

Hidden Centres: The Rise and Fall of the Secret Societies

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Summary:

Among the central concerns of early nineteenth-century European statesmen was the sudden flowering of new and dangerous organizations collectively known as the secret societies. But by the end of the century, in politics the term ‘secret society’ was principally used by Catholics to denounce what they saw as Masonic-led governments in Southern Europe. This development and its perception together constitute an interesting chapter in the history of European associations and political life.

Draft – please do not quote without consulting the author:

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Ten years after the fall of the Bastille and a year after the outbreak of the Irish Rebellion, William Pitt drew the attention of the House of Commons to “the existence of secret societies totally unknown in the history of this or any other country”, calling it “the most desperate, wicked, and cruel conspiracy against our liberties, our constitution, and our peace, that is to be found in the history of this country”. Two decades later, Clemens von Metternich pointed to “l’un des instruments à la fois les plus actifs et les plus dangereux dont se servent les révolutionnaires de tous les pays avec un succès qui aujourd’hui n’est plus contestable [...] les *sociétés secrètes*, puissance véritable, et d’autant plus dangereuse qu’elle agit dans les ténèbres, qu’elle mine toutes les parties du corps social, et dépose partout les germes d’une gangrène morale qui ne tardera pas à se développer et à porter ses fruits”. And on the 1856 anniversary of the Bastille’s fall, Benjamin Disraeli told the House of Commons, “It is useless to deny, because it is impossible to conceal, that a grand part of Europe – the whole of Italy and France and a great portion of Germany, to say nothing of other countries – is covered with a network of these secret societies, just as the superficies of the earth are now being covered with railroads”.¹ Even after deduction of a rhetorical surplus for political convenience these were strong statements made by some of the most influential men of their times. Clearly, in their eyes, secret societies were a core element of what they regarded as the centre of the world.

This is not a view one would easily share after reading certain post-ww II historians. It is true that some, such as Reinhart Koselleck and Maurice Agulhon, emphasized the role of Freemasonry – which despite much protest is still widely considered the secret society *par excellence* – in the dissemination of Enlightenment ideas, the building of a civil society, and the development of a modern sociability. But others, such as J.M. Roberts, whose book on *The Mythology of the Secret Societies* discussed the organizations most feared by Metternich and Disraeli, asserted that “though secret societies existed in large numbers in Western Europe between 1750 and 1830 and strove to influence events, their main importance was what people believed about them. This always mattered more than what they did and their numbers and practical effectiveness were in no way proportionate to the myth’s power”. Roberts did not hide that he regarded this mythology as “a view of politics shaped by nonsense”, and warned against “taking the recurrent irrational element in history too lightly”.²

¹ *The Speeches of the Right Honourable William Pitt, in the House of Commons*, vol III, London: Longman etc, 1806, pp 404-5 (speech of April 19, 1799, to defend the Unlawful Societies Act); *Aus Metternich’s nachgelassenen Papieren*, ed Richard Metternich-Winneburg, vol III, Wien: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1881, pp 409-10 (‘Geheime Denkschrift Metternich’s an Kaiser Alexander’, December 1820); *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 3rd series, vol 143, p 774, accessible through hansard.millbanksystems.com (checked 10 Aug 2009). Disraeli’s words were used as an epitaph by Nesta H. Webster, *Secret Societies and Subversive Movements*, London: Boswell, 1924, p IV.

² J.M. Roberts, *The Mythology of the Secret Societies*, London: Secker & Warburg, 1972, pp 347-9, VII. Cf Reinhart Koselleck, *Kritik und Krise: eine Untersuchung der politischen Funktion des dualistischen Weltbildes im 18. Jahrhundert*, thesis Heidelberg 1954, book ed with the subtitle *eine Studie zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, often reprinted; Maurice Agulhon, *La sociabilité méridionale (confréries et associations dans la vie collective en Provence orientale à la fin du 18ème siècle)*, 2 vols, Aix-en-Provence: La Pensée universitaire, 1966, reissued as *Pénitents et Francs-Maçons de l’ancienne Provence*, Paris: Fayard, 1968. For the *status quaestionis* in Masonic studies, see Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire, *L’Espace des franc-maçons: une sociabilité européenne au XVIIIe siècle*, Rennes:

The historians of socialism, quite numerous after the war, were similarly cautious. Sure, the Carbonari and the Charbonnerie, which at the turn of the nineteenth century had become firmly embedded in the republican histories of Italy and France, now also got a place of honour in the history of revolutionary movements. Yet ever since the split in the International Working Men's Association in 1872, the appreciation of secret societies, which had played a prominent role in the conflict, was ideologically charged. In particular, research about Karl Marx's Communist League, the International Brotherhood of Michail Bakunin, and the origins of the Bolshevik Party was much affected. The argument of rationality, with its subtle moral overtones, was routinely deployed against secret societies, as in Eric Hobsbawm's analysis of the decline of ritual in the labour movement.³

The differences of opinion between nineteenth-century statesmen and twentieth-century historians as well as among the historians themselves throw an interesting light on the development of civil society. Building on a tradition established by Alexis de Tocqueville, modern theories of Western democracy stress the importance of voluntary associations for the vitality of the social and political structures in which it is rooted.⁴ Among such associations, Freemasonry played a significant role, both in eighteenth-century Europe and in the young United States, thanks largely to its formula of a publicly known yet secret organization without any particular doctrine, offering, to those who could afford the dues, a free space in which fraternal tolerance allowed for meaningful and pleasant company. Its three-graded structure, taken from the guilds of masons and soon expanded in various more or less autonomous rites, suited the taste for progress through education as well as for knowledge not available to everybody.

In the course of the long nineteenth century, this flourishing organizational model became compromised as a result of changing views of secrecy. The long trend towards openness of knowledge that had started in the sixteenth century, pushed on by the Reformation and the invention of printing, accelerated and affected conceptions of rationality that were forged in religious

Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2003; J.A.M. Snoek, *Researching Freemasonry: where are we?*, Sheffield: Centre for Research into Freemasonry and Fraternalism, 2008 (Working Paper Series, 2).

³ E.J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: studies in archaic forms of social movement in the 19th and 20th centuries*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959, ch ix.

⁴ In addition to the work of Koselleck and Agulhon, see most notably Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1962; Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: civic traditions in modern Italy*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993, and Putnam, *Bowling Alone: the collapse and revival of American community*, New York etc: Simon & Schuster, 2000. On voluntary associations, see Jack C. Ross, *An Assembly of Good Fellows: voluntary associations in history*, Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1976; Etienne François (ed), *Sociabilité et société bourgeoise en France, en Allemagne et en Suisse, 1750-1850*, Paris: Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1986; Maurizio Ridolfi, *Il circolo virtuoso: sociabilità democratica, associazionismo e rappresentanza politica nell'Ottocento*, Firenze: Centro editoriale toscano, 1990; Wolfgang Hardtwig, *Genossenschaft, Sekte, Verein in Deutschland: Band 1: vom Spätmittelalter bis zur Französischen Revolution*, München: C.H. Beck, 1997; Carol E. Harrison, *The Bourgeois Citizen in Nineteenth-Century France: gender, sociability, and the uses of emulation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999; Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800: the origins of an associational world*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; Elena Maza Zorrilla (ed), *Sociabilidad en la España contemporánea: historiografía y problemas metodológicos*, Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 2002; Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, *Geselligkeit und Demokratie: Vereine und zivile Gesellschaft im transnationalen Vergleich 1750-1914*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003.

conflicts, where Reason was more and more often invoked to settle debate. The new polemical rationality inevitably affected the working of associations. Increasingly, in science as much as in the political process, it was considered irrational to operate outside the public arena, which itself continued to grow both in size and importance.⁵ Secrecy, which had been the norm in politics since the Middle Ages and had still been positively valued in the *Encyclopédie*, became suspicious; and whereas most organizations had used to hide important elements of their activities as a matter of course, now limitations to openness demanded an explanation – a rational explanation, to be sure.⁶

The Masonic lodges that had, according to some, virtually hatched civil society, now came under attack; and associations that would once have been called secret societies started to present themselves as clandestine organizations or liberation armies, arguing that their concealment was not a choice of their own, but a necessity imposed on them by a repressive external world, whose rationality should itself be put in doubt. The secret societies of Metternich's days gradually disappeared under that name. Those that remained were either pushed to the margins of civilized discourse, as in the case of many an esoteric association, or turned into otherworldly enemies, as happened, for example, to the Freemasons in Catholic French or Nationalist German opinion. Even the many secret societies that used to dot both colonial and ethnographic maps were all but gone.

This process, in which the meaning and appreciation of secrecy were refashioned in a quintessentially modern way, has in turn thrown a veil over much of the nature and actions of the secret societies, which retrospectively became ever harder to understand. In order to see how this came about, we will briefly retrace, in what will mostly be a historiographical essay, how those societies from their terrifying origins came to be seen as a normal phenomenon and at the same time as an increasingly quaint and exotic type of association; how recent research has been qualifying much of that picture; and how reinserting them in a broader historical context might bring new insights.

⁵ William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: books of secrets in medieval and early modern culture*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994; Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: civility and science in seventeenth-century England*, Chicago, IL etc; University of Chicago Press, 1994; Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge: from Gutenberg to Diderot*, Cambridge etc: Polity, 2000; Pamela O. Long, *Openness, Secrecy, Authorship: technical arts and the culture of knowledge from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, Baltimore, MD etc: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001. On the polemical aspects of rationality, see S.J. Barnett, *The Enlightenment and Religion: the myths of modernity*, Manchester etc: Manchester University Press, 2003, ch 2.

⁶ On secrecy in general, see Stanton K. Tefft (ed), *Secrecy: a cross-cultural perspective*, New York: Human Sciences Press, 1980; Lucian Hölscher, *Öffentlichkeit und Geheimnis: eine begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zur Entstehung der Öffentlichkeit in der frühen Neuzeit*, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1979; Manfred Voigts, *Das geheimnisvolle Verschwinden des Geheimnisses: ein Versuch*, Wien: Passagen Verlag, 1995; Aleida and Jan Assmann (eds), *Schleier und Schwelle*, 3 vols, München: Wilhelm Fink, 1997-9; André Petitot, *Secret et formes sociales*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1998; Albert Spitznagel (ed), *Geheimnis und Geheimhaltung: Erscheinungsformen, Funktionen, Konsequenzen*, Göttingen: Hogrefe, 1998; Gisela Engel et al (eds), *Das Geheimnis am Beginn der europäischen Moderne = Zeitsprünge*, 6 (2002), Frankfurt/Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2002. The *Encyclopédie* (vol XIV, p 862) looked at secrecy from the point of view of the individual, stating, 'Les Romains firent une divinité du secret, sous le nom de *Tacita*; les Pythagoriciens une vertu, & nous en faisons un devoir, dont l'observation constitue une branche importante de la probité. D'ailleurs, l'acquisition de cette qualité essentielle à un honnête homme, est le fondement d'une bonne conduite, & sans laquelle tous les talens sont inutiles.'

