, which, reminding the guards of their country, their old pleasures, their youth, and their entire way of life, arouse in them a bitter sorrow at having lost all that"].²⁹ The nostalgia of the Swiss guards serves here to draw out the mechanisms by which folksongs bind people to the society to which they belong and to its way of life, creating a sense of coherence and belonging, simply by being constantly repeated. A mere tune is enough to invoke this sense of belonging (or of exile, as the case may be), just as the mere notice of the festival is enough to revive for the protagonist a dense, iterative experience.

What this comparison to the folksong obscures in the narrator's account of the *fête du bouquet provincial*, however, is the element of self-conscious performance and staging involved in the repetition of the festival. The "répétition" here is not simply repetitive in the way of Rousseau's nostalgic song, but also invokes another, quite different iterative concept, that of rehearsal. Part of what the protagonist recalls of the *fête* is the role he would play in it, along with the other boys: "nous, enfants de ces contrées, nous formions le cortège avec nos arcs et nos flèches, nous décorant du titre de chevaliers" ["we, the children of these parts, were escorting it with our bows and arrows, imagining ourselves knights of old"]. The festival's yearly repetition is naïve insofar as it is made without awareness of the druidic rite on which it is based. It is also, however, creative and actively imaginative in its relation to the past, insofar as its participants reinterpret the components of the

²⁸ "Sylvie," *Les Filles du feu* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:540/*Selected Writings*, 148.

²⁹ *Dictionnaire de musique*, 314-15.

festival (the bows and arrows) and invent historical personas for themselves based on them. Not only does this initial description of the festival in *Sylvie* invoke the continuity between festival and theater, it also demonstrates the kind of theatrical imagination the festival participants employ to give content to the ritual. Though it is only a brief memory, sparked by an even briefer newspaper notice, this first appearance of the festival in *Sylvie* already suggests the complex combination of naivety and self-conscious fictionality that tradition implies for Nerval.

The two memories of the Valois that the narrator recounts as the protagonist makes his carriage ride through the night only exacerbate this complexity. The examples of festivals he recalls are less and less grounded in the naturalized, unconscious performance of tradition, and more and more mediated by outside influences—and yet, the interest and intensity of these festivals do not decrease or even change significantly. Both memories come from the same adolescent trip to the Valois to see Sylvie. In the first, the protagonist returns to the “fête patronale” to be a knight once more. After describing the traditional archery competition and procession through the countryside, the narrator gives a detailed account of the celebratory feast in which the young people set out to improve upon tradition:

[L]es vainqueurs avaient été conviés à un repas qui se donnait dans une île ombragée de peupliers et de tilleuls, au milieu d’un des étangs alimentés par la Nonette et la Thève. Des barques pavoisées nous conduisirent à l’île,—dont le choix avait été déterminé par l’existence d’un temple ovale à colonnes qui devait servir de salle pour le festin. [...] Trois colonnes avaient succombé emportant dans leur chute une partie de l’architrave ; mais on avait déblayé l’intérieur de la salle, suspendu des guirlandes entre les colonnes, on avait rajeuni cette ruine moderne,—qui appartenait au paganisme de Boufflers ou de Chaulieu plutôt qu’à celui d’Horace.

La traversée du lac avait été imaginée peut-être pour rappeler le *Voyage à Cythère* de Watteau. Nos costumes modernes dérangent seuls l’illusion.

[[T]he victors had been invited to a banquet which was to take place on an isle shaded by limes and poplars in the middle of one of the lakes fed by the rivers Nonette and Thève. Small boats, all decked out with flags, ferried us over to the island—the site had been chosen because it featured an oval temple with columns which was going to serve as the banquet hall. [...] Three of its columns had collapsed, carrying along with them a portion of the architrave; but the interior had been cleared of debris and garlands had been strung between the columns, thus rejuvenating this modern ruin—a remnant of the paganism of Boufflers or Chaulieu rather than that of Horace.

The crossing of the lake had perhaps been devised to recall Watteau’s *Voyage to Cythera*. Our modern dress alone spoiled the illusion.]³⁰

In this memory, the young people reengineer the festival to improve upon the received form, augmenting the celebration with the picturesque setting of the island and its temple to Urania. Inspired by the tradition they have long known, they innovate in ways that suggest the influence of Watteau’s *fête galante*. If we hold the festival to a standard of authenticity predicated on its loyalty to the traditional script (if we expect that it be an unthinking repetition), the banquet walks a strange line between the legitimately ancient and the merely staged. But as in the first festival memory, the element of staging does not appear as an obstacle to the festival’s effect. The “illusion” created

³⁰ “Sylvie,” *Les Filles du feu* in *Œuvres complètes* 3:545/*Selected Writings*, 153.

through the mediation of “Voyage to Cythera” is an addition to, rather than a perversion of, the effect of the traditional festival. There is no ideal here of the preservation of original forms, no opposition between the authentic and the artificial. Rather than the preservation of a naturalized, wholly traditional imaginary, the young people here participate in a mode of festival performance that reengineers the naively traditional to reflect a historical imaginary influenced by painting and literature—a mode echoed in the temple itself, which, though authentically dilapidated, is an 18th-century replica of a Greek temple.³¹

The conjunction of authenticity and artifice, of naïve repetition and self-conscious innovation, that we see in the archery festival is repeated and intensified in the second memory of that visit to Sylvie. In this second memory, they young lovers spend a day together just the two of them, outside the context of any particular traditional practice, but capable nonetheless of engineering a similar effect. The day after the archery festival, Sylvie and the protagonist pay a visit to Sylvie’s elderly aunt, and, while she prepares lunch for them, they stage what has become the most iconic scene of the story. Digging around in the cupboards in search of models for her lacemaking, Sylvie finds the old woman’s wedding portraits and decides that she and the protagonist should become, with the help of the old couple’s wedding clothes, the reincarnation of that portrait. She jumps into action, directing an impromptu mini-festival in which she and the protagonist perform an invented relation to the traditional heart of the region by embodying these figures of the past. There is no tradition here at all, no received form for the practice Sylvie creates; the form of tradition has been entirely usurped by the image of the portrait that the young couple self-consciously stage for Sylvie’s dumbstruck aunt, their scrambling around in preparation evoking the chaos backstage at the theater.

When they appear before the aunt, hand in hand, however, they *are* the young couple “de l’autre siècle” [“of another century”], both for themselves and for her: “C’était l’image de sa jeunesse,—cruelle et charmante apparition !”³² The fiction that the couple performs by taking on the roles of bride and groom seems to pass into delusion here: in the absence of any traditional form, illusion seems to replace naivety as the source of the practice’s effect. But this moment of “apparition” quickly gives way to another in which the aunt begins to share memories of her wedding. The costumes of the young couple are put back in proper relation to the past they repeat, as she teaches Sylvie and the protagonist the old wedding traditions:

Elle retrouva même dans sa mémoire les chants alternés, d’usage alors, et le naïf épithalame qui accompagnait les mariés rentrant après la danse. Nous répétions ces strophes si simplement rythmées, avec les hiatus et les assonances du temps ; amoureuses et fleuries comme le cantique de l’Ecclésiaste ;—nous étions l’époux et l’épouse pour tout un beau matin d’été.

[She even managed to recall some of the songs which it was the custom in those days to sing back and forth across the banquet table, just as she remembered the quaint epithalamium which had accompanied the newly-weds as they returned home from the dancing. We again sang with these stanzas, with their simple rhymes and their

³¹ This centrality of mediation to the functioning of the festival in Sylvie puts the lie to the absolute opposition between the artifice of theater and the authenticity of the festival that is so important to scholars like Christopher Prendergast; see *The Order of Mimesis*, 153-56.

³² “Sylvie,” *Les Filles du feu* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:551 / *Selected Writings*, 160.

bygone assonances and hiatuses—as flowery and as impassioned as the Song of Songs. We were bride and bridegroom one whole, fine summer morn.]]³³

By teaching them the songs, the aunt projects forward the tradition that was missing from Sylvie's initial impulse to embody the portraits. Sylvie seemed to know this would work, and it seems to have worked even before the wedding songs close the circle.³⁴ For her and the protagonist, wearing the wedding clothes creates the combination of lucid theatricality and naïve pleasure that they felt the night before at the archery festival. Now, however, there is no opposition between traditional form and the creativity that can be the basis of innovation, because Sylvie's sense of tradition is an essential element of her innovative impulse, just as much as the portraits she takes as her inspiration.

Through these two memories of the archery festival and the dress-up scene, *Sylvie* thus puts forward a conception of traditional practice that emphasizes its creative dimension over its repetitive dimension, and emphasizes self-conscious, mediated performance over naïve, unthinking ritual. The fictions that the young people engineer in these memories do not negate the effect of traditional practice that weaves itself into the fabric of lived experience, but allow for a simultaneity of life and illusion. The appeal of the Valois, and of Sylvie, must be understood in relation to the appeal of this kind of practice. The adolescent Sylvie appears through these two memories as a kind of imaginative collaborator for the protagonist: she is a lover of festivals, always the last to stop dancing, but more importantly she is an inventor of festivals, as she demonstrates with the wedding clothes. She both produces and enjoys with the protagonist the kind of effect that draws him to traditional practices.

The question arises, then, why she eventually fails the protagonist, why this youthful partnership does not work in the long run. We have seen that the problem is not, as some scholars argue, that the protagonist wants something impossible from Valois culture, and from Sylvie as part of it. The problem is rather that Sylvie loses interest in the kind of practice she and the protagonist used to enjoy together, as she adopts the logic of modern popular culture. When the protagonist returns to see her, she prefers not to sing the old songs because they have gone out of fashion, along with the social rituals of which they were a part: “Sylvie ne voulut pas chanter, malgré nos prières, disant qu’on ne chantait plus à table” [“Sylvie refused to sing despite our entreaties, claiming that singing at the dinner table just wasn’t done any more”].³⁵ She has cut ties with her traditional imagination, and so views the songs through the eyes of fashion: they are not iterative, but rather passé. So it is that when she does agree to sing, it is in a distinctly modern style, much to the protagonist's horror: “Sylvie modulait quelques sons d’un grand air d’opéra modern... Elle *phrasait* !” [“Sylvie intoned a few bars of a grand aria from a modern opera... She was *phrasing*”].³⁶ Even the wedding dress that played such a central role in her engineering of her own mini-festival has been assimilated to a new, urbanized culture: Sylvie has worn it as a mere costume to a public dance in the nearby town. For the protagonist who expected to find the Sylvie he had known in his youth, her scorn for the practices they shared is shocking and painful. He has lost his partner, not only (and perhaps not even primarily) in love, but also in imagination. But Sylvie no longer has any interest in

³³ Ibid., 551-52/160.

³⁴ My reading of Sylvie here departs radically from the one Richard gives, which understands disguise and dress-up as failures to achieve the ideal: “prostituant l’essence dans la honte d’une fausse incarnation, il est le signe d’une légèreté, d’un manque de fidélité à l’être.” Rather than opposing performance and being to approach performance as a spiritual or existential problem, I am arguing instead that, for Nerval, the conjunction of the fictional and the real allows for the creation of a desired form of imaginative practice. See “Géographie Magique de Nerval,” 67-68.

³⁵ “Sylvie,” *Les Filles du feu* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:563/*Selected Writings*, 172.

³⁶ Ibid., 560/169.

mixing life and illusion. She no longer wants to play; she is a good bourgeoisie for whom “il faut songer au solide” [“let’s think of practical matters”].³⁷

The protagonist does not fight for Sylvie when he finds out about her baker-suitor, because she is not the woman he thought she would be. She has not simply grown up, but been transformed by her initiation into a modernized, industrialized culture. When he returns to Paris, he is thus still in search of what he had hoped to find in a return to festival practice and Sylvie: a revival of collective imaginative practice. He reimagines this search in light of the theater, a form with a different relationship to modernization. In the quick passage from Sylvie to Aurélie (which, we must remember, only reverses the original slide from Aurélie to Sylvie), we see a profound continuity between tradition and theater that goes against the Idealist association of tradition with authenticity and naivety. Just as Nerval’s treatment of the festival in *Sylvie* complicates the operation of tradition, his treatment of theater suggests a relation to illusion and artifice that is much more complex than the association of theater with mere falseness. Here, too, collective practice creates the possibility of bridging reality and imagination, turning fiction into a lived practice.

Theater and Sincerity

If, according to the pastoral logic the story seems to put forth, tradition and authenticity are positive terms opposed to the negative terms of theater and artifice, what will surprise us in *Sylvie*’s treatment of Aurélie is the way in which it is precisely her sincerity that disappoints the protagonist. As we have already seen, he turns away from the actress at the moment when she makes it clear that she is looking for a good bourgeois marriage (a business partnership) rather than the kind of creative partnership he is looking for. But it is not only in her utilitarianism that she disappoints him. It is also in her understanding of what it is to be an actress. The disjuncture between the protagonist’s desires and the reality of the woman here is not a gap between ideal and real any more than it was with Sylvie. But the historical transformation at stake with Aurélie plays out differently than the one at stake with Sylvie. Rather than through a break with traditional culture, Aurélie fails the protagonist through her position on the wrong side of a change in the aesthetics of acting that has removed all art and artifice in the name of sincerity and spontaneity.

Sylvie thinks historically about the actress as much as it does about the fate of tradition in modern France. This is evident from the story’s first pages, in which the narrator justifies his younger self’s reticence to approach Aurélie, though he has gone to see her perform every night for a year. He delights in her voice, in the way her beauty is transformed by different kinds of lighting on stage. And yet, we find out, he has never made any attempt to approach her; what is more, he has not learned anything about who she is off stage: “Depuis un an, je n’avais pas encore songé à m’informer de ce qu’elle pouvait être d’ailleurs ; je craignais de troubler le miroir magique qui me renvoyait son image” [“For an entire year it had not even occurred to me to find out who or what she might really be; I was afraid to cloud the magic mirror that cast her image back at me”].³⁸ He has allowed the actress to be only what she is on stage, fearing, he says, that knowing about her in life might disturb his attraction to her.

The narrator goes on to give an explanation for this impulse to keep his distance from the actress, citing a piece of advice he received in his youth: “un de mes oncles qui avait vécu dans les avant-dernières années du XVIII^e siècle, comme il fallait y vivre pour le bien connaître, m’ayant prévenu de bonne heure que les actrices n’étaient pas des femmes, et que la nature avait oublié de leur faire un cœur” [“one of my uncles who had lived through the penultimate years of the eighteenth century (and who knew the period as only those who had truly experienced it could) had

³⁷ Ibid., 562/171.

³⁸ Ibid., 538/145.

warned me quite early on that actresses were not women, nature having forgotten to endow them with hearts”].³⁹ The uncle’s counsel emphasizes the falseness of the actress in her real-life relationships; she may be able to feign emotion on stage, but that does not imply that she is capable of any more than feigning. Showing the young protagonist the many trinkets and portraits he collected as remembrances of his romantic disappointments, the uncle creates an image of the actress who cannot be real, who can only act in real life the way she acts on stage and who is, thus, destined to break the heart of any man who endeavors to share a real romance with her. His nephew takes this advice to heart, and so prefers not to approach Aurélie, however enchanting she may be on stage: “je m’étais habitué à penser mal de toutes sans tenir compte de l’ordre des temps” [“I became accustomed to think ill of all actresses regardless of their place in time”].⁴⁰

Following this first rationale for staying away from the actress because she is incapable of real feeling, “sans cœur,” the narrator promptly provides a second explanation. Unlike the first, which was inherited advice gleaned from his uncle’s experience in the late 18th century, the second is particular to the protagonist’s (and Nerval’s) own generation. He and his fellows find themselves living in a strange period in which elegant or cynical dissipation is out of fashion, and in which a more utopic, philosophical, even religious sentiment dominates, but is stymied in hesitation, unable to pass into action. He goes on to contrast the materiality of the young men of his generation with the spirituality of their aspirations: “L’homme matériel aspirait au bouquet de roses qui devait le régénérer par les mains de la belle Isis ; la déesse éternellement jeune et pure nous apparaissait dans les nuits, et nous faisait honte de nos heures de jour perdue” [“Material man longed for the bouquet of roses which would regenerate him at the hands of the lovely Isis; forever young, forever pure, the goddess would appear to us at night, filling us with shame for having so wasted the hours of the day”].⁴¹ And yet not even this longing for spiritual affirmation can set the youth of his generation to work and stop them wasting their daylight hours: “L’ambition n’était cependant pas de notre âge” [“Worldly ambitions, however, meant little to our generation”].⁴² Children of Musset’s *mal de siècle*, this generation is unable to bridge its ideals and the need for action, and so it turns away from the material world:

Il ne nous restait pour asile que cette tour d’ivoire des poètes, où nous montions toujours plus haut pour nous isoler de la foule. À ces points élevés où nous guidaient nos maîtres, nous respirions enfin l’air pur des solitudes, nous buvions l’oubli dans la coupe d’or des légendes, nous étions ivres de poésie et d’amour. Amour, hélas ! des formes vagues, des teintes roses et bleues, des fantômes métaphysiques ! Vues de près, la femme réelle révoltait notre ingénuité ; il fallait qu’elle nous apparût reine ou déesse, et surtout n’en pas approcher.

[The sole refuge left to us was the poets’ ivory tower—which we climbed, higher and higher, in order to isolate ourselves from the crowd. Having been guided to these heights by our masters, we at last breathed the pure air of solitude, drinking ourselves into oblivion from the golden cup of fable, drunk with poetry and love—love, alas, of vague shapes, of blue and rosy hues, of metaphysical phantoms. Seen close, any

³⁹ Ibid., 538/146.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

real woman seemed too gross to our starry-eyed sensibilities. She had to appear a queen or a goddess: above all, she had to lie beyond reach.]⁴³

Here the narrator attributes as clearly as possible the reticence to approach the beloved woman to a kind of neo-Platonism that finds itself revolted by the real—the kind of Idealism with which *Sylvie* is so often associated. Love belongs to the spiritual aspirations of the young men of his generation, and getting too close to a woman (even an actress, we must assume) means coming face to face with her vulgar reality and so losing the ideal image one has created.

We cannot but be struck here by the divergence in the logic of these two reasons not to pursue Aurélie. For the uncle, the issues at stake are falseness and artifice: in pursuing a romance with the actress, one wants to be engaged with her as a real woman, one wants her to feel real feelings, but she can only act. One can only be hurt by such a woman, since the reality of one's own emotions cannot be reciprocated. For the men of the protagonist's own generation, however, there is quite another danger in approaching the woman (who, we should note, is not specified here as an actress, but who must be Aurélie as much as any other woman). One does not want a real romance with her, does not want the real emotions of a real woman, but rather the ideal figure she represents, be it on stage or in the imagination. One's own feelings for her are predicated on a kind of abstraction that her reality can only destroy, and so those feelings can only be protected by keeping one's distance. In the generational gap, then, desire seems to shift from the real to the ideal, and a kind of worldly attraction to women of the late 18th century is replaced by a neo-Platonism, confined to its "tour d'ivoire."⁴⁴

This account of the Platonism of the young men of 1830 plays into *Sylvie*'s apparent (and apparently doomed) Idealism. And yet, not only does the Platonist explanation appear in proximity to the uncle's quite different one, but it is also followed by what looks like a complete disavowal. After describing the aversion to real women that marked his generation ("et surtout n'en pas approcher" ["above all, she had to lie beyond reach"]), the narrator immediately changes course: "Quelques-uns d'entre nous néanmoins prisait peu ces paradoxes platoniques, et à travers nos rêves renouvelés d'Alexandrie agitaient parfois la torche des dieux souterrains, qui éclaire l'ombre un instant de ses traînées d'étincelles" ["Some of us, however, were not too keen on these Platonic paradoxes, and amid our renewed fantasies of Alexandria, we would occasionally brandish the torch of the gods of the underworld, momentarily illuminating the darkness with a trail of sparks"].⁴⁵ A counter-impulse emerges here: rather than the striving toward an ideal woman that rejects the vulgarity of the real, a more fleeting light than that eternal fire of Isis tempts "quelques-uns d'entre nous" with its sparks and flashes. The protagonist thus moves immediately from the Idealist space of the theater into the company of a group of *bons vivants*, whose motto is "« Buvons, aimons, c'est la sagesse ! »" ["You can't go wrong with wine, women and song!"].⁴⁶

Among this company is the young man who is actually Aurélie's lover. Thus, despite the protagonist's refusal to pursue her, the shift in this passage demonstrates that he is not entirely

⁴³ Ibid., 538-39/146.

⁴⁴ The ambiguity of these opening pages is also to be found in the title of the collection in which *Sylvie* would eventually be included, *Les Filles du feu*. If the neo-Platonism here is understood as a confession of a fatal desire for an image that dooms the protagonist to disappointment in love, the collection's title seems to evoke Isis (the fire opposed to Osiris' water) and to suggest that each text's eponymous woman refers back to her, without ever being able to provide access to her: they are only daughters, incapable of reconciling real and ideal. If, on the other hand, we put credence in the uncle's warning against actresses, the *Filles du feu* appear as a band of seductresses—not the daughters of fire, but the "girls of the stage lights."

⁴⁵ "Sylvie," *Les Filles du feu* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:539/*Selected Writings*, 147.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

foreign to the kind of man who *would* pursue her, nor to the kind of pleasure seeking that would make him want to. Indeed, when the protagonist glances at the newspaper to find that a shift in the stock market has just made him rich (the news item he notices right before the *fête du bouquet*), the money's first significance is that it might allow him to pursue Aurélie: "la femme aimée si longtemps était à moi si je voulais.—Je touchais du doigt mon idéal" ["the woman I had so long adored was now mine for the asking. My ideal was henceforth within reach"].⁴⁷ This "idéal" must be read with care, since, as we have seen, the narrator takes a critical distance from the idealism of his generation. What is clear is that his newfound wealth offers the protagonist an opportunity to cross the distance between him and the actress, but in a way he is ultimately not interested in crossing it. He does not want to be a corrupter, the narrator tells us, which might mean that he has moral qualms about tempting her virtue with money, or that he does not want to buy that false affection his uncle warned him about, or even yet that he does not want the version of her who would love him for money, at the expense of his ideal. All of these possibilities are kept in play here (both the ones that fit the *Revue's* spiritualism and the ones that don't) as the narrator turns away from Aurélie and turns his eyes to the next news item, the announcement of the *Fête du Bouquet provincial* that, as we have seen, sends him back to the Valois. The opening of *Sylvie* is ambiguous as to the significance the story will give to acting, and the way it intends us to read the actress. It is not until after the elaboration of festival performance that the story returns to Aurélie to clarify its rejection, not only of the Idealism of the narrator's generation but also of the actress herself.

The difference between the view the narrator's uncle took of the actress in the late 18th century and the view his friends take in the early-mid 19th century is, as the story makes clear, not merely personal but deeply historical, inscribed in "l'ordre des temps" [in "their place in time"].⁴⁸ It has to do not only with changes in the views of actress-loving men, but also and more importantly with changes in the actress herself, as both an artist as a citizen. The actress of 1830 is not at all the actress of 1780: both her civil status and her aesthetics have changed significantly. Once the narrator of *Sylvie* has worked through the historical transformations that eroded traditional Valois practice, he returns to Paris to work through the historical transformation of the actress alluded to in the story's opening pages. He finally gets close to Aurélie, and in so doing he reveals both what he wants from her (the kind of actress he thought she might be) and how she disappoints him (the kind of actress she really is), a disjuncture that must be explained by a historical reflection on the actress in the first half of the 19th century.

Approaching the causes of Aurélie's allure for the protagonist and the reasons she fails to satisfy him as historical questions means reading against the grain, both of the story and of the scholarship, treating historically what is presented symbolically, both in *Sylvie's* apparent Idealism and in scholarly readings.⁴⁹ There is no debate as to the centrality of the actress to Nerval's writing, both in the texts collected in *Les Filles du feu* and more broadly: from *Un roman à faire*, through "Octavie" and "Corilla" to *Pandora*, by way of the more autobiographical *Petits châteaux de bohème* and *La Bohème galante* and the theatrical *La Polygamie est un cas pendable*, actresses traverse his work. This omnipresence is most often explained as a feature of Nerval's Idealism, by a view of the actress as a kind of blankness that makes her particularly suited to the serial substitutions in which Nerval is seen to be engaged—an ahistorical phenomenon. The most thorough exploration along these lines is Chambers's *L'Ange et l'automate*, which looks at the way the actress operates in the imaginary of

⁴⁷ Ibid., 540/148.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 538/146.

⁴⁹ Substantive reflection on the significance of the actress in Nerval's writing has often been short-circuited by the autobiographical logic according to which every actress is an avatar for one particular actress whom Nerval seems to have loved, Jenny Colon. As Brix notes, the myth of Jenny Colon was created in large part by ungenerous accounts of Nerval written by his friends, particularly Arsène Houssaye; see "Nerval, Houssaye, et *La Bohème galante*."

Romantic writers including Nerval. Chambers identifies the essential feature of the actress, the feature that makes her so useful as a kind of mythical figure, namely her status as a sign with no referent: “Elle apparaît alors, moins comme *signe de...* que comme une actualisation des signes eux-mêmes dans ce qu’ils ont de plus troublant” [“She thus appears less as a *sign of...* than as an actualization of the signs themselves in their most troubling form”].⁵⁰

According to Chambers, the epitome in Nerval’s work of this emptiness of the actress and her absolute superficiality is the Aspasia of the 1851 play *L’Imagier de Harlem* [*The Image-Maker of Harlem*].⁵¹ In this *drame-légende*, Aspasia is Alilah, the female companion of Satan, provided by him with one identity after another and appearing under six guises throughout the play’s ten tableaux. Each of her roles is selected by Satan to pique the interest of Laurent Coster, the play’s hero and the inventor of print; at any given moment, she appears as the woman who most answers his desires. As Chambers points out, even though Satan also appears under multiple guises, his multiplicity is of a significantly different sort than that of Aspasia.⁵² While the devil is always himself, superficially masked to accomplish his ends, Aspasia is nothing but her roles. She has no autonomous being; there is no reality behind the artifice. She is precisely the actress that *Sylvie*’s protagonist’s uncle warns against: she has no heart but is only “versatilité et fausseté de surface se déployant sur un fond vide” [“superficial versatility and falseness covering an empty core”].⁵³ The actress here is both dangerously empty and apt to be filled by the imaginations of the men-poets whom she fascinates.

This reading of the actress is predicated, however, on a kind of double de-historicizing of the actress, failing to consider both Nerval’s real relationship to the theater and its performers, and the real, shifting terms in which acting was being understood during this period. In the first place, Chambers’s reading is rendered problematic by the distance required for the actress to maintain the great degree of abstraction she enjoys in *L’Imagier de Harlem*. In formulating the relationship of the poet to the actress, Chambers writes, “Les poètes ne voient pas la comédienne de près, de la coulisse ; ils la rêvent à partir de la salle, et leur amour est un *amor de lonh*” [“Poets do not see the actress up close, from the wings; they dream her from the audience, and their love is a love from afar”].⁵⁴ While this might be true of some of the poets Chambers discusses, it certainly does not apply to Nerval. Far from an uninitiated spectator of the theater, Nerval lived in close proximity to the business of the stage. He wrote more than twenty plays over the course of his career, alone or in collaboration, and worked almost constantly as a Parisian theater critic. These two professional pursuits sent him to the theater almost nightly, and there is every indication that he would have been there nearly as often even if it were not his business; when abroad, he consistently sought out the theater district of the towns he visited and made it a point not only to see many shows, but also to meet many performers. Even the major business venture of his life was a *magazine pittoresque* devoted to the theater, *Le Monde dramatique. Revue de spectacles anciens et modernes* [*The World of Drama. Review of Ancient and Modern Spectacles*]. Given all this, we can easily agree with Bony, who suggests that Nerval might be better understood as a man of the theater first, and a poet and storywriter second.⁵⁵ His passionate interest in the theater was anything but abstract, as the historicist, sociological tendencies of *Le Monde dramatique* demonstrate: the world of the theater and the people (including women) who populate it were very real to him.

In the second place, it is not only Nerval’s own relationship to the theater that is at stake, but also the state of the world of acting more broadly. Chambers’s argument, emphasizing the pure

⁵⁰ *L’Ange et l’automate*, 10.

⁵¹ Joseph Méry, Gérard de Nerval, and Bernard Lopez, *L’Imagier de Harlem, ou la découverte de l’imprimerie*.

⁵² *L’Ange et l’automate*, 23.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁵ “Nerval et les aspects matériels du spectacle,” 127.

artifice of the actress, is underpinned by a Diderotian conception of acting. This conception, famously laid out in the *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, valorizes a stark distinction between art and life and identifies artifice as the essence of the actor's craft. Great actors, Diderot argues, are great because of their careful observation of human emotion, and their thoughtful development of a way of playing the part that conveys emotion to the spectator.⁵⁶ Their job is not to really feel the emotion they convey, but to create the optimal artifice to elicit the emotion in their audience.⁵⁷ Acted and lived sensibility are two entirely different things (the traits required to be a good actor and to be a good spectator are not the same here), and the best actors are those without a strong character of their own.⁵⁸ For Chambers, the cultural dominance of this way of understanding acting through a complete break between the real and art is what explains the emptiness of the actress figure. However, Diderot's conception of acting dates from the 18th century, and corresponds to a much more Classical aesthetic than the one that came to prominence during Nerval's lifetime. When we think about the Romantic renovation of the theater, we tend to emphasize the generic innovation of the melodrama and especially of the drama, with their rejection of Classical formal constraints in favor of representations more true to life. This transformation of theater during the 19th century in fact went well beyond the plays themselves: the visual elements of décor and costumes became more realistic and historically accurate, and the staging and acting became more natural.⁵⁹ In the realm of décor, the realism introduced by Romanticism entailed an intensification of artifice, with the construction of elaborate sets and the invention of special effects, particularly of light. In the realm of acting, however, Romantic realism marked a turn away from artifice toward a sincere, spontaneous style of performance.

Until the early 19th century, actors in the major Parisian theaters had been trained almost exclusively at the Conservatory, where they studied a histrionic and affected style of acting. Like Diderot's great actors, these men and women cultivated artificial gestures and ways of speaking to create forceful, grandiose performances. Much closer to declamation than to contemporary acting, this style of performance began evolving toward a more expressive style during the Restoration, with the celebrated tragedian François-Joseph Talma.⁶⁰ But it was the visit of a Shakespearean company from London in 1827, the year after Talma's death, that blew the doors off the old theater. Instead of standing around the prompter's box declaiming their lines, the English actors moved around the stage as though it were real space; rather than making restrained, cultivated gestures and facial expressions, they were natural and expressive.⁶¹ Paired with the violence of Shakespeare's plays, their acting came as a shock and a revelation to Parisian theater audiences. The English immediately influenced the acting of the promising young actors and actresses of the period, including Frédéric Lemaître, Bocage, and Marie Dorval, causing Delacroix to observe, "Our own actors have gone back to school."⁶²

Not all actors entirely embraced the new aesthetic, of course, and many of the great rivalries of the century, including that between Marie Dorval and Mlle Mars, continued to play out around

⁵⁶ *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, 33.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 61 and 77.

⁵⁹ For a broad overview of 19th-century French theater, see the chapter on France in Donald Roy's *Romantic and Revolutionary Theater, 1789-1860*; see also Marvin A. Carlson, *The French Stage in the Nineteenth Century*, and F.W.J. Hemmings, *The Theater Industry in Nineteenth-Century France*. For surveys with an emphasis on the genres of Romantic theater, see Gérard Gengembre, *Le théâtre français au 19^e siècle*, and Marie-Pierre Le Hir, *Le Romantisme aux enchères: Ducange, Pixérécourt, Hugo*.

⁶⁰ Roy, *Romantic and Revolutionary Theater*, 346.

⁶¹ Hemmings, *The Theater Industry in Nineteenth-Century France*, 212-13.

⁶² Cited in Carlson, *The French Stage in the Nineteenth Century*, 60.

competing styles of acting.⁶³ Overall, however, the Conservatory's Diderotian aesthetic was largely displaced by the realist and sentimental tendencies of Romanticism, in a "gradual replacement of an art of acting recognizably governed by precedent and artifice to one that was more freely expressive, more 'true to life' in its representation of human behavior."⁶⁴ The actress of the mid-nineteenth century, then, was not necessarily the wholly artificial creature of Diderot's ideal, and Nerval's actress was not necessarily Chambers's Aspasia. The heartless woman the protagonist is warned about in "Sylvie" is, after all, the actress of an earlier generation (the uncle's late eighteenth-century youth) rather than the new, spontaneously expressive actress of 1830.

The transformation that replaced the artifice of the *ancien régime* actress with the naivety of the Romantic actress was a historical phenomenon of great interest to Nerval and his colleagues during the first year of their periodical venture, *Le Monde dramatique*.⁶⁵ In the issues that Nerval edited in 1835, the actress is a major subject of reflection (much more than she was after Nerval and his co-editor resigned), yet she is never treated as a timeless or universal figure, as a mere trope. The journal as a whole takes a highly historicist view of the theater, and the actress is no exception. Two series of articles in particular, both published during Nerval's tenure as editor, are of particular interest here: "Mœurs dramatiques" ["Dramatic Mores"] and "Des Filles d'opéra. 1770" ["Opera Girls. 1770"]. These two series provided venues in which to explore and weigh in on the changing social status of actresses and the changing aesthetics of acting that were transforming the way the actress operated in the social imaginary. Here we begin to see more clearly what was at stake for Nerval in this transformation, and so to appreciate what he valued in the creative practice of the actress (and what his protagonist hopes to find, but does not, in Aurélie): a commitment to joining art and life, fiction and reality.