Hidden Jesuits

The expression ‘secret societies’, in the alliterative and often plural form that became standard in the major West-European languages, was not in common use before the final quarter of the eighteenth century.⁷ The first time it seems to have appeared in a monograph title was in 1772, when Carl Ekman was examined at the University of Åbo, the present Turku, on a dissertation *De secretis societatibus litterariis*, written by his teacher, Johan Bilmark. On proper inspection, though, the book is not so much “On Literary Secret Societies” as “On Secret Literary Societies”, since the author’s main purpose was to applaud the recent foundation of just such an association at Åbo. Their secrecy was praiseworthy, he explained, because of the anonymity on their members’ good works, which discouraged ostentation and vanity. And their tradition, running from the Egyptian mysteries and Pythagoras through the *disciplina arcani* of the early Christian Church to the Freemasons and the Stockholm literary and musical society *Utile Dulci*, was eminently respectable.⁸

The real beginnings of the term should probably be located in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* of the mid-1780s. At that time, the journal of Friedrich Nicolai focused its anti-Catholic polemics on the Jesuit order, even though this had been suppressed by Clemens XIV in 1773. The Jesuits were suspected simply to have gone underground and actively to fight Protestantism and the Enlightenment through “eine Menge geheimer schädlicher Gesellschaften”.⁹ This suspicion was of course fed by a long tradition of alleged Jesuit conspiracy, which had found a remarkable expression in the *Monita secreta Societatis Jesu*, originally published in Kraków in 1614. The reworked version of these invented ‘secret rules’ that first appeared in 1676, possibly due to a Jansenist hand, already sketched the outline of an organization that resembled a modern ‘secret society’. The *Monita* were translated and endlessly reprinted at each burst of anti-Jesuitism anywhere, as had most recently happened when Portugal

⁷ Cf French ‘sociétés secrètes’, Italian ‘società segrete’, Spanish ‘sociedades secretas’, German ‘geheime Gesellschaften’; Dutch has ‘geheime genootschappen’. The earlier use of ‘cabal’ in its various forms dates from the sixteenth century. Derivations and translations of Latin ‘coniuratio’ were common since the Middle Ages; see Otto Gerhard Oexle, ‘Conjuratio und Gilde im frühen Mittelalter: ein Beitrag zum Problem der sozialgeschichtlichen Kontinuität zwischen Antike und Mittelalter’, in Berent Schwineköper (ed), *Gilden und Zünfte: kaufmännische und gewerbliche Genossenschaften im frühen und hohen Mittelalter*, Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke, 1985, pp 151-214; and Oexle, ‘Die Kultur der Rebellion: Schwureinigung und Verschwörung im früh- und hochmittelalterlichen Okzident’, in Marie Teres Fögen (ed), *Ordnung und Aufruhr im Mittelalter: historische und juristische Studien zur Rebellion*, Frankfurt/Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1995, pp 119-37. In English statutory law, ‘conspiracy’ was defined in 1305 as a combination for the false and malicious promotion of indictments; from the seventeenth century on, a combination to commit conspiracy was punishable even though the conspiracy had not been executed; see R.S. Wright, *The Law of Criminal Conspiracies and Agreements*, London: Butterworths, 1873.

⁸ Johan Bilmark, *Dissertatio academica de secretis societatibus litterariis*, Åbo: Johan Christopher Frenckel, 1772, 18 pp. Professors at Åbo University were obliged to write at least one dissertation every year; cf Otto Brusiin, *Bilmark-Studien: 1: Einführung in das Studium der Philosophie Johan Bilmarks*, Turku: Turun Yliopisto, 1971, p 5. The literary society Aurora was founded in Åbo in 1770 and published *Tidningar*, Finland’s first newspaper. One of its founders, the Fennophile historian Henrik Gabriel Porthan, was also a member of *Utile Dulci*, which existed since 1766 and is considered the forerunner of the Swedish Royal Academy of Music; cf Otto Sylwan, ‘Till *Utile Dulcis* historia’, *Samlaren*, 1907, pp 230-41, here p 236.

⁹ *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, January 1785, quoted by Christoph Hippchen, *Zwischen Verschwörung und Verbot: der Illuminatenorden im Spiegel deutscher Publizistik (1776-1800)*, Köln etc: Böhlau, 1998, p 55.

opened the series of government attacks on the order in the mid-eighteenth century. There had been at least 13 reprints between 1750 and 1785.¹⁰

In a few months, the discussion started by the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* not only spilled over to other German journals, but also came to include a new topic, the order of the Illuminati. This association, founded in 1776 by Adam Weishaupt, professor of Canon Law at the (formerly Jesuit-dominated) University of Ingolstadt, aimed to obtain important positions in society in order to establish a moral regime that would lead all citizens back to the original state of liberty and equality. Weishaupt designed a graded secret organization based on elements taken from Freemasonry and the Jesuit order (as he perceived it), and led by a few higher degrees, whose very existence was to remain unknown. Only this invisible inner circle was acquainted with the final aims of the order; the lower degrees, whose understanding was deemed insufficient, were persuaded that less radical goals were pursued. The Illuminati tried to seize control of certain Masonic lodges to use them for propaganda and recruitment. Due in large part to the efforts of Baron Adolph von Knigge, the future author of an immensely popular book of manners, *Über den Umgang mit Menschen*, the organization succeeded in the first half of the 1780s in expanding from Bavaria to northern Germany. At its zenith, it numbered between 1,000 and 2,000 members, among them several princes as well as prominent intellectuals such as Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Johann Gottfried Herder, and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi.¹¹

After the Illuminati were accused of interfering in the sensitive matter of a possible exchange of Habsburg and Wittelsbach lands, in June 1784 the Bavarian Elector Karl Theodor issued a decree against “heimliche Verbind- und Versammlungen” in general, and in March and August 1785 against Freemasons and Illuminati in particular. Important papers were seized and published by the authorities, the first of many such official efforts to fight the dangers of secret societies by exposing them. As a result, the Illuminati now got a public face, which would be the face of the secret societies for a long time to come. While certain Catholic circles discerned an Enlightenment conspiracy, the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* and like-minded journals saw the ban on the Illuminati as part of a reactionary offensive. Suspicion rose to the point where some radicals feared that Masonic lodges and even the leadership of the Illuminati themselves had become tools in the hands of the Jesuits. In the five years till 1790 no less than 50 individual publications in Germany and abroad discussed the fate of the group.¹²

¹⁰ Sabina Pavone, *Le astuzie dei Gesuiti: le false Istruzioni segrete della Compagnia di Gesù e la polemica antigesuita nei secoli XVII e XVIII*, Roma: Salerno, 2000, pp 292-3. See also Pavone, ‘Between History and Myth: the *Monita secreta Societatis Jesu*’, in John W. O’Malley, SJ, et al (eds), *The Jesuits: cultures, sciences, and the arts 1540-1773*, vol II, Toronto etc: University of Toronto Press, 2006, pp 50-65; and the introduction of José Eduardo Franco, Christine Vogel (eds), *Monita secreta: instruções secretas dos Jesuítas: história de um manual conspiracionista*, Lisboa: Roma, 2002.

¹¹ For the extensive literature from 1784 till 2006, see Hermann Schüttler, Reinhard Markner, *Bibliographie zum Illuminatenorden*, markner.blogspot.com/2006/06/bibliographie-zum-illuminatenorden.html (checked 10 Aug 2009).

¹² Manfred Agethen, *Geheimbund und Utopie: Illuminaten, Freimaurer und deutsche Spätaufklärung*, München: Oldenbourg, 1984, p 81. See *ibid*, pp 279-87, for a summary of the speculations regarding the Jesuits. Karl Theodor’s decrees are in Leopold Engel, *Geschichte des Illuminaten-Ordens: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte Bayerns*, Berlin: Hugo Bermühler, 1906, pp 161-5.

Rise of a Concept

Thus, ‘secret societies’ began as a term that was tied to highly divisive issues, expressed or implied an accusation of conspiracy, possibly with international ramifications, and had a tendency to infect other associations in both past and present. Once coined, it was spread and broadened in various ways, spreading its organizational model on the way. As is well known, some of the earliest theories about the causes of the French Revolution looked for a hidden hand, which was frequently found in Freemasonry. Since the Masons in their Constitutions of 1723 had claimed a distinguished pedigree, which had only been expanded by later authors, the secret societies came to share this honour. Already by 1796 the first outline of a historical canon became visible, including, among others, Templars, Assassins, Jesuits, Masons and “Illuminés”, a term that comprised not just the Illuminati, but also some more esoteric individuals and associations.¹³ A year later appeared the first volume of the French Jesuit Augustin Barruel’s *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire du Jacobinisme*, as well as *Proof of a Conspiracy against All the Religions and Governments of Europe* by John Robison, a Scottish philosopher and physicist – the two most famous books to blame the fall of Throne and Altar on secret societies working through *philosophes*, Freemasons and Jacobins. Barruel’s English translator, Robert Cliford, applied his thesis to the situation in Ireland and Great Britain.¹⁴

As if in confirmation, and in spite of the fact that Roberts was certainly right in doubting the extent of their influence on events they were supposed to have orchestrated, soon the actions of secret societies themselves persuaded public opinion of their effectivity. In fact, what people thought they saw in the first decade of the Restoration era, was more or less as follows. The murder of August von Kotzebue by Carl Sand in 1819 demonstrated the determination of the hidden core of the German student unions. At the beginning of 1820 the Spanish secret societies forced Ferdinand VII to reinstate the Constitution of Cádiz. The Portuguese societies rose half a year later. In 1821 the Carbonari were all over Italy, while the Philiki Etairia started an insurrection in Greece. In 1822 the Four Sergeants of La Rochelle gave expression to the struggle of the French Charbonnerie, and in 1825 it was the turn of the Russian Decembrists. It is true that by the mid-1820s very little had been accomplished in real terms – even the Spanish constitution was lost again – but this was surely not for want of trying.¹⁵

¹³ Cf *Le Tombeau de Jacques Molai, ou le secret des conspirateurs*, Paris, An 4 (1796), a pamphlet written by Charles-Louis Cadet Gassicourt, who later became Napoleon’s apothecary. See in general Jacques Lemaire, *Les Origines françaises de l’antimaçonnerie (1744-1797)*, Bruxelles: Université de Bruxelles, 1985; Charles Porset, *Hiram sans-culotte?: Franc-maçonnerie, Lumières et Révolution: trente ans d’études et de recherches*, Paris: Honoré Champion, 1998.

¹⁴ *Application of Barruel’s Memoirs of Jacobinism to the Secret Societies of Ireland and Great Britain*, London: E. Booker, 1798.