What strikes one most about these articles, published by a group of writers at the heart of a burgeoning dramatic Romanticism, is how often they lament the changes to "la race des *actrices*."⁶⁶ We might expect the expressiveness of the Romantic actress and her newfound naturalness to be an unquestioned improvement for these young critics and playwrights (strongly associated with literary Romanticism), but the issue proves to be more complex than this. Two schools of actresses are seen to exist in Paris at the same time: one, "le vrai type, heureusement conserve en elle, des filles de l'opéra en 1770" ["the real type, happily conserves within herself the opera girls in 1770"], while the other is "plus naïve et plus vraie" ["more naïve and more true"].⁶⁷ Each is attractive in its own way, in accordance with the charms of the woman herself, the particularity of her talent. Mlle Mars, representing the old guard at the Comédie-Française, is compared in her striking "esprit" ["wit"] with Marie Dorval, who "n'a pas précisément ce qu'on est convenu d'appeler de l'esprit de mots ou de conduite. Elle a toute la naïveté, le laisser-aller de l'artiste.[...] [E]lle ne cherche pas le mot, elle dit la passion, la peint, l'inspire ou l'éprouve.[...] [E]lle pleure des douleurs imaginaires qu'elle retrace, comme de ses propres douleurs : son cœur est brisé" ["does not quite have what is conventionally called witty speech or conduct. She has all the naivety and impulsivity of the artist.[...] She does not search for words, she speaks passion, paints it, inspires it or feels it.[...] She cries for the imaginary suffering she rehearses, as if for her own suffering: her heart is broken"].⁶⁸ We see here an

⁶³ See Anne Martin-Fugier, *Comédienne*.

⁶⁴ Roy, 332.

⁶⁵ While Nerval did not sign any of the articles in this review that he co-owned briefly with Anatole Bouchardy, and none can be attributed to him unproblematically, he clearly had a strong influence on the publication's interests. Without assigning any details of the analysis to him, we can assume that the broad outlines of a reflection on the transformations of the actress are likely in keeping with his own thinking on the matter.

⁶⁶ R. de B., "Des Belles actrices," *Le Monde dramatique*, 1:276.

⁶⁷ "Mœurs dramatiques. Les Actrices d'esprit. (Suite)," *Le Monde dramatique*, 2:42 and 43.

⁶⁸ "Mœurs dramatiques. Des Actrices d'esprit," *Le Monde dramatique*, 2:13.

appreciation for the affective intensity of Dorval's acting, which she feels as though she were really living it, but this does not preclude an appreciation for Mlle Mars, nor does it forgive the mediocrity to which naïveté without genius is doomed. The potential for a powerful (or disappointing) performance exists on one side and the other, there being actresses with varying degrees of each kind of brilliance.⁶⁹

If no strong allegiances are declared with regard to the aesthetics of the performances given by these actresses, the same cannot be said for their lives off-stage. It is not simply in their understanding of their art that these actresses differ, according to the writers of *Le Monde dramatique*, but also in their understanding of the relationship between art and life. Here, the actress of times gone by (the opera girl of 1770) is the clear favorite. When the actress's art is considered beyond the stage, the naturalness of the new generation is seen to come at a great cost. This question of the actress in her "real" life is treated in the journal from a sociological as well as an aesthetic perspective, and is closely linked to the actress's integration into post-Revolutionary society. Along with her male counterpart, the Parisian actress had been excommunicated from the Catholic Church during the *ancien régime*, unable to marry or receive the last rites without renouncing her dramatic vocation. She was, then, excluded from society except in her role as actress: given the centrality of the church, she was effectively excluded from civil society, unable to play the social role of wife or mother and so allowed no identity aside from that of artist. By comparison, the actress of the 1830s belonged to the world in a different way: the simple expressiveness of her acting maps onto the straightforward bourgeois existence she was able to lead. Her vocation as an actress was now legally compatible with a social identity as wife and mother, making the question of marriage for actresses a crucial and controversial one.⁷⁰ According to the writers of *Le Monde dramatique*, by marrying, the actress removes herself from her public role (no less important than that of the clergy) and gives herself to one person. But what is really at stake here is less her romantic availability than her ideological allegiances. Through marriage, the actress allies herself with the interests of a family and allows money to overtake art as her motive for acting. "Parlez à ces dames de leur art, elles vous répondront : « J'ai deux mois de congé avec mon mari, tant par représentation, et nous comptons rompre notre engagement, si monsieur notre directeur de Paris ne veut pas augmenter mes appointemens [sic] et ceux de mon mari »" ["Speak to these women of their art, they'll reply: 'I have two months of vacation with my husband, so many francs per performance, and we intend to break our contract if our director in Paris refuses to increase my salary as well as my husband's'"].⁷¹ The "artiste" must at some level be a solitary creature, beyond the reach of the banal concerns that accompany her integration into society.

The marginal status of the 18th-century actress appears in *Le Monde dramatique* to have liberated her from such things. It is not that her position is simply romanticized here, for the journal's writers were acutely aware of the emotional havoc such extreme vulnerability wreaked on these women.⁷² And yet, the full existence of actresses as such seems to depend upon it. It is being denied any life outside their profession that makes actresses synonymous with their art: "C'est qu'en effet, Laguerre [, actrice du 18^e siècle], la belle Laguerre n'était elle-même que son masque" ["Indeed,

⁶⁹ The sense that these competing aesthetics both have a place in the contemporary theater is one that is also to be found throughout Nerval's *comptes-rendus* (reviews) of plays: it is not a question for him of condemning neo-Classical tragedy in favor of the new drama, or of absolutely favoring one style of acting over another; he is interested rather in what is appropriate to different genres—what stories as well as what actors. See for example his article in *L'Artiste*, 28 January, 1844 in *Œuvres complètes*, 1:766-71.

⁷⁰ H. Blanchard, "Mœurs dramatiques. Les Actrices mariées," *Le Monde dramatique*, 1:53-54.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁷² See, for example, Roger de Beauvoir, "Des Filles d'opéra. 1770. Mademoiselle Laguerre," *Le Monde dramatique*, 2:3-9.

Laguerre [an 18th-century actress], the beautiful Laguerre was no one apart from her mask”].⁷³ The artificiality of the 18th-century actress that, in the opening pages of *Sylvie*, seemed to indicate only a lack of real feeling, appears here in a more complicated light, as a total devotion to her art. It is not her stock portfolio or her children that concern her, but rather her beauty and the effect she can produce, onstage and off.⁷⁴ While so many contemporary actresses aspire to be *bas-bleus* (bluestockings), to produce something in their own name independent of any role, the 18th-century actress is her roles, her beauty, the constancy of her artifice.⁷⁵ She is not, as the narrator’s uncle suggests, a heartless creature who exists only in a mode of deception; she is rather an artist who is never *not* an artist, who has no “real” life separate from her art. She is not inauthentic, but her authenticity comes from the way she lives her life as a performer, without reference to any prior personal truth. It is this version of the actress as a consummate artist that the young writers of *Le Monde dramatique* mourn when they complain that “la race des actrices se perd” [“the race of actresses is in decline”].⁷⁶

At stake for them, and for Nerval with them, are the differences in the relationship between art and life, between imagination and reality, implied by the transformation of the actress. These differences are ones that have been theorized by Rousset in his analysis of modes of acting from the Baroque through Romanticism.⁷⁷ Rousset’s opposition between neo-Classicism and Romanticism corresponds to the distinction we have already observed in the history of the aesthetics of acting, with Romantic acting requiring an alignment between art and life. This mode of acting is epitomized by the literary play-within-a-play (or play-within-a-novel) tropes in which characters take on roles that correspond to what they already feel: “Telle est l’identité de la scène et de la vie qu’on ne peut représenter ce qu’on n’éprouve pas” [“Such is the coincidence between stage and life that one can play nothing one does not feel”].⁷⁸ We find again here the acting of a Marie Dorval, who feels what she acts but must also act what she feels. In such an aesthetic, the actor or actress is no longer someone who can embody any emotion and transition from one to another from night to night, or even over the course of a single, multi-play performance (as required by repertory theater). The actor is instead marked by his or her own sensibility and associated with the roles that sensibility serves best. Hence the rise of long runs and plays written for particular actors, allowing the actor to make a name by playing always more or less the same character.⁷⁹ Romantic actors are, in some ways, not actors at all. As Rousset observes, the realism of their performances is exacerbated to the point that “À pousser bien loin le dogme de la sincérité en art, l’art s’abolit dans la vie” [“When the dogma of sincerity in art is taken to extremes, art collapses into life”].⁸⁰

On the other end of the spectrum in Rousset’s account is the neo-Classical actor, who corresponds to something like Diderot’s vision, in which actors suspend their own identities in order to create the illusion of the characters. In the theater, neo-Classical actors are *all* art. Their real lives do not come into play, neither impact nor are impacted by the illusion they creates. This account applies an absolute separation of life and art where the people who actors are outside the theater

⁷³ Ibid., 4.

⁷⁴ This broad shift toward a worldlier actress, less reducible to her profession, is evident as well in 19th-century portraiture. From the earlier practice of painting actors exclusively in the roles for which they were best known, there is a transition toward “des représentations en tenue de ville caractéristiques du nouveau rôle mondain que tiennent en particulier les comédiennes.” See Agathe Sanjuan, et al., *La Comédie-Française s’expose au Petit Palais*, 28.

⁷⁵ R. de B., “Des Belles actrices,” *Le Monde dramatique*, 1:278.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 276.

⁷⁷ See *L’intérieur et l’extérieur*.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 152.

⁷⁹ Carlson, *The French Stage in the Nineteenth Century*, 6.

⁸⁰ Rousset, 153.

make no contact with the roles they play. As we have seen, however, this account of neo-Classical acting implies an opposition between the actor's *real* life and the actor's performance that is missing from the account of the 18th-century actress in *Le Monde dramatique*. In her case, there is not a life outside the theater that can be opposed to the art of her performance. Even offstage, she lives as an actress. There is for her no mode of life that is not simultaneously a mode of art, no reality that is not also a fiction. She corresponds much more to what Rousset writes of the Baroque actor, who has no self apart from the roles he takes on one after another. The Baroque actor's roles are fictions, but what truth he has is through them: "La vérité du jeu fait la vérité de l'homme qui le joue[...]" ["The truth of the performance creates the truth of the man who performs it"].⁸¹ For Rousset, this feature of the Baroque has primarily to do with the capacity of the role to act back on the actor, which is not precisely what is at stake in the artistic life of the opera girl. This model is useful, nevertheless, as a third position between the neo-Classical and the Romantic that conceives of art and life as intimately related.⁸² In the opera girl's life as a constant creative practice, imbricating sincerity and artifice, we finally find clear resonances of *Sylvie's* treatment of tradition. The 18th-century actress's very life appears as a kind of imaginative practice in which the writers of *Le Monde dramatique* feel they participate as part of her public. In her very way of living as an artist, onstage and off, she shares with others (and perhaps lovers, above all) a kind of performance of life that does not fool them (they do not need the uncle's warning), but rather initiates a kind of collective fiction. In this practice of pretending but not faking, the opera girl creates something like what Sylvie creates with the dress up clothes, something like what the protagonist of *Sylvie* finds in the festival. If we give the 18th-century actress her rightful place in *Sylvie*, it seems that when the protagonist gives up on the Valois and returns to Paris (when he shifts his hopes from Sylvie to Aurélie), it is precisely such an actress he seeks.

Performing Naivety

After Sylvie refuses to share in traditional practice with him, the protagonist of *Sylvie* returns to Paris in pursuit of Aurélie, hoping to collaborate with her in creating a mode of lived performance that conjoins sincerity and artifice. The series of memories through which the narrator leads readers while his younger self travels through the Valois reveals the continuity between traditional and theatrical practice, and sets the stage for the protagonist's turn to the actress as another practitioner of collective fictional forms. However, this pursuit is no less disappointing than the last, as Aurélie turns out have the sensibility of a Romantic actress far more than that of an opera girl. What she wants from the protagonist is authenticity, sincerity.

On the protagonist's return from the Valois, he sets his sights once again on Aurélie and decides finally to approach her. But establishing a relationship with her on the terms he wants, at the juncture of fiction and reality, requires a great deal of engineering on his part to create a desirable illusion and to position it in direct relation to their lived romance—not unlike Sylvie's engineering of the dress-up scene. So it is that he doesn't approach Aurélie immediately (which his newly-recovered inheritance would allow him to do), but rather takes his time in setting up the conditions for their meeting. He does not simply present himself to her as the desirous man he is; instead, he approaches her in the role of suitor. This is, we must recall from the story's opening sentence, a role he had already played, unbeknownst to Aurélie, during the entire year leading up to his departure for the Valois in search of Sylvie: "Je sortais d'un théâtre où tous les soirs je paraissais aux avant-scènes en

⁸¹ Ibid., 156-57.

⁸² I will return in Chapter Four to Rousset's fascinating exploration of the Baroque as a third position in this structure, enabling entirely different relations between identity and role than those we are familiar with from neo-Classicism or Romanticism.

grande tenue de soupirant” [“I was coming out of a theater where, night after night, I would make my appearance in one of the stage boxes, dressed in the elegant garb of an ardent suitor”].⁸³ All those nights at the theater, Aurélie was not the only actor; the young protagonist, too, dutifully played his part as her admirer. It is in the guise of this admirer that he finally introduces himself to Aurélie, making his first advances in the form of anonymous letters, signed only “*Un inconnu*” [“*A Stranger*”].⁸⁴ The protagonist does not start to woo the actress *as himself*. By writing her letters, he appears before her as nothing more than the character of “Suitor” (a role he hopes to play someday in the flesh) while he, the writer-actor of those letters, sets off to travel around Germany.

Aurélie gets to meet the real man behind the fiction of the *inconnu* only after the protagonist has written a fiction that the two of them can perform together. Indeed, while he is traveling, he composes a play with her in mind as the leading lady, a play that he uses to get close to her on his return to Paris:

Je n’oublierai jamais le jour où elle me permit de lui lire la pièce. Les scènes d’amour étaient préparées à son intention. Je crois bien que je les dis avec âme, mais surtout avec enthousiasme. Dans la conversation qui suivit, je me révélai comme l’*inconnu* des deux lettres. Elle me dit : « Vous êtes bien fou : mais revenez me voir... Je n’ai jamais pu trouver quelqu’un qui sût m’aimer ».

[I shall never forget the day she allowed me to read her the play. The love scenes had been written with her in mind. I believe I recited them with spirit, and above all with rapture. In the conversation that ensued, I revealed I was the *Stranger* of the two letters. She said to me: ‘You’re mad, but come and see me again... I have yet to find a man who knows how to love me.’]⁸⁵

This scene of the reading of the play is a promising one: the protagonist performs for Aurélie and reveals himself to be the one who has in fact been performing as her secret admirer for quite some time, and the actress responds positively to his performances. She is baffled, perhaps, but also intrigued by his actorly approach to love, and seems to see promise in it, all other attempts at love having failed her. She agrees to the play as well as to an increasingly intimate relationship with the protagonist, agreeing to link her art and her life in collaboration with him. The romantic fiction he has carefully orchestrated thus seems to be bound for success.

There is still an element missing, however, in order to establish the desired conjunction between art and life, between on stage and off stage. It is the revelation of this element that will destroy the protagonist’s relationship with Aurélie. The play he has written for her, the one that allows their real relationship to be doubled by the romance she performs on stage, does not tell just any love story, but takes up the protagonist’s own memories of Adrienne, mediated through the story of the love of Francesco Colonna for Lucretia Polia de Trevisse: “j’avais entrepris de fixer dans une action poétique les amours du peintre Colonna pour la belle Laura, que ses parents firent religieuse, et qu’il aima jusqu’à la mort,” writes the narrator [“I had undertaken to portray in a poetic action the loves of the painter Colonna for the fair Laura, whom her parents had forced into a nunnery and whom he loved unto his dying day”].⁸⁶ In engaging Aurélie to stage this particular romance, the protagonist deploys the same kind of traditional imagination that Sylvie used to create

⁸³ “Sylvie,” *Les Filles du feu* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:537/*Selected Writings*, 145.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 564/173.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 565/174.

⁸⁶ “Sylvie,” *Les Filles du feu* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:565/*Selected Writings*, 174.

a mini-festival around the wedding clothes. He begins with a memory of Adrienne that, via the song she sang, holds within it the kind of collective practice for which he longs. Then he finds an image that can mediate a repetition of that memory the way the Watteau painting mediated the archery festival, only here he turns to an imaginary drawn from Renaissance literature. The selection of Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* as the source for the protagonist's play allows not only for the repetition of Adrienne in the person of Lucretia (the young beauty lost to a convent), but also, and just as importantly, for the repetition of the festival culture of the Valois in the romance's voyage to Cythera.⁸⁷ The play, consciously performed, would thus intertwine even more intricately reality and fiction, repetition of received forms (traditional practices, memories, and theatrical roles) and creative innovation. It would allow for a lucid fictionalization of a past that the participants might still take naïve pleasure in reviving. It can only do all this, however, with Aurélie as a conscious participant, sharing not only in the staging of the fiction but also in the sense of repetition that accompanies it.

This is precisely what Aurélie refuses to be for the protagonist: a willing participant in the full functioning of his fictional practice. He does not broach the question right away, but there is nonetheless a sense that the relationship will only satisfy him once she is fully on board, and so he must eventually test her willingness to play with him in life as well as in art. On a tour with the acting troupe, he takes her to the castle where he first saw Adrienne—to one of the Valois sites that invokes the entirety of the old community and its practices. He hopes that it will affect her, that she will feel here the resonance of what she has been acting out all this time. She is unmoved, however, so he takes a more direct approach to elicit her complicity:

Alors je lui racontai tout ; je lui dis la source de cet amour entrevu dans les nuits, rêvé plus tard, réalisé en elle. Elle m'écoutait sérieusement et me dit : « 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 ! »

[Then I told her everything; I told her the source of this love first glimpsed in the night, then in dreams, and realized in her. She listened attentively, then said: ‘You do not love me! You’re expecting me to say: “The actress and the nun are one and the same.” You’re chasing after some drama, and you can’t come up with the dénouement. What nonsense! I no longer believe you at all!’]⁸⁸

The protagonist faces the same incomprehension from Aurélie as *Sylvie* has faced from so many readers, who have assumed that the repetition of Adrienne in Aurélie is to be taken literally, that the illusion the protagonist seeks in his performance with Aurélie is in fact a delusion. The convergence between the two women is ridiculous to the actress, and makes clear that the protagonist does not love her “for herself.” But this is not true in the way that she understands it. She is not asked by the protagonist's fiction to *be* the nun, nor is she asked to hide herself by *pretending* to be the nun. She is rather asked to *play* the nun, to inhabit simultaneously the lucid awareness of her own acting and the pleasure of allowing that acting into the reality of her life. What the protagonist asks of her (asks to share with her) is a mode of performance that has much more in common with participation in a

⁸⁷ The mediation of the narrator's memories of the Valois here by Colonna is, as we see, further mediated by Watteau's *Voyage to Cythera*, which was such an effective mediating element for the young innovators of the archery festival.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 566/176.

festival or with the play of children (like the young archer-knights) than it does with the theater as either pure artifice or pure sincerity.

This is not a kind of performance that interests Aurélie, however. She does not want to play in her real life; she wants to be sincere, to be loved for herself.⁸⁹ She is, in many ways, just like Sylvie, looking for a sensible, realistic love rather than a wild, imaginative one. Indeed, once Aurélie has refused a full part in his fiction, the protagonist starts to suspect that he has a rival for her affections: “Je crus apercevoir qu’elle avait un faible pour le régisseur [...]. Cet homme était d’un caractère excellent et lui avait rendu des services” [“I seemed to notice that she had a weak spot for the director [...]. He was a man of excellent character who had done a great deal for her”].⁹⁰ The director is an actor, too, but there is no comparison between him and our actorly protagonist, for the director’s appeal lies entirely in his off-stage practicality, in who he is as a man. What Aurélie wants in a lover is not an imaginative collaborator, or someone trying to work out a drama in real life, but the business partner needed by the actress-entrepreneur. The protagonist’s invitation to play with him in a shared fiction is not what she understands by love; she is looking rather for the real life support the director might offer her: “Aurélie m’a dit un jour « Celui qui m’aime, le voilà ! »” [“One day Aurélie said to me: ‘You know who truly loves me? That man there’”].⁹¹ She, like Sylvie, has no interest in mixing love and illusion, and so the protagonist is left without a partner to create with him the kind of collective imaginative practice he longs for.

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, the double failure of the protagonist’s pursuit of Sylvie and Aurélie, piled on top of his inability to recover Adrienne, makes *Sylvie* read as a melancholic tale. A young man chases his desires up and down the French countryside, only to be disappointed by the impossibility of what he seeks. In the Idealist reading that *Sylvie* seems to encourage with its pastoralism, it is naïve authenticity he seeks, both in the countryside where he might have been successful if he were less radical in his rejection of time, and in the city where he is doomed to come up against a fundamentally inauthentic culture. As we have seen, however, *Sylvie* puts forward a conception of the protagonist’s desire that disrupts this picture. First, it is a desire for a practice of tradition, rather than for a transcendence of time or a return to origins. Second, that traditional practice is not simply associated with naivety and authenticity, but rather with a conjunction of naivety and fiction, beyond an opposition between authenticity and inauthenticity. And third, the desired practice can exist as easily in Paris as in the Valois. If the protagonist struggles to find the conjugation of art and life he is looking for, then, it is not because he desires an impossible degree of naivety, but because he desires an unfashionable degree of artifice. In the cases both of Sylvie and folk traditions, and of Aurélie and acting, *Sylvie* shows mid-19th-century culture turning away from a vital relationship to illusion and artifice, in favor of an aesthetic of sincerity more compatible with bourgeois values. The obsession with naivety that *Sylvie* seems to espouse is pointed up through the story as rather an obsession of the culture at large—and of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, as much as anyone else.

The story stages a pastoralism and Idealism that it simultaneously critiques—but this critique does not simply negate the pastoralism as an inauthentic alibi. *Sylvie* does not oppose its apparent meaning to its real meaning, but rather performs a role appropriate to its venue while also acknowledging the status of that role *as* a role. The narrator of *Sylvie* performs Idealism the way the

⁸⁹ She is like the actress in Nerval’s one-act play “Corilla,” who presents herself to each of her two suitors under a different guise—to one as a cruel queen, to the other as a poor flower-seller—and so seems to be “comédienne en amour comme au théâtre” [“actress in love as at the theater”], but turns out to be simply scheming in service of her desire to be loved for her *true* self. The play’s entire drama is in determining which man deserves to see her authentic face. See “Corilla,” *Les Filles du feu* and *Petits châteaux de Bohême* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:420-37.

⁹⁰ “Sylvie,” *Les Filles du feu* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:567 / *Selected Writings*, 175-76.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 567/176.

young archers perform chivalry. But is certainly not a role he chose, as the irony of the “Dernier Feuille” makes clear. If the narrator closes the story by giving the authorized interpretation (“Telles sont les chimères qui charment et égarent au matin de la vie” [“Such are the chimeras that beguile and mislead us in the morning of life”]), he also insists that this interpretation is but a rehearsal: “qu’on me pardonne ce style vieilli” [“forgive me my old-fashioned turns of phrase”].⁹² It is not a role he chose, because it is a role that does not know it is one but rather understands itself to be natural even when it is clearly “vieilli.” In place of the unselfconscious sincerity of its apparent Idealism, *Sylvie* offers a view of sincerity itself as always mixed with artifice, as valuable only insofar as it is allowed to coexist with illusion.

We see this in the festivals that the narrator recalls and in the romantic fiction the protagonist invents for Aurélie, but we also see it in the Valois itself. According to the pastoral logic *Sylvie* puts forward, the Valois is a place of immediacy and authenticity. It is natural, free of any artifice—and that is why the protagonist cannot get back there. This is the Valois of Rousseau, the subject of the narrator’s bittersweet nostalgia: “Rousseau dit que le spectacle de la nature console de tout. Je cherche parfois à retrouver mes bosquets de Clarens perdus au nord de Paris, dans les brumes. Tout cela est bien changé !” [“Rousseau said the spectacle of nature provides consolation for everything. Sometimes I go looking for my groves of Clarens again, lost somewhere to the north of Paris in the mists. Everything has so changed!”]⁹³ The mist figures again the elusive origin concealed in the Valois, never to be recovered because time has done its work. And yet, the authentic Valois the narrator seems to mourn is not quite (or not only) what it seems. The narrator is indeed nostalgic, but the object of his nostalgia is not merely authenticity, it is authenticity understood as a form of artifice:

Quelquefois j’ai besoin de revoir ces lieux de solitude et de rêverie. J’y relève tristement en moi-même les traces fugitives d’une époque où le naturel était affecté ; je souris parfois en lisant sur le flanc des granits certains vers de Roucher, qui m’avaient paru sublimes,—ou des maximes de bienfaisance au-dessus d’une fontaine ou d’une grotte consacré à Pan. Les étangs, creusés à si grands frais, étalent en vain leur eu morte que le cygne dédaigne.

[Every now and then I feel the urge to revisit these scenes of solitude and reverie. There I sadly rediscover within myself the fleeting traces of an era when naturalness was affected; I occasionally smile when I read certain lines of Roucher that had once seemed so sublime to me chiseled into the granite rocks—or else philanthropic maxims inscribed above a fountain or a grotto dedicated to Pan. The ponds, dug at such expense, are now stagnant expanses, shunned by swans.]⁹⁴

The Valois that the narrator reminisces about here is not an original, natural landscape, but a constructed one. What is to be mourned is the artful mediation of the real that does one better than the real itself, the affectation that *makes* naturalness. This is the Valois hidden in the mists of *Sylvie*: not an unattainable authenticity but a conjunction of reality and illusion that lies beyond an opposition between authenticity and inauthenticity. We might also say, *Sylvie* is this Valois landscape, concealing within its mists a pastoralism enriched by the artifice through which it is created. The Valois of *Sylvie* is thus, like the Valois of *Les Nuits d’octobre*, a space beyond oppositions (between

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

sincerity and falseness, as between perception and imagination) in which the individual imagination can open itself to something that exceeds it. As we have seen, however, this Valois is not a space beyond the reach of authority, be it cultural or legal: proper forms of subjectivity are still enforced there, as are proper forms of writing. It is this legislation that I will consider in Chapter Three, where authoritarianism will assert itself on the scale of the state, and where Nerval's writing will be above all a work of evasion. In *Les Faux Sauniers*, fiction will be not only a victim but also a weapon of cultural authority, a weapon the writing subject will dodge by making himself a fiction.

Chapter Three

Fictional Crimes

Les Faux Saulniers

[Ils] sont devenus réels à force d'avoir été inventés.

[They have become real by dint of having been
invented.]

Nerval, "Histoire véridique du canard"¹

The Occasional and the Oppositional

In the first installment of the *feuilleton* *Les Faux Saulniers* [*The Salt Smugglers*], published October 24, 1850, Nerval explains to the director of *Le National* the strange authorial predicament he faces.² He has promised *Le National* a serialized historical portrait of an esoteric 18th-century thinker, the continuation of a series of portraits he has been publishing in various newspapers and journals.³ He discovered the subject for this latest study (a fascinating story of a radical priest's escape from the prisons of Fort l'Evêque and the Bastille) in a biography in a Frankfurt book market, but found the asking price for the book rather steep and chose not to buy it, counting instead on acquiring it back in Paris. Though further research has confirmed the book's existence and led Nerval to other sources documenting the abbé's life, the biography itself has not turned up by the deadline for the first installment. There can be no question of changing subjects: the publication of the study has already been announced in *Le National*, complete with its projected title: "Études historiques: Les Faux Saulniers (Extrait de la *Vie et aventures de l'abbé Bucquoi*)" ["Historical Studies: The Salt

¹ In *Œuvres complètes*, 1:860. Nerval is writing here of Kaspar Hauser and the brigand Schubry, two famous 19th-century canards. Literally a "duck," a canard is a bit of sensational news that may or may not be true. In his *Monographie de la presse parisienne*, Balzac describes the canard as being made up of "[l]a relation du fait anormal, monstrueux, impossible et vrai, possible et faux" ["the account of a strange, monstrous fact, impossible and true, possible and false"] (39).

² *Les Faux Saulniers* in *Œuvres complètes*, 2:1-169. The serial originally ran in the daily opposition paper *Le National* between October 24 and December 22, 1850. All English citations from *Les Faux Saulniers* will be quoted from Richard Sieburth's excellent translation *The Salt Smugglers*, which places a high value on the text's journalistic context, going so far as to approximate the formatting of its serial publication. All other translations are my own, except where indicated.

³ These studies, treating a mix of pre-revolutionary writers, mystics and socialists, were later collected in the 1852 volume *Les Illuminés*.

Smugglers (Extract from the *Life and Adventures of the Abbé Bucquoy*)”]. Nerval thus announces that he has no choice but to carry on with *Les Faux Saulniers* without the biography for reference.⁴

This situation is problematic (and interesting to Nerval) because of a new constraint that has been causing problems for French journalism since the summer. The Riancey amendment to the July 1850 Press Law placed a hefty stamp tax on the publication of *romans-feuilletons* (serialized novels) in political newspapers like *Le National*—a tax steep enough to ruin papers who dare publish any but the most profitable *romans-feuilletons*, or even anything that might be mistaken for a *roman-feuilleton*.⁵ Nerval, of course, is not a novelist; his extensive publishing in the press has rather consisted primarily of standard journalistic forms like theater columns, as well as travel writing and historical studies like the one he is trying to publish in *Le National*.⁶ The Riancey amendment should not, then, have any impact on Nerval’s writing, and yet, in *Les Faux Saulniers*, he presents this troublesome new law as a threat: without the biography of the abbé de Bucquoy in hand to serve as incontestable proof of the historicity of his subject, he asks, what is to keep the tax authorities from accusing him of writing a serial novel? “Moi-même, qui ne suis pas un romancier, je tremblais en songeant à cette interprétation vague, qu’il serait possible de donner à ces deux mots bizarrement accouplés: *feuilleton-roman*.[...] je commence à m’effrayer aujourd’hui des condamnations suspendues sur les journaux pour la moindre infraction au texte de la loi nouvelle” [“I myself, who am no novelist at all, was alarmed at the vagueness of interpretation invited by these two oddly coupled words: *serial novel*.[...] I’m beginning to get somewhat frightened about the penalties that threaten to befall any newspaper in violation of the slightest letter of the new law”].⁷

Nerval thus finds himself in a bind in the first installment of *Les Faux Saulniers*. The solution he proposes is to continue his search for historical documentation of the abbé, writing about that search until he can safely write his portrait of the abbé “d’une façon historique et non romanesque,—car il faut bien s’entendre sur les mots” [“in an historical rather than in a novelistic fashion,—for let’s at least get our terms clear”].⁸ “[J]e vous tiendrai au courant,” he assures the director of *Le National*, to whom the *feuilleton* is directly addressed, “du voyage que j’entreprends à la recherche de l’abbé de Bucquoy.—Ce personnage excentrique et éternellement fugitif ne peut échapper toujours à une investigation rigoureuse” [“I shall keep you abreast of my travels in search of the abbé de Bucquoy.—This eccentric and ever-so-slippery figure cannot hope to elude my painstaking investigation for very long”].⁹ Nerval’s quest for unimpeachable evidence begins in the first installment at the National Library and continues for weeks, through archives in Paris and beyond, and through the various kinds of documentation Nerval comes across in his research and his travels. As Malandain has observed, there is something of the detective story about *Les Faux Saulniers*: Nerval follows the abbé’s traces through police records, family genealogies, and memoirs,

⁴ “Note sur le texte” [*Les Faux Saulniers*] in *Œuvres complètes*, 2:1327.

⁵ It is worth noting that while in English the historical phenomenon of the serial novel is identified in name with the feature of seriality (the fact of its being broken down into installments that were published one at a time), in French it is identified with the area of the newspaper in which it was published. The *feuilleton*, which long predated the *roman-feuilleton*, refers to a distinct space usually on the bottom of the first two to four pages of a newspaper; because of this position it is also known as the *rez-de-chaussée* (ground floor), in opposition to the main news stories above it on the *haut-de-page* (upper page). Before the advent of the *roman-feuilleton* in 1836, and a few days a week after that time, the *feuilleton* was filled with theater columns and reviews, accounts of meetings of the Académie Française, and sometimes travel writing or historical studies. See Queffélec, *Le roman-feuilleton français aux XIXe siècle*.

⁶ For a detailed documentary study of Nerval’s career as a journalist, see Brix, *Nerval Journaliste*; for reflection on the relationship between his journalistic writing and his fictional practice, see Dina Blanc, *Nerval in the Newspaper*.

⁷ *Les Faux Saulniers* in *Œuvres complètes*, 2:5-6/*The Salt Smugglers* 8-9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 5/8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 10/11.

trying to track down something that can guarantee the truth of his account of the man and so avoid contravention of the law.¹⁰

The ongoing absence of the source that would anchor the portrait Nerval was hired to write keeps him in constant and explicit relationship to the law. Throughout the installments, Nerval reiterates his supposed anxiety about the Riancey amendment and the consequences he could bring down on *Le National* if his text looks like a novel. He reassures the director of *Le National* again and again, “Ce n’est pas un roman,” “Ne craignez rien,—ce n’est pas un *roman*” [“This is not a novel,” “Have no fear,—this is not a *novel*”].¹¹ The reiteration of his anxieties and reassurances is not, however, as straightforwardly submissive as it might initially appear. The *feuilleton*’s reaction to the constraint of the law is not a constant genuflection but rather a kind of dance: rather than stifling the text, the constraint provides its narrative energy, spurring it onward. Nerval insists that he must keep writing in ever more inventive ways, until the conditions of the law can be met. More importantly, the content of the installments that so volubly proclaim their legality seems cherry-picked to provoke the law, to put pressure in every conceivable way on its logic. The investigative structure has none of the clear-cut orderliness of a good-faith inquiry, but rather indulges in every possible digression—as long as there is documentation for it, of course. The mention of a “*prétendu comte de Bucquoy*” [“*alleged count de Bucquoy*”] in the police records at the Bibliothèque nationale, for example, is duly noted and analyzed, but then gives way to the transcription from those same records of a deathbed dispute over the contents of a will.¹² The potentially problematic transcription is included here despite the risk it poses, even though it has nothing to do with the missing abbé. From this brief early digression to the weeks-long detour through the racy memoirs of the abbé’s great-aunt Angélique de Longueval, the elements of Nerval’s text that seem most likely to displease the tax office and so to need defending are not unavoidable risks but seem to be included precisely to provoke the law.

The obsessive references to the *feuilleton*’s respect for the constraints of the law, its constant insistence that it is *not* a novel, thus create an exhilarating effect, wherein what Chambers calls its “overt, and indeed ostentatious submissiveness to the law” shades into blatant provocation.¹³ When Nerval summarizes Angélique’s memoirs, he seems to delight in both arousing and dismissing the director’s supposed anxiety, in what seems less like a plea of innocence than a taunt: “P.S. Est-ce que vous craindriez d’insérer demain la suite de l’histoire de la grand-tante de l’abbé de Bucquoy? On m’a assuré que dans les circonstances actuelles cela pouvait présenter des dangers.—*Cependant, c’est de l’histoire*” [“P.S. Would you be afraid to insert the continuation of the tale of the great aunt of the abbé de Bucquoy in tomorrow’s installment? I have been informed that given the present state of affairs this might be a dangerous course of action.—*And yet, it’s straight history*”].¹⁴ As Daniel Sangsue observes, “[Nerval] ne fait pas qu’esquiver habilement l’amendement Riancey, sa pratique anti-romanesque s’accompagne d’une réflexion pénétrante sur la pertinence des distinctions génériques et leur fondement, de même que sur les conditions et la possibilité d’une inscription du réel dans le texte” [“Nerval not only skillfully evades the Riancey amendment, his anti-novelistic practice is accompanied by a penetrating reflection on the pertinence of generic distinctions and their basis, as

¹⁰ *Nerval, ou l’incendie du théâtre*, 78.

¹¹ *Les Faux Saulniers* in *Œuvres complètes*, 2:22 and 14/*The Salt Smugglers*, 20 and 14.

¹² *Ibid.*, 12/13.

¹³ *Room for Maneuver*, 116. While Chambers’s reading emphasizes the melancholic dimension of Nerval’s opposition to the law through self-erasure, rather than the more active forms of critique I will explore here, his insistence on the layered nature of oppositional texts is essential, and missing from the overly-literal readings of Nerval’s account of his submission to the law, cf. Daniel Desormeaux, “Sans foi ni loi: (Nerval et Marx) pour ou contre le roman feuilleton.”

¹⁴ *Les Faux Saulniers* in *Œuvres complètes*, 2:55/*The Salt Smugglers*, 43. My emphasis.

well as on the conditions and possibility of an inscription of the real in the text”].¹⁵ Indeed, more than protecting himself from a law that threatens the writing he intended to do, Nerval seems to conceive of the project of *Les Faux Saulniers* precisely in order to provoke the law, selecting sources that walk the line between fact and fiction, from Angélique’s titillating memoirs to Valois peasants’ rewriting of French history as legend. Despite the impression Nerval gives in the first installment, then, we must read *Les Faux Saulniers* not as what we might think of as a *passively* occasional text, unavoidably shaped by the intervention of the law, but rather as *actively* occasional, itself intended to intervene with regard to the logic of the law.

To understand the text this way, as an intentional engagement with the terms set forward by the new Press Law, we must part company with existing readings of *Les Faux Saulniers*.¹⁶ These readings begin without fail from the account of his subjection to circumstance that Nerval puts forward in the text’s early installments, and in so doing they miss the irony of Nerval’s voluntary and provocative engagement with the Press Law. Even the few readings that do not see Nerval as a victim here, but laud the force and wit of his political critique, do not break with the assumption that the terms of the confrontation are those Nerval makes explicit.¹⁷ By subordinating the text to the historical contingency of the July 1850 Press Law, scholars use history with regard to *Les Faux Saulniers* the way that psychology is so often used with regard to Nerval’s other works: as an external force to which Nerval’s writing can be attributed as a symptom or reaction. A reading of this *feuilleton* that does not take for granted its inevitability under the circumstances, then, will restore not only the full effect of Nerval’s irony, but also his status as an intentional, insightful writer. By asking why Nerval engages with Riancey, we can appreciate not only Nerval’s remarkable ability to make lemonade (both bitterly ironic and sweetly hilarious) out of political lemons, but also the tactical ingenuity of his position taking.

Once we allow Nerval’s confrontation with the law to become a question in this way, it becomes clear that we cannot look only at the features of his writing and of the law to which he draws our attention—that is, we cannot think only in terms of the novel. Nerval, after all, was not a novelist and did not intend to write a novel in *Les Faux Saulniers*.¹⁸ When he laments the “beau roman” [“fine novel”] that might have been written by combining the raw data of the abbé’s story with a love plot to motivate his actions, the irony of his depiction of the novel and its predictable narrative processes is nearly as cutting as his irony regarding the law itself.¹⁹ If Nerval’s confrontation with the law in *Les Faux Saulniers* is a voluntary engagement, it must be motivated by something more than the prohibition of the serial novel, to which he demonstrates no great loyalty. The great critical force of the text must counter the authority of the law on a higher-stakes matter.

¹⁵ *Le récit excentrique*, 406.

¹⁶ These readings are still very few, though the decision to publish the version of *Les Faux Saulniers* that ran in *Le National* in the second volume of the new Pléiade edition has brought increased attention to a text that was, up until that edition, largely ignored as an early draft of “Angélique.” The publication of the text in its *feuilleton* form (now doubled by Sieburth’s English translation) signals a new interest in the occasional dimension of Nerval’s writing by not absolutely privileging the more “timeless” or “literary” iteration of the text in *Les Filles du feu*.

¹⁷ See especially Brix, “Nerval et la réflexion politique”; Chambers, *Room for Maneuver*; and Sieburth, “Translator’s Postface” to *The Salt Smugglers*. Blanc’s *Nerval in the Newspaper* goes the furthest in this direction, noting the ways in which Nerval changes the terms of the debate on fiction established by the National Assembly; but even she does not call into question the primacy or significance of the ban on the novel for Nerval’s text.

¹⁸ *Les Faux Saulniers* in *Œuvres complètes*, 2:18 / *The Salt Smugglers*, 17.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 138/101. Though some scholars read this as an authentic lament for the novel Nerval could have written, his general indifference to the novel (evinced by the early abandonment of his only foray into the genre with the *Marquis de Fayolle* in 1849, as well as by his more general resistance to the delimitation of a purely fictional literary space) suggests that irony is at work here, too, and that “quel beau roman” is intended as a send-up of the novel. Cf. Dunn, “Nerval: Transgression and the *Ammendement Riancey*”; and Blanc, *Nerval in the Newspaper*.

This confrontation has sometimes been understood as representative of Nerval's non-specific oppositional politics. In such readings, Nerval is seen to take a critical stance in relation to any manifestation of arbitrary power, from censorship to passport inspections to incarceration, without there being any specifically literary stakes.²⁰ The remove at which *Les Faux Saulniers* seems to stand from Nerval's other works might tempt us to follow this lead and focus on the thematics of opposition *qua* opposition that permeates the text, but the distance between the concerns of *Les Faux Saulniers* and the work of a more literary Nerval is only apparent. The specific terms of Nerval's confrontation with the law here have everything to do with his literary endeavors, and particularly with the relationship of Nerval's work to culturally dominant forms like the novel (though not in the terms he makes explicit). In order to uncover this relevance, we must revive the richness of the issues at stake in the July 1850 Press Law.²¹ We must unearth the unique discursive features of the mid-century press that troubled the National Assembly (the imbrication of fact and fiction and the collective nature of authorship) as well as the terms in which the law sought to repress those features. Only then can we think alongside Nerval about the relationship of journalistic writing to other forms, including the novel, and about the relationship of individual to collective voices, and recognize the specific opposition he makes in *Les Faux Saulniers* to the marginalization of the unique literary space still constituted by journalism during this period.

Political Guarantees and Literary Constraints

The Press Law of July 1850 must be understood as part and parcel of the increasingly repressive policy of France's Second Republic.²² Following the violent defeat of the proletarian uprising in Paris in June 1848 and its echo in the defeat of the petty-bourgeois and proletarian insurgency in June 1849, the forces of socialism and democracy were overpowered in the National Assembly by the conservative Party of Order.²³ With the abolition of universal manhood suffrage at the end of May 1850, the summer announced the death of the dream of a democratic republic and the consolidation of conservative parliamentary authority. The July Press Law played a crucial role in this consolidation, limiting the political power of the press, the National Assembly's great opponent in "la lutte sourde des deux grands pouvoirs de l'Etat" ["the mute struggle of the State's two great powers"].²⁴ The Assembly used this piece of tax policy to target political and economic papers, making no secret of its intentions to weaken press influence, or, as proponents of a free press had it, to attack liberty and repress political dissent. Given the political climate during that summer, when the legitimate means of popular political participation through voting had just been eliminated and the politicizing of the people was much to be feared as a force capable of destabilizing the republic, the baldness of the anti-press rhetoric framing the Assembly's discussion of this law is not

²⁰ This thematics of opposition, strongly associated for Nerval with the Valois region, runs throughout *Les Faux Saulniers*: from Angélique's refusal to succumb to paternal authority, through the interventions of arbitrary state power in Nerval's own life in the form of gendarmes asking for papers and his eviction justified by eminent domain, to the *abbé* himself, that paragon of opposition. For readings of this politics of opposition, see especially Brix, "Nerval et la réflexion politique"; and Chambers, *Room for Maneuver*.

²¹ This focus on the world of the press is not a matter of introducing questions foreign to Nerval's text; as a writer who, like many of his generation, made his living through the ongoing work of journalistic writing, Nerval was without doubt proximate enough to the press to feel the full impact of the July 1850 press law.

²² *Loi du 16-23 juillet 1850, sur le cautionnement des journaux et le timbre des écrits périodiques et non périodiques*. [Law of 16-23 July 1850, On the Bond on Newspapers and the Stamp Tax on Periodical and Non-periodical Writing.] For more on this law within the context of press reforms during the Second Republic more broadly, see Christophe Charle, *Le siècle de la presse (1830-1939)*.

²³ Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* remains an invaluable account of the complex jockeying that took place during the short-lived Second Republic; see also T. J. Clark's *The Absolute Bourgeois* for a detailed chronology.

²⁴ *Le National*, July 16, 1850.

surprising. What is perhaps surprising, however, is the way that the Party of Order, openly fearful that newspapers had become too influential in shaping the public's political ideas in view of fomenting discontent, sought to rein in the press. The Press Law did not primarily target specific political content (though there were certainly elements of such censorship within it), but instead used tax measures to take aim at two formal features of journalistic writing that were believed to be dangerous to the government and to order. The overall structure of the law was borrowed from earlier legislation that regulated the press in ways that made sense given the way the press operated during the period, but the law also contained two amendments that sought to force fundamental changes in the newspaper's operations. These amendments, much more explicitly political and moral in ambition than the rest of the tax law, demonstrate the disjunctures between the press as it existed and the press as the National Assembly wanted it to exist, disjunctures that imply a need to transform (i.e., neutralize) the unique discursive space of the press.²⁵

The first, proposed on July 10 by Charles-Louis Tinguy de Nesmy, required that the author's signature appear at the bottom of every printed article.²⁶ Tucked into the section on the collective *cautionnement* (bond money), the Tinguy amendment contradicts the entire logic of that section. There, the law set the rates of the bond paid by newspaper owners on behalf of their entire staff, against the risk of legal transgressions like libel. The *cautionnement* thus treated the agents behind the newspaper collectively, reflecting the reality of an editorial voice that transcended individual writers. At this time, as Marie-Ève Thérénty and Alain Vaillant observe, "dans la presse, il sembl[ait] aller de soi que l'écriture journalistique [était] du côté du collectif, du reproductible, du non-identifiable" ["it seemed to go without saying in the press that journalistic writing was on the side of the collective, the reproducible, the unidentifiable"].²⁷ The collective voice of the press was the product of various forms of collaborative authorship: one writer might compose an article based on another's notes, for example; what's more, the shape of an article might be greatly determined, not by the man who wrote it, but by the editor who assigned it and then gave it its final form. It is in light of these kinds of practices that the voice of the paper was most often represented by a *nous*, a first person plural that reflected the complex forms of collaboration that produced it.

The collective accountability of the editorial staff in the *cautionnement* also recognized the complexity of the relationships of individual writers to their work through the use of pseudonyms. Articles were often signed under false names or initials, with many authors (including Nerval) using different signatures for different genres of writing, different collaborative writing arrangements, and

²⁵ For contemporary analysis of the politics of the July press laws, and the Riancey amendment in particular, see Claudin, *Le Timbre Riancey*; and Chassan, *Lois sur la presse depuis le 24 février 1848*.

²⁶ Titre I. Cautionnement, Article 3. "Tout article de discussion politique, philosophique ou religieuse, inséré dans un journal, devra être signé par son auteur, sous peine d'une amende de 500 fr. pour la première contravention, et de mille fr. dans le cas de récidive. Toute fausse signature sera punie d'une amende de mille francs et d'un emprisonnement de six mois, tant contre l'auteur de la fausse signature que contre l'auteur de l'article et l'éditeur responsable du journal."

["Every article treating politics, philosophy, or religion inserted in a newspaper must be signed by its author, liable to a fine of 500 francs for the first offence, and 1000 francs for repeated offences. For any false signature, the author of the false signature and the author of the article, as well as the managing editor of the newspaper, will face a fine of 1000 francs and a six month prison sentence."] The reach of the Tinguy amendment was then extended by Article 4. "Les dispositions de l'article précédent seront applicable à tous les articles, quelles que soit leur étendue, publiés dans les feuilles politiques ou non politiques, dans lesquels seront discutés des actes ou opinions des citoyens, et des intérêts individuels ou collectifs." ["The provisions of the preceding article will apply to all articles, whatever their content, published in political or non-political papers that treat the acts or opinions of citizens, or individual or collective interests."] For transcripts of the National Assembly's discussion of the Tinguy amendment, see "Assemblée nationale législative. Séance du mercredi 10 juillet 1850," *Le Moniteur universel*, 2357-59; for the article in its final form with analysis of the Assembly debate, see Chassan, *Lois sur la presse depuis le 24 février 1848*, 124-137.

²⁷ 1836 : *L'an 1 de l'ère médiatique*, 85.

different periods of their careers.²⁸ These pseudonyms were not necessarily meant to disguise the authors, to deceive the public as to their “real” identities; nor can they be explained by the supposed shameful of collective writing practices that Marie-Ève Thérenty groups under the heading of *supercherie* (scams). She attributes these “dishonest” practices of signature to the deceptive motives of authors who wanted to sell the same book to more than one publisher under different names, or to remain at a distance from writing they did not want to claim as their own; first and foremost, these “false” signatures indicate, for Thérenty, a devaluation of the writing to which they are attached. However, the logic that only values “authentic” individual authorship is one foreign to the mode of production of the press at this time, a standard imposed upon it by the Press Law and by other literary discourses, in order to find journalism lacking—morally and literarily suspect. To move beyond the critiques of 19th-century politicians and poets, we must set aside their moralizing logic to consider how journalism functioned, according to practices and logics of authorship with their own integrity.²⁹ Looked at from this point of view, pseudonyms were incredibly productive, allowing writers to consolidate their careers around multiple centers (political journalism, criticism, narrative, etc.), in multiple registers, and in multiple relationships to the commercial writing markets.³⁰ One young writer could be more than one author—not in the sense of wearing masks to hide his real face, but in the sense of exposing multiple facets of a single talent or career. Along with the anonymous *nous* of journalistic writing, pseudonyms thus helped create a journalistic space in which the editorial staff was indivisible into simple individuals and so had to be treated legally as a whole.

For the conservative National Assembly, this collective voice was a primary source of the newspaper’s dangerous power, and so Tinguay proposed an amendment to counteract the lack of individual accountability that the bond generally enabled. The central issue at stake was that of the irresponsible anonymity of the journalistic *nous*, whose unearned authority was the root of the press’s evils:

Eh! mon Dieu! quelle est la puissance véritable de la mauvaise presse ? quel est son danger ? C’est le prestige de l’anonyme pour la majeure partie des lecteurs. Un journal n’est pas l’œuvre de tel ou tel individu, c’est une œuvre collective, c’est une puissance mystérieuse, c’est le prestige de l’inconnu. Voilà la puissance de la presse, elle n’est que cela.

[Well! My God! What real power does bad journalism have? What makes it dangerous? It is the prestige that anonymity holds for the vast majority of readers. A newspaper is not the work of this or that individual, it is a collective work, a

²⁸ Nerval is, of course, itself arguably a pseudonym—though Gérard Labrunie had ceased to sign anything but letters to his father with his family name by the time he made the definitive move to signing all of his literary and journalistic output *Gérard de Nerval*, making the distinction between a public (pseudo) and a private (authentic) name more complex. Until that time, he drew on a shifting set of shortened signatures that moved from *Gérard* and *G.-D.* in the late 1830s, to *G. de N.* and *Gérard de Nerval* in the mid 1840s; the constant use of the one *nom de plume* (*Nerval*) by which we know him did not begin until 1850.

²⁹ See Thérenty, *Mosaïques: Etre écrivain entre presse et roman (1829-1836)*. Daniel Couégnas begins to acknowledge the distinctiveness of the pseudonymous or anonymous signature’s function with regard to the *roman-feuilleton* in particular, but ultimately attributes it to the practical demands of a commercial literature; see his *Introduction à la paralittérature*. The studies of writer-journalists undertaken by Marie-Françoise Melmoux-Montaubain share, and even intensify, this over-emphasis on the practical constraints of journalistic writing, seen to make of the press an anti-literature; see “Chroniqueurs et romanciers” and *L’écrivain-journaliste au XIX^e siècle*.

³⁰ This sort of practice of pseudonymy finds its closest descendent in the 21st-century U.S. in music, and particularly among singer-songwriters who often take on different names to distinguish multiple solo and/or collaborative projects with distinct sounds or inspirations.

mysterious force, the prestige of the unknown. There you have the power of the press, it is no more than that.]³¹

The newspaper's power came from the prestige of an anonymous, authoritative voice—one that bore all the weight of a respected author without being attached to any individual whose honor might justify its respectability. This supposed voice of authority was in fact, Tinguay argued, no one's voice, the voice of insincerity: without the attribution of articles to individuals, nothing prevented writers from leading the public astray in favor of any cause that would pay.³² Diffusing the troublesome power of the newspaper, then, was as simple as eliminating that anonymous voice, and so Tinguay demanded a radical and unprecedented form of simplified individual accountability for journalistic articles: the name of the author—his *real* name. Signed articles, Tinguay imagined, would ensure that the value of opinions espoused be evident, since the public would be able to judge the validity of the argument by the honorability of the author's name. The signature thus promised nothing less than the restoration of truth to the press: “Ainsi vous aurez établi dans la presse la plus complète vérité: chacun répondra de son œuvre” [“In this way you will have established the most complete truth in the press: everyone will be accountable for his own work”].³³

In the Tinguay amendment, the National Assembly acted on its discomfort with the forms of authority deployed by the newspaper through the collective mode of writing that the bond itself acknowledged, pointing to the undue power associated with that mode and the unfair advantage the press therefore had over its parliamentary opponent. The amendment reduced the collective voice of the newspaper to the individual rhetorical voice of the parliamentary debate, backed by the presence (at least in name) of a speaker whose identity would testify to the credibility of his arguments. It thus aimed at nothing less than a transformation of the epistemology of political journalism, toward a rhetorical model in which the mark of truth would be the author's first person singular. But where Tinguay presented the thought of an individual, identifiable writing subject as unquestionably more valid than the deceptively anonymous thought of a collective, France's major liberal dailies insisted that such an individual subject never had been and never should be at stake in journalism: “Le public ne voit pas la main qui tient la plume; il ne cherche pas dans un article la pensée personnelle d'un

³¹ “Assemblée nationale législative. Séance du mercredi 10 juillet 1850,” *Le Moniteur universel*, 2357.

³² This view of the press as a field of inauthentic writing aimed at making a profit and in which even opinions are for sale is epitomized by Balzac's portrait of journalism in *Illusions perdues*. On one hand, this portrait contains a significant truth, which is that journalism was for writers of Nerval's generation a way of making a living and so the features of journalistic writing were marked by economic necessity; but there is a risk of going too far in privileging this fact, as Melmoux-Montaubain does in her studies of writers who worked as journalists. The unique features of journalistic writing cannot be reduced to an improper influence of the market on literature, according to a binary of pure, authentic literature and fallen journalism. While many writers were critical of the forces that influenced journalistic writing, it is more productive and, I believe, more true to the close ties these writers had to a journalistic writing practice, to see their critiques as indicative of an ambivalence about the complexities of journalism rather than a condemnation of it. The newspaper of the July Monarchy also provided a freedom that many writers found invigorating, as Thérenty and Vaillant note: “L'essentiel—et l'inattendu—est là : parce qu'il est absolument informe et polymorphe, le journal de 1836 est un extraordinaire espace d'invention et de liberté scripturale.[... C]'est grâce au journal que l'homme de lettres, sous la monarchie de Juillet, jouit, avec une jubilation d'ailleurs aussi perceptible que communicative, de la liberté d'écriture, à l'intérieure des limites légales imposées, par ailleurs à la liberté d'expression : pour cette liberté, que revendique par vocation tout écrivain, il intéresse au premier chef le spécialiste de littérature.” [“This is the most important—and surprising—thing: because it is absolutely formless and polymorphous, the newspaper of 1836 is an extraordinary space of invention and scriptural freedom. It is thanks to the newspaper that under the July Monarchy, the man of letters enjoyed, with an obvious and infectious jubilation, a freedom of writing, within legal limits, and a freedom of expression: this freedom, by nature demanded by all writers, is of primary interest to the literary specialist.”] (*1836 : l'an 1 de l'ère médiatique*, 19.) Cf. Melmoux-Montaubain, “Chroniqueurs et romanciers” and *L'écrivain-journaliste*.

³³ Ibid.

écrivain” [“The public does not see the hand that holds the pen; it does not look to articles for the personal reflection of a writer”].³⁴ This vindication by *La Presse* of journalistic discourse’s difference was echoed by *Le National* (where Nerval would publish *Les Faux Saulniers* later that fall): “La pensée d’un journal n’est jamais, on le sait, une pensée individuelle, mais une pensée collective. Par conséquent, en individualisant la responsabilité, on ment aux faits eux-mêmes” [“We know that a newspaper’s thought is never an individual thought, but a collective thought. As a result, in individualizing responsibility, we are putting the lie to the facts themselves”].³⁵ Given the unique collective operation of journalism, *Le National* argued, Tinguay’s maneuver did not constitute a revelation of journalistic truth (searching out and bringing to light the real journalistic agents), but rather a misrepresentation and a falsification that “ne tend à rien moins qu’à rendre tout journal impossible” [“aims at nothing less than rendering any newspaper impossible”].³⁶

What the newspapers recognized was the profound contradiction between journalism’s mode of production (as acknowledged by the collective nature of the *cautionnement*) and the demands of the new law. By insisting on signatures, the Tinguay amendment aimed to bring journalism under the logic of the public sphere of which the National Assembly was itself the model, and so to destroy its singularity as a discursive space. There is something unexpected in this approach to censoring the press, which did not simply seek to take away its oppositional power by restricting the political content available to it, but which rather aimed to reshape it formally as a political adversary. The National Assembly here seemed to admit the press’s superior cultural authority (the efficacy of the tools available to journalists but not to politicians) and to try to use its legislative authority to level the cultural playing field. In a sense, in saying, “We must hobble the press,” the deputies continuously said, “We must make the press more like *us*.”

The National Assembly’s ambivalent relationship to the political role of the newspaper also played out in the other major amendment to the Press Law, introduced by Henry Camusat de Riancey just a few days after that of Tinguay.³⁷ This amendment came in the section on the *timbre*, which set the stamp tax rates for different categories of newspapers (political, literary, etc.) depending on where and how widely they were circulated, and straightforwardly targeted political papers with higher taxes. Undermining the profitability of newspapers whose focus was economic or political, the stamp tax made it more difficult for those papers to remain financially buoyant and encouraged a shift in press production toward politically innocuous forms that focused exclusively on art and culture. In the midst of this clear attack on the viability of political journalism, the Riancey amendment looks like a strange digression, calling for an additional one-centime tax on all political and economic newspapers that printed *romans-feuilletons*. Since the one-centime tax exceeded

³⁴ *La Presse*, “La loi contre la presse. (Troisième séance). L’amendement de M. de Tinguay,” July 11, 1850.

³⁵ *Le National*, July 11, 1850.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Titre II. Timbre, Article 14. “Tout roman-feuilleton publié dans un journal ou dans son supplément sera soumis à un timbre de un centime par numéro. Ce droit ne sera que d’un demi-centime pour les journaux des départements autres que ceux de la Seine et de Seine-et-Oise.” [“Any *roman-feuilleton* published in a newspaper or a supplément will subject to a stamp tax of one cent per issue. This duty will be only a half-cent for newspapers in departments other than Seine and Seine-et-Oise.”] For transcripts of the National Assembly’s discussion of the Riancey amendment, see “Assemblée nationale législative. Séance du lundi 15 juillet 1850,” *Le Moniteur universel*, 2423; for the article in its final form with analysis of the Assembly debate, see Chassan, *Lois sur la presse depuis le 24 février 1848*, 147. It is also worth noting that the discussion of the Riancey amendment is preceded by discussion of the proposed prosecution of the newspaper *Pouvoir* for printing an article critiquing the National Assembly (“Affaiblissement graduel de l’Assemblée nationale”) that very day. This discussion throws into all-too-stark relief the political motivations of the press laws, which are explicitly designed to repress critiques such as this; the vote to prosecute *Pouvoir* is also central in framing the press’s reaction to the Riancey amendment, intensifying the sense of open conflict no longer masked by the bad-faith moral justifications of the legislators. See, for example, the leading articles of July 16, 1850 in both *La Presse* and *Le National*.

the profits rendered by all but the most successful *romans-feuilletons*, it effectively functioned as a prohibition of the serial publication of novels, aimed at political dailies. This amendment's absurd contradictions—penalizing political periodicals for publishing literary works though it was placed within a section of the law that favored literary periodicals—were not lost on *La Presse*: “Il faudrait cependant se mettre d'accord. Qui est-ce qui est dangereux? Est-ce la littérature? est-ce la politique?” [“But we must get this straight. What is dangerous? Is it literature or is it politics?”].³⁸ Of course, the incoherence of the Riancey amendment was (as the editorial staff of *La Presse* was certainly aware) only apparent: the danger that the National Assembly identified was precisely the collusion between two discourses (the literary and the political) that *should* have been distinct but that were largely intertwined in the mid-century newspaper.

This interrelation of literature and politics in the press took two major forms that made the *roman-feuilleton* a particular target for the Assembly's restrictions. On one hand, the serialized novel played a central role in the transformation and expansion of the political press over the first half of the 19th century. From *La Presse*'s introduction of the first serialized novel in a political daily in 1836 (Balzac's *La Vieille Fille* [*The Old Maid*]), the *roman-feuilleton* was an enormous resource in attracting new readership to a new kind of newspaper.³⁹ The large new public for mass journalism was not necessarily a politically minded one, especially since poll taxes throughout the July Monarchy had kept many of its members from voting. The *roman-feuilleton* thus served as an essential supplement to a newspaper's politics by drawing in more subscribers.⁴⁰ Doing away with serialized novels was thus not simply an attack on the *roman-feuilleton* as a literary form; it was also an attack on the political dailies that thrived on the readership won, in large part, with seductive serials. By eliminating one of the greatest attractions of the political dailies, the Riancey amendment aimed at reducing the number of readers for their politics.

On the other hand, however, the literary specificity of the *roman-feuilleton* must be taken into account, since it was by no means politically neutral. Though many different kinds of literature, many of them novelistic, were serialized during the heyday of the *roman-feuilleton*, the runaway hits of the genre were of a marked political content and consequence.⁴¹ While the serial novel would go on to align its interests with those of the ruling authorities under the Second Empire, many of the most successful *romanciers-feuilletonistes* of the July Monarchy and Second Republic, including Paul de Kock, wrote novels treating popular and petit bourgeois subjects that were seen as tools for revolutionary politics.⁴² The exploration of the plight of the lower classes in France for democratic ends was deployed most spectacularly by Eugène Sue in his best-sellers of the *feuilleton* genre: *Mystères de Paris* [*The Mysteries of Paris*] (*Journal des Débats*, 1842-43) and *Le Juif errant* [*The Wandering Jew*] (*Le Constitutionnel*, 1844-45).⁴³ For conservative politicians, there was no question that a direct line could be drawn from Sue's novels to the revolution of 1848.⁴⁴ The power of social unrest that had been

³⁸ *La Presse*, July 17, 1850.

³⁹ For the history of the *roman-feuilleton* from its emergence in France, see Couégnas, *Introduction à la paralittérature*; Olivier-Martin, *Histoire du roman populaire en France*; and Queffélec, *Le roman-feuilleton français au XIX^e siècle*.

⁴⁰ Garnering ongoing loyalty from its readership sufficient to motivate subscription (as opposed to a day-to-day interest sparked by sensational stories glimpsed at the newsstand) was especially important prior to 1848 when it was illegal to sell newspapers in the street by the issue to unsubscribed customers. For more on the transition to sales by the issue after 1848, see Kalifa et al., *La civilisation du journal*, 195-203.

⁴¹ Richard Sieburth offers an insightful analysis of the broader political situation that might serve as a third answer to the question: “in a fake Republic, presided over by a fake president who was very likely merely the fake descendent of the great Napoléon, no subject was more politically sensitive than the legitimacy of fiction”; see the “Translator's Postscript” to *The Salt Smugglers*, 144.

⁴² Olivier-Martin, *Histoire du roman populaire en France*, 20.

⁴³ Adamowicz-Hariasz, *From Opinion to Information*, 164 and 160.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 160 and Queffélec, *Le roman-feuilleton français aux XIX^e siècle*, 35.

unleashed would not subside as long as it was being constantly aroused by novels like Sue's (as evidenced by the uprising of June 1849, also blamed on the serialized novel). The elimination of the *roman-feuilleton* was thus an essential part of repressing political dissent.⁴⁵

What made the serialized novel such an effective and, for the Assembly, problematic political tool was its unique brand of fictionality, which was by no means predicated on an autonomy from the daily vicissitudes of political life. Its power was seen to derive from the combination of its fictional status and its treatment of real subjects. Throughout the July Monarchy and Second Republic, the *roman-feuilleton* tended to treat political subjects in close proximity to the news; indeed, *fiction d'actualité* (topical fiction) went so far as to directly address and incorporate, day by day, the news that occupied the page above it, thereby blurring the line between fiction and journalistic fact in the press.⁴⁶ The imbrication of social and political actuality in the novel was especially powerful because it moved the matter of politics into a different discursive space where it could reach a larger audience in compelling ways. For the National Assembly, the insidiousness of this new political mode lay precisely in its ability to operate beyond the boundaries of explicitly political discourse and so to evade the kinds of analysis to which that discourse was subject. The novel was, in Riancey's words, "à l'abri de la curiosité qu'inspire les affaires et les débats politiques" ["sheltered from the curiosity inspired by public affairs and political debates"], and so able to arouse political feelings without passing through critical political debate.⁴⁷ The fictionality that might at first glance seem opposed to politics acted, instead, as a unique tool for generating political engagement beyond the means and audience of political journalism proper. Suppressing the *roman-feuilleton*, then, was a matter of eliminating an aberrant (and fearsome) form of political discourse.

In the Riancey amendment, as in the Tinguay amendment before it, the undue political influence of the newspaper was to be neutralized, not simply by censoring its political content, but by controlling the form of its discourse. However, the prohibition of the *roman-feuilleton* presented a much greater challenge to enforcement than the parallel demand for authors' signatures. How was the *roman-feuilleton* to be defined for the purpose of the law? How could it be distinguished from various historical genres on the basis of form alone? This problem was evident to the National Assembly itself, and even the commission assigned to consider the amendment argued against it on the grounds that, "il est impossible de distinguer quelles sont les limites véritables entre le roman-feuilleton et l'histoire" ["it is impossible to distinguish the real limits between the *roman-feuilleton* and history"]. The spokesman for the commission went so far as to demand of his fellow assemblymen, "Ne nous laissons donc pas entraîner en dehors des limites du juste, du vrai, du possible" ["Let us not get carried away beyond the limits of the just, the true, the possible"] in attempting to draw such a distinction.⁴⁸ In a literary market where the historical novel and the *roman d'actualité* reigned supreme precisely because of their intertwining of fact and fiction, the possibility of making an apparently commonsense distinction between the novel and history could not be taken for granted. In addition, fiction and fact were bound together in the newspaper during this period: the great popularity of the serialized novel had already transformed the whole of journalistic writing, so that "factual" genres were now variously marked by writing procedures and reading habits drawn from fiction.⁴⁹ The imbrication of fact and fiction both within and beyond the space of the *feuilleton*

⁴⁵ Brix, "Nerval et la réflexion politique," 24; and Claudin, *Le Timbre Riancey*, 31.