¹⁵ Karin Luys, *Die Anfänge der deutschen Nationalbewegung von 1815 bis 1819*, Münster: Nodus, 1992; Ramon Arnabat Mata, ‘Las sociedades secretas durante el Trienio Liberal’, in Santiago Carillo, Pedro Oliver (eds), *Las Figuras del Desorden: heterodoxos, proscritos y marginados*, Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2006, CD-ROM; Alberto Valín Fernández, *Masonería y revolución: del mito literario a la realidad histórica*, Santa Cruz de Tenerife: Ideas, 2008; Maria João Mogarro, *José da Silva Carvalho e a Revolução de 1820*, Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, 1990; Giampietro Berti, Franco Della Peruta (eds), *La Carboneria: la nascita della nazione: intrecci veneti, nazionali e internazionali*, Rovigo: Minelliana, 2004; Richard Clogg (ed), *The Struggle for Greek Independence: essays to mark the 150th anniversary of the Greek*

Meanwhile, another important way in which the secret societies gained notoriety was through literature. Writers from Percy Bysshe Shelley to George Sand read Barruel with great interest and profit. Sand, Goethe and Friedrich Schiller featured the Illuminati in their work. The success of the Gothic novel and the *Bundesroman* from the 1790s on naturally did much to propagate the model. Because many of these works were produced as ‘bluebooks’ or ‘penny dreadfuls’, they had an unusually wide readership. They also extended the field by adding the nuances of the rough but noble brotherhood on the one hand, and the conspiracy of power, as in the case of the Inquisition, on the other. At the same time, novels might reflect efforts undertaken to make the concept of ‘secret societies’ cover ever more unpleasant groups such as, in the British case, trade unions, Catholics or Thugs.¹⁶

Some members of secret societies wrote memoirs that may be considered as a belletristic subcategory, since much of their content is either fictional or at least patently shaped by the literary fashions of the day. To this category belong the stories of the Philadelphes and other anti-Bonapartist conspirators by the writer Charles Nodier, and the *Fragmente aus meinem Leben* of Johannes Wit von Dörring, a Danish-born adventurer of the early Restoration period, who ended up being mistrusted by both the revolutionaries and the police. Alexandre Andryane, who was arrested in 1823 on a mission to Italy on behalf of Filippo Buonarroti, wrote about his years in the Spielberg prison and then added a book of reminiscences about his mentor. Another of Buonarroti’s lieutenants, Gioacchino Prati, serialized his memoirs in the radical *Penny Satirist* (“a cheap substitute for a weekly newspaper”). Though probably more reliable he, too, occasionally couldn’t restrain himself. For example, in a typical passage apt to arouse any statesman’s fears, he wrote about his cooperation with the German exiles Wilhelm Schnell and Carl Follen:

“No sooner had we become acquainted with each other, than we formed ourselves into a political triumvirate, and established the centre with which for many years after[,] all political events which took place on the continent have been connected. We considered ourselves, and were, in fact, the three representatives of Robespierre, St Just, and Couthon. [...] A few minutes’ walk from my residence [at Chur, Switzerland], which was situated at the entrance of one

War of Independence, London etc: Macmillan, 1973, chs 4-5; Alan B. Spitzer, *Old Hatreds and Young Hopes: the French Carbonari against the Bourbon Restoration*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971; Pierre-Arnaut Lambert, *La Charbonnerie française: du secret en politique*, Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1995; V.M. Bokova, *Epocha tajnych obščestv: Russkie obščestvennie ob’edinenija pervoj treti XIX v.*, Moskva: Realii, 2003.

¹⁶ Marie Roberts, *British Poets and Secret Societies*, Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1986, p 89; Simone Vierne, *George Sand et la Franc-maçonnerie*, Paris: Ed maçonniques de France, 2001, pp 60-1; Walter Müller-Seidel, Wolfgang Riedel (eds), *Die Weimarer Klassik und ihre Geheimbünde*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2002; Julia Wagner, *Die Turmgesellschaft in Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, in: Goethezeitportal, www.goethezeitportal.de/fileadmin/PDF/db/wiss/goethe/meisterslehrjahre_wagner.pdf (checked 10 Aug 2009); Hans-Jürgen Schings, *Die Brüder des Marquis Posa: Schiller und der Geheimbund der Illuminaten*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1996; Marianne Thalmann, *Die Romantik des Trivialen: von Grosses ‘Genius’ bis Tiecks ‘William Lovell’*, München: List, 1970; Michael Voges, *Aufklärung und Geheimnis: Untersuchungen zur Vermittlung von Literatur- und Sozialgeschichte am Beispiel der Aneignung des Geheimbundmaterials im Roman des späten 18. Jahrhunderts*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1987; Jerrold E. Hogle (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; Albert D. Pionke, *Plots of Opportunity: representing conspiracy in Victorian England*, Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2004.

of the town gates, there was a lonely lane leading to a dale, through which the river Plessure [Plessur] flows, and at the entrance of which the citizens of Chur built a century ago an hospital for such as were attacked with the pestilence, which raged at that time all over the continent. This building, which is now but a mass of ruins, gives to this secluded place a most romantic appearance. There S[chnell], F[ollen], and I retired in the afternoon, to converse about our affairs, and to exercise ourselves in the use of fire-arms".¹⁷

In addition to former members, there was also a number of anonymous and pseudonymous observers who recorded the dramatic exploits of the secret societies from the outside in more or less reliable or fanciful works.¹⁸

Naturally, the law and its various officers also played an important role in promoting the concept. Whereas in France the political police was born in reaction to the numerous plots discerned by the revolutionaries in the early 1790s, in Britain the conspirators gained prominence through the debate about

¹⁷ [Charles Nodier], *Histoire des sociétés secrètes de l'Armée et des conspirations militaires qui ont eu pour objet la destruction du gouvernement de Bonaparte*, Paris: Gide fils etc, 1815. See E. Guillon, *Les Complots militaires sous le Consulat et l'Empire: d'après les documents inédits des archives*, Paris: Plon, 1894, ch VIII; A. Richard Oliver, *Charles Nodier: pilot of romanticism*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1964, pp 78-81; and Hans Peter Lund, 'Nodier et le roman de l'histoire: les Philadelphes: *Histoire des sociétés secrètes de l'Armée*', in *Charles Nodier: colloque du deuxième centenaire: Besançon, mai 1980*, Paris: Belles-Lettres, 1981, pp 41-55. Johannes Wit, genannt von Dörring, *Fragmente aus meinem Leben und meiner Zeit: Aufenthalt in den Gefängnissen zu Chambery, Turin und Mailand, nebst meiner Flucht aus der Citadelle letzteren Ortes*, 4 vols, Braunschweig: Friedrich Vieweg, 1827-30; a French translation was published in 1830 as *Les Sociétés secrètes de France et d'Italie*. On Wit (or Witt), see Peter Kaupp, 'Ich habe ein gewagtes Spiel gespielt': *Johannes Wit genannt von Dörring (1799-1863): Urburschenschafter, politischer Abenteurer, Spion und Schriftsteller*, 2003, accessible at www.burschenschaftsgeschichte.de/pdf/kaupp_johanneswit.pdf (checked 10 August 2009). Alexandre Andryane, *Mémoires d'un prisonnier d'Etat au Spielberg*, 4 vols, Paris: Ladvocat, 1837-8 (other ed Bruxelles: Meline, Cans et Cie, 1837-8), repr 1840, 1850, 1862, 1879; an English translation appeared in 1838, repr 1840, 1848; an Italian translation in 1861. Andryane, *Souvenirs de Genève: complément des mémoires d'un prisonnier d'Etat*, 2 vols, Paris: Coquebert, 1839 (other ed Bruxelles: Meline, Cans et Cie, 1839). On Andryane, see most recently Vittorio Scotti Douglas, "'La queue" della cospirazione del 1821: Alexandre Andryane, prigioniero di stato', in Berti, Della Peruta (eds), *La Carboneria* (see above, n 15), pp 413-24. Prati's memoirs were published anonymously in *The Penny Satirist* (in which he wrote a medical column) from 1 June 1837 to 7 September 1839 as 'An Autobiography: the Medical Adviser's life and adventures: written expressly for the *Penny Satirist*'; the quotation is from the issue of 10 February 1838. An Italian edition appeared as Pietro Pedrotti (ed), *Note autobiografiche del cospiratore trentino Gioacchino Prati*, Rovereto: Ugo Grandi, 1926, see p 63. On Risorgimento memoirs in general, see Alberto M. Banti, *La nazione del Risorgimento: parentela, santità e onore alle origini dell'Italia unita*, Torino: Einaudi, 2000, ch 1.

¹⁸ For example, *Des sociétés secrètes en Allemagne, et en d'autres contrées: de la secte des Illuminés, du Tribunal secret, de l'assassinat de Kotzebue, etc*, Paris: Gide fils, 1819, anonymous, by Vincent Lombard de Langres, a writer and one-time French envoy to the Batavian Republic. Then there was *Memoirs of the Secret Societies of the South of Italy, particularly the Carbonari*, London: John Murray, 1821, anonymous, by Baron Jakib Ludwig Salomo Bartholdy, Prussian consul in Rome and an uncle of the composer Felix Mendelssohn. The German original appeared in 1822 with Cotta at Stuttgart; there were also German and French translations from the English. For Bartholdy's authorship, see Vladimiro Sperber, 'Il cavalier Bartholdy ed i Carbonari', *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento*, LVII (1970), pp 3-47; but a large part of the text follows almost literally the memoirs of Richard Church, an Anglo-Irish general and Philhellene, which were published only much later in E.M. Church, *Sir Richard Church in Italy and Greece: chapters in an adventurous life*, Edinburgh etc: William Blackwood, 1895. Mention should also be made of Saint-Edme (pseud of Edme-Théodore Bourg, a former secretary of marshal Louis-Alexandre Berthier), *Constitution et organisation des Carbonari, ou documens exacts sur tout ce qui concerne l'existence, l'origine et le but de cette société secrète*, Paris: Corby, 1821 (2nd ed, Paris: Brissot-Thivars, 1822); on which see Pierre Merlin, 'Les Bons cousins charbonniers étaient-ils des Carbonari?', in Pierre Merlin et al, *Bons cousins charbonniers: autour d'un catéchisme de la 'société secrète' 1835*, Nancray: Folklore comtois, 2005, pp 145-52; and Maurice Dayet, *Un révolutionnaire franc-comtois: Pierre-Joseph Briot*, vol II, Paris: Belles-Lettres, 1979, pp 78-79.

the Unlawful Societies Act of 1799. There was another significant debate in Prussia, where the origins of the political police had been closely related to underground efforts against the French after the disaster of 1806: after Napoleon's fall, the reformist policy associated with the name of Carl vom Stein was discussed in the half-disguised form of a polemical exchange about the merits and demerits of the Tugendbund, one of those underground efforts. The Central Investigations Commission established at Mainz as a result of the Carlsbad Decrees of 1819 first brought organizations of students (the Burschenschaften) under the umbrella of the secret societies. Metternich's police was constantly on the alert in both the German and Italian states. In Russia, the Third Department, created in response to the Decembrist conspiracy of 1825, had a tremendous social impact.¹⁹

In this context, the Catholic Church was a special case. With the Bulls *In Eminentissimi* (1738) and *Providas Romanorum* (1751) the Church was among the early proscribers of Freemasonry, and in *Ecclesiam a Jesu Christo* (1821) it condemned the Carbonari. Naturally, it was first of all worried about the heretical nature of the organizations, which it suitably expressed in naming them "sectae", a term that became common in Romance languages. Yet the threats to its temporary territories posed by the French Revolution and the Risorgimento gave the Papacy additional political reasons to oppose the secret societies. In the opposite camp, the resurrection of the Societas Jesu in 1814 reignited the fear of underground manoeuvres, which was particularly vocally stated in France at various occasions during the century, as well as in the German Kulturkampf. After the fall of Rome in 1870, developments in France, Italy and Spain further exacerbated the conflict between the Church and Freemasonry, although many felt that power relations had now been inversed. At any rate, in all three countries the 'secret societies' retained, in the guise of Masonry, a remarkable presence in political debate until the mid-twentieth century or even beyond.²⁰

¹⁹ Paolo Napoli, *Naissance de la police moderne: pouvoir, normes, société*, Paris: La Découverte, 2003, ch 6; Andrew Prescott, 'The Unlawful Societies Act of 1799', in M.D.J. Scanlan (ed), *The Social Impact of Freemasonry on the Modern Western World*, London: Canonbury Masonic Research Centre, 2002, www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/prescott15.html (checked 10 Aug 2009); Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire, 'William Pitt, les francs-maçons anglais et la loi sur les sociétés secrètes de 1799', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 342 (2005), ahrf.revues.org/document1935.html (checked 10 Aug 2009); Wolfram Siemann, 'Deutschlands Ruhe, Sicherheit und Ordnung': die Anfänge der politischen Polizei 1806-1866, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1985; Hans-Christof Kraus, *Theodor Anton Heinrich Schmalz (1760-1831): Jurisprudenz, Universitätspolitik und Publizistik im Spannungsfeld von Revolution und Restauration*, Frankfurt/Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1999, pp 189-242 (on the 'Tugendbundstreit'); Jakob Nolte, *Demagogen und Denunzianten: Denunziation und Verrat als methode polizeilicher Informationserhebung bei den politischen Verfolgungen im preußischen Vormärz*, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2007; Donald E. Emerson, *Metternich and the Political Police: security and subversion in the Hapsburg monarchy (1815-1830)*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968; Sidney Monas, *The Third Section: police and society in Russia under Nicholas I*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961; P.S. Squire, *The Third Department: the establishment and practices of the political police in the Russia of Nicholas I*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968. For insight in the Spanish situation, see Pedro Pegenaute Garde, *Trayectoria y testimonio de José Manuel del Regato: contribución al estudio de la España de Fernando VII*, Pamplona: Universidad de Navarra, 1978.

²⁰ Christopher Clark, Wolfram Kaiser (eds), *Culture Wars: secular-Catholic conflict in nineteenth-century Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003; José Antonio Ferrer Benimeli, *Masonería, Iglesia e Ilustración: un conflicto ideológico-político-religioso*, 4 vols, Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 1976-1977; Michel Leroy, *Le Mythe jésuite: de Béranger à Michelet*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1992; Geoffrey Cubitt, *The Jesuit Myth: conspiracy theory and politics in*

Birth of a Canon

It fell to amateur and professional historians to provide a deeper-probing analysis of the remarkable new phenomenon. While the first historical-documentary works on Freemasonry, such as the *Acta Latomorum* and the *Encyclopädie der Freimaurerei*,²¹ began to appear after the Napoleonic era, associations of earlier times were increasingly scrutinized for possible keys to the present. Joseph Hammer set an early example in 1818 with two seminal studies, one on the Templars, in which he launched the modern Baphomet myth, and one on the Nizaris, or Assassins, in which he suggested significant parallels between the alleged Medieval terrorists and the secret societies of modern Europe.²²

Then, in the second half of the nineteenth century, each of the major West-European languages was enriched by a multi-part history of secret societies averaging over a thousand pages. The novelist and playwright Pierre Zaccone opened the series in 1847 with the first of five volumes of his *Histoire des sociétés secrètes politiques et religieuses*.²³ He was followed by his fellow-

nineteenth-century France, Oxford: Clarendon, 1993; Róisín Healy, *The Jesuit Specter in Imperial Germany*, Boston, MA etc: Brill, 2003; Emile Poulat and Jean-Pierre Laurant, *L'Antimaçonisme catholique: Les Franc-Maçons par Mgr de Ségur*, Paris: Berg International, 2006; Michel Jarrige, *L'Antimaçonnerie en France à la Belle Epoque: personnalités, mentalités, structures et modes d'action des organisations antimaçonniques 1899-1914*, Milano: Archè, 2006; Lucien Sabah, *Une police politique de Vichy: le Service des Sociétés secrètes*, Paris: Klincksieck, 1996; Olivier Dard, 'Vichy face aux complots: le Service des Sociétés secrètes (SSS)', in Frédéric Monier (ed), *Complots et conspirations en France du XVIIIe au XXe siècle*, Le Mont-Houy: Presses universitaires de Valenciennes, 2003, pp 107-18; Martine Poulain, *Livres pillés, lectures surveillées: les bibliothèques françaises sous l'Occupation*, Paris: Gallimard, 2008, chs 3-5 (on Bernard Faÿ and the Musée des Sociétés secrètes); Luigi Pruneti, *La Sinagoga di Satana: storia dell'antimassoneria 1725-2002*, Bari: Laterza, 2002; Gian Mario Cazzaniga (ed), *Storia d'Italia: Annali 21: la Massoneria*, Torino: Einaudi, 2006; José Antonio Ferrer Benimeli, *El Contubernio judeo-masónico-comunista: del satanismo al escándalo de la P-2*, Madrid: Istmo, 1982; Luis P. Martín, *Los Arquitectos de la República: los Masones y la política en España, 1900-1936*, Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2007.

²¹ [Claude-Antoine Thory], *Acta Latomorum, ou chronologie de l'histoire de la Franche-Maçonnerie française et étrangère, contenant les faits les plus remarquables de l'institution, depuis ses temps obscurs jusques en l'année 1814, la suite des Grand-Maîtres, la nomenclature des rites, grades, sectes et coteries secrètes répandus dans tous les pays [etc]*, 2 vols, Paris: Dufart, 1815 (repr Genève etc: Slatkine, 1980); C. Lenning [Friedrich Mossdorf], *Encyclopädie der Freimaurerei, nebst Nachrichten über die damit in wirklicher oder vorgeblicher Beziehung stehenden geheimen Verbindungen [etc]*, 3 vols, Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1822-8.

²² Joseph Hammer, *Die Geschichte der Assasinen aus morgenländischen Quellen*, Stuttgart etc: Cotta, 1818. German, English and French editions are currently in print; the latter is less outspoken than the original. Hammer's article on the Templars, 'Mysterium Baphometis revelatum', appeared in his journal *Fundgruben des Orients*, 1818. Cf Farhad Daftary, *The Assassin Legends: myths of the Isma'ilis*, London etc: I.B. Tauris, 1995; Peter Partner, *The Murdered Magicians: the Templars and their myth*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981. On 9 April 1819, Metternich echoed Hammer when he wrote to Friedrich von Gentz, referring to Carl Sand: "Es scheint ganz sicher zu sein, daß der Mörder Kotzebue's als der Emissär – ein wirklicher Haschischin – der Jenenser Vehme handelte"; cf *Aus Metternich's nachgelassenen Papieren* (see above, n 1), p 227. The Baphomet played a major role in a famous hoax, cf Eugen Weber, *Satan franc-maçon: la mystification de Léo Taxil*, Paris: Julliard, 1964. Directly or indirectly, Hammer's works were at the basis of Thomas Keightley, *Secret Societies of the Middle Ages*, London: sn, 1837 (an anonymous ed, with support of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge). On Hammer, see Hannes D. Galter, Siegfried Haas (eds), *Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall: Grenzgänger zwischen Orient und Okzident*, Graz: Leykam, 2008; on Keightley, see Richard M. Dorson, *The British Folklorists: a history*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1968, pp 52-7.

²³ Originally published in Paris: Henri Morel, 1847-9. The 1852 edition (Paris: P.-H. Krabbe, 5 vols), entitled *Histoire de l'Inquisition, des Jésuites et des Franc-Maçons [etc]*, deals extensively with the events in France in 1848-51. A later edition (Paris: Fayard, 1866-79, 3 vols) encompasses the history of the International Working Men's Association. Parts of the work were reprinted or translated separately. A

writer Giovanni De Castro, whose *Il Mondo segreto* comprised nine admittedly smaller volumes.²⁴ Charles Heckethorn, who first set out to translate them, ended up writing two extensive volumes of his own entitled *The Secret Societies of All Ages and Countries*.²⁵ Meanwhile, Vicente de la Fuente, a theologian, historian and legal scholar, had published the three volumes of his *Historia de las sociedades secretas antiguas y modernas de España*.²⁶ Finally, Georg Schuster, the archivist of the Hohenzollern, wrote *Die geheimen Gesellschaften, Verbindungen und Orden*, which was published in two hefty tomes in 1906.²⁷ The sheer size of the books, their wide circulation, and their authors' thoroughness in identifying suitable candidates for inclusion turned them into long-term reference works for interested laymen and researchers alike. The exhaustive inventories of Heckethorn and Schuster, in particular, listing hundreds of organizations, established a canon that continues to inspire most modern overviews of the field.²⁸

Not surprisingly, our five authors differed in almost every respect. Zaccone, who had vague socialist sympathies, was inordinately interested in the Jesuits, who were allotted far more space than anybody else. De la Fuente wrote in the Catholic anti-Masonic tradition, whereas De Castro – whose book appeared with the publisher of Giuseppe Mazzini, Italy's foremost conspirator – treated his subject with marked sympathy. Indeed, to Heckethorn, De Castro's book was "coloured by a certain political bias, and somewhat too indulgent to various Italian political sects, who, in many instances, were scarcely more than hordes of brigands". Schuster, for his part, had a low opinion of Heckethorn's work.²⁹ De la Fuente, whose distinguished career brought

Spanish version appeared in 1879 (repr 1880); a Portuguese one, translated by Heliodoro Salgado, a member of the Carbonária Lusitana, was published in the early years of the twentieth century.

²⁴ Originally published in Milano: G. Daelli, 1864. There is a recent photographic reprint in 3 vols. De Castro also wrote *Fratellanze segrete*, Milano: F. Menozzi, 1879 (repr 1978, 1999).

²⁵ Originally published in London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1875; a "thoroughly revised and greatly enlarged" edition followed, London: G. Redway, 1897. It has been often reprinted and is currently in print. So is the German translation (an authorized adaptation) by the social reformer and peace activist Leopold Katscher, originally published in 1900 and reprinted in three different editions in 2007 alone. There were Russian editions in 1876 (St Peterburg: E.N. Achmatova), 1993 and 1995.