⁴⁶ See Thérenty, *La Littérature au quotidien*; and Thérenty and Vaillant, *1836 : L'an 1 de l'ère médiatique*, especially the chapter on "La fiction au-delà du feuilleton."

⁴⁷ "Assemblée nationale législative. Séance du lundi 15 juillet 1850," *Le Moniteur universel*, 2423.

⁴⁸ "Assemblée nationale législative. Séance du lundi 15 juillet 1850," *Le Moniteur universel*, 2423, 2424.

⁴⁹ For a study of how serialized publication influenced the poetics of fiction and how the serial novel influenced the poetics of journalism in the 19th century, see Thérenty, *La Littérature au quotidien*.

complicated enforcement of the law, making it a weapon aimed at many things amongst which it would be hard to identify its stated target, the serialized novel.

The newspapers faced with reinventing their *feuilletons* to accommodate the formal constraint of the Riancey amendment immediately recognized this ambiguity, as well as the political use to which it would be put. The editorial staff of *Le National* argued that, even if the ambition to sort novel from history in the newspaper was so ridiculous as to have necessarily been intended as a joke, there was nonetheless no question as to what kind of sorting the amendment would enable: “M. de Riancey aurait bien dû nous dire à quel caractère on reconnaîtra le genre d’ouvrages qu’il veut proscrire, et si, par exemple, la *Vie de sainte Elisabeth de Hongrie*, de son ami M. de Montalembert, la *Vie de sainte Philomène* et les récits des miracles de Rimini, sont ou ne sont pas romans” [“M. de Riancey should have told us by what mark we are to recognize the sort of works he wants to forbid, and whether, for example, the *Life of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary* by his friend M. de Montalembert, the *Life of Saint Philomena*, and the tales of the miracles at Rimini are or are not novels”].⁵⁰ The government could certainly not be expected to prosecute for the saint’s lives written by Riancey’s conservative friends, though many people would certainly consider them fictional. Thus the inefficacy of the criterion of fictionality was not really a weakness in the amendment, but its strong point: the ambiguity it created allowed the National Assembly to enforce it selectively and so hit its real target, which was not fiction *per se*, but the oppositional political content and force of fiction as it was singularly deployed by political newspapers.

Like the collective voice of journalistic writing, the political deployment of fiction came under attack in the July Press Law as one of the formal features of the political press that differentiated it from the political discourse of parliament and made it a fearsome rival. The National Assembly put forth a demand for proper political discourse in the press, discourse characterized by an individual identity able to act as guarantor of its validity and a clear division of fact and opinion from fiction, in hopes of neutralizing the dangerous force of a journalistic discourse marked by the anonymity of a collective voice and the real vitality of fictional stories.

Historical Fiction

In the midst of this battle between the discourses of political rhetoric and the press, the questions of voice and factuality at play in *Les Faux Sauniers* appear in all their complexity. Rather than a forced evasion (however playful) of the novelistic form that has been forbidden, the text appears as a complex critique of both the assumptions about the proper limits of fictionality implied by the Riancey amendment, and the conception of authorial authenticity put forward by Tinguay. The evasion Nerval undertakes in *Les Faux Sauniers* is, I have argued, entirely voluntary: the ostentation of his obedience to the law in fact marks the position he maintains always on the verge of breaking it (like the child with her hand right in front of her brother’s face: “I’m not touching you!”).⁵¹ But Nerval’s gleefully flagrant provocation-by-submissiveness is not provocation for provocation’s sake,

⁵⁰ *Le National*, July 16, 1850. The works mentioned here are all hagiographic, pointing to the religious component of the Party of Order’s program of “Ordre, Propriété, Religion”; the *Vie de Philomène* (1836) was an early work of Charles Forbes René de Montalembert, who was by 1850 an influential politician of the catholic right; the *Vie de sainte Philomène* was the record of the 1833 revelation to a Neapolitan nun of the life of a 3rd century martyr; the miracles at Rimini refer to a 13th century miracle in which Saint Anthony of Padua persuaded a donkey to choose the Eucharist over hay.

⁵¹ It is perhaps in this sense that we might be able to go along with Richard Sieburth’s surprising characterization of *Les Faux Sauniers* as an “experimental serial novel”: though the text had no novelistic intentions independent of the legal constraints, its form is entirely bound up in this navigation of the limit between the novel and what lies outside of it. Still, it is unclear that the double negative of Nerval’s authorial stance here produces the novel it refuses, making Nerval “one of the savviest political novelists of the short-lived Second Republic.” Nerval’s acute critique of the novel itself as the limit of the fictional seems to challenge such a classification (though not its praise). See the “Translator’s Postscript” to *The Salt Smugglers*, 135 and 139.

and the particular forms of fiction that he uses to challenge the law here contribute to a reflection on the relationship between fact and fiction. Nerval draws on forms of popular belief in which fiction is in a vital relationship to life and to history in order to put pressure on the terms of the Riancey and Tinguay amendments, challenging the National Assembly's conception of fact. But at the same time, Nerval also challenges the literary establishment's conception of fiction as a technical procedure entirely separate from the world it draws on for material. Men of letters are shown to be complicit with politicians in dividing discursive space between fact and argument, on the one hand, and fiction on the other, and so breaking fiction's connections with social life. *Les Faux Sauniers* has been seen to take sides with the novel against the factual logic of journalism, but its critique is more radical than this. It examines the restricted notions of truth that operate in both the political and the literary fields, as well as their conceptions of "authentic" subjectivity, and it stages modes of fiction and collective subjectivity (still present in journalistic discourse in this period) that both fields exclude.

The Riancey Amendment, as we have seen, was intended to keep the novel out of the newspaper as a space of political discourse, because of the way that fiction (improperly) impacted the real world with which it came into contact in this space. It is thus significant that Nerval chooses to address this concern for the relationship between the real and the fictional by centering his battles with Riancey on the conventions of the historical novel. This is at once the genre that relies most heavily on fact as a ground for its fictionalized narratives, and a genre that does not challenge the established limit between fact and fiction. The historical novel's great practitioners, most notably Dumas and Sir Walter Scott (who serves as Nerval's shorthand for the writing procedures he is supposedly renouncing), undertook extensive research to generate detail about the places and history depicted in their books, so that the invented plot of the novel is intricately woven into a fabric of real people, events and places. Since the novel is thus full of real history, fictionalized through plot, the trait that might be used to identify novels illegally printed in newspapers is not simply fictionality, but the proximity of fiction and history. In his own text, then, he endeavors to protect his reproduction of the racy memoirs of the abbé's great-aunt Angélique from the accusation of being a novel by relegating all his comments on her to digressions distinct from her story. He keeps the documented historical facts of the memoirs entirely separate from everything else:

Avant de parler des grandes résolutions d'Angélique de Longueval, je demande la permission de placer encore un mot. Ensuite, je n'interromprai plus que rarement le récit. Puisqu'il nous est défendu de faire du *roman* historique, nous sommes forcés de servir la sauce sur un autre plat que le poisson ;—c'est-à-dire les descriptions locales, le sentiment de l'époque, l'analyse des caractères,—en dehors du récit matériellement vrai.

[Before going into detail about Angélique de Longueval's great decision, I wonder whether I might be allowed to insert a few words here. I promise that I shall hereafter interrupt the narrative only on rare occasions. It being illegal to engage in the historical *novel*, we shall just have to serve up the sauce on some other platter;—that is, local color, period atmosphere, analysis of characters,— complementing the material truth of the facts being related.]⁵²

Nerval displaces the terms of the Riancey debate on the novel here, making novelhood not simply a matter of fiction but of the imbrication of the fiction into the "matériellement vrai," as it is in the

⁵² *Les Faux Sauniers* in *Œuvres complètes*, 2:60-61 / *The Salt Smugglers*, 47.

historical novel. This shift shows the difficulty of identifying the novel by its relation to facts, as the tax authorities had been instructed to do but as even the National Assembly knew they could not.

It also articulates what will be one of Nerval's ongoing critiques of the literary establishment's conception of fiction as plot. The very possibility of serving the sauce on a different plate than the fish in the historical novel is for Nerval an indicator of that genre's limited understanding of fiction as unproblematically distinguishable from history.⁵³ This limited view of fiction is paradoxically what underpins the mixing of history and fiction in the historical novel: the two modes can be combined only insofar as they are entirely distinct. There is no real confusion, no elision of the boundaries between *vrai* and *faux* in the culturally sanctioned form of the historical novel, the way there is in Nerval's more radical conception of fiction. This was to be the irony of Nerval's retort to Dumas in the dedication of *Les Filles du feu* three years later, when Nerval defended himself from Dumas's claim that he lost touch with reality, by pointing up the merely technical confusion between true and false in Dumas's own novels: "[vous] avez su si bien vous jouer avec nos chroniques et nos mémoires, que la postérité ne saura plus démêler le vrai du faux, et chargera de vos inventions tous les personnages historiques que vous avez appelés à figurer dans vos romans" ["you so skillfully handled our chronicles and memoirs, that posterity will be unable to distinguish true from false and will attribute your inventions to all of the historical figures you have called to appear in your novels"].⁵⁴ Dumas does nothing to challenge the boundaries between history and fiction, but rather deploys a banal convention wherein fiction-as-plot mobilizes history-as-fact. The historical novel's imbrication of fact and fiction is invoked by Nerval to challenge the law here, not because it is a real threat to Riancey's logic, but because it is in fact underwritten by the same ideology of historical fact as the Riancey amendment itself.

The complicity of the historical novel with the assumptions of the politicians is further articulated in the displacement of the historical novel's terms operated by the racy memoirs of the abbé's great-aunt Angélique. Whereas the amorous plot line would usually be the author's embellishment of history (as it is when Nerval explains how to turn the abbé's story into a novel, the "beau roman [qu']on eût pu faire avec ces données" ["fine novel all this material could have made"]), in Angélique's case, the racy love plot is the factually verifiable part, and it is the introduction of too many other facts that will make it start to look like a novel.⁵⁵ The terms of the division between the historical element and the novelistic element (the fish and the sauce) are reversed here, and all the juicy romance (unimpeachably documented in letters and personal accounts) has to be protected from the incriminating introduction of local color. In mocking the strict conventions of plot in the historical novel, Nerval also mocks the National Assembly's reliance on those conventions to identify the novel. His location of historical truth in the romance of Angélique's story flies in the face of the logic the government had been using in implementing the Riancey amendment. One of its rules, already put into practice, for distinguishing the novel from other commonly serialized forms like criticism or historical studies was apocryphally summarized by an official in this way: "Ce qui constitue le feuilleton-roman, c'est la peinture de l'amour. Le mot *roman* vient de *romance*. Tirez la conclusion" ["Serial novels have to do with the depiction of love. The word for novel, *roman*, derives from the word *romance*. Draw your own conclusion."].⁵⁶ The politicians are onto the historical novelist's tactics and know that love is the sign of plot and plot is the sign of the novel,

⁵³ The division, in historical novels of the period, between sections of commentary and sections of narration could be seen as indicative of this simplistic breakdown.

⁵⁴ "À Alexandre Dumas," *Les Filles du Feu* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:451.

⁵⁵ *Les Faux Sauniers* in *Œuvres complètes*, 2:138/*The Salt Smugglers*, 101.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 27/23.

and the conclusion drawn by all about the nature of fictional narrative as romance is, as far as Nerval is concerned, “twaddle.”⁵⁷

Inverting romance’s relationship to documentable truth by thus making the love story a historical fact continues a challenge to the National Assembly’s division of fact and fiction that places romantic sentiment on the side of invention, a challenge Nerval begins even before Angélique is introduced, in terms silly enough to make his disdain palpable. He recounts a story he was told by the woman who runs a fair-ground attraction, about how the trained seal he saw at the Versailles fair the year before had to be replaced because he died of a broken heart when the daughter of the family left home to be married.⁵⁸ The seal here cannot help but reference a *feuilleton* about Eskimos that had recently been taxed under the Press Law for its love story, and the displacement of the romance from people to animals is at once mirthful and scathing. There is love here, but it is not invented by the author: the story of the heart-broken seal is told by its owner as an explanation for the real necessity she faced of getting a new animal to show for her business—it had consequences in the realm of material facts that seem to guarantee its truth. This factual sentimentality of the seal sets up Angélique’s appearance, two installments later, so that Nerval’s constant insistence that her memoirs are not a historical novel is already inscribed in an ironic refusal to take the conflict between documentable fact and romance (fiction) seriously.

Nerval’s use of Angélique’s memoirs in *Les Faux Sauvages* functions as a send-up of both the law and at least one of the novelistic forms it is meant to prohibit, insisting that history and fiction are less distinct than imagined by either tax officials or historical novelists. It cannot be a question of vindicating the novel against the factual logic of journalism, especially since, as we have seen, such a factual logic of journalism was not yet solidly established in 1850.⁵⁹ The epistemology of journalistic space was much different in the mid-19th century than in the 20th century, let alone the 21st, and Nerval’s critique of the possibility of excluding fiction must be understood in the context of a journalistic discourse permeated with fiction of various kinds. This variety is elided, however, by the terms of the political crusade against the serial novel, where “fiction” becomes the sign of “novels,” which are themselves targeted as a way of getting at the content of *certain* novels, perceived as improperly political. The slippage between the novel and fiction in enforcing the Riancey amendment meant that the entire field of fictional journalistic writing, broadly construed, was to be the baby thrown out with the bathwater of the novel. What’s worse, the novel already had a stable position outside the newspaper in the literary culture of the 19th century, and would no doubt continue to thrive in book publication, while other forms of journalistic fiction risked being eliminated altogether. Nerval’s critique of the banality of the historical novel, which deploys a restricted notion of fiction as (a certain kind of) plot used to animate the raw materials of history in counterfactual ways, insists on the possibility of more vibrant models of fiction than this combination of narrative and historical banalities. In comparison to the multifarious, sometimes strange ways that fiction operated in the newspaper, the novel is for Nerval perhaps the least interesting victim of the Riancey amendment’s ban on fiction.

Journalism can also be seen as a microcosm of the culture at large in Nerval’s thinking, and his vindication of the possibility of vital relationships between fact and fiction in the newspaper has everything to do with broader cultural transformations. Just as politics was to be protected from fiction in the newspaper, so politics was being cut off from imagination more broadly, as France

⁵⁷ Ibid., 27/24.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 26/23.

⁵⁹ Thérenty argues that the form of newspaper journalism we take for granted wasn’t really solidified until the 1930s, though an important first stage in the transition toward a more ostensibly informational press took place in the decades after *Les Faux Sauvages* was published—in part as a result of the politics the Second Empire that would continue the work of the 1850 press law in suppressing the overt political impact of journalism; see *La littérature au quotidien*.

moved away from the visionary, utopian thinking of the early 1800s toward more fact-based approaches to its present and future. David Harvey insists that this was true not only of conservative elements but also of the culture more broadly: “It is undeniable that some sort of shift in sensibility occurred after 1848 in France that redefined what political struggle was about on both the left and the right. Socialism, for example, became much more ‘scientific’ (as Marx insisted), ... while bourgeois thought became much more positivist, managerial, and tough-minded.”⁶⁰ The pride of place given to imaginative discourses in shaping France’s future after the 1789 revolution was revoked after the disappointment of utopian hopes in 1848, and forms of modern, scientific thinking were increasingly given a monopoly on real world relevance. Thus Nerval battles in *Les Faux Sauniers* not only the conservative push to purify political discourse in the newspaper, but also a cultural trend toward relegating fiction and imagination to a closed, aesthetic space, exiling them from the *real* (the realm of *action*), which scientific thinking could then rule without challenge.

The forms of fiction that were left without venue in the division of discourses into journalism and literature, fact and fiction, by the Riancey amendment were not only stories to be read, but relationships to the real capable of pushing back against the increasing hegemony of what Harvey identifies as “scientific” trends in thinking. In this regard, Nerval’s interest in them may at first glance seem to belong to a nostalgia for a lost Romanticism that dreamed of the imagination’s capacity to reshape the world. However, this Romantic nostalgia is troubled by the way his interest in these fictions is in fact inseparable from his challenge to authentic writing subjectivity (just as the Riancey amendment was inseparable from Tinguay in the July 1850 Press Law). In Nerval’s account, the subjectivity that was once at the foundation of Romanticism’s imagination has been made complicit in the real defeat of imagination by positivism, so that there can be no question of a return. Since a conception of authentic subjectivity has been used to prevent engagement with the imagination, the way back to imagination will have to be through a radicalization of fiction that erodes even that subjectivity. In this way, Nerval offers in *Les Faux Sauniers* a glimpse of a way forward for literature that is neither Romantic nor Realist (historical), but rather moves in an innovative way through the space that journalism once occupied between them.

Popular Fiction

It is through fiction’s less canonical forms that Nerval explores the vitality of imagination beyond the distinction between fact and fiction, and so the installments of *Les Faux Sauniers* are full of diffuse forms of story-telling that have no apparent relevance to the abbé or Riancey. The connection these many anecdotes have to Nerval’s position in this text lies in the way he vindicates them as fictions outside the novel, in more complex relation than the novel can accommodate to both factual, historical reality and dominant conceptions of “authentic” writing subjectivity. We might begin by returning to the seal. The story described earlier (the heartbroken seal) is told directly to Nerval by the woman whose seal it involves. In the context of the text, then, it is documentation of the woman’s testimony of her own experience. It is preceded, however, by another seal story (what Nerval calls an “anecdote” told by the Dutch) that functions differently, belonging instead to the realm of hearsay. The identifiable originator of the story, in which a seal repeatedly finds its way home after its fisherman owner releases it at sea to spare himself the cost of feeding it, is replaced by an entire country, and the story becomes attributable to “the Dutch” in general.⁶¹ Its character as a popular “legend” is only magnified by its similarity to the story of Hansel and Gretel, effectively

⁶⁰ Paris, *Capital of Modernity*, 59-60.

⁶¹ *Les Faux Sauniers* in *Œuvres complètes*, 2:23/*The Salt Smugglers*, 20.

removing this story from the economy of verifiable truth to which the lovesick seal might still be held (humorously) accountable.⁶²

The legend of the intrepid seal belongs instead to a complex realm of popular belief, a proliferation of storytelling practices (including the freak show we saw in Chapter One), independent of properly literary genres and especially of the dominant literary conception of fiction. The legend is a form Nerval returns to often, giving it a rather expansive definition as we see, for example, during his visit to Ermenonville. There, Nerval receives the following information about one of the towers at the château: “Un paysan qui nous accompagnait nous dit : « Voici la tour où était enfermée la belle Gabrielle... tous les soirs Rousseau venait pincer de la guitare sous sa fenêtre, et le roi, qui était jaloux, le guettait souvent, et a fini par le faire mourir »” [“A peasant who was accompanying us said: ‘Here is the tower where Rousseau used to come and strum his guitar under her window, and the king, who was jealous, used to spy on him and had him killed in the end’”].⁶³ Conflating the 16th-century history of Henri IV and his mistress, Gabrielle d’Estrées, with the 18th-century history of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the peasant has created a legend, which for Nerval is not at all the same as saying he has told a story that is untrue:

Voilà pourtant comment se forment les légendes. Dans quelques centaines d’années, on croira cela.—Henri IV, Gabrielle et Rousseau sont les grands souvenirs du pays. On a confondu déjà,—à deux cent ans d’intervalle,—les deux souvenirs, et Rousseau devient peu à peu le contemporain de Henri IV. Comme la population l’aime, elle suppose que le roi a été jaloux de lui, et trahi par sa maîtresse—en faveur de l’homme sympathique aux races souffrantes. Le sentiment qui a dicté cette pensée est peut-être plus vrai qu’on ne croit.—Rousseau ... a ruiné profondément l’édifice royal fondé par Henri. Tout a croulé.

[This is how legends are born. Several centuries from now, this will be taken for fact.—Henri IV, Gabrielle and Rousseau are the major names that are remembered in this region. A mere two hundred years later, the memory of these two men has been conflated and Rousseau is gradually becoming a contemporary of Henri IV. Since Rousseau is beloved by the locals, they imagine that the king was jealous of him because his mistress preferred this man who felt so much sympathy for the sufferings of the oppressed. This imaginary scenario is perhaps truer than one might believe.—Rousseau ... brought down the royal house founded by Henri. The entire edifice came tumbling down.]⁶⁴

This amalgamation of the key moments of the region’s history, retaining each character in his or her original position of oppressor, mistress or revolutionary, recounts the people’s sense of their past as an undifferentiated time of opposition to arbitrary power. In straying from the facts, Nerval suggests, the peasant has nonetheless said something true. This is not to claim that the truth of the legend is *truer* than the chronology it thwarts (though, given enough time, the one may overtake the other). Rather, two different modes of truth, two different functions that truth might serve, are at work here, each with its own value.

The unique truth-value of the legend is importantly not the truth-value of fiction as we commonly understand it, and exists in an importantly different relation to its other: scientific fact.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 103/76.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 103-04/77. Punctuation of translation modified.

When we talk about novels, we say that they ring *true*, though we know the characters and events in them do not have any empirical existence outside the text. In popular belief, however, we are not dealing with suspension of disbelief; we are dealing with real belief that does not, for some reason, come into conflict with other knowledge or belief about the world with which it seems incompatible. The stories Nerval deploys as “legend” put fiction in a different relation to belief than the dominant forms of modern literature that retreat into a separate sphere, leaving unchecked the dominance of scientific fact as the truth of reality. These forms of popular belief do not simply constitute an idealistic refusal of the modern or of scientific truth, but rather place that mode of truth in relationship to others. Such structures of belief are like those discussed in *Les Grecs ont-ils cru à leurs mythes?* [*Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths?*], where Paul Veyne refuses to see truth as perfectible, a development in which new, more “sophisticated” forms of truth are unproblematically superior to older, less “sophisticated” ones. He argues that truth is not natural or objective, but constituted by the imagination, making it impossible to pit different modes of truth against each other from the outside; the degree of truth of each one depends entirely on its context.⁶⁵ If truth is socially constructed in this way, rather than sought out in its object with ever-increasing accuracy, then the scientific model of truth as constantly progressing and correcting itself is only one conception among others, and certainly not the most intuitive.⁶⁶ In this way of thinking, folk belief does not appear as a form of stupid backwardness, a refusal to embrace the truth of science, but rather as an alternate form of truth that, in the modern world, coexists with that of the scientific fetishization of fact.

Most important for Veyne’s argument and for ours is the possibility of the coexistence of multiple modes of truth, even within the same individual. There is no reason, Veyne claims, to think that only through bad faith can one person believe things that answer to different conceptions of truth. On the contrary, people live more often than not in states of dual belief: “Notre esprit ne se met pas au supplice quand, semblant se contredire, il change subrepticement de programme de vérité et d’intérêt, comme il le fait sans cesse ; ce n’est pas là de l’idéologie : c’est notre façon d’être la plus habituelle” [“Our mind does not torment itself when, seeming to contradict itself, it suddenly changes systems of truth and interest, as it does constantly; this isn’t ideology: it is our most habitual way of being”].⁶⁷ The combination of the historically accurate and the historically inaccurate in the peasant’s legend of Rousseau and Gabrielle is characteristic of the structures of myth that elicit this kind of dual belief.⁶⁸ The legend elicits real belief from people, though elements of it are false according to the mode of scientific and historical truth in which those people simultaneously believe. Popular belief thus operates as a kind of fiction that is not relegated to the closed space of a suspension of disbelief, but that coexists with other forms of truth. It is the story Nerval hears about the former head librarian’s ghost ringing the new librarian’s doorbell at the Arsenal Library: that ghost is real enough to Nerval to have material effects, to keep him from going to the Arsenal (“Et j’irais, moi, tirer cette même sonnette !... Qui sait si ce n’est pas le fantôme qui m’ouvrira ?” [“And I was about to go ring this same bell! ... Who knows whether the ancient ghost himself might not greet me at the door?”]), though his humor insists that it is not a complete break with the sort of rationality that dictates the impossibility of such a haunting.⁶⁹

This mode of fiction characteristic of popular belief does not originate in the newspaper but is certainly no stranger to it. Indeed, when the mechanism of legend encounters commerce, it

⁶⁵ *Les Grecs ont-ils cru à leurs mythes?*, 123.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁶⁹ *Les Faux Sauniers* in *Œuvres complètes*, 2:20/*The Salt Smugglers*, 18.

emerges in the form of the freak show or the tabloid—two phenomena in which Nerval shows a lively interest.⁷⁰ The journalistic canard is the epitome of the encounter between popular belief and the press, as Nerval explores in the 1844 article “Histoire véridique du canard” [“The True Story of the Canard”], where he lays out the whole history of counterfactual legends as the canard’s pre-history. From Herodotus’ men with tails, through the Biblical Ixion, and up to Fourier’s future men with trunks, “Les histoires de tous les peuples ont commencé par des canards. Le canard est la base des religions” [“The histories of all peoples began with canards. The canard is the basis of religions”].⁷¹ These stories—of sea monsters and Big Foot, of Latin-speaking fish being taken to meet the Pope—have always challenged the limits of belief according to a standard of factual possibility, and yet they compel people and solicit a kind of belief that accounts for their durability. They do not originate with the newspaper, but do in some ways find their culmination in it, as the newspaper provides a forum for large-scale public engagement with them, as we see in Nerval’s account of what he deems the first canard published in a newspaper:

Le premier canard répandu par les journaux a été la dent d’or. Un enfant était né avec une dent d’or ; le fait fut constaté, prouvé, étudié par les académies ; on publia des mémoires pour et contre.—Plus tard il fut reconnu que la dent était seulement plaquée ; mais personne ne voulut croire à cette explication.

[The first canard spread by newspapers was the golden tooth. A child had been born with a golden tooth; the fact was stated, proven, studied by scholars; reports were published for and against.—Later it was admitted that the tooth was only plated; but no one wanted to believe this explanation.]⁷²

The baby’s gold tooth engaged the scientific authorities in a battle over the truth of the phenomenon—but it was a battle they could not possibly win, no matter what their answer, because the truth of the story would never be scientific. Even though they definitively proved that the tooth was only gold-*plated*, the public at large did not want to believe this explanation because it ultimately had nothing to do with their belief in the story.⁷³

These stories, like the legends to which they are related, act as a productive cultural force, populating the social world with the shared symbols and allegories by which the people constitutes

⁷⁰ The fair at Versailles with its trained seal in this text prefigures the woman with Merino wool for hair at the Meaux freakshow in *Les Nuits d’octobre* (*Œuvres complètes*, 3:342-44). See Chapter One.

⁷¹ “Histoire véridique du canard” in *Œuvres complètes*, 1:854-55.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 856.

⁷³ It is worth noting that Nerval expresses, in the “Histoire véridique du canard,” a scorn for the papers who all but steal the nickels of honest people by selling these stories: “Le canard est une nouvelle quelquefois vraie, toujours exagérée, souvent fausse. Ce sont les détails d’un horrible assassinat, illustré parfois de gravures en bois d’un style naïf ; c’est un désastre, un phénomène, une aventure extraordinaire ; on paie cinq centimes et l’on est volé. Heureux encore ceux dont l’esprit plus simple peut conserver l’illusion” [“The canard is a story that is sometimes true, always exaggerated, often false. It is the account of a horrible killing, occasionally illustrated with naïve wood engravings; it is a disaster, a phenomenon, an extraordinary adventure; people pay five cents and are swindled. Happy are those whose simpler minds are able to preserve the illusion.”] (*Ibid.*, 854). We see here the conventional degree of contempt for the canard, that trusty tool for hoodwinking the reading public. And yet this concern seems above all parroted, given the fascination the rest of the article shows for this timeless fictional form. The irony of the objection comes, perhaps, from its assumption that only a fool would be able to “conserver l’illusion” [“preserve the illusion”] held out by the canard. In order to think that tabloid stories wrong their readers, one must think that those readers are being tricked into believing something that is simply not true. But, as we have seen, the believer of this kind of story need not be a victim, led astray from truth by a talking fish; the lovers of canard journalism participate, on the contrary, in the complex form of dual belief characteristic of popular legend, believing in it even as they know it is not, in some sense, *true*.

its own truth, becoming (like Kaspar Hauser and the brigand Schubry) “réels à force d’avoir été inventés” [“real by virtue of having been invented”].⁷⁴ They are what Michel de Certeau identifies as *superstition*, which must be distinguished from *rumeur* (rumor). While rumor propagates beliefs that enforce the dominant order, the stories of superstition trouble and complicate that order:

Par les procès de dissémination qu’ils ouvrent, les récits s’opposent à la *rumeur* car la rumeur est toujours injunctive, instauratrice et conséquence d’un nivellement de l’espace, créatrice de mouvements communs qui renforcent un ordre en ajoutant un faire-croire au faire-faire. Les récits diversifient, les rumeurs totalisent.

[Because of the process of dissemination that they open up, stories differ from *rumors* in that the latter are always injunctions, initiators and results of a leveling of space, creators of common movements that reinforce an order by adding an activity of making people believe things to that of making people do things. Stories diversify, rumors totalize.]⁷⁵

It is, for us twenty-first century readers, intuitive to associate newspapers with the ideological coherence of modernity that was becoming more and more inescapable in the mid-19th century, eradicating traditional culture. And so it is also intuitive to understand the canard as a form of rumor, using the public’s petty gullibility to insinuate the social order even further into readers’ lives. But Nerval suggests that there remained in the newspaper, in 1850, the last glimmers of a real superstition, of popular stories that opposed the dominant order and provided alternatives to it.⁷⁶ By subjecting political newspapers to an ambiguous formal prohibition against “the novel,” the Riancey amendment also threatened to do away with these other forms of fiction that had nothing to do with the *roman-feuilleton*. Given the impossibility of absolutely determining the limits of the novel except using the criterion of fictionality, Nerval is critical of the new law’s tendency to eliminate any stories from the news that are not scientifically documentable—something which may make sense to us today as readers of an ostensibly informationalized and factualized press, but which marked a real transformation of the press in 1850, and a real impoverishment as far as Nerval was concerned. The Riancey amendment participated in a relegation of fiction to a closed, literary space—an autonomization of literature. Nerval’s response to the constraint of the Press Law that made autonomization not only possible but necessary points to the broader spectrum of fiction whose place in public discourse was effectively eliminated in this distribution of fact and fiction between the newspaper and the novel. Doing away with fiction in the press meant doing away with a crucial site of these forms of popular storytelling, which refused the absolute authority of modern, scientific ideology in ways that the novel did not.

We need not think of this extinction of popular fiction as an accidental or unwanted byproduct of the Press Law, just because it was not one of the law’s stated aims. As we have seen, one of the central rationales for marginalizing fiction, according to the supporters of the Riancey amendment, was the potential of the novel to espouse political ideas, circumventing the proper channels of political discourse. The elimination of popular fiction that Nerval identifies as an unintended consequence of the new law was not, then, inconsistent with the law’s intentions. For the proponents of a press composed of more straightforward political rhetoric, the forms of popular

⁷⁴ Ibid., 860.

⁷⁵ *L’invention du quotidien*, 161 / *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 107.

⁷⁶ For a fascinating account of the importance of the canard to literary sociability around 1830, and its relation to belief, see Filip Kekus, “Du Canard Romantique.”

fiction and fictionalized news that made up liminal journalistic genres represented another form of discourse that could not be easily controlled and monitored, that worked through narrative to produce its own brand of truth. Not only that, but popular fictions partook in their own way in the problem of authentic authorial subjectivity that concerned the National Assembly. Like the collective authorship of journalistic writing, popular fictions had diffuse origins, unattributable to a single, authenticating individual: they spoke in a collective voice.⁷⁷

Authorial Fiction

The problem of fiction, then, meets up with the problem of subjective authenticity brought to light by the Tinguay amendment. Narrative fictions of various kinds (signed or unsigned) appear as another way around an injunction to speak one's opinions directly, in one's own name. Nerval makes this connection palpable in his insistence on the way that the historical truth of what is being written requires an identifiable speaking subject to guarantee it. He emphasizes the privilege of the first person singular, in the context of the dual restrictions of Riancey-Tinguay, as a unique form of writing that does not require any research or any documentation to be truthful. It is in the absence of documents, Nerval explains, that he is compelled to write *Les Faux Sauniers* in the first person to begin with, rather than as a third-person *étude historique* (historical study) like the others in the series. When, in the fifth installment, he is still narrating his own search rather than the abbé's life, he excuses himself with the following explanation:

Je suis encore obligé de parler de moi-même et non de l'abbé de Bucquoy. La compensation est mince. Il faut cependant que le public admette que l'impossibilité où nous sommes d'écrire du *roman* nous oblige à devenir les héros des aventures qui nous arrivent journellement, comme à tout homme,—et dont l'intérêt est sans doute fort contestable le plus souvent.

[I am obliged to ramble on about myself without getting to the abbé de Bucquoy. Small consolation indeed. But our audience will have to admit that given the impossibility of writing a *novel*, we shall have to become the hero of those adventures that befall us every day, as they do every man,—and whose interest is admittedly often quite limited.]⁷⁸

⁷⁷ This collectivity was in fact a feature they shared with the *roman-feuilleton*, whose reading practices and aesthetics often differed significantly from the novel in volume publication and might help explain why it was seen as being so dangerous. Because of their broad circulation in daily papers that reached households of various classes and political orientations, serialized novels suffused the culture and became a feature of its sociability (Thérenty, *La littérature au quotidien*, 51-52. For more on shifts in reading culture, see Alan, *In the Public Eye*). The *roman-feuilleton* was able to participate in the lives of its readers on a daily basis, not only through a private activity of reading, but as a shared cultural object, a subject of collective discussion and reflection. It also treated characters much closer to the people most of its readers knew in the real world than the characters of traditional novels, and the timing of its writing was often nearly simultaneous with its publication, giving it a very literal immediacy. The world of the novel was so close in so many ways, in fact, that reader sought to intervene in it, writing letters to novelists to try to influence the development of the plot. Eugène Sue's almost day-by-day writing of his serialized novels made it possible for readers to participate in the composition by sending their opinions on the story's development. Readers were even moved to contribute their own stories to the novel: Sue drew on the stories readers recounted to him in their letters, using them in his novels and so advocating for his readers in real time, so to speak, by revealing their plights (Blanc, *Nerval in the Newspaper*, 20). The novel produced in this way represents not only Sue's individual creative genius but also the lives of thousands of readers, making it a collective epic, just as the canard has the potential to invoke a broader social discourse in which different conceptions of truth are negotiated. For more on the centrality of reader contributions to popular novel forms like the serial, see Olivier-Martin, *Histoire du roman populaire*, 36.

⁷⁸ *Les Faux Sauniers* in *Œuvres complètes*, 2:28/*The Salt Smugglers*, 24.

The protagonist of the third person account he intended to write is not yet proven to have the weight of an historical individual, and so the author is forced to step in as hero, lending his own being to his still dubious subject. The quest for documentation in *Les Faux Saulniers* reveals itself as a quest for a protagonist who could be one; we must remember that what allows Angélique to step in as protagonist for several installments are her memoirs, a first person account of her life. What protects her from being identified as the heroine of a taxable historical novel is the simple fact that, in the source documents and sometimes in Nerval's text itself, she speaks in her own name; "her implicit integrity and the authenticity of her voice" act as guarantors of truth for the story.⁷⁹ She, like Nerval himself, is cast into the spotlight by the Riancey amendment's prohibition of fiction.

This exposure of the writing "I" doubles that of the Tinguay amendment's call for articles signed by their individual authors. The call for signatures is, as Nerval interprets it in a theater column in *La Presse* earlier that fall, an injunction to write in the first person singular, to the detriment of journalism.⁸⁰ The prohibition of the collective voice (the journalistic *nous*) has resulted, he laments, in a foregrounding of the individual writer in the text: "Depuis que la loi oblige tout journaliste de signer ses articles, la personnalité de chaque écrivain risque de se développer outre mesure. Sans être forcé peut-être de raconter son histoire, on se voit néanmoins conduit à *poser* davantage devant le lecteur" ["Since the law requires all journalists to sign their articles, the personality of each writer runs the risk of developing out of control. Though perhaps not forced to tell his story, one nonetheless finds oneself driven to *pose* for the reader more and more"].⁸¹ The writer has been made visible so that he can be accountable for what he writes, but this turns into an obligation to stage himself for readers. The individual subject takes on an undue importance here so that even when the writer isn't writing about himself, the text is always at risk of being overrun by his *personality*. Nerval's response to this dilemma in the column is to try to defuse it by facing it head on. If the law requires it, he says, "Prenons donc, pour l'essayer un instant, ce terrible moi de Montaigne et de Pascal, qu'on ne peut faire supporter que par le génie—ou par l'influence inattaquable d'une honnête sincérité" ["So, in order to try it out, let's adopt this terrible self of Montaigne and Pascal, that can be made bearable only by genius—or by the unassailable influence of an honest sincerity"].⁸² Rather than allowing the *je* to suffuse the text with its personality, Nerval opts to "raconter son histoire" ["tell his story"] directly, giving an account of his career as a journalist. His ostentatious response to the demands of the law is to ironically adopt precisely the "honnête sincérité" of which the National Assembly dreamed.

The approach he takes in this column in many ways prefigures the approach he takes in *Les Faux Saulniers*, where he is, for the complex reasons we have been exploring, obliged to "devenir le héros." Nerval chooses to adopt an epistolary form in the *feuilleton*, making the person of the writer (as well as the person of the *directeur* to whom he writes) palpably present throughout and emphasizing the text's attribution to an identifiable individual. Though the typographical conventions of the letter are not applied to the *feuilleton* as a whole, the first installment is explicitly addressed "Au Directeur du « National »" ("To the Director of the *National*"), and the writing *je* is in constant relation to the recipient *vous*.⁸³ The relationship of a disembodied writer, writing to a reader

⁷⁹ Blanc, *Nerval in the Newspaper*, 146.

⁸⁰ "Théâtres," *La Presse*, September 30, 1850, 2:1199-1207.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 1199-1200.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 1200.

⁸³ *Les Faux Saulniers* in *Œuvres complètes*, 2:3. . Of course, many of Nerval's columns and other journalistic writing are marked by the presence of an addressee (as when he publishes a letter to Théophile Gautier in the *Journal de Constantinople*), but more often than not this addressee is the reading public (the readers themselves)—the readers with

who can only be imagined (that literary relation of two subjects entirely abstract for one another) is supplanted by a concrete relationship between two well-defined subjects.⁸⁴ The form of the writing gives body, in a certain sense, to the communicative act at work within it, insisting on a literalness of the relation marked not only by the identity of the writer, as the Tinguay amendment proposed, but also by the identity of the addressee. Nerval seems to one-up the law with his letter form, explicitly short-circuiting all of the ineffability of address characteristic of journalism (and, we must also remark, literature more broadly) with a particular, occasional structure of address.⁸⁵ By foregrounding an obsessive concern with the danger of this exchange of writing—with the possible consequences of his *feuilleton* for the director—Nerval keeps this real relationship between two real people adamantly present throughout *Les Faux Saulniers*. Through his defensiveness, he constantly consolidates the writing subject in precisely the terms in which the law imagines it.

This is perhaps most evident in two strange digressions in the text in which Nerval defends himself against criticisms of his previous writing, apparently entirely unconnected to the abbé. It is in the terms of the criticisms and his defense that some connection to the rest of the text can be found, in the emphasis on the kinds of authorial authenticity demanded by the law. In the first of these digressions, Nerval defends himself against the accusation of having changed political stripes.⁸⁶ The newspaper *Le Corsaire* has claimed that Nerval used to write for *L'Esprit public*, a paper whose Republican politics vary significantly from those of the oppositional *National*. Nerval claims, however, that similar names have caused a mix up: “Il y a eu, dans les renseignements qu’a pu prendre le rédacteur du *Corsaire*, confusion entre deux noms. Je ne suis pas ce même M. Gérard [...]” [“Whoever wrote the piece in the *Corsaire* confused my name with someone else’s. I am not the same M. Gérard [...]”].⁸⁷ Nerval’s own use of the signature *Gérard* early in his career has made a mess here, allowing him to be mistaken for a M. Gérard, “auquel mon nom a pu faire du tort dans son parti, comme le sien risquerait de m’en faire aujourd’hui,—si j’appartenais à un parti” [“whom I suppose my name could have hurt in his party affiliations, just as his seems to be affecting me today,—that is, if I indeed belonged to a political party”]. The bind Nerval finds himself in here is precisely the one the Tinguay amendment was intended to avoid.⁸⁸ And indeed, he defends himself in terms the National Assembly might approve of, assuring readers of the consistency of his (lack of) political commitments and even going so far as to justify the only ongoing professional engagement he has had with the government (a long battle with the theater censor in 1839). When his integrity as a journalist comes under attack in *Le Corsaire*, he reacts to protect it, showing himself to be an authentic writing subject, the journalist of the Tinguay amendment.

whom Nerval is engaged week-to-week, article-to-article, in a sort of “causerie” (“Théâtres,” *La Presse*, September 30, 1850 in *Œuvres complètes*, 2:1201).

⁸⁴ Even if the director never speaks directly, Nerval allows us to infer some communication from him, at least in forwarding letters from readers: “Vous m’envoyez deux lettres[...]” [“You have forwarded onto me two letters [...]”] (*Les Faux Saulniers* in *Œuvres complètes*, 2:85/*The Salt Smugglers*, 64).

⁸⁵ This potentiality of the epistolary form to create vivid specificity and reality for its two implied characters is one that Nerval had already experimented with by the time he wrote *Les Faux Saulniers*. Indeed, the epistolary texts that are known, following Jacques Bony’s classification, as the “Essais romanesques,” are remarkable precisely for the degree to which they create a sense of the real existence of their addressee, in a very concrete relation to their writer. These texts from the early 1840s, including “Les Amours de Vienne,” “Un roman à faire” and “Le Roman tragique” take the form of love letters. The case of the “Lettres d’amour” is particularly interesting: the beloved addressed in these letter is so little the abstract muse of love poetry that scholars long took these letters for ‘real’ love letters addressed to Jenny Colon, the woman Nerval is believed to have loved, and failed to recognize them as part of Nerval’s engagement with the fictional potential of the epistolary. For the classic refutation of this literal reading of the “Lettres d’amour,” see Bomboir, “Les Lettres d’amour de Nerval : mythe ou réalité ?”

⁸⁶ “Réponse au *Corsaire*,” *Les Faux Saulniers* in *Œuvres complètes*, 2:28-39.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 29/25. Translation modified.

⁸⁸ Ibid. Translation modified.

In a parallel defensive digression, he stages himself as a serious historian, compliant with the Riancey amendment.⁸⁹ Here Nerval responds to an article in *La Presse*, written by Auguste Bernard of the National Printing Works, claiming that the account Nerval has given elsewhere of the history of printing was mere *fable* (tall tale): “On me reproche d’avoir, dans un article signalé *spirituel* (triste compensation : nous avons tous de l’esprit, en France) ; on me reproche, dis-je, d’avoir écrit, il y a deux mois, des *fables*,—en parlant de la découverte de l’imprimerie” [“I have been accused, in an article of mine deemed quite *witty* (not much of consolation, this: here in France, everybody is a wit), accused, I say, of having told some *tall tales* some two months ago,—while discussing the invention of printing”].⁹⁰ The importance attributed to this accusation is surprising given that Bernard’s dismissal of Nerval’s account was only a sentence long, and yet it makes perfect sense when we see how closely this accusation maps onto the terms of the Riancey amendment, with its concern for historical veracity. The quicksand-like danger of the law becomes visible here, as *fable* (awfully close to *fiction*) is used to describe what might also be thought of as simply inadequate history:

[C]eci me fait courir un nouveau danger.—Ainsi, je tenterais de faire de l’histoire sur des récits vagues ;—je me livrerais à des fables ;—je serais capable d’écrire des *romans* !—Allez plus loin ; dénoncez-moi à la commission chargée de qualifier nos feuilletons et d’y découvrir le vrai ou le faux,—selon les termes de l’amendement Riancey [...]

[I am still navigating through dangerous waters.—I stand accused of turning vague hearsay into history, of indulging in *fables* or worse, of perpetrating *novels* !—Well, why not just go all the way! Go ahead, denounce me to the commissioners whose business it is,—faithful to the stipulations of the Riancey amendment [...]]⁹¹

If the last time he meant to write history, he wrote a tall tale, Nerval jokes, they might as well condemn his *feuilleton* now. Even in his humor here, Nerval seems to acquiesce to the logic of the Riancey amendment; Bernard’s characterization of his writing, however offhand it might have been, is answered with (mock) seriousness as part of *Les Faux Saulniers*’ ostentatious obsequiousness to the law. And so a new history is given, in an apparent attempt to vindicate Nerval as a historian, as a subject of authorized writing. In these twin responses to *Le Corsaire* and Auguste Bernard, Nerval brings to the surface the axes along which his authorial *je* is officially constituted and makes a show of valuing them, protecting them. Constantly obliged, as he says, to talk about himself (“Je suis encore obligé de parler de moi-même et non de l’abbé de Bucquoy” [“I am obliged to ramble on about myself without getting to the abbé de Bucquoy”]⁹²), he aggressively asserts that self as the National Assembly’s paragon of journalistic integrity.

It might be tempting, then, to see Nerval forced by the Press Law into assuming the *je* (the writing of the self in the first person) that will be associated with his later work.⁹³ But the irony that

⁸⁹ “Réponse à M. Auguste Bernard,” *Les Faux Saulniers* in *Œuvres complètes*, 2:47-50/*The Salt Smugglers*, 38-39.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 48-49/38.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 48/38.

⁹² *Les Faux Saulniers* in *Œuvres complètes*, 2:28/*The Salt Smugglers*, 24.

⁹³ It is very much in this sense of a progression toward authentic self-expression that Bony understands the importance *Les Faux Saulniers*, where the given constraint obliges him to tell himself. Nonetheless, Bony’s study of *Le récit nervalien* is invaluable, particularly for its insistence on Nerval as an intentional, rather than purely symptomatic, writer; Bony writes, “Ce Nerval-là, cet écrivain lucide, est un artisan, un travailleur de la poétique, on ne l’a pas assez dit, peut-être parce qu’il ne le dit guère lui-même” [“This Nerval, this lucid writer, is an artisan, a poetic laborer, which has not been remarked often enough, perhaps because he rarely says it himself”] (20). Bony analyzes the development of Nerval’s narrative

runs rampant in this text is indeed self-ironizing—not in the limited sense in which it is sometimes read, but in a radical sense of ironizing the selfhood of the writing subject altogether.⁹⁴ The *je* that Nerval adamantly assumes in the course of the text is more fraught than it presents itself as being, and is in a highly problematic relation to what we might think of as Nerval-himself, or an “authentic” subject. This ambivalence is evident in *Les Faux Saulniers*’ treatment of Rousseau, that great writer of the self who cannot help but be evoked by the insistence on a supposedly integral “I.” Rousseau epitomizes both the confessional staging of the writing subject and the fictional use of the first person in the epistolary form that Nerval deploys in *Les Faux Saulniers*, and so the text’s ongoing gestures to him seem another guarantee of the kind of authentic *je* at stake. And yet, though Rousseau haunts the text, he is conspicuously missing from the tradition of first person writing in which Nerval ironically inscribes himself: “Prenons donc, pour l’essayer un instant, ce terrible moi de Montaigne et de Pascal...” [“So, in order to try it out, let’s adopt this terrible self of Montaigne and Pascal”].⁹⁵ In one installment, Nerval even sets out to pay homage to Rousseau by visiting his tomb, but the ghost never materializes. The tomb, as it turns out, is empty: “Accomplissons le pèlerinage que nous nous sommes promis de faire, non pas près de ses cendres, qui reposent au Panthéon,—mais près de son tombeau” [“Let us pursue the pilgrimage that we promised ourselves to undertake: it shall lead us not to his mortal remains,—which are enshrined in the Pantheon,—but rather to the original site of his tomb”].⁹⁶ With a tomb and no earthly remains, the site of pilgrimage to pay homage to the most ostentatious of “I”s is nothing but the inscription of a name: what remains of the man (his ashes) is elsewhere. If Rousseau seemed to underwrite an authentic bond between a name (a *je*) and a real subject, his absence from the text in all but name thus emphasizes that that bond has been broken.⁹⁷

It is in the spirit of this disjuncture between the writing subject and a real individual who could authenticate it that, amidst his insistence on the integrity of his journalistic subject, Nerval practices a constant alienation of that subject. While some of his apparent digressions lead us to a consolidation of the *je* (as in the defenses against *Le Corsaire* and Auguste Bernard), others efface the *je* in favor of other speakers. As Richard Sieburth observes, “even as we think we have entered into the quotidian intimacy of our narrator, ... the Nervalien “I” keeps slipping through our fingers, lost in the labyrinth of the Archive, its voice receding into the intertextual murmur of the Library of Babel.”⁹⁸ The number of voices we hear in the first-person narrative *Les Faux Saulniers* is baffling: there is, as I have discussed, Angélique de Longueval speaking for herself in excerpts from her memoirs, but also her first suitor writing her a love letter, and her cousin recounting the end of her life. There is the lovesick seal’s owner telling its story, and the seal’s audience discussing its performance. There is the peasant explaining the significance of Gabrielle’s tower, and the Valois peasantry singing songs, as well as Nerval’s childhood friend Sylvain summarizing a play he wrote. There is d’Argenson reporting on police activity, and Pontchartrain commenting on it, and even the prefect of Paris writing to evict Nerval. There is the abbé’s aunt petitioning for his exoneration, and

practice as it passes through dominant narrative forms, moving toward the strange autobiography of the first-person texts toward which Nerval turns after 1850. While Bony’s conception of Nerval’s career as a quest for the appropriate form in which to recount the self leads him at times awfully close to the vision of Nerval as a personality in search of a form that he is trying to avoid, his taking Nerval seriously as a writer even in the early narrative work is very fruitful; see *Le récit nervalien*.

⁹⁴ Cf. Bony, *Le récit nervalien*, 219.

⁹⁵ “Théâtres,” *La Presse*, September 30, 1850 in *Œuvres complètes*, 2:1200.

⁹⁶ *Les Faux Saulniers* in *Œuvres complètes*, 2:91 / *The Salt Smugglers*, 68.

⁹⁷ For a thorough and insightful reading of the ways Nerval deploys Rousseau in his writing at various stages of his career, including in *Les Faux Saulniers* / *Angélique*, see Streiff Moretti, *Le Rousseau de Gérard de Nerval*.

⁹⁸ “Translator’s Postscript” to *The Salt Smugglers*, 146.

finally the abbé himself denouncing arbitrary authority. On and on, these characters' voices spring up in the text, displacing Nerval's own voice. Chambers places this phenomenon of "elocutionary disappearance" at the center of his reading of *Les Faux Saulniers*, or rather, of its later iteration, "Angélique":

We will see that the source of "Angélique"'s oppositionality as writing lies in its textual mimesis of melancholy as the "elocutionary disappearance" [...] of the individual self, replaced by an errant, nomadic textual subject whose voice melds into the text as "collective enunciation," as his uncentered identity fuses with the wanderings of temporality.⁹⁹

As it turns out, whenever we are not looking, the adamant *je* of *Les Faux Saulniers* is giving voice to a quite different subject: to all and sundry, to an indiscriminately inclusive *nous*. What's more, even when the *je* seems to be itself, it is only performing as protagonist in place of the abbé, who can't be staged directly. In subjecting himself to and also constantly trying to evade the July 1850 Press Law, Nerval is perhaps the most accurate, legal depiction possible of the abbé de Bucquoy, who was constantly trying to escape from prison, though he was never arrested for crimes he had actually committed. The writing subject of *Les Faux Saulniers* is thus never just itself, but becomes the site of the forbidden fiction, the story it set out to tell.

For Chambers, this dislocation of the writing subject constitutes its suicide, participating in what he calls the "melancholic epistemology" of the work, organized around the central absence of a subject.¹⁰⁰ Yet we might follow Chambers in his identification of the collective voice generated (preserved) in the text without understanding this as a mark of destruction, as a painful departure from the ideals of Romanticism. On the contrary, as we have seen, forms of collective subjectivity are very much at stake in the transformation faced by journalistic writing in 1850. Both a strictly journalistic collective voice (Tinguy's pesky *nous*) and the voice of popular (counter-factual) belief were being purged from the press during this period. In this context, the kind of "authentic writing subject" we might assume to be the desirable sort for writers (and certainly those still influenced by Romanticism and Rousseauism) shows itself to be much more fraught. We see the ideological stakes, beyond an ideal of self-expression, that are bound up in an emphasis on writing in the first person. By placing Nerval within the journalistic universe where such ambivalences are in play, we make possible a positive reading of the strange "elocutionary disappearance" of *Les Faux Saulniers*. The *je* may be compromised here, but it is compromised in favor of a collective voice that is at risk of expulsion from the discursive space of journalism, and so from the modern public sphere more broadly, a collective voice that generates its own truths alongside the facts put forth by the government. *Les Faux Saulniers* appears, then, not "in terms of a melancholic epistemology—an epistemology of loss, unavailability, episodcity, and deferment" through the tension of writing-while-not-writing a *roman-feuilleton*, but rather as a recovery, within and against the constraints of the law, of the unique journalistic epistemology the National Assembly wanted to destroy.¹⁰¹ This collective fiction belongs neither to the modern, informational journalistic discourse that was being consolidated during the mid-19th century, nor to the novel that was retreating into an autonomous literary space. It is, in the culturally dominant definition of the terms, neither fact nor fiction, but a deployment of both to create a mode of fictional discourse that their separation has excluded. The subjectivity that lay at the origin of literature for Romanticism is here but a mask in a fiction freed

⁹⁹ *Room for Maneuver*, 115.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

from its reduction to plot and restored to its full cultural importance. The *faux saulnage* (salt smuggling, but literally salt counterfeiting) that goes on in the text is not the abbé's, but Nerval's own—though not in the sense in which some scholars have understood this, as a smuggling into the *feuilleton* of the forbidden novel. What is smuggled in the text is a fiction that opposes both the National Assembly *and* the novel, both the political *and* the literary authority: a collective subject that cannot be reduced to the *je* for which it passes itself off. This collective subject is not, as I will show in Chapter Four, unique to *Les Faux Sauniers*, but is rather a crucial feature of Nerval's poetics more broadly. In its poly-vocality and intertextuality, this subject expands to include not only the writing but also the reading subject, and so to make of the literary text the kind of collective performance we saw in *Sylvie*'s festivals, a fictional practice far more vital than the novelistic one targeted by the Press Law.

Chapter Four

Performing Authorship

Les Illuminés and *Les Chimères*

Il était à la fois tous les artistes qu'il avait étudiés et tous les livres qu'il avait lus, et cependant, en dépit de cette faculté comédienne, il restait profondément original.

[All at once he was every artist he had studied and every book he had read, and yet, despite that actor's gift, he remained deeply original.]

Baudelaire, *La Fanfarlo*¹

Anti-Lyric and Poetic Innovation

Our readings thus far have created a picture of Nerval that radically differs from the canonical one. The canonical Nerval may vary slightly from one reading to the next, but is universally read in a lyrical mode: perhaps this is why we know him as a poet despite the fact that poems represent a tiny fraction of his writing. The self-expressive Nerval is the best-known one, the one that seems to reveal himself in first-person texts like *Sylvie* and *Aurélia*, as well as the sonnets of *Les Chimères* [*The Chimeras*]. It is generally agreed that his is a troubled subject—whether for biographical reasons of madness and confinement, or for textual reasons of fragmentation and instability—and that his troubled subject is always oriented toward its (impossible) recovery. Even at the moments when lyricism breaks down, it remains the primary point of reference for reading Nerval. In canonical readings, the *je* is the thing: both the origin and the goal of Nerval's writing. In this sense, Nerval scholarship has served as a privileged bastion of Idealist-Romantic literary ideals over the past century and a half, despite occasional suggestions that Nerval's writing might have a complicated relationship to Romanticism.² His links to the German tradition in particular are used to justify a

¹ In *Le Spleen de Paris*. *La Fanfarlo*, 41/*Fanfarlo*, 7. Other translations are my own except where noted.

² We might think here of readings like those in Bénichou's hugely influential *Romantismes français*: Bénichou's thoughtful and erudite reflections on Nerval's literary ambitions take into account his break with the hopes of High Romanticism à la Hugo, but ultimately situates the significance of his literary choices in his biography and privileges apparently autobiographical texts like "Octavie" and *Aurélia*, so that the authorial subject remains the be-all and end-all of the reading; see, in particular, *L'École du désenchantement*.

generally Idealist approach to his work, authorizing literary values like sincerity of expression, originality, aesthetic autonomy, and a relative indifference to the real as measures of his success or failure as a writer, without calling them into question.

My readings have revealed instances of an adamant resistance to certain elements of such Romanticism, and particularly its lyrical subjectivity. In *Les Nuits d'octobre*, I showed the writing subject not as integral or self-contained, but as the site of a disorderly encounter between world and imagination. In *Sylvie*, I theorized this porousness of the subject as a form of imaginative practice, as a form of lived fiction that opens the self beyond the flatness of sincerity or utility. In *Les Faux Sauniers*, I revealed that fictional self to be composed of a host of other subjects—the site of encounter not only of self and world but also of *selves*, the site of a community that disguises itself as the individual the law requires it to be. It is the poetics of this collective subject that I will explore in what follows, demonstrating how the local instances of opposition to a self-contained subjectivity we have already seen in fact participate in a much broader literary project. They are not simply negative responses to particular discourses, but participate in an affirmative poetics that creates a porous and mobile subject as a way of transforming literature itself. This is a writing subject that operates beyond the relevance of categories like authenticity or sincerity, and that in the process reforms the experiences of reading and writing, as well as the relationships established between readers and writer. By turning the writing subject into an actor, Nerval's poetics allows literature to function like the collective performance of *Sylvie*, responding to the desire for lost continuity and collective experience done away with by the bourgeois ideology (political, philosophical, and aesthetic) that increasingly underpinned mid-19th-century French society.

Intertextuality and Literary Values

At the center of this transformative poetics lies one of the most unmistakable, and yet least theorized, features of Nerval's writing: its vertiginous intertextuality. Nerval's writing is as often as not some form of rewriting: translation, anthology, adaptation, transposition, recapitulation, summary, allusion, citation, and even plagiarism. His tendency toward different forms of what we might call textual borrowing shifts over time, but the fact of the borrowing remains constant. He publishes translations of Goethe and Heine, and anthologies of renaissance and German poetry; he rewrites stories by Jean Paul, Hoffmann, and Scarron, an article by Dickens, and poems by Jean Paul, Goethe, and Du Bartas; he passes off one of his own poems as a translation of Bürger, and a translation of Sealsfield as his own story; his travel writing lifts whole scenes from William Lane and his historical portraits are dense patchworks of existing sources—and the list goes on.³ I will argue that the profusion and fragrance of his intertextual gestures are essential to his writing practice as a whole, serving as the primary site of the dislocation of the subject that allows for a reconceptualization of literature as a fundamentally extra-subjective practice.

This feature of the writing is commonly observed, but rarely given much serious consideration. It is ignored largely as a kind of shameful detail, the critic passing quietly over the

³ I am thinking here of: *Faust* and *Second Faust*, *Les poésies de Henri Heine*, *Choix des poésies de Ronsard...*, *Poésies allemandes*, *Les Faux sauniers/Leben Fibels*, *des Verfassers der Bienrodischen Fibel*, *Pandora/Abenteuer der Silvesternacht*, *Le roman tragique/Le roman comique*, *Les Nuits d'octobre/The Key of the Street* (discussed in Chapter One), "Le Christ aux oliviers"/"Siebenkaes," "Delfica" (or "Daphne," or "à J—y Colonna")/"Chanson de Mignon," "à Mad^e Sand"/8th sonnet of the *Dialogue des Neuf Muses Pyrénées...*, "Sonnet" (or "Le Soleil et la gloire"), "Jemmy"/"Christophorus Bärenhäuter im Amerikanerlande," *Voyage en Orient/Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, *Les Illuminés*. The complex relationships of Nerval's writing to source texts are well documented, if not analyzed, in the voluminous notes to the new Pleiade edition. The evidence of intertextuality is less abundantly publicized when it comes to his most canonical works, however: the link between "Sylvie" and the 1833 George Sand and Jules Sandeau novel, *Rose et Blanche, ou la comédienne et la religieuse*, goes unmentioned.

author's naughty habit. What meaning is attributed to borrowing is almost always negative, and often does not go beyond Nerval's fear of sterility and need to make a living writing day-to-day.⁴ Jean Richer is an exception when he argues that Nerval's use of references is an attempt to assert textual mastery,⁵ but when considering Nerval's borrowings more broadly, most modern scholars see them through the lens of Nerval's psychology, attributing them to a failure of identity, failure to differentiate himself from what he is not.⁶ In such readings, Nerval cannot help but disturb the ideal of a coherent, expressive subject with his troubling, involuntary readiness to find himself everywhere and so to destabilize the self altogether.⁷ Borrowing is thus seen as a symptom, independent from any properly aesthetic intent or effect, indicating either an idiosyncratic psychological problem or a more universal problem of the "madness" and subjective loss of textuality, independent from any properly aesthetic intent or effect. Even Lawrence Schehr's understanding of Nerval's intertextual "vampirism," which interprets these practices as a function of influence and imitation and a crucial element of Nerval's particular mode of literary production, ultimately makes of borrowing a weakness: Schehr locates Nerval's aesthetic autonomy in the ways he distances himself from his source texts through misreading, setting aside the moments of more direct, "accurate" transmission.⁸

The Romantic literary values of originality and authentic self-expression thus prevail in interpretations of Nerval's intertextual practices, which unanimously read borrowing as an aesthetic failure, a symptom of some lack. The superiority of original writing over rewriting has a self-evidence that makes itself available to various frameworks, unified by their unconscious (or at least unacknowledged) reliance on these historically specific literary values.⁹ They are values strongly associated with the mid-19th century, not only with the height of Romantic aesthetics but also with the steady strengthening of intellectual property rights that institutionalized those aesthetics.¹⁰ In the Tinguay amendment to the July Press Law, we saw the National Assembly's push for individual authorial accountability, but this one piece of legislation was part of a much broader trend, and one that did not always act on literature from the outside.¹¹ This period saw the naturalization of the

⁴ For example, Bony takes this position, attributing many of the writing practices that interest us here to "alimentaire" necessity, though he does acknowledge the experimental use to which Nerval puts these supposedly instrumental borrowings; see *L'Esthétique de Nerval*, in particular "Écriture et musique : arrangement, combinaisons, création," 90-99. Even Lawrence Schehr's substantial analysis of intertextual practice in Nerval reduces it to a "disease" that the writing seeks to overcome; see "Romantic Interruptions" in *Rendering French Realism*.

⁵ Richer, *Expérience vécue et création ésotérique*.

⁶ Recall as well our discussion of the self and the non-self in Chapter One.

⁷ See, among many others, Malandain, *Nerval ou l'incendie du théâtre*; and Tsujikawa, *Nerval et les limbes de l'histoire*. I will return to this question in greater depth below.

⁸ Schehr, "Le *Faust* de Nerval: Poésie et Vérité."

⁹ As Hélène Maurel-Indart observes in her historical survey of plagiarism, during the Renaissance, for example, the creative dimension of borrowing was often emphasized over the parasitic dimension that stands out in later discourses of intellectual property rights. Maurel-Indart's study is nevertheless tinged by a latent disapproval, a tendency to see plagiarism as theft that partakes of a very specific conception of literature and literary property; see *Du plagiat*.

¹⁰ The 19th century saw a continuous fortification of the legal rights of intellectual and specifically literary property. From the *ancien régime* system of royal privileges under which publishers but not authors were given monopoly printing rights over specific works, policy in post-Revolutionary France gave authors rights over their work, framed in terms of property rather than privilege—rights that were then strengthened at intervals throughout the century. On this history of intellectual property in modern France, see Carla Hesse, "Enlightenment Epistemology and the Law of Authorship in Revolutionary France, 1777-1793"; and Christine Haynes, "The Politics of Authorship: The Effects of Literary Property Law on Author-Publisher Relations" and *Lost Illusions: The Politics of Publishing in Nineteenth-Century France*. For contemporary analysis of the issues at stake, see Augustin-Charles Renouard, "Théorie du droit des auteurs sur les productions de leur intelligence"; and Joseph Adrien Gastambide, *Historique et théorie de la propriété des auteurs*; the latter provides a detailed survey of the legislative vicissitudes of intellectual property through the early years of the Second Empire.

¹¹ See Chapter Three.

conception of literary and other intellectual production as original products of individual labor whose authenticity was underwritten by their link to their creator and which had to be duly protected like the fruits of other labors. Yet as we see in *Les Faux Saulniers* and *Les Nuits d'octobre*, it is not at all clear that Nerval's writing adheres to these values: his writing maintains a troubled relationship to valorizations and regulations of authentic self-expression, and it ironizes and evades constraints that seek to constitute such authorized expression.

If we take the period in question to be synonymous with a conception of literature as originating in an individual's creative labor, Nerval's apparent opposition might appear profoundly anachronistic, suggesting either an untimeliness in his writing or an insensitivity to timeliness in our readings. But to cast out Nerval's resistance to mid-19th-century literary discourses of originality and authenticity is to forget the debates on literary property that were ongoing throughout the century. The development of intellectual, and specifically literary, property rights might appear, in retrospect, as an inexorable forward march, but was in fact mired well past mid-century in disagreements as to the nature and proper limits of such property. These debates engaged not only men of letters but also political thinkers of all stripes throughout the July Monarchy and Second Empire, interrogating the nature of property in general and in particular the viability of public goods.¹² One axis of the ongoing debates lines up precisely with the issues at stake in our readings of Nerval: the individual versus the collective nature of literary production.¹³

The position most familiar to modern readers, because ultimately borne out by the development of intellectual property law, identified authors with other producers insofar as they labored to create goods that should be defended as private property. The book is a commodity that creates value for the publisher who sells it and for the public who purchases it, so it is only right that the author who originates that value should own it.¹⁴ Such was the view of proponents of extending authors' rights, including well-known writers of the Romantic period like Vigny, Balzac, and the great statesman Alphonse de Lamartine.¹⁵ Even if it had to be admitted that the content of ideas originates in the public domain and returns to it when circulated in print, this camp argued that the *form* given to ideas in books is the result of one person's labor and has to be protected as such: "[L]a pensée n'a pas de tarif. Le livre en a un" ["Thought has no price. A book has one"].¹⁶ This conception of literary property allows for a certain amount of borrowing in literary production, but ultimately insists on the transformation and rearrangement (*formal* originality) by which appropriation must be redeemed. Whatever the author draws into his text must come to be recognizably his own, manifest in a distinctly *new* combination. The proponents of literary property thus emphasized the originality of literary production over its derivative and collaborative dimensions, arguing that the author has a right to his writing insofar as his primary function is to give a unique shape to his ideas. In addition to defining literary production in a way that justifies property rights, this conception of literature also serves effectively to regulate literary production, defining legitimate and, by implication, illegitimate, authorial practice. It implies that derivative,

¹² See for example Alphonse de Lamartine's 1841 speeches before the National Assembly; and the second part of Louis Blanc, *Organisation du travail*.