²⁶ Originally published in Lugo: Soto Freire, 1870-1. The full title adds *y especialmente de la Franc-Masonería*. It was reprinted in 1874, 1933 (Barcelona: Prensa Católica) and 2006. See also Vicente de la Fuente, *Vindicación de la Historia de las Sociedades Secretas [...]*, Madrid: Antonio Pérez Dubrull, 1873. Another voluminous example of Catholic polemics was the posthumously published work of Nicolas Deschamps, SJ, *Les Sociétés secrètes et la société, ou philosophie de l'histoire contemporaine*, 3 vols, Avignon etc: Séguier frères, 1874-6, later ed by Claudio Jannet, often reprinted and currently in print.

²⁷ Originally published in installments from 1902 on; the first full edition appeared in Leipzig: Theodor Leibing, 1906, often reprinted and currently in print. An early Russian translation by Ol'ga Akimovna Vol'kenštejn, a Socialist-Revolutionary and feminist, was published in St Peterburg: O.N. Popova, 1905-7 (repr 1996, 1997).

²⁸ Cf the oft-reprinted and much translated books by Serge Hutin, *Les Sociétés secrètes* (1952), Arkon Daraul, *Secret Societies: yesterday and today* (1961), or Norman MacKenzie, *Secret Societies* (1967); also, more recently, Marco Frenschkowski, *Die Geheimbünde: eine kulturgeschichtliche Analyse*, Wiesbaden: Marix, 2007.

²⁹ Heckethorn, 1897 ed, p XXIII; Schuster, 1906 ed, vol I, p v, "Die wunderliche Schrift von Heckethorn, obwohl mit grossem Fleisse zusammengetragen, vermag nicht einmal bescheidenen Ansprüchen zu genügen". Heckethorn seems to have been a man of many abilities nonetheless. He designed *Exercises in French Orthography, on a plan entirely new* (London: Relge & Fletcher, 1850, introducing himself as "professor of French and German in Mr Bass's School, Ryde, Isle of Wight") and sought to patent an invention consisting of "improvements in obtaining and applying motive power by means of a wheel containing mercury" (*Newton's London Journal of Arts and Sciences*, vol XVI, 1862, p 48). He wrote on topics as varied as his journey through Italy, Old London, and early Basle printers.

him to the rector's chair at the universities of both Salamanca and Madrid, and Schuster, an editor of the *Jahresberichte für Geschichtswissenschaft*, were professionals compared to Zaccone, an early practitioner of the detective novel, who was even in his lifetime characterized as a “très-fécond, mais médiocre écrivain”.³⁰

Whatever their differences, however, all authors agreed on one thing – that secret societies were in fact ‘of all ages and countries’. As Zaccone wrote, “Les sociétés secrètes ont été, de tout temps, l’expression des besoins ou des tendances des époques dans lesquelles elles se sont produites”. Schuster affirmed, “Gesellschaften, Vereine und Orden, die ihre Zwecke und Gebräuche geheim hielten, haben zu allen Zeiten und bei allen Völkern bestanden”. Earlier, Thomas Keightley had opened his book *Secret Societies of the Middle Ages* with the assertion, “If we had the means of investigating historically the origin of Secret Societies, we should probably find that they began to be formed almost as soon as any knowledge had been accumulated by particular individuals beyond what constituted the common stock”. Evidently, the phenomenon was now considered natural, for better or for worse.³¹

Still, in spite of the encyclopaedic nature and global aspirations of the books, they concentrated almost exclusively on European men. As to gender, this was of course just another symptom of the well-known fact that the European associational world was predominantly and in places exclusively male, both in practical and theoretical terms; the secret societies were no exception.³² As to geography, apart from standard references to the mystery religions of Antiquity and the Assassins, there was hardly any mention of organizations from Asia or the Americas, and none at all from Africa. Those that were acknowledged, such as the Thugs of India and the Chinese Triads, mostly represented the sensational top of a mountain of colonial headaches. Even though Schuster noted the existence of secret societies “bei den wilden Naturvölkern”, he gave them only a few pages of the most general nature.³³ And yet, at around the time he was writing, the young discipline of ethnology reached conclusions on ‘indigenous’ associations that were remarkably similar to his own. It is true that claims to ubiquity and perpetuity were not upheld, but plenty of evidence had accumulated over the last half century to show that they

³⁰ By Pierre Larousse's *Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle*, vol 15, Paris 1876, p 1444. See also Philippe Régner, ‘Entre roman du peuple et roman “populaire”: la carrière littéraire de Pierre Zaccone (1817-1895)’, in Antoine Court (ed), *Le Populaire à retrouver*, Saint-Etienne: Université de Saint-Etienne, 1995, pp 41-50.

³¹ Zaccone, 1852 ed, vol 1, p 49; Schuster, 1906 ed, vol 1, p 1; for Keightley, see above, n 22.

³² See above, n 4, especially Clark, *British Clubs*, pp 198-204, Harrison, *Bourgeois Citizen*, and Hoffmann, *Geselligkeit*; see also Rita Huber-Sperl, ‘Organized Women and the Strong State: the beginnings of female associational activity in Germany, 1810-1840’, *Journal of Women's History*, 13, 4 (2002), pp 81-105. On Freemasonry and women, see René Le Forestier, *Maçonnerie féminine et loges académiques*, ed Antoine Faivre, Milano: Archè, 1979; Margaret C. Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and politics in eighteenth-century Europe*, New York etc: Oxford University Press, 1991, ch 5; Janet M. Burke, Margaret C. Jacob, ‘French Freemasonry, Women, and Feminist Scholarship’, *Journal of Modern History*, 68 (1996), pp 513-49; Alexandra Heidle, Jan A.M. Snoek (eds), *Women's Agency and Rituals in Mixed and Female Masonic Orders*, Leiden etc: Brill, 2008.

³³ Schuster, *ibid*. The Thugs were discussed by Zaccone and Heckethorn, the Triads by Heckethorn and Schuster. Cf Kim A. Wagner, *Thuggee: banditry and the British in early nineteenth-century India*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007; Dian H. Murray, with Qin Baoqi, *The Origins of the Tiandihui: the Chinese Triads in legend and history*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994.

were an irrepressible part of the human condition. While Arnold van Gennep's book *Les Rites de passage* is the most well-known expression of this view, it was Heinrich Schurtz, a favorite student of Friedrich Ratzel and a curator at the Museum für Völker- und Handelskunde in Bremen, who first brought it up.³⁴

Schurtz's consideration of the ethnographical record led him to the conclusion that, whereas women were the pillar of the family, men were the builders of society from the groundwork of their age-classes, men's houses and clubs. He suggested that in many places secret societies were a stage, albeit not a necessary one, in this historical development. He even went so far as to assert, "Mit leisem Vorbehalt also lässt sich doch sagen, dass jeder Geheimbund der Gegenwart auf die Formen zurückführt, die sich bei der Umwandlung der Altersklassen zu geheimen Verbänden gebildet haben". This was, he noted, one more reason for further ethnological research. Yet when the American Museum of Natural History actually undertook an extensive research program among American Indians, neither Schurtz's teleological ideas nor the contemporaneous suggestion of Hutton Webster that secret societies sprang from initiation ceremonies withstood the test.³⁵ All the same, the debate reinforced the notion that secret societies were a fact of life – a fact subtly analyzed in those same years by Georg Simmel, who emphasized the social importance of secrecy and noted the connection between the diminishing Reason of State and the growing privacy of the citizen.³⁶

Meanwhile, as if to stress the point, across the Atlantic more and more white American men had been founding and joining secret societies in the course of the nineteenth century, especially after the end of the Civil War.

³⁴ Arnold van Gennep, *Les Rites de passage: étude systématique des rites*, Paris: Emile Nourry, 1909, ch vi (repr 1969, 1981); Heinrich Schurtz, *Urgeschichte der Kultur*, Leipzig etc: Bibliographisches Institut, 1900, ch II, 1, and Schurtz, *Altersklassen und Männerbünde: eine Darstellung der Grundformen der Gesellschaft*, Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1902.

³⁵ Schurtz, *Altersklassen*, p 352; Hutton Webster, *Primitive Secret Societies: a study in early politics and religion*, New York: Macmillan, 1908; Clark Wissler (ed), *Societies of the Plains Indians*, New York: AMNH, 1916 (= *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, XI); Robert H. Lowie, *Primitive Society*, New York: Liveright, 1920, ch XI. For similar ideas on the role of initiation, see Mircea Eliade, *Initiation, rites, sociétés secrètes: naissances mystiques: essai sur quelques types d'initiation*, Paris: Gallimard, 1959; for a 'rediscovery' of Schurtz, see Richard Maitland Bradfield, *A Natural History of Associations: a study in the meaning of community*, 2 vols, New York: International Universities Press, 1973, ch 20. Schurtz had the bad fortune to be admired by the *Wandervogel* Hans Blüher; cf Claudia Bruns, *Politik des Eros: der Männerbund in Wissenschaft, Politik und Jugendkultur (1880-1934)*, Köln etc: Böhlau, 2008. For his moderately positive scholarly reputation, see Robert H. Lowie, *The History of Ethnological Theory*, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1938, pp 99-100; Woodruff D. Smith, *Politics and the Sciences of Culture in Germany 1840-1920*, New York etc: Oxford University Press, 1991, p 154; André Gingrich, 'Ruptures, Schools and Nontraditions: reassessing the history of socio-cultural anthropology in Germany', in Fredrik Barth *et al*, *One Discipline, Four Ways: British, German, French, and American anthropology*, Chicago, IL etc: University of Chicago Press, 2005, pp 59-153, here pp 91, 103.

³⁶ Georg Simmel, *Soziologie: Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung*, Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1908, ch v; this chapter was published separately as *The Sociology of Secrecy and Secret Societies*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1906. Other contributions to the 'normalization' of secret societies came from the young history of religion, which provided the respectability of Christianity (eg, due to a renewed interest in the early-Christian *disciplina arcani*) and Antiquity (eg, through studies such as Richard Reitzenstein's *Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen*, 1910). Cf the remarks on "the sensualizing of secrecy as a category of religious explanation" by Luther H. Martin, 'Secrecy in Hellenistic Religious Communities', in Hans G. Kippenberg, Guy G. Stroumsa (eds), *Secrecy and Concealment: studies in the history of Mediterranean and Near Eastern religions*, Leiden etc: Brill, 1995, pp 101-21, quote p 118.