¹³ Our discussion of the politics of intellectual property in 19th century France is necessarily limited to this one axis, emphasizing the ideological dimension of the debate rather than the incredibly complicated economic relations between corporatist and liberal forces within the publishing industry and the various ways that writers and other public figures positioned themselves in those economic conflicts. For more on the messiness of the liberalization of the book trade, see Christine Haynes's instructive work.

¹⁴ Lamartine, "Sur la propriété littéraire," paragraph 13.

¹⁵ Haynes, "The Politics of Authorship," 102.

¹⁶ Lamartine, "Sur la propriété littéraire," paragraph 13.

citational writing, in which what is public and what is private cannot be distinguished, lies outside the realm of literature.

This view of literature and of the legitimacy of literary property stood in stark opposition to a collectivist view of literary production, shared by such unlikely fellows as conservative jurist Augustin-Charles Renouard and socialist politician Louis Blanc.¹⁷ At the heart of this conception of literature (motivated by vastly different political projects) is an emphasis on ideas as public goods that cannot and *should not* be converted to private property. For Renouard, this refusal of intellectual property was grounded in a defense of property more broadly as a natural and not a conventional institution: ideas, like everything else, the argument went, come from God and can be rightly held as private property only insofar as that is necessary, i.e. insofar as use by multiple individuals is mutually exclusive and the right to sole ownership is thereby validated. Since printed ideas can be circulated without alienating the ownership of the original holder and so are not naturally, or necessarily, private property, they cannot be private property at all.¹⁸ Lamartine sums up the position held by his opponents Renouard and his conservative colleagues thus:

La pensée est à tous, la pensée est du domaine public, car elle est du domaine divin, car elle traverse une tête d'homme, d'un être misérable, borné, transitoire, qui n'en est que le réflecteur, pour se réfléchir, pour se rejaillir sur tous les hommes. Elle est, à tout œil qui s'ouvre et qui la reçoit, inaliénable comme la clarté une fois reçue.

[Thought belongs to everyone, thought belongs to the public domain, for it belongs to the divine domain, for it traverses the mind of a man—of a miserable, narrow-minded, transient being who is but its reflector—in order to reflect itself and rain down on all men. It is, for any eye that opens to it and receives it, unalienable like the light once received.]¹⁹

This argument holds that authors should be compensated by remunerated copyrights for the social utility of their work; they have a moral right, but have no property rights.

This was a view largely shared by Blanc, who favored a national system of remuneration for writers, independent of a literary market. The non-exclusivity of intellectual property (likened by Renouard to fire and air) was also fundamental to Blanc's reasoning, according to which an idea cannot be isolated from the world from which it emerges and in which it circulates: "La propriété de la pensée ! Autant vaudrait dire la propriété de l'air renfermé dans le ballon que je tiens dans ma main. L'ouverture faite, l'air s'échappe ; il se répand partout, il se mêle à toutes choses : chacun le respire librement" ["Ownership of thought! Why not ownership of the air enclosed in the balloon I hold in my hand? As soon as I release it, the air escapes; it spreads out in all directions, it mixes with everything: everyone breathes it freely"].²⁰ Thought (and, by implication, literature) is above all collective property, wont to circulate throughout society and thus deformed by attempts to confine it: "soumettre la pensée à la théorie de l'échange, c'est donner une quantité finie pour mesure à une quantité infinie" ["to submit thought to the theory of exchange is to use a finite quantity to measure

¹⁷ This is a view of intellectual property that has come to the fore once again in recent years with movements to revitalize the public domain, including Creative Commons and Free Cultural Works. The ease of circulation of intellectual property of various kinds enabled by digital media has led to a resurgence of questions about the nature and regulation of intellectual property, reopening debates that had long been largely resolved under the domain of print.

¹⁸ Renouard, "Théorie du droit des auteurs," 253.

¹⁹ Lamartine, "Sur la propriété littéraire," paragraph 13.

²⁰ Blanc, *Organisation du travail*, 188.

an infinite quantity”].²¹ According to Blanc, the primary goal of any regulation of literature should be to maximize the circulation of good ideas, which realize their value precisely by dispersing and escaping the grasp of the person who “originated” them. Counter to the liberal view of intellectual property put forth by Lamartine, Blanc envisioned a strong public domain composed of the best works made available to all. The essential nature of literature here lies not in its origin in an individual but in its capacity for circulation and diffusion, for appropriation by many people. So it is that the restrictions on legitimate forms of literary production implied by literary property do not emerge here, and the possibility of sharing and reiteration appears as a positive literary dynamic.

This conflict about the nature of literature, individual or social, must provide the backdrop for our reading of Nerval’s poetics, which cannot simply be interpreted in terms of the liberalized-Romantic model of authentic, individual literary production, but must be positioned between these two divergent conceptions. The evidence upon which we might base an assessment of Nerval’s political views is admittedly sparse: he never made explicit statements on the matter, and was certainly not an outspoken proponent of either position. Yet what testimony we do have to Nerval’s attitude toward writing suggest a resistance to the liberalization of literature and an evasion of its mandate for individualistic production.

What is known about Nerval’s direct involvement with the politics of intellectual property is that it skirted the central question posed above, despite the ongoing polemic. Nerval’s recorded activity and reflection on issues pertaining to literary property exclusively concern the problem of the black market or pirated French books printed in Belgium that dramatically undercut the French publishing industry.²² His correspondence clearly attests to his interest in the problem of counterfeiting and its effect on the livelihood of French writers, particularly around the time of his 1840 travels in Belgium, where he planned to produce a report on *la contrefaçon belge* (Belgian counterfeiting) that would launch his (unrealized) diplomatic career.²³ It does not, however, necessarily follow from Nerval’s engagement with the problem of pirated books, or from his taking (at least instrumentally) a position friendly to the French government’s protectionism, that he favored an expansion of authors’ rights conceived as individual property. On the contrary, the debates surrounding international pirating and domestic intellectual property regulation often unfolded at cross-purposes, making it impossible to deduce his position in the second from the first.²⁴ The authors and publishers who were so at odds (at least rhetorically) at home found themselves allied in their opposition to the Belgian threat: whether one preferred to think of literary property as belonging to the individual or to society as a whole, there was agreement that literary property was *national* property and that its appropriation by foreigners at the expense of domestic economic interests was unacceptable. So it is that Nerval’s involvement in seeking solutions to the problem of *la contrefaçon belge* implies very little about his thinking regarding intellectual property beyond a concern for the economic viability of literature in France.

²¹ Ibid., 195.

²² This problem of *la contrefaçon belge* worsened with Belgian independence from Holland in 1830 and reached its peak in 1840; see Haynes, *Lost Illusion*, Chapter Two: The Battle Between Corporatists and Liberals, 48-91.

²³ It is unclear whether this report was ever written; it has, at least, yet to be located. For more on Nerval’s brief diplomatic ambitions, see Gérard Cogez, Gérard de Nerval; see also Janin, “Gérard de Nerval”.

²⁴ In the case of piracy, increased regulation was intended to protect the French book market against foreign producers, while in the case of intellectual property, regulation was advocated as a way to protect the livelihood of writers against the forces of the domestic book trade. What’s more, it was argued that measures increasing authors’ property rights in France tended to increase the price of domestic books and so weaken the French industry’s ability to compete with the international black market – and so, too, weaken the prospects of authors who depended on a legitimate market. Haynes makes it clear that the impression relentlessly promoted that literary property rights were meant to protect authors (and their descendants) was largely a screen for internal power struggles in the publishing industry; public debate nonetheless centered on intellectual property as a benefit to the authors themselves.

A concern for the livelihood of writers is also the only position Nerval is shown to take in the 1841 article in which Jules Janin addressed both Nerval and the question of literary property.²⁵ There, Janin paraphrased a recent conversation among several friends, including Nerval, about intellectual property. The conversation was sparked, Janin writes, by Nerval's enthusiasm on his return from Belgium about the question of pirated books, but the conversation immediately entangles the stakes of *la contrefaçon* with those of the duration of authors' domestic property rights, with each friend expounding on his position in the face of Nerval's constant, good-natured ridicule. When Nerval finally does intervene directly to dismiss the anti-intellectual property arguments of his fellows, his argument hinges on the viability of literature as a career: the writer who sells his services day-to-day (writing for newspapers, as Nerval often did, or selling his manuscripts without the promise of significant royalties) has no future, lives "au hasard" ["at random"]. This is the difficulty of the profession that drives even the most successful writers (think Lamartine or Hugo) into political life in search of a surer outlet for their ambition, a difficulty that must be answered by protecting the rights of writers. No principles are invoked here as to the nature of intellectual work or the essence of creative production; rather, Nerval extolls the usefulness of intellectual property solely as a way of making the writer's career viable. In Janin's depiction, Nerval entirely sidesteps the incendiary rhetoric of intellectual property debates, making no argument for an individualist model of literary production but simply advocating the social utility of ensuring writers a livelihood.

If he takes no explicit position in favor of literary property rights and the aesthetics that underpin them, it is also true that neither his interest in the black market nor the arguments Janin attributes to him constitute a clear opposition to literary property, either. Perhaps Janin did not know what Nerval's position was, or perhaps Nerval did not clearly have one; more likely still, perhaps it was not in the interest of Janin's portrait of Nerval to attribute a coherent political position to him. The figure Nerval cuts in Janin's "biographie anticipée" ["preemptive biography"] is a hapless one: a wandering, impractical eccentric who stumbled into his talent; a profligate who squandered his inheritance and gave wildly to his friends' literary projects rather than investing in his own renown.²⁶ He appears here as a childlike figure, ill-suited to the demands of real life, and it would certainly be inconsonant with this depiction for him to be politically conscious, let alone radical. But even in the traits that Janin uses to dismiss him here, a shadow of Nerval's position becomes visible.

Janin plays on the caricature of Nerval that Dumas was so influential in creating: the writer modest to the point of ineffectuality, who seems to evaporate at the mere mention of his name.²⁷ Nerval's prime characteristic seems to be a lack of personal ambition: he is not driven as befits the young writer of the July Monarchy (think Lucien de Rubempré). Rather, Janin observes, he invests freely in his friends' work without worrying about receiving credit or compensation:

[I]l se passionnait pour les livres d'autrui bien plus que pour ses propres livres ; quoi qu'il fût, il était tout prêt à tout quitter pour vous suivre. "Tu as une fantaisie, je vais

²⁵ "Gérard de Nerval"; see also Nerval's response 11 years later, "À Jules Janin", preface to *Lorely* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:3-12. Janin's article, written on the occasion of Nerval's first confinement to a mental institution in 1841, must be read with caution: Nerval describes it bitterly as a premature obituary and it certainly makes him fodder for readers' appetites for tragic figures of the *poète maudit*, that fragile idealistic child unsuited for the brutality of real life—a recognized phenomenon long before Verlaine named it in 1884 but treated inevitably with a mix of romance and scorn—and so does not necessarily have accurate representation as its primary motivation. The discussion of intellectual property "reported" in the article itself seems highly fictionalized and stands in an unclear relationship to the treatment of Nerval more broadly, although I will suggest one important link.

²⁶ "À Jules Janin," *Lorely*, in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:4.

²⁷ Théophile Gautier, *Histoire du Romantisme*, 74.

me promener avec elle, bras dessus, bras dessous, pendant que tu resteras à la maison à te réjouir”; et quand il avait bien promené votre poésie, ça et là, dans les sentier que lui seul il connaissait, au bout de huit jours, il vous la ramenait calme, reposée, la tête couronnée de fleurs, le cœur bien épris, les pieds lavés dans la rosée du matin, la joue animée au soleil de midi. Ceci fait, il revenait tranquillement à sa propre fantaisie qu’il avait abandonnée, sans trop de façon, sur le bord du chemin.

[He was fascinated by others’ books much more than by his own; whatever he might be doing, he was always ready to set it all aside to follow you. “You have a fancy, I shall take her walking, arm in arm, while you stay at home and revel”; and after a week, when he had taken your fancy for a stroll here and there, down paths known only to him, he would bring her back to you, calm, rested, her head crowned with flowers, her heart full of love, her feet bathed in the morning dew, her cheek brightened by the midday sun. With that done, he would quietly return to his own fancy, which he had unceremoniously left by the wayside.]²⁸

Despite his multifarious successes as a translator, poet, journalist, and playwright, Nerval appears here as the sort of anti-Hugo or anti-Dumas, unconcerned with his own reputation and his own project, eager to share in his friends’ endeavors, apparently for the sheer joy of it. This is a characteristic that appears again in Eugène de Mirecourt’s 1854 biography, in an image that succinctly captures the essence of the comparison being made by Janin: “Les uns sont les frelons, les autres sont les abeilles. Butinant ça et là, chaque jour, au milieu des plaines fleuries de l’imagination, Gérard apporte des richesses à la ruche et garnit les alvéoles du suc le plus pur.[...] Plus qu’un autre il avait droit à la récompense, et nous voyons les mouches paresseuses manger son miel. Il en rit le premier” [“There are wasps, and there are bees. Gathering nectar here and there amidst the flowered plains of the imagination, Gérard brings riches to the hive and fills the honeycomb with the purest nectar.[...] More than others, he has earned a reward, and we see idle flies eating his honey. He is always the first to joke about it”].²⁹

For Janin, as for Mirecourt years later, Nerval’s refusal to prioritize his own work signals his eccentricity and incompetence. It is a symptom of his failure to be a *real* writer, nothing more. But in the context of our discussion of intellectual property, these paired images of “promenant ta fantaisie” and “l’abeille altruiste” suggest that Nerval had a concerted allegiance to a collectivist model of literary production, albeit misunderstood by his contemporaries. It is not a question here of symptoms but of values, and Nerval is represented by both Janin and Mirecourt as valuing collaboration and engaging in an un-self-centered literary practice. Ideas for him appear to be shareable, borrowable, revitalized by their circulation among different writers; it seems to be the ultimate fruitfulness of the literary endeavor as a whole that matters, rather than the limited subsection of it that appears under his own name and that could constitute his personal *property*. If Nerval had a position in the debates surrounding literary property, then, it seems clear that he aligned himself (explicitly or not) with a conception of literature as a public good, maximized and realized by its free social circulation.

²⁸ “Gérard de Nerval,” *Journal des Débats* 1 March 1841: 1–3, 1. Cited in Nerval, “À Jules Janin,” *Lorely* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:3–12, 6–7.

²⁹ *Gérard de Nerval*, 23.

The Writing Subject as Impersonal Actor

It is in the context of this conception that we can begin to understand Nerval's poetics and to appreciate the central role that intertextuality plays within it. The derivative and citational nature of so much of Nerval's writing begins to appear as an aesthetic choice rather than as a failure of subjectivity or of writing. It contributes to local instances of opposition and evasion, as we have seen in *Les Faux Saulniers* where the insistently integral "I" is a screen for a polyphonic collective voice; or in *Les Nuits d'octobre* where ironic voicing of dominant discourses on the subject's relationship to the world creates a space for the imagination that they exclude. But the oppositional force of his intertextual gestures is not limited to these two serials, and in fact suffuses his entire body of work, bringing its productivity to bear in every one of the disjunctures between author and text listed earlier—each rewriting, each allusion, each citation. His is a writing practice that refuses to appropriate what it takes in, that refuses to transcend its borrowings with formal innovation, but rather retains the traces of its derivative gestures. These evident textual borrowings are central to the experiences of both writing and reading in Nerval's œuvre, establishing an alternative to the increasingly dominant model of individualist production and originality—a mode in which the collective process of circulation is kept in constant motion.

In its refusal to absolutely privilege the individual as the originator of literary creation, Nerval's writing practice based on citation transforms the writing subject. It becomes a kind of non-subject that denies itself, reduces itself to what Antoine Compagnon describes as a "répétiteur" ["repeater" or "rehearser"] or "rapporteur" ["reporter"], voicing another and so making of itself a mere medium.³⁰ It is this change in the function of the writing subject that is so often read as a failure of some sort; in psychological readings, it appears as a literal breakdown of the author's subjective identity. But if we approach it as a feature of the text rather than of the author, it needn't have this negative valence. It can be thought in relation to other textual practices that displace the clear presence of writerly authority within the text, like Bakhtinian dialogism.³¹ Nerval's borrowings do not function in a manner precisely analogous to the one Mikhail Bakhtin attributes to Dostoevsky's independent characters. While Dostoevsky is the creative origin of the characters to whom he gives apparent autonomy, Nerval invites preexisting autonomous voices into his texts, either directly or by allusion. Nevertheless, the approaches of these authors share a displacement of the writing subject as the perceived creator and arbiter of all that is written, a displacement that does not disrupt the text, but becomes one of its fundamental features.³² This displacement is everywhere at stake in Nerval's intertextual practices, his borrowing drawing its significance precisely from its effect as an enunciative gesture of repetition or reference rather than simply from the content it brings into the text.³³ The effect of this gesture is not purely ironic, as it is in what Terdiman describes as Flaubert's counter-discursive parroting; it does not signal the presence of writerly authority as what must distance itself from the language it dismisses by repeating it.³⁴ Rather, in Nerval's case, the repetition of, allusion to, and adaptation of others' words shift from one source to another so vertiginously as to make fixing a single relationship between writer and source

³⁰ Compagnon, *La Seconde main ou le travail de la citation*, 40. Compagnon's reflections on citation as a practice inherent to reading itself, as a fundamental element of our relationship to all text, are thought-provoking and provide an intriguing model of the activity of reading.

³¹ See Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*.

³² Below I will explore further the specificity of Nerval's textual practice as one that thus displaces the writing subject even as it proceeds in the first person.

³³ For more on the primacy of enunciation over enounced in the citation, see Compagnon, *Seconde main*.

³⁴ See Terdiman's treatment of citation as satire in Marx and Flaubert in "Counter-Humorists," *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France*, 198-226.

impossible. The effect is not one of monolithic irony that allows us to situate the writing subject, but of a mobility in which the writing subject is always slipping away toward its next borrowing.

The function of intertextuality in Nerval's writing as I have described it may seem liable to collapse into a post-structuralist conception of text. We seem to encounter here precisely Julia Kristeva's displacement of the expressive subject of the "work" in favor of a de-subjectivized productivity of "text."³⁵ And indeed, Nerval has been of great interest to post-structuralist scholars, Kristeva and Shohana Felman in particular.³⁶ They have not, however, taken into account the citational practices I am interested in here and which seem so perfectly emblematic of the textual phenomena that interest them. This is because both Kristeva and Felman read the subjective displacement that characterizes Nerval's writing not as a properly textual phenomenon, but as a mimetic one, preceded by, and corresponding to, Nerval's psychological state, understood in broadly Lacanian terms. By locating the significance of Nerval's writing practice in his psyche and the ways in which it reflects the underlying fissures within language itself, these readings cannot help but divorce the writing from the specific historical situation to which, as we have already seen, it so clearly responds. Even if we were to try to read Nerval as a historically-specific instance of the emergence of text (in opposition to the increasing dominance of just the sort of ideologies to which Kristeva claims text provides the only "outside"), our historicizing project would require a clean break with the Lacanian categories that are, according to Kristeva, the only way of thinking that "outside" of rationalist epistemology. As I have already shown, the moment at which Nerval found himself writing was one in which the far-reaching bourgeois ideologies to which both he and Kristeva respond were still in the process of solidification. There certainly was, by the early 1850s, a sense of the oppressive ramifications of the social, political, and cultural transformations taking place in France, but the possible forms of opposition and the alternate logics on behalf of which such opposition might have been made were not yet restricted as they have come to be since. Thus, we must not limit our understanding of the logic of Nerval's opposition to a hermeneutic that grew out of a later stage of development of the social conditions that were still nascent during this period. We must instead seek out a picture more complex than our broad narratives of capitalism and its discontents, attending to the surprising, local sites where emergent ideology was opposed, and to the particular values on behalf of which that opposition was made.³⁷ Only by considering Nerval in the specificity of his historical moment can we appreciate the complex phenomenology of the ideological changes he experienced in their early stages and the way in which he sought to transform literature in response to them.

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To read Nerval historically in this way, we must avoid as much as possible projecting preconceived logics of opposition (our ideas about what was to be opposed during this period, and on behalf of *what*) and seek instead a way of conceiving the particular oppositional gesture made by Nerval's writing practices themselves. We must look within Nerval's writing for models that might help to make sense of the decentering intertextuality of his texts. We have already encountered the

³⁵ Kristeva, *Semiotike*, 15.

³⁶ See Kristeva, *Soleil Noir. Dépression et mélancolie*; and Felman, *La Folie et la chose littéraire*. Gilles Deleuze is worth mentioning as another post-structuralist reader of Nerval, though he never produced a sustained reflection on Nerval's work. Like Kristeva and Felman, his interest in Nerval seems to derive largely from the eccentricity of Nerval's psychology taken as a revelatory limit case, albeit of very different psychological structures.

³⁷ Terdiman's studies in *Discourse/Counter-Discourse*, for example, tend to rely on a monolithic conception of capitalist ideology that limits the nuance of his readings of counter-discursive practices of different thinkers in different moments; the dynamism of the ongoing unfolding of modern ideological institutions throughout the July Monarchy, Second Republic, and Second Empire—and the corresponding partialness of those manifestations at any given moment—is subsumed into the vague and seemingly timeless category of *discourse*.

germ of such an approach in our discussion of the aesthetics of acting, where Nerval seems to indicate a non-nostalgic way out of the impasse of Romantic sincerity. In *Sylvie*, Nerval's narrator imagines a mode of collective performance in which neo-Classicism and Romanticism might be bridged, combining in each actor conscious artifice with a real experience of the illusion produced.³⁸ Performance as imagined by Nerval corresponds neither to the Diderotian model of actorly impassibility nor to Romanticism's total sympathy, neither to absolute distance nor to total overlap of actor and character. It is rather a synthesis of the two, in which artifice allows the performer to get outside the limitations of his real, lived experience while maintaining the intensity of lived experience. As I have discussed, *Sylvie* demonstrates the difficulty of creating this collective performance, but opens the way for a textual practice that would achieve the desired synthesis.

In such a translation of acting into the space of the text, the writing subject can be understood as an actor, in various possible relationships to the role to which he gives voice. The ideal of authentic self-expression would correspond, then, to the sincere actor in *Sylvie* who can act only what he already feels. In this case, the link between the writing subject and the content of its enunciation can be only nominally broken: the writing subject, like the actor, might take on a different character, but only insofar as that character were like him.³⁹ On the opposite end of the spectrum, the actor who unfeelingly produces an illusion felt only by his audience would correspond to a rhetorical writing subject, one whose statements would take their significance entirely from the effect they were able to produce, regardless of their relationship to the subject himself. This rough mapping of acting onto the text makes very clear that Nerval's own writing must fall somewhere in between, in some complex synthesis like the one he advocates with regard to acting. If no reader of his texts would ever mistake him for a cold rhetorician, neither is his writing reducible to a sincere autobiography, as so many scholars have assumed. Nerval's writing practice occupies a third position in our schema, one that meets the demands of the oppositional impulses I have already observed in specific texts. This position opens the writing subject beyond the confines of a sincere, expressive individual, allows for the multiple, contradictory truths of the imagination, and creates the pleasure of a lucidly shared illusion, through its reconfiguration of the relationship between the writing subject and its many roles, as well as between writer and readers.

To understand this third position, it is useful to return to Rousset's classification of acting in the European tradition. As we have already explored, Rousset enriches the dualism of neo-Classicism and Romanticism with a consideration of the Baroque, which he characterizes most broadly as an aesthetic of constant transformation and simulation.⁴⁰ Its emblems are the paired figures of Circe and Proteus, propagating changefulness in the world and the self, and demonstrating that being exists only in a state of metamorphosis: "tout se décompose pour se recomposer, entraîné dans le flux d'une incessante mutation, dans un jeu d'apparences toujours en fuite devant d'autres apparences" ["everything breaks itself apart and puts itself back together, pulled along in the flow of a ceaseless mutation, in a play of appearances always fleeing before other appearances"].⁴¹ The series

³⁸ See Chapter Two.

³⁹ As I will explore at further length in our discussion of syncretism, this is the position most often attributed to Nerval: the proliferation of characters he writes is reduced to a host of other selves, significant only for the identity that overrules all apparent differences. It is according to this logic that even the third-person historical portraits of *Les Illuminés* can be read as autobiographical texts.

⁴⁰ See the Introduction and Chapter Two. As I discuss there, Rousset's work aims to reconceive the Baroque, making it a positive value rather than simply the imperfect transition to classicism; in so doing, it is also invaluable for our purposes in expanding the aesthetic values of the *ancien régime* beyond the cold classicism described in the Romantic manifestos and so proliferating the possible meanings of drawing on pre-Revolutionary literary traditions. See especially *La Littérature de l'âge baroque en France. Circé et la paon*; see also *L'Aventure baroque*. For more in-depth treatment of Baroque theater's difference from the Romantic, see *L'Intérieur et l'extérieur. Essai sur la poésie et sur le théâtre au XVIII^e siècle*.

⁴¹ Rousset, *La Littérature à l'âge baroque*, 16.

of appearances that motors the Baroque is never brought to a halt by an underlying truth, but progresses only from appearance to appearance, like the play whose disguises are only revealed through a more complex play of disguise.⁴² Likewise, in Rousset's analysis, the actor's Protean being is located in the series of masks he wears rather than in a face that they hide. It is the figure of Don Juan that best exemplifies what is striking about this paradigm.⁴³ The Baroque Don Juan, exemplified by Molière's depiction, locates his being in the shifting personas he uses to seduce woman after woman.⁴⁴ Rousset notes the resistance we cannot help but feel to this use of dissimulation to inspire love, but he argues that this is an anachronistic response:

Comme il faut peu tenir à soi, nous semble-t-il, pour accepter d'être aimé comme si l'on était un autre ! Propos de moderne, de romantique ; dans le monde du Baroque, l'homme-acteur s'identifie sans peine à ses moi d'emprunt ; il se quitte si bien qu'il n'est pas moins lui-même dans chacun des personnages que lui proposent les instants successifs et sans mémoire de sa durée.

[How little one must think of oneself, it seems to us, to accept being loved as if one were someone else! A modern remark, a romantic one; in the world of the Baroque, the man-actor painlessly identifies with his borrowed selves; he leaves himself so completely that he is no less himself in any one of the characters offered him moment by moment and with no memory of its duration.]⁴⁵

The actor's identity is not falsified by the multiplicity of his appearances, but inhabits those appearances fully in turn. Identifying with the role does not imply that the role double the self that precedes it; nor is the self protected from identification, a master of "se prêter sans se donner" ["lending himself without giving himself"].⁴⁶ The self is rather a mobility expressed through the series of identifications that seem to replace identity entirely.⁴⁷

As Rousset observes, this Baroque conception of the power of theater and its identificatory force comes with certain risks. The actor who gives himself fully to his role gambles on his ability to limit that identification to the realm of the play.⁴⁸ Rotrou's *Le Véritable Saint Genest* [*The Real Saint Genest*] exemplifies the danger of being overtaken by one role, as its protagonist identifies permanently with the character he is playing and so goes beyond the role as written and acts in his own name. In the process of rehearsing, the Roman actor really undergoes the conversion experienced by his character, and so makes a real confession of faith that results in his martyrdom. The space of the theatrical illusion of identification is completely destroyed when the identification loses its mobility and becomes delusional.⁴⁹ For the Baroque actor, healthy control over his identity requires that that identity remain in motion; madness befalls him only when his identity is fixed.

⁴² Ibid., 54.

⁴³ See Rousset, "Entre baroque et romantisme: Don Juan ou les métamorphoses d'une structure" in *L'Intérieur et l'extérieur*.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 137.

⁴⁵ Ibid. The resistance Rousset describes here echoes in many ways the resistance I have observed in Janin, Dumas, and Mirecourt toward Nerval's lack of ambition of self-interest ("Comme il faut peu tenir à soi").

⁴⁶ Rousset, *L'Intérieur et l'extérieur*, 161.

⁴⁷ Likewise, in ways that recall our discussion in Chapter Two, the significance of the series of Don Juan's conquests is very different in the Baroque instantiation of the myth than in the Romantic one: rather than a series of inherently meaningless substitutes for a desired ideal, the women seduced by Molière's Don Juan are "relais indifférenciés le long d'une chasse sans autre but qu'elle-même" ["undifferentiated relays in a chase with no end but itself"] (Ibid., 148).

⁴⁸ Ibid., 159.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 156.

The protagonist of *Sylvie* never arrives at this limit of Baroque acting, where one of the actor's roles sticks to him and becomes a delusion, but it is an extreme about which Nerval writes much elsewhere. The on-stage conversion of Genest bears, in fact, much resemblance to the textual conversion Nerval recounts in his portrait of Jacques Cazotte in *Les Illuminés* [*The Illuminati*]. The overblown and even comical mysticism of this 18th-century writer does not precede the composition of his novel *Le diable amoureux* [*The Devil in Love*], but emerges from it: what begins as a merely textual phenomenon for Cazotte becomes, through the writing, a real belief.⁵⁰ Nerval turns to the metaphor of acting to describe this transformation of the author by the roles he takes on in writing: Cazotte and the other great authors of his period “jouaient leur rôle au sérieux, comme ces comédiens antiques qui tachaient la scène d'un sang véritable pour les plaisirs du peuple-roi” [“played their roles seriously, like those classical actors who stained the stage with real blood for the enjoyment of the people-king”].⁵¹ In Nerval's account of Cazotte's case, writing invites the same identification as acting does in Rotrou's play, and so comes with the same risk of allowing illusion to pass into delusion.

The metaphor of the actor who plays his role seriously returns in a later discussion of Nerval's own writing practice, where he dramatically reverses the terms of Romanticism in favor of this Baroque model. This discussion comes in 1854 in the preface to *Les Filles du feu*, where Nerval responded to the way Dumas had characterized him in an article a few weeks earlier. In the tradition of Janin's necrology, Dumas had portrayed Nerval as a kind of kook, “le plus rêveur” [“the dreamiest”] of all poets, to the point of losing his identity and forgetting himself in his character: “Tantôt [...] le roi d'Orient Salomon, [...] tantôt [...] le sultan Ghera-Gherai, comte d'Abyssinie, duc d'Égypte, baron de Smyrne [...]” [“Sometimes [...] the Oriental King Salomon, [...] sometimes [...] the Sultan Ghera-Gherai, Abyssinian count, Egyptian duke, Smyrnaean baron [...]”]⁵² Nerval's propensity to identify with his characters was depicted as a kind of double-edged sword, both the source of his skill as a story-teller and the sign of his madness. Speaking from a position of great cultural authority and from the editor's seat at his newspaper *Le Mousquetaire*, Dumas pitied Nerval for his propensity to identification and for the troublesome instability of his identity. Nerval's prefatory letter “À Alexandre Dumas” thus faced the arduous task of self-justification, which it undertakes by pointing up Dumas's misprision of the identification about which he is so condescending.

Nerval agrees that he and Dumas are very different sorts of writers. Nerval is prone to “s'incarner dans le héros de son imagination” [“incarnate himself in the hero of his imagination”] and thus to implicate himself in the blurring of fact and fiction in his writing, while Dumas remains master rather than object of the “jeu” through which he draws history into his inventions.⁵³ In other

⁵⁰ Nerval, “Jacques Cazotte,” *Les Illuminés* in *Œuvres complètes*, 2:1075-1118, 1083.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Dumas, “Causerie avec mes lecteurs,” *Le Mousquetaire* 10 Dec. 1853: 1. Nerval cites this portion of Dumas's text in “À Alexandre Dumas,” changing “sultan de Ghera-Gherai” to “sultan de Crimée” (*Les Filles du feu* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:450).

⁵³ Nerval, “À Alexandre Dumas,” *Les Filles du feu* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:449-458, 3:450. The play on the word *jeu* here is worth nothing: in Dumas's case, *jeu* (“game” or “acting”—homophone for *je* or “I”) and *jouer* (“to play” or “to act”) are restricted to their significance with relation to games, but the terms cannot help simultaneously marking the acting, the real engagement with literary illusion, that Nerval claims is absent from Dumas's practice. This critique thus returns to the one Nerval makes in *Les Faux Saulniers* of the superficial significance of fiction for historical novelists, and Dumas first among them: fiction is for them but one half of a facile and absolute opposition with history. Just as Nerval articulates a realm of popular fiction beyond such an opposition in *Les Faux Saulniers*, so he puts forward here a relationship between the subject of writing and his characters that refers neither to the fiction writer's distance from his third person creations nor to the autobiographer's (or poet's) self-expression. The fiction thus produced will not be that of the suspension of disbelief, but will operate in the complex and productive space of the multiple belief of popular fiction. See Chapter Three.

words, Nerval writes fiction in the first person. However, Nerval insists that, while Dumas was right to note Nerval's tendency to identify with his characters, Dumas misunderstood that identification. What might be mistaken for a delusional belief in the transmigration of souls, represented by Pythagoras and Pierre Leroux, is quickly shown to belong instead to the realm of writing, as Nerval's list of his fellow "mystics" shifts to include Voisenon, Moncriff, and Crébillon *filz*, authors who wrote fictional "adventures" about mysticism without clearly believing in it.⁵⁴ The fluidity of identity that Dumas mistook for a delusion must thus be understood as a *textual* phenomenon rather than a psychological one. To clarify the mechanism of this phenomenon, Nerval turns to the figure of the actor, invoking the exemplary case of Brisacier through a long citation from his incomplete novel *Roman tragique* [*Tragic Romance*], which begins thus:

Renonçant désormais à la renommée d'inspiré, d'illuminé ou de prophète, je n'ai à vous offrir que ce que vous appelez si justement des théories impossibles, un *livre infaisable*, dont voici le premier chapitre [...] jugez-en:

"Me voici encore dans ma prison, madame; toujours imprudent, toujours coupable à ce qu'il semble, et toujours confiant, hélas! dans cette belle *étoile* de comédie, qui a bien voulu m'appeler un instant son destin."

[Renouncing henceforth the reputation of visionary, illuminato, or prophet, I have nothing to offer you but what you so justly call impossible theories, an *impracticable book*; here is the first chapter [...] judge for yourself:

"Here am I still in my prison, madam, still reckless, still apparently guilty, and still confident, alas, in that beautiful, theatrical *star*, who was willing for a moment to call me her destiny."]⁵⁵

The citation interrupts Nerval's first person writing with the character's own, playing up the tension between identification and distance inherent in the writer's relationship to his characters. The citation thus seems to respond directly to Dumas's critique of Nerval's identificatory practice, and yet it is not at all clear what kind of response the citation is meant to be.

Nerval claims to cite Brisacier as an example of a character with whom he had identified, but Brisacier's exemplary status is confused by the fact that he, too, is wont to identify with his characters, even to the point of disaster. The example thus creates a kind of nesting effect (Nerval identifying with Brisacier, who identifies with his own roles), and Nerval offers no explicit guidance for interpreting this structure. It might seem, given the apparent analogy between Brisacier's story and Dumas's version of Nerval's story, that the identification between the two is simply the sign of a deeper identity—that the nesting is in fact mere doubling. The actor might seem to stand in for the writer, so that in recounting Brisacier's disastrous slippage of identity with one of his own roles, Nerval is really confessing to Dumas's accusation.⁵⁶ We would be mistaken, however, in thus reducing Brisacier's *je* to a mere disguise for Nerval's own, and his story to a simple *mea culpa*, for Nerval troubles the passage from identification to identity with his character by containing Brisacier in a well-marked citation. Nerval demonstrates identification by lending his voice to the character, temporarily substituting one *je* for the other, but the quotation marks prevent any blurring between

⁵⁴ Ibid., 451. I will return to the difficulty of the question of belief in Nerval's relationship to mysticism below.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 450-51.

⁵⁶ In his reading of "À Alexandre Dumas" in *Subjects of Terror: Nerval, Hegel, and the Modern Self* (88-96), Jonathan Strauss acknowledges the irony of the letter, while nonetheless reading the confession earnestly. The irony with which Nerval treats Dumas's writing practice in *Les Faux Saulniers* excludes a sincere reading of his ostentatious deference here and rather reinforces a more strategic reading of the letter. See Chapter Three.

the two “I”s. The care with which Nerval maintains Brisacier’s difference suggests that the two levels of nested identifications cannot be collapsed into the writer’s loss of identity, but rather that the actor’s story has significance of its own. Indeed, it is through the story of Brisacier, and the theory of acting it suggests, that Nerval draws out the complexities at stake in identification and so positions his writing practice.

Brisacier’s is importantly not the story of *one* identification, nor even of one kind of identification, but of a veritable transformation of identification itself. Brisacier begins as a successful actor and ends in madness. There is nothing in his initial acting practice that necessitates its eventual breakdown; he seems to become the role while safely maintaining his difference from it. The vitality of his performance emerges from the careful balance he strikes between sympathy and distance. Brisacier writes intimately of the characters he played, describing the kinship he felt with them, but he also describes the reserve he experienced, the ways in which the artifice of the play inserted itself between him and his roles. Playing Achilles, for example,

Moi, je m’indignais parfois d’avoir à débiter de si longues tirades dans une cause aussi limpide et devant un auditoire aisément convaincu de mon droit. J’étais tenté de sabrer pour en finir toute la cour imbécile du roi des rois, avec son espalier de figurants endormis! Le public en eût été charmé; mais il aurait fini par trouver la pièce trop courte, et par réfléchir qu’il lui faut le temps de voir souffrir une princesse, un amant et une reine; de les voir pleurer, s’emporter et répandre un torrent d’injures harmonieuses contre la vieille autorité du prêtre et du souverain.

[It sometimes outraged me to have to deliver such long monologues on behalf of such a lucid cause, in front of an audience easily persuaded of my claim. I was tempted to be done with and saber the whole idiotic court of the king of kings, with its gallery of sleepy onlookers! The audience would have been delighted; but in the end they would have found the play too short and considered the time it takes to witness the suffering of a princess, a lover, and a queen; to witness their tears, their outbursts, and the torrent of insults they hurl at the old authority of priest and king.]⁵⁷

The actor certainly feels sympathy with the character here (perhaps even more than most actors), but this does not imply that he loses all distance. The effect he aims to create for the audience (and the implausible delay required to produce it) prevents him from merging with the character in spontaneous action. There are thus strict limits on the continuity between the actor and his role, making the identification palpable, but partial. The balance between sympathy and distance, sincerity and artifice, is what makes Brisacier an actor, able to merge with his character, but only temporarily, so that the series of his roles might continue. This relationship to role as serial, partial identification appears as the norm of Brisacier’s career, operating up to a point even in the disastrous case of Nero that causes his downfall.

The break in his healthy practice of provisional, actorly identifications comes only in a moment of crisis, when the actor’s self-conscious artifice is disrupted and his series of identifications is halted in a single role. A hiss from the audience cuts him deeply, following as it does on a snub from his lover, and all at once the space between actor and character collapses. He is spurned by the audience and by his beloved, just as Nero was spurned by the people of Rome—and suddenly Brisacier and Nero are one. Brisacier is overtaken by his role, inspired to rise to the level of Nero’s

⁵⁷ Nerval, “À Alexandre Dumas,” *Les Filles du feu* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:453.

murderous desire and undertake an action as great as the burning of Rome: “j’ai eu un moment l’idée, l’idée sublime, et digne de César [Néron] lui-même, [...] l’idée auguste enfin de brûler le théâtre et le public, et vous tous! [...]” [“for a moment I had the idea, the sublime idea worthy of Cesar [Nero] himself, [...] the noble idea of burning the theater and the audience, and all of you [...]”].⁵⁸ The actor loses control of his identification and mistakes it for his identity: “mon rôle s’est identifié à moi-même, et la tunique de Néron s’est collée à mes membres qu’elle brûle [...]” [“my role identified itself with me, and the tunic of Nero stuck to my limbs, which it burns [...]”].⁵⁹ The monstrous force of Nero’s love and pride in *Britannicus* infects the actor, who is compelled to behave like Nero, but on his own account. Writes Brisacier, “Mes amis! comprenez surtout qu’il ne s’agissait pas pour moi d’une froide traduction de paroles compassées; mais d’une scène où tout vivait, où trois cœurs luttèrent à chances égales, où comme au jeu du cirque, c’était peut-être du vrai sang qui allait couler” [“My friends! You must understand above all that it was not for me a cold translation of stuffy lines; but a scene where everything was alive, where three hearts were fighting and it was anyone’s fight, where, like at the circus, real blood might flow”].⁶⁰ What happens onstage is no longer bound, set apart by the demands of the play, but is indistinguishable from the realm of the actor’s life. The series of provisional identifications that characterizes the actor’s craft stops, and the actor is stuck in a delusion.

What Brisacier’s story reveals, then, is the danger that lies, not in the mobility of identification, but in its fixity. The actor becomes a madman at precisely the moment when he loses the dynamism of the “tantôt, tantôt” [“sometimes, sometimes”] of Nerval’s imaginative identification, which Nerval himself does not seem to have lost. Even in his relationship to Brisacier in the preface, Nerval’s coincidence with his character is provisional: he stages the actor (as the actor stages a role) just for the length of a citation, without mistaking Brisacier for himself. Indeed, Brisacier fulfills his explanatory role in “À Alexandre Dumas,” not because he is Nerval, but because his story demonstrates the difference between delusion and a mode of identification as mobility. The latter is the mode of identification at work in Nerval’s writing, in which his identity never fully coincides with that of a character. This is importantly not to say, that his is a voice apart or a face hidden behind these masks. Rather, the writing subject’s identity, like the healthy actor’s, lies in the series of roles he plays insofar as they are serial (“le prince ignore, l’amant mystérieux, le déshérité, le banni de liesse, le beau ténébreux” [“the unknown prince, the mysterious lover, the man dispossessed, the exile from jubilation, the handsome man of gloom”]⁶¹); his identity lies nowhere if not in his identificatory capacity itself, in the “tantôt, tantôt.” What Nerval’s writing subject voices is thus neither authentic self-expression nor a deceptive appropriation; his writing subject is strictly neither authentic nor inauthentic, just as Rousset insists that Molière’s Don Juan acts neither sincerely nor in bad faith.⁶² The relation between writing subject and characters is one of illusion, which does not pass into delusion (except in extreme cases like Brisacier’s), but rather maintains the mobility of the series of illusions acknowledged as such.

The writing subject here resembles not only Rousset’s Baroque actor, but also the impersonal actor of Gilles Deleuze’s *Logique du sens* [*Logic of Sense*], an actor who is none of his roles,

⁵⁸ Ibid., 455.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 456.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 452.

⁶² Rousset, *L’Intérieur et l’extérieur*, 149. On the relevance of Rousset’s Baroque to Nerval, see Chamarat-Malandain. Our use of the Baroque as a third term distinguishes our reading from Mizuno’s reading in *Gérard de Nerval, poète en prose* (65-77), which insightfully places the *Roman tragique* in the context of the renewed battle between Classical and Romantic theater sparked by the revival of tragedy in 1844; however, Mizuno’s reading of the *Roman tragique* as a polemical gesture in favor of Romanticism disregards the disastrous consequences of Brisacier’s convergence with his character.

but rather the point of their reflection. Deleuze distinguishes what the actor participates in from what is normally called illusion—illusion understood as mere appearance, a kind of untruth (what we might align with the mere fiction of Dumas that Nerval maligns). He associates the actor instead with *simulation*, which exists apart from truth and untruth as an *effect*:

Que le Même et le Semblable soient simulés ne signifie pas qu'ils soient des apparences ou des illusions. La simulation désigne la puissance de produire un *effet*. Mais ce n'est pas seulement au sens causal, puisque la causalité resterait tout à fait hypothétique et indéterminée sans l'intervention d'autres significations. C'est au sens de 'signe,' issu d'un processus de signalisation ; et c'est au sens de 'costume,' ou plutôt de masque, exprimant un processus de déguisement où, derrière chaque masque, un autre encore...

[That the Same and the Similar may be simulated does not mean that they are appearances or illusions. Simulation designates the power of producing an *effect*. But this is not intended only in a causal sense, since causality would remain completely hypothetical and indeterminate without the intervention of other meanings. It is intended rather in the sense of a "sign" issued from a process of signalization; it is in the sense of a "costume," or rather a mask, expressing a process of disguising, where, behind each mask, there is yet another....]⁶³

The series of masks that does not resolve into a face (because it does not bely one) is assimilated here to the production of effects through simulation.⁶⁴ These effects cannot be judged as false in comparison to something originally true, but enjoy their own status, that of the simulacrum. They partake in the lack of individuality or personality of the event, which is instead composed of nomadic, pre-individual singularities. This status independent of truth and falsehood offers another way of understanding Nerval's actorly writing subject. This subject gives voice to characters who are not Nerval, which may mean that they are not true in the sense of sincerity or authenticity. But it does not follow from this that those roles can be dismissed as false. The writing subject's relationship to its characters through simultaneous distance and identification operates, not in violation of the criteria of truth, but independently of them. Voicing the fiction and acknowledging its fictionality are inseparable in the gesture of writing here, as we saw them to be in the lucid performance of the festival in *Sylvie*.

The Syncretic and the Hybrid (or, *Je* versus *It*)

In "À Alexandre Dumas," the writing subject explicitly takes on the voice of Brisacier by setting off the character's monologue (letter) from the rest of the preface. But the relationship of writing subject to character in this instance also helps shed light on citation in Nerval's writing more broadly (whether marked or unmarked), offering a model of writing as a practice of simulation. The endless borrowing that characterizes Nerval's writing thus appears as a kind of textual acting: the staging of a repertoire of existing roles and plots. The question of authenticity becomes irrelevant, as does the question of deception: the writing subject takes up other voices not as part of a narcissistic identification or misidentification, but as the mobile identification of the actor who is the changing of his masks. There is not one single mechanism by which this textual staging operates throughout Nerval's *œuvre*. The relationship to other writers is made quite differently, for example, in an

⁶³ Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, 304/*The Logic of Sense*, 263. The ellipsis is Deleuze's.

⁶⁴ Cf. Guillaume, *Nerval. Masques et visage*.

anthology than in an unacknowledged citation. Nonetheless, these varying gestures all partake in a displacement of the writing subject as the original source of authentic writing, in favor of a proliferation of other voices, openly indicated or not. In its permanence, the writing subject, like the actor, appears as a kind of receptivity, a site of reflection for these other voices.

The porousness of the subject in Nerval's writing can thus be understood as a textual phenomenon, a feature of his poetics: it is not narcissism or a failure of identity, but a productive simulation. This conception liberates the writing, not only from its author in a strictly autobiographical sense, but also from the coherence of the writing subject's identity. The diversity of Nerval's *œuvre* is not superficial; it is neither the residue of countless failures at articulating a singular truth, nor that singular truth in multiple guises. A narcissistic logic is so often attributed to Nerval's writing, a logic of identity according to which the texts are outward-looking only insofar as the reflection of the self is to be found in the world, and any apparent multiplicity is reducible to the same. But what becomes evident here is rather a logic of difference, in which the writing subject makes itself the very site of diversity. Literary production is not limited to the confines of the individual subject, but opened onto its collective circulation.

We reencounter here the relationship between self and non-self that is at stake in *Les Nuits d'octobre*. There, Nerval vindicates the disorderly imagination as the core of the self, receiving and transforming the non-self without ever formulating itself as a coherent entity in opposition to the non-self.⁶⁵ The imagination is not a faculty that manages and regulates the multiplicity of the world, but one that encounters it in its irreducibility. This conception of the self (the writing subject) as a receptivity to the non-self that is taken in without being assimilated (without collapsing into the self) provides an illuminating way of understanding Nerval's relationship to his characters, and one that departs starkly from existing readings. Nerval's characters have long been read either as autobiographical or as avatars of the autobiographical subject. The first group includes the first person narrators of not only *Les Filles du feu* and *Aurélia*, but also texts of more problematic status like the *Lettres d'amour* [Love Letters] (long assumed to be real *Lettres à Jenny Colon*, but more likely an unfinished epistolary novel⁶⁶), while the second group includes the protagonists of *Les Illuminés* and the *Histoire du Calife Hakem* [The Tale of Caliph Hakim]. As the story goes, Nerval never escaped the progressive and inexorable "rétrécissement, ... la cristallisation des préoccupations [...] autour de la problématique de moi" ["constriction, [...] the crystallization of his preoccupations around the problematic of selfhood"].⁶⁷ Nerval, it has been understood, only ever wrote *je*, even when he appeared to be writing *il*, and the trajectory of his career was toward the increasing explicitness of that *je*.⁶⁸ We might rather think, however, that Nerval was always crafting a sort of communal subject irreducible to any of its members, and that the trajectory of his career was toward the development of a *je* that might contain a complex of *ils*. He never ceased to write the other *as the other*, but only found a way to do so in the first person.

I will return below to the way that the social relations of literature (those between writer and readers, and among readers) are transformed by this shift to an impersonal "I." But first we must consider how fully this shift in perspective alters the traditional view of Nerval, both in the way it

⁶⁵ See Chapter One.

⁶⁶ Regarding the dubious status of the *Lettres*, see Bomboir, *Les Lettres d'amour de Nerval: Mythe ou réalité?*

⁶⁷ Tritsmans, "Impasses Narratives dans les Nuits d'octobre," 163.

⁶⁸ This mechanism works differently for different scholars, but the readings across the board come down to a problematic of the narcissistic self. This is evident in readings of *Les Illuminés*: even short of the strong syncretist readings of Richer and Jean-Marie Schaeffer, to which I will return, scholars like Jeanneret and Malandain see Nerval constantly defining himself against his references, demonstrating the force and identity of his self by mastering and transforming them. See Jeanneret, *La Lettre perdue*; Malandain, *Nerval ou l'incendie du théâtre*; Richer, *Expérience vécue et création ésotérique*; and Schaeffer, *Une double lecture de Nerval: Les Illuminés et Les Filles du feu*. See also Bony, *Le Récit nervalien*.

reads identity and in the way it treats belief. Replacing the narcissistic “I” with a porous one constitutes a complete reversal of forces within the texts: what has long appeared as an irresistible centripetal movement by which the non-self is obliterated by the self in a static black hole of narcissism, appears instead as a force of attraction on the self exerted by the non-self—but only ever temporarily, resulting in a continual motion. This motion does away with both the expressive Nerval and his supposed mystical beliefs.

The profound reorientation brought about by our understanding of the writing subject as an actorly one is most evident in *Les Illuminés*, a collection in which the question of coherence insistently poses itself. The motley crew of oppositional and mystical figures treated in *Les Illuminés* never definitively accounts for its own composition: what does the incarcerated madman of “Le roi de Bicêtre” [“The King of Bedlam”] have to do with the mystico-political leaders of “Cagliostro” and “Quintus Aucler,” or the confessional writer of “Les Confidences de Nicolas” [“The Confessions of Nicolas”]? Though we can constellate some of the text’s figures around motifs of mysticism, madness, and revolution, it seems we can never constellate those three motifs into any stable configuration that would give the collection as a whole a fixed shape. And yet the logic of selection seems to bear the entire burden of the collection’s coherence, since the vast majority of the content of the portraits is borrowed from other sources:

Quintus Aucler consiste, pour une large part, en une longue citation de *La Thrécie*, l’ouvrage majeur de Quintus Aucler. *L’Histoire de l’abbé de Bucquoy* est, comme l’a montré Jacques Bony, un assemblage d’extraits de *l’Evènement des plus rares* [...] et d’autres écrits et témoignages de l’époque. Quant à *Cagliostro*, il contient, comme Jean Richer l’a remarqué, un chapitre entier recopié, avec des modifications, de l’ouvrage de La Roche du Maine, marquis de Luchet : *Mémoires authentiques pour servir à l’histoire du comte de Cagliostro*.

[*Quintus Aucler* largely consists of a long citation from *La Thrécie*, Quintus Aucler’s major work. *L’Histoire de l’abbé de Bucquoy* is, as Jacques Bony has shown, an assemblage of extracts from *Evènement des plus rares* [...] and other texts and testimonies from the period. As for *Cagliostro*, as Jean Richer has remarked, it contains an entire chapter copied, with modifications, from a work by La Roche du Maine, Marquis of Luchet: *Mémoires authentiques pour servir à l’histoire du comte de Cagliostro*.]⁶⁹

If the writing is not Nerval’s own, that is to say, if spontaneous creation is not the principle regulating the work, then there must be some other mechanism by which these disparate elements are brought into unison. For Max Milner, as for many scholars, this mechanism is the force of attraction of similar elements, “la similitude même, c’est-à-dire la rencontre du semblable dans l’autre” [“similarity itself, that is, the encounter with the similar in the other”], evidenced by the figure of the double in “Le roi de Bicêtre.”⁷⁰ But the presence of one instance of doubling within the collection does not necessarily trump all the other portraits in providing its underlying structure: not all of the work’s diversity can be reduced to the sameness of this one portrait, itself a figure of

⁶⁹ Tsujikawa, *Nerval et les limbes de l’histoire*, 32-33. Tsujikawa’s reading of *Les Illuminés* as a response to the rationalization of culture at the start of the Second Empire is enormously useful and evocative, moving away (though never definitively) from psychological explanations in favor of meticulous readings and historical contextualization that retain the text’s complex strangeness.

⁷⁰ Milner, “Notice aux *Illuminés*” in Nerval, *Œuvres complètes*, 2:1701.

sameness. Readings of *Les Illuminés* must account instead for the diversity of the portraits and the complex and shifting articulations of politics, mysticism, and literature they put forward.

In order to read *Les Illuminés* in this way, we must rethink not only Nerval's relationship to the historical figures he represents, but also the status of the beliefs he attributes to his characters. In other words, reading for the diversity and mobility of the collection displaces not only Nerval's supposed narcissism but also his supposed syncretic mystical belief. This second element has been a cornerstone of Nerval studies since Richer's 1947 *Nerval et les doctrines ésotériques*. Based primarily on readings of *Les Illuminés* and the *Voyage en Orient*, this conception interprets Nerval's interest in religion and mysticism as a quest for a spiritual unity, drawing traditions past and present into one great mystical synthesis. Richer's comments from 1981 are characteristic of this approach:

[L]e « syncretisme » nervalien est souvent une mosaïque d'emprunts assez disparates. Le poète ne vise pas à exprimer des théories cohérentes, mais à créer, à suggérer, une certaine atmosphère de mystère et d'originalité essentielle. Le lien entre toutes ces études variées est dans la personnalité de l'auteur, dans son tempérament d'artiste. C'est l'attraction du semblable pour le semblable.

[Nervalian "syncretism" is often a mosaic of rather disparate borrowings. The poet does not attempt to express coherent theories, but to create, to suggest a certain atmosphere of mystery and essential originality. The link between all of these various studies is in the personality of the author, in his artistic temperament. It is the attraction of like to like.]⁷¹

The references in Nerval's work to esoteric doctrines, ranging from the Tarot to Freemasonry, are read as confessions of authentic belief, a series of tenets to which he is drawn by their resonance with his existing core of belief (often related to the structure of his madness) and the possibility of integrating them with it.⁷²

This way of reading draws together citations regarding religion and mysticism from throughout Nerval's œuvre without regard to differences in register, attribution, or irony, on the assumption that all statements made by the writing subject represent (at some level, at least) his sincere belief. But we need not think that everything Nerval says in the name of every one of his characters (the many accounts of others' beliefs that are treated with varying degrees of distance) is attributable to him as either a biographical or a writing subject. On the contrary, Nerval's citational writing practice invites us to read these multifarious statements of a mobile subjectivity as an irreducible multiplicity of positions. Even when the statements are attributed to the "I," they cannot be situated on a solid ground of authentic belief, but partake of the illusory (simulated) existence of the actor's roles. Such beliefs are tried on, in a sense, adopted in an entirely provisional manner that

⁷¹ Richer, *Expérience vécue et création ésotérique*, 131.

⁷² Nerval was diagnosed during his lifetime with the melancholic affliction demonomania, or its ecstatic variant theomania. Both are forms of monomania, meaning a single form of madness, a partial affliction of an otherwise sound mind. If the first is a disease of religious fearfulness and anxiety, the second is a subset of spiritual audacity and violence. The grandiose visions of the theomaniacal pole seem more in keeping with Nerval's documented crises (like his quest to unite himself with the eastern star, and his quasi-biblical struggle with the friend who tried to restrain him in *Aurélia*, 3:699), though as I have noted elsewhere, scholars have tended to move with ease between multiple and apparently contradictory interpretations of Nerval's mental illness. What is most important for us here is to note the *partial* dimension of both these diagnoses, which speak only to a state of crisis and leave open the possibility of a quite different relationship to spirituality during periods of health. For contemporary diagnoses of *démonomanie* and *théomanie*, see the *Dictionnaire des sciences médicales par une société de médecins et de chirurgiens*, 8:294-318 and 55:85-87.

does not cancel them out or refute them by abandoning them. Belief here is no more subject to the judgment of authenticity or inauthenticity than is the writing subject's mobile identity.⁷³ This multiplicity of provisional beliefs does not constitute a unified coherence (of belief or even of "atmosphere"), but generates instead a proliferative variety. In this way, the text is composed of foreign elements (non-self) that are not assimilated (to the self), but rather retain their difference.

Displacing the concept of syncretism, this multiplicity appears as a kind of hybridity. This conceptual shift opens the possibility of genuine diversity in the beliefs Nerval writes about, not requiring any of them to be his "real" belief. But it also casts his writing more broadly in a very different light, providing a way of understanding the tendency toward borrowing (of characters, words, ideas), not as one designed in some way to shore up the unity of the writing subject, let alone of any particular text, but as one enamored of true diversity. The hybrid is not first composed of the writing subject and his spontaneous creations, then modified by external elements; it rather puts the apparently authentic contributions of the writing subject to use on equal terms with the other textual materials, so that whatever belongs distinctively to the writing subject is not a component of the hybrid but the act of combination itself. The radical multiplicity of the writing need not be reducible to, or a departure from, some authentic source or origin, but is itself a value affirmed by the writing against the constraints of an individualist conception of literary practice. This is what makes of the literary text a site of real encounter, of circulation and community.

*

Nerval's poetics of hybridity, with its positive valuation of mobility and difference, has been no more visible to scholars in the last century and a half than it was to Dumas in 1853. The value of a coherent, lyrical subject has been taken for granted to such an extent that it has entirely obscured the innovative dimension of Nerval's writing, even in the places where it is most flagrant. So it is with his most famous collection of poems, *Les Chimères*, where the title's announcement of an interest in multiplicity has not prevented the collection from being understood as a site of (attempted and/or failed) subjective consolidation. The chimera poems have most often been read as lyrical expressions of Nerval's unique brand of madness, the dreams and illusions of his unmoored imagination that signal his ailing subjectivity, or the poetic forms through which he sought to counteract that ailment.⁷⁴ And yet the framing of the collection strongly resists such readings, aligning the poems with Brisacier's letter in the preface as part of Nerval's response to Dumas's misprision of his writing practice. By taking seriously the invocation of hybridity in the collection's title, we can see the profoundly anti-lyrical thrust of the poems, which participates in Nerval's broader affirmation of an alternative poetics.

Les Chimères closely mirror the citation of Brisacier in the prefatory letter, seeming to answer Dumas's critique on its own terms (those of delusion), while in fact demonstrating the limitations of his understanding. We must recall that it is as another rejoinder to Dumas that the *Chimères* are published in *Les Filles du feu* at all: their inclusion as a strange appendix to the volume of stories is explicitly attributed to the fact that Dumas included one of these poems in his "Causerie," against

⁷³ This provisional belief echoes the internally inconsistent popular belief we encountered in Chapter Three, where mutually exclusive beliefs were negotiated without difficulty. No belief is absolute, but neither is its validity absolutely called into question when it is supplanted by another.

⁷⁴ This reading of the word "chimera" as an illusion of which one is disabused by experience corresponds to its use in the "Dernier Feuille" ("Last Leaf") of "Sylvie" ("Telles sont les chimères qui charment et égarent au matin de la vie" ["Such are the chimeras that beguile and misguide us in the morning of life"]). But, as I have previously discussed, the vigorous irony of that final chapter suggests, if anything, the need for a certain skepticism of "chimera" as a straightforward name for illusion. See "Sylvie," *Les Filles du feu* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:536-79; see also Chapter Two.

Nerval's intentions and express request.⁷⁵ Nerval announces the poems at the end of the preface thus:

Et puisque vous avez eu l'imprudence de citer un des sonnets composés dans cet état de rêverie *supernaturaliste*, comme diraient les Allemands, il faut que vous les entendiez tous.—Vous les trouverez à la fin du volume. Ils ne sont guère plus obscurs que la métaphysique d'Hegel ou les *Mémorables* de Swedenborg, et perdraient de leur charme à être expliqués, si la chose était possible [...].

And since you were careless enough to cite one of the sonnets composed in this state of what the Germans would call *supernaturalist* reverie you must hear them all.—You will find them at the end of the volume. They are hardly more obscure than Hegel's metaphysics or Swedenborg's *Memorabilia*, and would lose their charm in being explained, if that were possible[...].⁷⁶

The evident irony of this framing (“here are my poems, interpret them if you think you can”) is invoked again when we arrive at the poems to find they have been named “chiméras”: the word “chimère” is borrowed directly from Dumas's “Causerie,” where it was apposed to “hallucinations” to describe the mad world into which Nerval's stories led.⁷⁷ Nerval's allusion to Dumas's critique is often read as a kind of confession to the crimes with which Dumas charged him, but given our reading of “À Alexandre Dumas,” this redeployment of a word so strongly implicated in Dumas's dismissal of Nerval can only appear as a kind of provocation, ironizing and problematizing it as a category through which Dumas understood the failure of identity he saw as characterizing Nerval. Let Dumas try to read the sonnets, but with his false understanding of Nerval's identificatory practice and the chimera it produces, the poems will be as accessible as Hegel's metaphysics.⁷⁸

The title, *Les Chimères*, thus anticipates the ways in which it, as title, and the poems under its sign, will be misunderstood, even as it clearly puts forward the meaning it seems to know will remain invisible. The literal sense of chimera, as a name for the monstrosity of the hybrid, is hidden in plain sight in this title: a mythical monster with the head of a lion, the body of a goat, and the tail of a serpent.⁷⁹ The reference to this composite beast puts Nerval's collection under the sign of hybridity,

⁷⁵ Dumas included “El Desdichado” in his “Causerie,” claiming that Nerval had scrawled it at his (Dumas's) office as a sort of calling card. Dumas put the poem forward in the context of that highly charged article as a scrap that would shed light on Nerval's eccentricity. This despite Nerval's request, in a letter dated 25 November 1853, that the poem be discarded. Nerval insists in the letter, with a kind of tense good humor, that the sonnet was all in good fun—a fanciful payment for money borrowed from Dumas—and should not be printed as anything more than that: “Mon cher Dumas, Je vous prie de me rendre un service, c'est de ne pas insérer dans votre journal et de détruire même les plaisanteries que j'ai dictées ou écrites à votre bureau. Je ne suis ni un bouffon—ni un Brutus—. Et surtout, j'ai à garder pure la gloire de mon nom” [“My dear Dumas, I beg you to do me favor: don't publish and ruin, really, the jokes I dictated or wrote at your office. I'm neither a buffoon nor a Brutus.—And above all, I have to keep the glory of my name untainted”] (*Œuvres complètes*, 3:825-26). See the Prologue.

⁷⁶ “À Alexandre Dumas,” *Les Filles du feu* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:458.

⁷⁷ “Causerie avec mes lecteurs,” 1.

⁷⁸ As I will discuss more below, little criticism since Dumas has done much to elucidate these poems so as to make them feel more manageable than the texts to which Nerval facetiously compared them.

⁷⁹ This literal sense of the word *chimère* remained the primary definition in the mid-19th century, the constantly acknowledged basis for the figurative usage to mean illusion, and so it must be allowed to resonate in our readings of the collection. See the 1835 *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (6 ed.) and Littré's 1872-1877 *Dictionnaire de la langue française*. The use of *chimère* to refer to a hybrid creature is echoed in the first of the sonnets, “El Desdichado,” where the figure of Mélusine herself (half woman, half serpent) is evoked by references to fairies and to the Lusignan family into which she married.

emphasizing the combinatorial process through which the images are created (a process not erased by any apparent, *post facto* unity), as much as it emphasizes their oneiric origins.⁸⁰ The valorization of multiplicity in this claim to hybridity echoes the insistence on mobility in “À Alexandre Dumas.” Just as Nerval’s model of the actor favors many provisional identifications over any stable conception of identity, so does the figure of the hybrid resist coherent lyric expression in favor of assorted composition. In the sonnet’s spatialized expression of shifting subjectivity, the proliferation of roles appears as a simultaneous multiplicity.

The resonance between the hybridity of the *Chimères* and the actor of the prefatory letter is certainly clearest in the first sonnet (the one Dumas printed in his “Causerie”). “El Desdichado” is a poem that explicitly addresses identity, or the problem thereof, presenting itself as a series of assertions and interrogations that pose the question of the writing subject’s identity without every seeming to answer it:

Je suis le ténébreux, —le veuf—l’inconsolé,
Le prince d’Aquitaine à la tour abolie:
Ma seule étoile est morte,—et mon luth constellé
Porte le *Soleil noir* de la *Mélancolie*.

Dans la nuit du tombeau, toi qui m’as consolé,
Rends-moi le Pausilippe et la mer d’Italie,
La *fleur* qui plaisait tant à mon cœur désolé,
Et la treille où le pampre à la rose s’allie.

Suis-je Amour ou Phébus? ... Lusignan ou Biron?
Mon front est rouge encor du baiser de la reine;
J’ai rêvé dans la grotte où nage la syrène ...

Et j’ai deux fois vainqueur traversé l’Achéron:
Modulant tour à tour sur la lyre d’Orphée
Les soupirs de la sainte et les cris de la fée.