Sometimes these had been imported from Europe, as in the case of Freemasonry, sometimes they were newly created, as in the case of Lewis Henry Morgan's Order of the Iroquois or the Improved Order of Red Men, both inspired by Indian initiation rituals. At the turn of the century, one out of every five or six adult men in the United States was a member of the tens of thousands of lodges belonging to hundreds of fraternal orders, from the Odd Fellows to the Knights of Pythias. Since the mid-1890s they were all neatly listed in an annual statistical manual, which conveniently specified the conditions of the insurance packages that many associations offered. It seems that the membership of most of them peaked in the 1920s, but as late as 1966 – at about the time Hobsbawm and Roberts wrote their sceptical works – it was estimated that “at least 15,000,000 American men and women belong to one or more secret organizations”.³⁷

Towards the Margins

Thus, what had appeared entirely new to Pitt and most alarming to Metternich was now seen as a rather common thing, and often benign at that. This ‘normalization’ came, however, at the price of a loss of centrality or worse, as might be illustrated by a famous example. A case could be made that the bullets fired by Gavril Princip on June 28, 1914, demonstrated how a tiny secret society could bring down four Empires. Yet nobody is making that case. Indeed, in the build-up to the First World War, Princip was widely seen as a mere tool of the Serbian secret service, and his trial in October 1914 was used for a remarkable effort to lay the blame on French Freemasonry. The Young Bosnians to which he belonged were largely forgotten, and instead of the triumph of the secret societies the bullets of Sarajevo symbolized their marginalization, a process completed after the Second World War.³⁸

We can only speculate about the causes of this development, but changes in the position of the Continental radical-liberal elites likely played a role. Their traditional dilemma – how to act as a progressive vanguard in behalf of the masses in need of education – gradually diminished with the extension of the franchise, which opened the way to seize power without conspiracies and insurrections, and to educate the people without first establishing a dictatorship.³⁹ To the socialists who followed in their footsteps, this showed a similar perspective with a future further expansion of the electorate. In this way, secret

³⁷ William J. Whalen, *Handbook of Secret Organizations*, Milwaukee, WI: Bruce, 1966, p 1. Alan Axelrod, *The International Encyclopedia of Secret Societies and Fraternal Orders*, New York: Facts on File, 1997, lists addresses and telephone numbers of many of them. In general, see Noel P. Gist, *Secret Societies: a cultural study of fraternalism in the United States* = *The University of Missouri Studies*, xv, 4 (October 1940); Mary Ann Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood: class, gender, and fraternalism*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989; Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America*, New Haven, CT etc: Yale University Press, 1989; Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the transformation of the American social order, 1730-1840*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

³⁸ Vladimir Dedijer, *The Road to Sarajevo*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1966; David MacKenzie, *Apis: the congenial conspirator: the life of Colonel Dragutin T. Dimitrijević*, Boulder: East European Monographs, 1989.

³⁹ On this dilemma, see Irene Castells, *La Utopía insurreccional del liberalismo: Torrijos y las conspiraciones de la Década ominosa*, Barcelona: Crítica, 1989.

societies became less attractive to their most ardent organizers. At the same time, more generally, this process was accelerated by the growing ‘normalization’ of *non-secret* organizations in the course of the nineteenth century. Not only in Britain, but also in France and Germany, in spite of unfavourable legislation and suspicious authorities, the number of voluntary associations exploded. Of course it long remained unusual for most of them to admit members indiscriminately – or simply to admit women – but otherwise their openness and accessibility was unprecedented. Since openness was part of their claim to rationality, this shifted the burden of proof to the secret societies, whose very existence became questionable in ever more domains.⁴⁰

In reaction, in the political sphere, secrecy was ‘rationalized’ following a path that was already implied by Immanuel Kant when he wrote that secret societies are an indicator of a lack of freedom in the State and would cease to exist “wenn diese Freiheit begünstigt wird”.⁴¹ If one differentiates between secrecy (hiding privileged knowledge from outsiders) and clandestinity (hiding activities under outside pressure) it was the latter that was more and more invoked by rebellious organizations as the reason for their going underground, even if they actually concealed parts of their program and resembled secret societies more than anything else. Where parliamentary democracy was absent or slow to appear, clandestinity could be presented as a ‘rational’ response to the repressive power of the State. Indeed, its very existence was, following Kant, an indictment of that State and an argument in favour of revolt. Whereas secrecy was a self-imposed measure directed against fellow-citizens, clandestinity was an ignominy one was forced to suffer. As a result, there were still many political ‘secret societies’ being created on the margins of Western Europe, but from the late nineteenth century on they more often than not refused to be called by that name. It goes without saying that the societies identified by the administrators of the European colonies never even thought about using the term.⁴²

This left the field free, so to speak, for other kinds of use that were already in place but now became paramount. One was for the organizations implicated in what has been called the Occult Revival or the Theosophical Enlightenment.⁴³ Rarely clandestine, they thrived on ‘important knowledge’ they kept secret because, in the words of a famous alchemist, such ideas “suffer loss, when they are poured into prating and incredulous minds”.⁴⁴ Some of them, such as the Theosophical Society – which itself, admittedly, applied the

⁴⁰ See above, n 4, especially Hölscher, *Öffentlichkeit*; Clark, *British Clubs*; Harrison, *Bourgeois Citizen*, ch 2; Hoffmann, *Geselligkeit*. See also Maurice Agulhon, *Le Cercle dans la France bourgeoise 1810-1848: étude d'une mutation de sociabilité*, Paris: Armand Colin, 1977.

⁴¹ Immanuel Kant, ‘Über den Gemeinspruch: Das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt aber nicht für die Praxis’ (1793), *Werkausgabe*, ed Wilhelm Weischedel, vol XI, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1978, p 163.

⁴² Douglas H. Johnson, ‘Criminal Secrecy: the case of the Zande “secret societies”’, *Past & Present*, 130 (1991), pp 170-200; David M. Anderson, Douglas H. Johnson, *Revealing Prophets: prophecy in Eastern African history*, London etc: James Curry etc, 1995, ch 1; or, from a different angle, Gilbert Herdt, ‘Secret Societies and Secret Collectives’, *Oceania*, LX (1990), pp 360-81.

⁴³ Christopher McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival*, London: Rider, 1972; Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994.

⁴⁴ Cornelius Agrippa, *De occulta philosophia libri tres*, ed V. Perrone Compagni, Leiden etc: Brill, 1992, p 406 (1533), “patiuntur [...] iacturam cum loquacibus et incredulis animis ingeruntur” (transl by James Freake, 1651, now in Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, ed Donald Tyson, St Paul, MN: Llewellyn, 2000, p 444).

term above all to other organizations – were interesting newcomers, if only because they gave a prominent place to women. In part for this reason, however, they found it hard to gain intellectual respectability in the male associational world. The term ‘secret societies’ was now also much used in the sense of the *Revue internationale des Sociétés secrètes*, founded in 1912 by Mgr Ernest Jouin, who opened the first issue with the words, “De nos jours, la société secrète est la maîtresse du monde. En douter serait puéril; s’en désintéresser serait coupable”. This was the universe of anti-Masonic and, increasingly, anti-semitic conspiracy theory, which found its concentrated expression in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. After the Second World War, this milieu was considered irrational beyond appeal. Moreover, in the Open Society that became the stated ideal of the West, different forms of irrationality tended to be merged. As an example, Norman Cohn, in attributing paternity of the *Protocols* to a colourful group of Russians, linked secrecy, occultism and conspiracy theory. And James Billington traced the foundations of what he regarded as the “revolutionary faith” to the “occult origins of organization” at the end of the eighteenth century – where organization, in this view, was the secret society model.⁴⁵

New Perspectives

In the last twenty years or so, however, scholars have started to reverse the societies’ slide from the centre to the periphery. The rigorous opposition between occultism and modernity has been put in doubt. In the case of the Illuminati, for instance, whose eighteenth-century image as the emblematic embodiment of the Enlightenment had long remained intact, it has been argued that their ideology manifestly contained esoteric elements, in an intellectual context that contained many more.⁴⁶ In this way, the Enlightenment itself became far more fuzzy than the older paradigm allowed but, precisely because of that, all the more continuous with the later development of modernity. Likewise, the Occult Revival from the mid-nineteenth century on has been reinterpreted as very much part of the Modern, as is perhaps most easily seen in its huge impact on European artists, from Wasily Kandinsky to Piet Mon-

⁴⁵ James H. Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men: origins of the revolutionary faith*, New York: Basic Books, 1980, ch 4. Of the origins of the *Protocols* as told by Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: the myth of the Jewish world-conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967, very little still stands; see Cesare G. De Michelis, *Il Manoscritto inesistente: i ‘Protocolli dei savi di Sion’: un apocrifo del xx secolo*, Venezia: Marsilio, 1998; Michael Hagemester, ‘Der Mythos der “Protokolle der Weisen von Zion”’, in Caumanns, Niendorf (eds), *Verschwörungstheorien* (see below, n 49), pp 89-101; Hagemester, ‘Die Protokolle der Weisen von Zion - eine anti-Utopie oder der große Plan in der Geschichte?’, in Reinalter (ed), *Verschwörungstheorien* (see below, n 49), pp 45-57.

⁴⁶ Monika Neugebauer-Wölk, *Esoterische Bünde und bürgerliche Gesellschaft: Entwicklungslinien zur modernen Welt im Geheimbundwesen des 18. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen: Wallstein, 1995. See also Neugebauer-Wölk, with Holger Zaunstöck (eds), *Aufklärung und Esoterik*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1999; Martin Mulsow, *Monadentele, Hermetik und Deismus: Georg Schades geheime Aufklärungsgesellschaft 1747-1760*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1998; Mulsow, “‘Steige also, wenn du kannst, höher und höher zu uns herauf’: Adam Weishaupt als Philosoph’, in Müller-Seidel, Riedel (eds), *Die Weimarer Klassik* (see above, n 16), pp 27-66. The older point of view is (very well) expressed by Hans Grassl, *Aufbruch zur Romantik: Bayerns Beitrag zur deutschen Geistesgeschichte 1765-1785*, München: C.H. Beck, 1968; and Richard van Dülmen, *Der Geheimbund der Illuminaten: Darstellung, Analyse, Dokumentation*, Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1975.

driaan.⁴⁷ The esoteric aspects of right-wing associations, with their sometimes unexpected political implications, are also much better understood.⁴⁸

Conspiracy theories are of great interest to the historian of secret societies, if only because almost every outline of the topic will start with the work of the abbé Barruel. It has become exceptionally popular among researchers lately, largely due to American post-war history, from the McCarthy era to today's 'birthers', who think that Barack Obama was not born in the United States. Here, too, there appears to be a change from scholarly positions that stress the incongruence or insanity of the theories in question, to those that take them seriously, albeit perhaps rather as perceptions of risk than because of their intrinsic plausibility. It would seem that the latter perspective is better equipped to avoid both some obvious anachronisms and the precarious interpretation of the conspiracy theorist as either a rational manipulator or an irrational dupe. It should also be noted, however, that the modern 'super-conspiracies' or 'méga-complots' are rather different from the comparatively well-determined targets of nineteenth-century theories.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: spiritualism and psychical research in England, 1850-1914*, Cambridge etc: Cambridge University Press, 1985; Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and feminism in England*, Baltimore, MD etc: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001; Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British occultism and the culture of the Modern*, Chicago, IL etc: University of Chicago Press, 2004; Marie-Sophie André, Christophe Beaufils, *Papus: biographie: la Belle Epoque de l'occultisme*, Paris: Berg International, 1995; Helmut Möller, Ellic Howe, *Merlin Peregrinus: vom Untergrund des Abendlandes*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1986; Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: occultism and the genesis of the German Modern*, Baltimore, MD etc: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004; Maria Carlson, *'No Religion Higher Than Truth': a history of the Theosophical movement in Russia, 1875-1922*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993; Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (ed), *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, Ithaca, NY etc: Cornell University Press, 1997.

⁴⁸ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: secret Aryan cults and their influence on Nazi ideology*, London etc: I.B. Tauris, 2004 (¹1985); Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the secret intellectual history of the twentieth century*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

⁴⁹ The term 'conspiracy theory' seems to be of recent origin; it is not used in Richard Hofstadter's seminal *The Paranoid Style in American Politics, and other essays*, New York: Knopf, 1965. See Daniel Pipes, *Conspiracy: how the paranoid style flourishes and where it comes from*, New York etc: Free Press, 1997; George E. Marcus (ed), *Paranoia Within Reason: a casebook on conspiracy as explanation*, Chicago, IL etc: University of Chicago Press, 1999; Mark Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories: secrecy and power in American culture*, Minneapolis, MS etc: University of Minnesota Press, 1999; Timothy Melley, *Empire of Conspiracy: the culture of paranoia in postwar America*, Ithaca, NY etc: Cornell University Press, 2000; Robert Alan Goldberg, *Enemies Within: the culture of conspiracy in modern America*, New Haven, CT etc: Yale University Press, 2001; Peter Knight (ed), *Conspiracy Nation: the politics of paranoia in postwar America*, New York etc: New York University Press, 2002; Harry G. West, Todd Sanders, *Transparency and Conspiracy: ethnographies of suspicion in the New World Order*, Durham, NC etc: Duke University Press, 2003; Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: apocalyptic visions in contemporary America*, Berkeley, CA etc: University of California Press, 2003; Pierre-André Taguieff, *La Foire aux Illuminés: ésotérisme, théorie du complot, extrémisme*, Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2005; Véronique Campion-Vincent, *La Société parano: théories du complot, menaces et incertitudes*, Paris: Payot, 2005; David Aaronovitch, *Voodoo Histories: the role of the conspiracy theory in shaping modern history*, London: Jonathan Cape, 2009. See also, more generally, Johannes Rogalla von Bieberstein, *Die These von der Verschwörung 1776-1945: Philosophen, Freimaurer, Juden, Liberale und Sozialisten als Verschwörer gegen die Sozialordnung*, Bern etc: Peter Lang, 1976; C.F. Graumann, S. Moscovici (eds), *Changing Conceptions of Conspiracy*, New York etc: Springer, 1987; *Politica hermetica*, 6 (1992), 'Le Complot'; Jane Parish, Martin Parker (eds), *The Age of Anxiety: conspiracy theory and the human sciences*, Oxford etc: Blackwell, 2001; Lee Basham, 'Living with the Conspiracy', *The Philosophical Forum*, xxxii, 3 (2001), pp 265-80; Ute Caumanns, Mathias Niendorf (eds), *Verschwörungstheorien: anthropologische Konstanten - historische Varianten*, Osnabrück: Fibre, 2001; Helmut Reinalter (ed), *Verschwörungstheorien: Theorie - Geschichte - Wirkung*, Innsbruck etc: StudienVerlag, 2002; Reinalter (ed), *Typologien des Verschwörungsdenkens*, Innsbruck etc: StudienVerlag, 2004; Gian Mario Cazzaniga, 'Il complotto: metamorfosi di un mito', in Cazzaniga (ed), *La Massoneria* (see above, n 20), pp 312-30.

Historians of Europe have expanded the discussion about the possibly conspiratorial aspects of the French Revolution in two directions. On the one hand, it has been suggested that the theory associated with the name of Barruel grew in a climate of suspicion that existed long, perhaps even very long, before the events it interpreted. For a start, apart from the *philosophes*, who Barruel had already attacked in *Les Helviennes*, he was of course very much aware of the struggle between Jansenists and Jesuits, which had revived fears, already expressed in the seventeenth century, that the former willfully worked to destroy the latter. The series of suppressions of the Jesuits from the late 1750s on, to which Barruel himself fell victim, fit in well with this speculation.⁵⁰ In a broader way, earlier scholarly conclusions that conspiracy was disappearing from countries like England and France by the end of the seventeenth century have been seriously contested. Rather, it seems more likely that the distrust and dissimulation that inevitably accompanied the religious struggles of the sixteenth century had a long and tenacious life. Nicodemism, for instance, fostered such phenomena as the heretical elite order projected by Francesco Pucci and the Jewish confraternity of São Diogo in Coimbra, which might both be regarded as prefigurations of the secret society. As Peter Burke wrote, “The language of ‘partiality’ and ‘bias’ became increasingly commonplace. The metaphors of ‘masks’, ‘cloaks’ or ‘veils’ [were] often employed in attempts to detect deception [...]. In the course of the ‘intellectual crisis of the Reformation’ [...] and of the religious wars which followed it, some sceptical individuals and groups asserted that the appeal to religion was no more than camouflage.” And one literary critic has drawn attention to the centrality of the paranoid character in Western culture as illustrated by the birth of the modern hero in the late Middle Ages.⁵¹

On the other hand, Barruel has been related to the broader milieu of the Counter-Enlightenment in which he worked, and though the Count de Montlosier’s *De la monarchie française* (1814) offered a conservative interpretation of the French Revolution that was more strategic, longer-term and non-conspiratorial, the Jesuit’s treatise can now be better appreciated as a tactical

⁵⁰ The suspicion of a conspiratorial meeting of Jansenists at Bourfontaine in 1621, first reported in 1654 and relaunched in France and Bavaria a century later, has been described as the start of a momentous “deism scare”; cf Barnett, *Enlightenment* (see above, n 5), p 11. See also Dale Van Kley, *The Jansenists and the Expulsion of the Jesuits from France, 1757-1765*, New Haven, CT etc: Yale University Press, 1975; and Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: from Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560-1791*, New Haven, CT etc: Yale University Press, 1996. On Barruel, see Sylva Schaeper-Wimmer, *Augustin Barruel, SJ (1741-1820)*, Frankfurt/Main etc: Peter Lang, 1985; Michel Riquet, *Augustin de Barruel: un Jésuite face aux Jacobins francs-maçons 1741-1820*, Paris: Beauchesne, 1989.

⁵¹ Perez Zagorin, *Ways of Lying: dissimulation, persecution, and conformity in early modern Europe*, Cambridge, MA etc: Harvard University Press, 1990; Elie Barnavi, Miriam Eliav-Feldon, *Le Périple de Francesco Pucci: utopie, hérésie et vérité religieuse dans la Renaissance tardive*, Paris: Hachette, 1988, ch VI; João Manuel Andrade, *Confraria de S Diogo: Judeus secretos na Coimbra do séc XVII*, Lisboa: Nova Arrancada, 1999; Burke, *Knowledge* (see n 5), pp 210-1; John Farrell, *Paranoia and Modernity: Cervantes to Rousseau*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006. The ‘earlier scholarly conclusions’ are in Yves-Marie Bercé, Elena Fasano Guarini (eds), *Complots et conjurations dans l’Europe moderne*, Roma: Ecole française de Rome, 1996, ‘Introduction’. For their critics, see Barry Coward, Julian Swann (eds), *Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in Early Modern Europe: from the Waldensians to the French Revolution*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004; Cécile Révauger (ed), *Franc-maçonnerie et politique au siècle des Lumières: Europe-Amériques = Lumières*, 7 (2006), part 3; Peter R. Campbell, Thomas E. Kaiser, Marisa Linton (eds), *Conspiracy in the French Revolution*, Manchester etc: Manchester University Press, 2007.

political weapon against enemies he had identified long ago.⁵² He was also firmly put back in the historiographical context that made his book into “la vulgate de l’antimaçonisme” in the first place. Charles Porset has pointed out that it was socialists and radicals such as Louis Blanc or Alphonse Esquiros who in the mid-nineteenth century published histories of the French Revolution that took up Barruel’s theories of its Masonic origins as a source of republican pride. For the major adversaries in French politics, the past looked for a long time very much like the present. At the end of the 1860s, Michail Bakunin asserted that, before 1830 and especially before 1793, Freemasonry “était l’incarnation énergique et la mise en pratique de l’idée humanitaire du XVIII^e siècle. Tous ces grands principes de liberté, d’égalité, de fraternité, de la raison et de la justice humaines, élaborés d’abord théoriquement par la philosophie de ce siècle, étaient devenus au sein de la Franc-Maçonnerie des dogmes pratiques et comme les bases d’une morale et d’une politique nouvelles, – l’âme d’une entreprise gigantesque de démolition et de reconstruction. La Franc-Maçonnerie n’a été rien moins, à cette époque, que la conspiration universelle de la bourgeoisie révolutionnaire contre la tyrannie féodale, monarchique et divine. – Ce fut l’Internationale de la bourgeoisie.” This could easily pass for the purest Barruelism with its sign reversed.⁵³

If opponents and members of secret societies were thus sharing what was only later and a bit too hastily considered to be a ‘conspiracy theory’ of the French Revolution, their dichotomous or even manichean perspective frequently led to the stereotyping of the associations. Already in Sallust’s classic example, Catilina, a man of “great vigour both of mind and body, but an evil and depraved nature”, gathered a band of criminals, corrupted youth, and did not shy away from debauchery and murder in the preparation of his horrifying conspiracy. These elements – a disastrous combination of intelligence, force and wickedness – recur in many past and present accounts of secret societies and should of course not be taken at face value. They belong to the “Sprache der Verschwörung” known from Christian legends about Jews, or from Ancient Greek and Roman stories about Christians. In Song China, suspicious group activity was caught in the telling phrases, “gathering at night and dispersing at dawn”, “men and women intermingling indiscriminately”, and “eating vegetables and serving the devils”.⁵⁴

⁵² Darrin M. McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment: the French Counter-Enlightenment and the making of modernity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001; Sarah Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie: an essay on the social imaginary, 1750-1850*, Cambridge, MA etc: Harvard University Press, 2003, pp 150-8.

⁵³ ‘Aux Compagnons de l’Association internationale des Travailleurs du Locle et de La Chaux-de-Fonds’ (1869), in *Bakounine: oeuvres complètes* (CD-ROM), Amsterdam: International Institute of Social History etc, 2000; Charles Porset, *Hiram sans-culotte?* (see above, n 13), pp 266-70.