[I am the man of gloom—the widower—the unconsolated,
The Prince of Aquitaine, his tower in ruins:
My sole *star* is dead—and my constellated lute
Bears the *Black Sun of Melancholia*.

In the night of the tomb, you who consoled me,
Give me back Posilipo and the Italian sea,
The *flower* that so pleased my desolate heart,
And the arbour where the vine and the rose are entwined.

Am I Amor or Phoebus? ... Lusignan or Biron?

⁸⁰ In Nerval’s double invocation of the “chimera” as the literal and figurative creation of the imagination, surpassing the limits of the real, we can see a strong Hugolian legacy. Hugo’s insistence on the hybrid, dating back to his 1830 preface to *Cromwell*, called for a combination of high and low, sublime and grotesque, not as a superior mimetic principle (a way of representing the diversity of the real) but as a principle of literary creation. See, for example, Viegnès, *Hugo et la chimère*.

My brow still burns from the kiss of the queen;
I have dreamed in the grotto where the siren swims ...

And I have twice victorious crossed the Acheron:
Modulating on Orpheus' lyre
Now the sighs of the saint, now the fairy's cry.]⁸¹

This sonnet is often read as a crucial scene of self-identification for Nerval's lyric subject, the moment where his attempts at self-definition come up against their own negativity and the crisis of identity that is taken to be at the heart of the poet's psychological experience.⁸² However, the sense of the poet's lyric identification announces itself in relationship to that of Brisacier, echoing the actor's description of himself in his letter to Aurélie:

Où sont les aventures, désormais? où est la charmante misère qui nous faisait vos égaux et vos camarades, mesdames les comédiennes, nous les pauvres poètes toujours et les poètes pauvres bien souvent? Vous nous avez trahis, reniés! et vous vous plaigniez de notre orgueil! Vous avez commencé par suivre de riches seigneurs, chamarrés, galants et hardis, et vous nous avez abandonnés dans quelque misérable auberge pour payer la dépense de vos folles orgies. Ainsi, moi, le brillant comédien naguère, *le prince ignoré, l'amant mystérieux, le déshérité, le banni de liesse, le beau ténébreux*, [... je n'ai pas été mieux traité que ce pauvre Ragotin, un poète de province, un robin!

[Where are the adventures, henceforth? Where is the charming poverty that made us your equals and your companions, dear actresses, we who were always to be pitied and sometimes downright poor? You have betrayed us, denied us! And you complain about our pride! You began by following rich lords, embroidered, gallant, and bold, and you abandoned us in a miserable inn to pay the cost of your wild orgies. So it is that I, once a brilliant actor, *the unknown prince, the mysterious lover, the man dispossessed, the exile from jubilation, the handsome man of gloom*, [... I have been treated no better than poor Ragotin, a provincial rhymester, a fool!]⁸³

Brisacier identifies himself by the roles he played before being abandoned by his troupe, comparing the dignity of those characters, however marked by loss and a certain darkness, with the humiliation he has suffered. The *je* of "El Desdichado" returns to some of these same characters, and certainly to their shadowy gravity: the title itself alludes to "le déshérité," while the divested "prince" and the "ténébreux" are directly repeated. In defining the identity of its subject, then, the sonnet demands to be understood on the model of the actor that Nerval put forth in the preface by way of Brisacier.

The metaphor of the actor is not uncommon in readings of "El Desdichado," but our reading of Nerval's treatment of the actor in "À Alexandre Dumas" implies a theorization of his writing and a reading of "El Desdichado" that differ significantly from the ones often built on the

⁸¹ "Les Chimères," *Les Filles du feu* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:645/*Selected Writings*, 363; I have formatted Sieburth's prose translation to correspond roughly to the versification of Nerval's sonnet, to facilitate analysis. All ellipses are Nerval's.

⁸² For any biographically- or psychoanalytically-minded critic, such readings are encouraged by the fact that the *Chimères* seem to have been written during Nerval's two principal periods of psychological crisis, 1841 and 1853. On Nerval's two poetic phases (that of the *odelette* and that of the sonnet), see Steinmetz, "La double poésie de Gérard de Nerval" in *Reconnaisances*.

⁸³ Nerval, "À Alexandre Dumas," *Les Filles du feu* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:451-52. Emphasis added.

metaphorics of theater. The theater has often provided a figure for the apparent failure of Nerval's writing to coincide with itself, figuring the artifice that signals his dispossession of a coherent lyric subject. In Kristeva's reading of fragmentation, for example, "« Je » s'affirme alors sur le terrain de l'artifice : il n'y a de place pour le « je » que dans le jeu, le théâtre, sous le masque des identités possibles, aussi extravagantes, prestigieuses, mythiques, épiques, historiques, ésotériques qu'incroyables. Triomphantes, mais aussi incertaines" ["I affirms itself in the field of artifice: there is no place for the 'I' but in play, in theater, under the mask of possible identities as extravagant, prestigious, mythical, epic, historical, and esoteric as they are incredible. Triumphant, but also uncertain"]⁸⁴ The stability of an authentic lyric subject is certainly missing from Nerval's poem, replaced by a *je* that is staged like an actor and so simultaneously asserts and undermines itself. For Kristeva, this fragmentary nature of the poem's subject signals an existential loss: the break with plenitude (the archaic mother) and the passage into language.⁸⁵ The disjunctive subject of the poem strives to compensate for the lost object by creating a synthetic symbolic object—but this is a victory over its dispossession that can never be definitively achieved, as evidenced by the tension between triumph and uncertainty in the subject's multiple identities.⁸⁶

Restoring the poem's relationship to the Brisacier of the preface suggests, however, that the actor's significance lies elsewhere. Nerval's treatment of Brisacier does not present the provisionality and artifice of the actor's identifications as obstacles to identity or signs of its failure; it rather poses identity itself as a failure, the breakdown of identification. The series of roles is not significant in its difference from an authentic *je*-face that it either hides or surreptitiously reveals, but rather as the mobility of the *je*-masks. The only possible identity is the faculty of identification that binds them together in their difference. Through its allusion to Brisacier in the opening verses, the subject of "El Desdichado" thus declares itself to be an entirely different sort of subject than the one Dumas criticized Nerval for failing to be. Echoing Brisacier, the subject of the poem presents itself from the outset as a kind of hybrid, spatializing the actor's mobility in the form of a sonnet. The poem inscribes the series of provisional roles as a composition of disjointed parts with no identity except in its capacity for this disjunctive conjunction, just as the actor is no one but his faculty of receptivity.

This hybrid subject, already evoked by the mythological chimera that lends its name to the collection of sonnets, provides a way of understanding the tensions in "El Desdichado" between the assertion of subjective identities and their partialness, without seeing in it an erosion of logical predication itself by multiplicity or a failed attempt at unity. As an alternative to the concepts of subjective disintegration and narcissistic syncretism that often structure readings of this poem, the concept of hybridity allows the fragmentary nature of "El Desdichado" to appear as the affirmation of an aesthetic in which fragmentation need not be transcended. It brings our reading much closer to Jonathan Strauss's critique of Kristeva, in which he argues that the poem provides no stable ground, even in its form, but instead puts forward "a subject that, as supported on the lyre-poem, remains irreducibly plural, that always involves indeterminate fragmentation and a pointless displacement."⁸⁷ Here, the poem and its subject retain their disjunctive character and the lyric subject is abolished by the presence of negativity within it.⁸⁸ We find ourselves faced not with a Romantic

⁸⁴ Kristeva, *Soleil noir*, 157.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 173.

⁸⁷ Strauss, *Subjects of Terror*, 194. See also his "Singulières périodiques."

⁸⁸ *Subjects of Terror*, 196. Our reading of "El Desdichado" owes much to Strauss's, with its emphasis on subjective displacement and plurality. Strauss maintains, however, the mimetic significance of the poem's lack of subjective coherence, reading it always in relation to a horizon of normative psychology. Given the primacy he gives to Nerval's supposed distress at his own (lived) lack of subjective coherence, Strauss reads the poem as both a demonstration of and

poem, putting forth a subject and a symbol; nor with an attempt to overcome the impossibility of such a poem, transcending the lack of such a subject and such a symbol. Instead, “El Desdichado” appears as a refusal of the lyric and of the symbolic, capable through the figures of the actor and the chimera of gesturing to its own refusal and declaring the operations that Shoshanna Felman attributes to it, albeit in a more unconscious form:

Puisque l’allégorie déconstruit sciemment la prétention de la métaphore; puisque, consciemment, elle postule non une identité mais une citation qui se donne comme telle, qui assume sa textualité, la possibilité de substitution allégorique d’un texte à un autre devient infinie. Le « je » n’est que cette permutation, cette substitution infinie de citations sur « la lyre d’Orphée ».

[Since allegory deliberately deconstructs the pretention of metaphor; since, conscious, it posits not an identity but a citation that presents itself as such, that assumes its textuality, the possibility of allegorical substitution of one text for another becomes infinite. The “I” is nothing but this permutation, this infinite substitution of citations on “Orpheus’ lyre.”]⁸⁹

However, far from harboring its allegorical displacements secretly, as the unconscious of its language, “El Desdichado” flaunts them, offering the figures of the actor and the chimera to embody the displacement of lyricism and symbolism in the ceaseless circulation of identities and images.

This is the mobility, not to be stopped or synthesized, that makes itself evident in the unruliness of the sonnet’s intertextual references. Any reading of “El Desdichado” must contend with the difficulty these references cause, the sense that the poem is always eluding our interpretive grasp. This difficulty is often attributed to the supposed esoterism and intimacy of the poem’s intertexts, which could be understood only by meticulously reproducing Nerval’s field of personal references. Reading the poem in this way, however, renders it at once more arcane and more manageable than it is. On the one hand, it overemphasizes the obscurity of the poem’s references, which are drawn as much from the cultural mainstream (classical mythology, fashionable literature, and iconic images) as from oneiric or hermetic sources, and which are ostentatious rather than concealed: the poem’s very title is an allusion to Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe*, and three of the poem’s references are placed in italics in the version published in the *Chimères*, as though to point them out to readers who might have missed them in *Le Mousquetaire*. The references make an open invitation to culturally literate readers of Nerval’s day, referring to a collective body of readerly experience (Scott, Hugo, Shakespeare). Even what seem to be autobiographical allusions refer, we must not forget, to Nerval’s previously published texts and so belong to a shared, literary imaginary as much as to a purely private one.

On the other hand, attempting to decrypt the poem tames its multiplicity by referring it to a coherence that lies elsewhere: the symbolic significance that the poem thwarts through its constant motion is simply sought out on another plane, in a unified symbolic imaginary elaborated over all of

a textual remedy for that lack: “I, but really I and not the mere image of I, am structured and self-similar in these jokes and monsters that are only words” (198). I am concerned here rather with the possibility that identification might not lead circuitously to identity (“self-sameness”), but displace it entirely as a literary value.

⁸⁹ Felman, *La folie et la chose littéraire*, 84-85. The chapter on “El Desdichado” is not included in the English version, *Writing and Madness (Literature/Philosophy/Psychoanalysis)*.

Nerval's works.⁹⁰ The tradition of this kind of hermetic reading locates both the sonnet's obscurity and its ultimate coherence in a private symbolic universe, and in so doing produces unity only by bracketing the poem's existence as a text to be read. The difficulty readers encounter is simply attributed to their difference from Nerval, who is assumed to be the ideal reader, the only one capable of fully operating the promised synthesis. This approach is never wholly satisfying because it discounts the significance of the experience (compelling and strange, inviting and challenging) of reading the sonnet. It fails to take seriously the irresolvability of the intertextual references in their overwhelming proliferation.

Take the myriad resonances between Nerval's works (girls, vines, seas, gods), which seem to suggest an established stable of images: no matter how carefully we trace them, they tend to spiral out of control, to follow one after another, creating series and branches of references that never arrive at any fixed symbolic universe (even an extra-poetic one). So it is, for example, that the references to Italy in the second quatrain of "El Desdichado" (to Posillipo and the sea, to a trellis covered with vines and roses) do indeed reach out toward the Neapolitan stories of "Octavie" and "Un Roman à faire," but both of those texts imply so many of the particulars of their narratives that they introduce more complexity than clarity into the quatrain.⁹¹ Then, too, this Italian quatrain also resonates with the "hollyhock" of the sonnet "Artémis" and the Posillipo and intertwining hydrangeas and myrtles of "Myrtho," as well as the grotto of "Delfica" and the Vatican trellis of the novella *Pandora*. No amount of cataloguing makes this Italian landscape feel like solid ground for readers.

These intertextual connections do not so much explain the Italy of "El Desdichado" as set it in motion, revealing its relations with other elements and its transformation by them. The intertextual energy of Nerval's writing does not assimilate meaning so much as disperse it: the proliferation we observe opens up each moment of the text onto a variety of other moments that undermine its singularity. The fairy that closes "El Desdichado" is the hybrid Mélusine (half woman, half serpent), locked in a tower as in "Angélique," but she is also the prophetess Manto, i.e. Daphne, who figures in the sonnet "Delfica." Webs of meaning open up between these works, not signaling a unified symbolic imaginary, but initiating a ceaseless motion. The sonnet escapes the enclosure of a single symbolism (even one that transcends it) by keeping its images in circulation, referring each one to another without ever allowing the series to stop in a definitive origin.

This motion not only short-circuits the symbolic coherence of the poem, throwing it open to an unsynthesizable figural hybridity, but also evades the coherence of a writing subject that might be identified by its own expression. The relentless intertextuality of "El Desdichado" reaches beyond Nerval's own works, so that in identifying itself by way of these disparate citations, the sonnet's subject itself becomes a hybrid of other writing subjects. So it is that the title character of the poem is not simply an avatar that proclaims the subject's self-identity, but can be seen to open the poem outward through its allusion to Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, just as the title of an earlier version of the poem, "Le Destin," alludes along with the "star" of the third verse to the lover-actors of Scarron's *Le Roman comique* [*The Comic Romance*] (as well as, of course, to Brisacier and Nerval's *Roman tragique*). In the same way, the "Soleil noir de la Mélancolie" [*Black Sun of Melancholia*] refers to the famous engraving by Albrecht Dürer, while the "prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie" [*prince of Aquitaine,*

⁹⁰ Such an *a priori* imaginary is epitomized by the erudite scholarship of Jean Richer, but is to be found far beyond the usual bastions of thematic reading and relies not only on Nerval's biography but also, for example, on the mythological genealogy.

⁹¹ In the case of texts like "Octavie" and "Un Roman à faire," the tendency to synthesize images across works relies on biography as its extra-textual plane of coherence.

his tower in ruins”] recalls the medieval Black Prince with his ruined lighthouse who figures in Shakespeare’s *Edward III*, opening the poem’s subject to include a host of others.⁹²

These wide-ranging textual references partake in the same proliferation and undecidability as the networks of figures within Nerval’s own corpus, referring readers always outside of the poem, beyond its limits, but not to any place where they might rest. Take, for example, the series of figures in the first verse of the first tercet: “Suis-je Amour ou Phébus? ... Lusignan ou Biron?” [“Am I Amor or Phoebus? ... Lusignan or Biron?”] Though this set of figures can be initially divided into pairs of mythological and historical references, it begins to bloom on further inspection as it invokes a great network of intertexts. “Amour” suggests not only the god Eros, but also a character in the *Roman de la Rose* [*Romance of the Rose*] (where the beloved is, of course, a “fleur”). “Phoebus” is not only Apollo but also the Captain Phoebus of Hugo’s *Notre-Dame de Paris* and Phoebus de Lusignan, a fifteenth-century marshal who was a cousin of the Guy de Lusignan of Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, who figures in the verse as well. Likewise, “Biron” calls to mind the duke of Biron, who figured in the “Chanson de Biron” in “Chansons et légendes du Valois,” but also Berowne, the character he inspired in Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labor’s Lost*, as well as perhaps Lord Byron himself. Though some of the many intertexts suggested by these names may seem more plausible than others, what is essential is that none of them cohere clearly enough to rule out the rest. Readers are left with a sense of the multiplicity and unruliness of the references that make of the poem not a unified symbolic expression, but a many-headed creature. “El Desdichado” thus seems composed not to establish its own meaning or to predicate or produce the identity of its own writing subject, but to serve as a site of encounter between other texts.

These moments are, importantly, drawn from readers’ own readerly experience as much as from Nerval’s. They are not the coded symbolic allusions to esoteric doctrines that Richer discovers throughout Nerval’s writing, which necessitate for the text’s actualization a reader who is himself an initiate. They are rather a dense fabric of references to a broad collective experience that would have been evident to any reasonably culturally literate reader of Nerval’s day (though this would have been, of course, a relatively small group compared to the French population). The poem flaunts its intertextuality, sometimes aggressively—“El Desdichado” is the poem’s title, and the words “*étoile*” [“*star*”], “*Soleil noir*” [“*Black Sun*”], “*Mélancolie*” [“*Melancholia*”], and “*fleur*” [“*flower*”] are placed in italics—and references familiar sources like Greek and Roman mythology, fashionable literature, and iconic images. The poem’s hybrid nature is made abundantly obvious to readers: what the poem sings here is (unlike Orpheus) not its own song, but a compilation of “Les soupirs de la sainte et les cris de la fée” [“the sighs of the saint” and “the fairy’s cry”].⁹³

The sonnets of *Les Chimères* thus announce themselves not as works of lyrical self-expression, but as instances of the hybrid intertextual practice that is also to be found in Nerval’s other writing. “El Desdichado” crystallizes into a concise poetic form the incessant displacements of the writing subject’s performance, shunning the stability of the symbol just as the writing subject elsewhere refuses to resolve into a face behind the series of masks. The economy of the intertextual gestures is very tight in the sonnets, limited primarily to allusions (with one notable exception, Delfica, that I will discuss below). But the mechanisms at work here can help us to think the grander citational gestures elsewhere in Nerval’s œuvre. Indeed, many of his texts appear upon closer examination as hybrids, composed of various elements that seem in some way not to have the same

⁹² Likewise, the “exile from jubilation,” who is not included in the list of predicates for the actor-subject in Brisacier’s letter, alludes to two poets who used *banni de liesse* as a sobriquet: Jean Meschinot (1420-1491) and François Habert (1510-1561). Even the double passage of the Acheron in the final tercet echoes Pückler-Muskau’s account of twice traversing the funereal Lake Qarun (a scene that Nerval mistakenly attributes to *Lettres d’un mort* when he cites it in “À Jules Janin,” *Lorely*, in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:11).

⁹³ “Les Chimères,” *Les Filles du feu* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:645.

status, to be of the same kind. So it is with the portraits of *Les Illuminés*, written in such different styles, some of them lifted almost wholesale from other sources and some heavily fictionalized by their author. So it is, too, with other first person texts like the *Voyage en Orient*, where great chunks of the plot (and not the least memorable) are borrowed from William Lane. What might at first appear to be the relatively smooth surface of the first-person travel narrative turns out to be everywhere sutured together, combining original expressions of the author's lived experience with the writings of other travelers. These shifts are not signaled in the *Voyage*—readers do not face the kind of interweaving of lived and literary experience found in Chateaubriand's *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem* [*Itinerary from Paris to Jerusalem*], where the author constantly cites authorities—but the shifts are nonetheless immediately apparent to any reader of travel literature: the passages borrowed are taken from some of the most famous passages of what was arguably the most famous source available on the subject. The borrowings are not liable to be confused with creations of the writing subject, nor does the writing subject appropriate them by making his borrowing explicit and adding some frame of interpretation like Chateaubriand; rather the borrowings remain insistently but not explicitly foreign within the text, a constant reminder of the writing subject's lack of unity.

If this subject at times seems to be Nerval himself, it at other times clearly plays other parts (gives voice to the words and experiences of others, repeats what is common to all), so that it cannot be seen to coincide absolutely with the role of Nerval or with any other, but must be accepted by readers as that which circulates among them. Its singularity as a subject comes from the insistence with which it implies other subjects and the inevitable relationships between them in their literary production. This is true even in what seem to be the most obviously autobiographical of Nerval's texts, the ones where his *real* subjectivity seems so clearly at stake. We have seen this already in "El Desdichado" and find it as well in *Aurélia*, the text usually taken to be the most sincere, the most truly revealing of all Nerval's writing. Here, amidst the description of his confinement and the hallucinations he experienced during his periods of illness, Nerval includes an intertextual borrowing that calls straightforward lyrical readings of the text into question. In the middle of a recounted dream about the origin of the world, the narrator describes a vision of the biblical flood that harkens back to an 1844 diorama on the same subject that Nerval had himself reviewed.⁹⁴

Un fléau plus grand que les autres vint tout à coup rajeunir et sauver le monde. La constellation d'Orion ouvrit au ciel les cataractes des eaux ; la terre, trop chargée par les glaces du pôle opposé, fit un demi-tour sur elle-même, et les mers, surmontant leurs rivages, reflurent sur les plateaux de l'Afrique et de l'Asie ; l'inondation pénétra les sables, remplit les tombeaux et les pyramides, et, pendant quarante jours, une arche mystérieuse se promena sur les mers portant l'espoir d'une création nouvelle.

[A plague far greater than all the others suddenly swept down in order to rejuvenate and rescue the world. The constellation of Orion opened cataracts of water in the sky; the earth, top-heavy with the ice of the opposite pole, spun backwards and the seas overflowed their coastlines and poured into the plains of Africa and Asia; the flood waters seeped into the sands, filled the tombs and the pyramids, and for forty days a mysterious ark sailed the seas, carrying with it the hopes for a new creation.]⁹⁵

The incredibly visual account of the dream situates both readers and narrator much as they would have been situated at the diorama theater, facing an unfolding spectacle of rising water. The scale

⁹⁴ "Diorama. Odéon" in *L'Artiste*, 15 September 1844 in *Œuvres complètes*, 1:840-42.

⁹⁵ *Aurélia* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3 :695-756, 714/*Selected Writings*, 283.

has been altered, from the single antediluvian city presented in the diorama to entire continents, but the stock of images⁹⁶ relies heavily on the earlier spectacle.⁹⁷ The shared memory of this collective cultural reference (the diorama performance) breaks open the text's apparent confinement to the author's individual psyche, showing what seems to be the most inaccessibly personal place in Nerval's *œuvre* to be composed in fact of intertextual fragments.

The Intertextual Community (or, *Je* as *Nous*)

The literary text here is neither the expression nor the production of an individual, but a space in which the free circulation of ideas and images is allowed to be productive. Literary practice functions collectively, binding together not only multiple writers, but also all members of the culture at large in generating, transforming, and sharing ideas and images. Readers, too, are implicated in this literary community, since what circulates in Nerval's texts has circulated as well in his readers' prior readerly and cultural experience. What Nerval borrows from Lane belongs, so to speak, to any other reader of Lane as much as to him, just as he has no special claim on any of the historical figures he references or on the experience of the diorama. So it is that in those instances of borrowing, readers recognize in the writing subject not an integral and Other subjectivity, but a piece of themselves, their own experience. Not even the repeated images from within Nerval's own corpus are exclusively his own, since they refer to previous texts of his that were likely read by the same audience and so belong in some way to his readers' repertoire as much as to his own. His practice of republication thus binds him to be his own intertext, to cast his writing outside of the borders of his own subject so that he might find it there—not as a narcissistic reflection, but as the self made foreign—just as readers find themselves in the text. Readers are thus an integral element of the series kept in motion by this writing practice, essential members of the community established.

It is in this way that we might understand the enigmatic phrase “je suis l'autre” [“I am the other”] that Nerval inscribed above the engraved portrait that served as frontispiece to the Eugène de Mirecourt biography published just months after *Les Filles du feu* and *Les Chimères*.⁹⁸ The apparently proto-Rimbaldian pronouncement seems to invite readings of melancholy, a dispossession of the self that might be in part voluntary (the price of writing or of opposition), but that remains fundamentally negative, what Chambers calls suicide.⁹⁹ But in light of the reciprocal operation of Nerval's intertextual practice, inviting readers to join him in his radical destabilizing of the subject, we might see this statement quite differently. The poles of “je” and “l'autre” are abolished in this writing practice, with the *je* opening itself always onto the other and so meeting his fellows outside of an opposition predicated on identity. “Je suis l'autre” refuses a *je* that is formed in opposition to its other.¹⁰⁰ “You misunderstand me,” this inscription seems to say, “if you look for me in this image, in this biography.” It is, like so much of Nerval's writing, a first-person statement that in fact surpasses the subject to state the co-implication of the subject and a broader community.

⁹⁶ This includes the eerily wandering ark that Nerval did not see, since technical difficulties prevented showing the diorama's third tableau on the night he was in attendance; see “Diorama. Odéon” in *Œuvres complètes*, 1:842.

⁹⁷ Other aspects of Nerval's treatment of the flood in *Aurélia* also echo the diorama and his review of it: the inclusion in the dream of the Eloim and their struggle to establish a new peace after the flood refers back to the long philological discussion of the Eloim in Nerval's 1844 article, and the reprise of the flood in the second part of *Aurélia* (in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:736) seems to entertain the same speculation about how such a flood would play out in Paris as Nerval proposes in the review.

⁹⁸ Jeanneret, “Nerval et la biographie impossible,” 135. The portrait was engraved by Étienne Gervais from a daguerreotype by Adolphe Legros, taken in late 1853 or early 1854 and thus dating from the same period as Dumas's “Causerie” and Nerval's “À Alexandre Dumas.”

⁹⁹ Chambers, *Room for Maneuver*, 105.

¹⁰⁰ In other words, “je suis l'autre” recapitulates the (unsanctioned) relationship of self and non-self vindicated in *Les Nuits d'octobre*, as well as the forbidden collective subject of *Les Faux Saulniers*; see Chapters One and Three, respectively.

The actorly writing subject is no one but his masks—masks drawn, through a variety of intertextual gestures, from a shared culture. So it is that readers cannot help but recognize them *as masks*: the sheer obviousness of the unacknowledged citations reveals to readers the fiction being perpetrated by the writing subject. The text is not designed to fool readers into reading a coherent writing subject where there is none (its borrowings are too blatant for that); nor does it demand of them that they suspend disbelief and let themselves believe that such a subject exists (pretend for themselves to believe that it does). Rather, the text invites readers to go along with a certain kind of fiction, the simulation of the writing-subject-as-actor. The flood scene in *Aurélia* presents this most clearly, the quintessentially false hallucination providing an occasion to displace the very opposition between truth and falsehood, authenticity and inauthenticity, encouraging readers to relate to the narrator's dream on entirely different terms. The dream is not to be believed or disbelieved as a real or unreal part of the narrator's lived experience, but is rather a fiction that the writing subject here performs and that readers are invited both to recognize *as a fiction* and to believe nonetheless in the provisional, mobile way that such a performance requires. The fiction into which readers are invited by this flagrant but unacknowledged citational practice is thus one in which they must double the actor's provisional belief, as well as his lucidity about its provisional nature. Just as the actor to whom Nerval compares the writing subject identifies fully with his characters, only to pass on to another identification, readers here must affirm the writing subject's performance by believing him as each character, knowing all the while that he is liable to become another at any moment.

In doing so, readers bring about something like the collective performance of the festival in *Sylvie*. Lucidity and illusion are not divided up between actor and spectators, with the writing subject creating an illusion of subjectivity for his readers' benefit. But neither can readers purport to recognize as a fiction what the author mistakenly believes to be real.¹⁰¹ Rather, as in the festival, everyone participates on the same terms, with equal portions of lucidity and illusion. Nerval's writing stages a writing subject who knowingly performs a fiction for readers who are called on to acknowledge it *as a fiction* but to engage with it nonetheless. We might even say that the writing subject attempts here to perform not *for* readers, but *with* them, making of reading itself a process of mobile identification and belief akin to writing. This is what the use of widely known intertexts like the diorama or William Lane helps to ensure: not only do readers recognize the foreign elements voiced by the writing subject *as foreign* to it, but they also find their own experiences implicated alongside those of the author. By placing readerly and lived experience on the same level and moving between them without privileging one over the other, the subject of Nerval's writing creates a subjective experience that is neither autobiographical nor strictly fictional, and readers are invited to partake in this experience, to move between the intertextual gestures that call on their readerly experience as much as the author's and the elements of the text that are more absolutely foreign to them. Readers encounter the writing subject here not by being opposed to it by their mutual otherness, but by participating in an othering of themselves that likens them to the writing subject in its mobility. Readers and writing subject alike transcend their individual subjectivities to form a community of fictional performance.

In foregrounding its own intertextuality, the literary text becomes the site of a collective experience that can be shared by writer and readers on equal terms. This mechanism is performed explicitly in the fifth sonnet of *Les Chimères*, "Delfica," where a recognizable intertext generates a reflection on that intertextuality itself:

La connais-tu, DAFNE, cette ancienne romance,
Au pieds du sycomore, ou sous les lauriers blancs,

¹⁰¹ Such is the posture of the psychoanalytic reader, who always knows much more than the author himself.

Sous l'olivier, le myrthe ou les saules tremblants,
Cette chanson d'amour... qui toujours recommence!

Reconnais-tu le TEMPLE, au péristyle immense,
Et les citrons amers où s'imprimaient tes dents?
Et la grotte, fatale aux hôtes imprudents,
Où du dragon vaincu dort l'antique semence.

Ils reviendront ces dieux que tu pleures toujours!
Le temps va ramener l'ordre des anciens jours;
La terre a tressailli d'un souffle prophétique...

Cependant la sibylle au visage latin
Est endormie encor sous l'arc de Constantin:
—Et rien n'a dérangé le sévère portique.

[Do you know it, DAPHNE, this old romance,
At the foot of the sycamore or the white laurel trees,
Beneath the olive, the myrtle or the trembling willows,
This song of love ... that always rebegins!

Do you recognize the TEMPLE with its immense peristyle,
And the bitter lemons that bore the imprint of your teeth?
And the grotto, fatal to its careless guests,
Where the vanquished dragon's ancient seed lies asleep.

They shall return, these gods you still bemoan!
Time will bring back the order of the ancient days;
The earth has shuddered with a prophetic breath...

Meanwhile the sibyl with the Latin face
Still sleeps beneath the Arch of Constantine—
And nothing has unsettled the severe portico.]¹⁰²

The poem unmistakably invokes a well-known source text, Mignon's song from *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*.¹⁰³ The sonnet's quatrains mimic the stanzas of Goethe's poem with their call ("La connais-tu" ["Do you know it?"]) to the addressee's images of a cherished land, which is Italy in Nerval's poem as in Goethe's. But "Delfica" does not simply reactivate Mignon's song by repeating it. Instead, the sonnet uses this particular intertext to draw attention to the intertextual gesture itself, thematizing its own functioning. The act of reactivation is put front and center, as Italy becomes not simply a lover's paradise, but the land of a promised renewal, the return of the gods and the

¹⁰² "Les Chimères," *Les Filles du feu* in *Œuvres complètes*, 3 :647/ *Selected Writings*, 367. As with "El Desdichado," I have reformatted Sieburth's prose to correspond roughly to the sonnet's form. All ellipses are Nerval's own. See also the earlier, nearly identical "Daphné" published in 1853 in *Petits châteaux de Bohême* [*Little Castles of Bohemia*] in *Œuvres complètes*, 3:441-42.

¹⁰³ It is worth noting that this poem had already been rewritten within Gautier's "Chanson de Mignon" of 1833, where the paradise invoked is "the land of the poet" to which the muse would lead him.

beginning-again of the ceaseless love song. What the poem strives for, then, is not the object of the imagination only but also of memory, something to be *re-created*.

So it is that the lady's invitation to her lover to run away with her into a blissful future becomes, when rewritten in *Les Chimères*, an invitation of a different kind, calling on readers to join the poem's subject in reviving a text from the past without forgetting its pastness. The opening line of the *Chanson*, "Do you know the land where pale citrons grow" becomes "La connais-tu, Dafné, cette ancienne romance" ["Do you know it, Daphne, this old romance"], making the Goethe poem itself (the song being rewritten) the object referred to in the poem, recalled to the addressee as something to be re-actualized in the future. More than a simple wink at readers, this opening line with its conspicuous transformation of the original folds the poem back on itself so that readers must affirm their own participation in its staging of another text. "Cette ancienne romance" is at once recalled and repeated. As in the two-part recollection/invitation of Mignon's song, "Delfica" calls readers to recognize its borrowing while inviting them to participate in the performance that borrowing allows. The element of memory at work in this intertext is brought to the fore in the second quatrain, when "Reconnais-tu" ["Do you recognize"] replaces Goethe's "Do you know," and readers through their re-actualization of this past find themselves carrying out the renewal the sonnet seeks but claims not to find. Through its rewriting and its readers' awareness of it, the song truly becomes "Cette chanson d'amour ... qui toujours recommence!" ["This song of love ... that always rebegins!"].

"Delfica" thematizes the mode of reading called for by Nerval's intertextual poetics. It draws attention to the experience of familiarity generated by textual borrowings and republications, and gestures toward the kind of renewal that this kind of repetition seems to promise. As in *Sylvie*, the renewal recounted here is not successful; it nevertheless creates a model by which we can understand what writing might achieve. Familiarity here draws readers into the illusion the writing subject lives, with his strange combination of proximity and distance, belief and lucidity. It collapses the positions of writer and reader just as the festival collapses the positions of actor and spectator, making the literary text, like the festival, a site of collective performance. Writer and readers take the same series of ideas out for a stroll, enjoying both the mobility inherent in this literary activity and the community it produces between them, fellow strollers. In ceding its primacy and the possibility of its lyrical self-expression to a poetics of hybridity, the writing subject produces a literary form that acknowledges and performs the relational nature of literature.

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