⁵⁴ Johannes Heil, ‘Gottesfeinde’ - ‘Menschenfeinde’: *die Vorstellung von jüdischer Weltverschwörung (13. bis 16. Jahrhundert)*, Essen: Klartext, 2006, ch 2.2; Philip A. Harland, “‘These People Are... Men Eaters’: banquets of the anti-associations and perceptions of minority cultural groups”, in Zeba A. Crook, Philip A. Harland (eds), *Identity and Interaction in the Ancient Mediterranean: Jews, Christians and others: essays in honour of Stephen G. Wilson*, Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007, pp 56-75; B.J. ter Haar, *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999 (1992), pp 44-8. See Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae*, chs v, xiv-xvi (transl by J.C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library). On the classics, see Victoria Emma Pagán, *Conspiracy Narratives in Roman History*, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2004; Joseph Roisman, *The Rhetoric of Conspiracy in Ancient Athens*, Berkeley, CA etc: University of California Press, 2006.

Many more of precisely those aspects of secret societies that are usually perceived as ‘strange’ have in recent years been placed in a ‘normalizing’ context. The use of ‘brother’ – or in the Chinese case of ‘elder’ and ‘younger’ brother – in non-kinship relations is old and widespread. Blood oaths were so common in China before the Warring States that they “became the primary mode of establishing political ties between men”, and their later adoption by the Triads was as much frowned upon by the Qing authorities as anything similar in Europe. Among the numerous studies of initiation, some have tried to make a functional distinction between “doctrinal” and “imagistic” modes, characterized by longer, verbal, and indoctrinating versus concentrated, visual, and emotional ritual, respectively. The latter leaves a deeper impression and creates stronger solidarity among the participants, which might help explain its occasional attractiveness to modern fraternal organizations. More generally, social psychologists now consider one form or another of initiation to be a regular part of the dynamics of group formation. And it is good to remember that ritual, which is so distracting to modern observers if it takes unfamiliar forms, is itself a young concept. In its present sense, it appeared in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* only in 1910, after a long life as a word for a manual on how to perform Christian divine service.⁵⁵

Hinge Associations

Now that the secret societies seem again to be within reach of a more or less normal status, perhaps the time has come to reconsider their role. There are obviously good reasons to place them in the context of the history of voluntary associations, as has already been done with Freemasonry. It is also evident, though, that they follow a certain internal logic springing from the ‘important knowledge’ at their heart, which sets specific rules. While the societies aim to contribute to the health, wealth or wisdom of their members, they all have their reasons for withholding this knowledge from others. That’s why on communicating its secret, the society will naturally seek a guaranty against revelation – hence oaths, initiations, and the threat of punishment to traitors.⁵⁶ On the other hand, sharing the secret creates a bond between the members, with egalitarianism as a frequent concomitant. All the same, secret knowledge has an intrinsic tendency to generate hierarchies, which replicate the fundamental hierarchy that results from a common elite consciousness vis-à-vis unenlightened out-

⁵⁵ Brotherhood: Philip A. Harland, ‘Familial Dimensions of Group Identity: “brothers” (ἀδελφοί) in associations of the Greek East’, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 124, 3 (2005), pp 491-513; Ronald F.E. Weissman, *Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence*, New York etc: Academic Press, 1982, ch 2; Barend J. ter Haar, *Ritual & Mythology of the Chinese Triads: creating an identity*, Leiden etc: Brill, 1998, ch 5.3. Blood oaths: Mark Edward Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990, p 67; Ter Haar, *Ritual*, chs 4-5. Initiation: Harvey Whitehouse, *Inside the Cult: religious innovation and transmission in Papua New Guinea*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995; Rupert Brown, *Group Processes: dynamics within and between groups*, 2nd ed, Oxford: Blackwell, 2000, pp 24-34. Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: discipline and reasons of power in Christianity and Islam*, Baltimore, MD etc: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, p 56.

⁵⁶ Note that these are at the same time remedies against freeriding, “perhaps the most serious problem faced by social organisms”, according to Louise Barrett, Robin Dunbar, John Lycett, *Human Evolutionary Psychology*, Princeton, NJ etc: Princeton University Press, 2002, p 254. See also Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: public goods and the theory of groups*, Cambridge, MA etc: Harvard University Press, 1965.

siders. Their dependence on pre-existing social networks (related to the crucial importance of trust), the structure of such networks, and the degree to which the leadership is in control of the resources necessary to the organization are all factors that exert influence on their levels of centralization and hierarchization. The inherent tension between their hierarchical and egalitarian leanings may lead to problems of decision-making. This in turn may produce a special type of charismatic leadership that functions as a “substitute for authority in anti-authority organizations”.⁵⁷

The founders of the secret societies under discussion have usually avoided what Arthur Stinchcombe called the “liability of newness”, the invention of entirely new types of organization with the “high costs in time, worry, conflict, and temporary inefficiency” that come with the new roles that members have to learn. The societies have also tended to confirm another hypothesis of Stinchcombe, who suggested that the circumstances of the founding of an association have a disproportionately strong effect on the structure and strategy it exhibits in its further history, which only seldom breaks loose from the constraints set by that founding moment.⁵⁸ The organizational form of our societies has been patently shaped by the organizational tradition of Western Europe. Partly because of the personal experience of many of their founders, they were mostly a variation on the old example of Freemasonry, with its widely-known graded structure inherited from the guilds. Throughout the eighteenth century, Masonic lodges had proved their great elasticity, accommodating a broad variety of individuals and aims, and easily coping with the many demands of both clandestinity and secrecy. In the nineteenth century, this model was adopted by the secret societies and then copied in turn; for in matters of organization, copying is easy and safe, and creates something in tune with what members expect. Migrants tend to prove this rule when they take associational models with them.⁵⁹

While this logic seems to be proper to most secret societies, the political ones may be broadly divided into two groups. This was first noticed by Ar-

⁵⁷ Bonnie H. Erickson, ‘Secret Societies and Social Structure’, *Social Forces*, 60 (1981), pp 188-210; Richard J. Ellis, ‘Explaining the Occurrence of Charismatic Leadership in Organizations’, *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 3, 3 (1991), pp 305-19, here p 314. See also Mary Douglas, Aaron Wildavsky, *Risk and Culture: an essay on the selection of technological and environmental dangers*, Berkeley, CA etc: University of California Press, 1982, ch vi.

⁵⁸ Arthur L. Stinchcombe, ‘Social Structure and Organizations’, in: James G. March (ed), *Handbook of Organizations*, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1972, pp 142-93, here 148. See also Michael T. Hannan, John Freeman, *Organizational Ecology*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993; Mary Douglas, *Risk and Blame: essays in cultural theory*, London etc: Routledge, 1992, ch 10; Elisabeth S. Clemens, ‘Organizational Form as Frame: collective identity and political strategy in the American labor movement, 1880-1920’, and Kim Voss, ‘The Collapse of a Social Movement: the interplay of mobilizing structures, framing, and political opportunities in the Knights of Labor’, both in Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, Mayer N. Zald (eds), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and cultural framings*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp 205-26, 227-58.

⁵⁹ For an example, see Kevin Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, New York etc: Oxford University Press, 1998, which traces the roots of the Irish miners in Pennsylvania in the 1870s to a few counties in Ireland. See also Abner Cohen, *The Politics of Elite Culture: explorations in the dramaturgy of power in a modern African society*, Berkeley, CA etc: University of California Press, 1981, which shows how Sierra Leone politics in the 1970s pitted (imported) elite Creole Freemasonry against (indigenous) non-elite Poro societies. For the British ‘export’ of Masonry, see Jessica L. Harland-Jacobs, *Builders of Empire: Freemasonry and British imperialism, 1717-1927*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

mando Saitta, when he analyzed the development of Buonarroti's organizational ideas after the Conspiracy of the Equals against the French Directorate in 1795. What we see happening, he wrote, is "l'evoluzione del Buonarroti dal tipo di vera e propria cospirazione politica quale fu il complotto babuvista, al tipo ben diverso dell'incessante azione settaria, che a tratti diventa – ci si permetta la espressione – metapolitica per la netta distinzione che vi si introduce fra la società civile sulla quale agire e il gruppo settario liberatosi della corruzione e dall'ignoranza". Saitta identified the first type as 'French', not just for its geographical connections (most notably to the Franche-Comté, a curiously proliferate breeding ground for secret societies), but also because of its "tipica confluenza di un elemento giacobino e di un elemento militare". The second type he called 'German' for its resemblance to Adam Weishaupt's concept of an association that "non è più solo meccanismo di urto, ma anche sviluppo e palestra di quella 'filosofia' che deve render possibile la riforma della società".⁶⁰ It would seem that Bakunin evolved in a similar way. In 1848-1849 he organized secret societies that likely followed the 'French' pattern set by Auguste Blanqui, who had done more than anyone to put the traditional radical-liberal tactics of a semi-military coup d'état at the service of his communist ideas. After the failure of the Polish revolt of 1863, however, Bakunin went over to the 'German' type.⁶¹

Along the lines of the differentiation outlined above, the earlier organizations of both Buonarroti and Bakunin were inclined towards clandestinity, and their later ones towards secrecy. Like the Illuminati – but also like the Communist League or the early Bolshevik party organization – Buonarroti's Monde and Bakunin's Fraternité were not intended for the short-term goal of insurrection, but for the strategic leadership of a long revolutionary process that was not expected to be completed during their founder's lifetime, but on the contrary supposed to continue for a considerable time after the insurrectional moment. Different from the majority of the political secret societies of Europe, the 'German' type had a fundamentally international, universalist perspective, which substantiated its claim to be the vanguard of a vast historic movement. In this respect, it is interesting to note that their origins coincide more or less with the birth of artistic and intellectual avant-garde groups, at the same time marginal and elitist, with a similarly universalist outlook.⁶²

⁶⁰ Armando Saitta, *Filippo Buonarroti: contributo alla storia della sua vita e del suo pensiero*, 2nd ed, 2 vols, Roma: Istituto storico italiano per l'età moderna e contemporanea, 1972, I, pp 149, 111-3 (1949).

⁶¹ Peter Scheibert, 'Bakunins Entwurf einer internationalen revolutionären Organisation (Oktober 1864)', in Heinz Maus (ed), *Gesellschaft, Recht und Politik*, Neuwied etc: Luchterhand, 1968, pp 333-41; E.L. Rudnickaja, V.A. D'jakov, 'Rukopis' M.A. Bakunina "Meždunarodnoe Tajnoe Obščestvo Osvoboždenija Čelovečestva" (1864 g)', in *Revolucionnaja situacija v Rossii v 1859-1861 gg*, Moskva: Nauka, 1974, pp 295-355; Silvio Furlani, 'Bakunin e la sua associazione segreta dei fratelli scandinavi del 1864', *Rivista storica italiana*, LXXXIX (1977), pp 610-51; Michel Mervaud, 'La "Société internationale secrète de l'émancipation de l'humanité" (Bakounine et Sohlman)', in Jacques Catteau (ed), *Bakounine: combats et débats*, Paris: Institut d'Etudes slaves, 1979, pp 107-15, 183-240; M. Kun, 'Un tournant décisif dans la vie de Bakounine: données inédites sur son évolution idéologique et sur son activité conspiratrice', *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 26 (1980), pp 27-75.

⁶² Helmut Kreuzer, *Die Boheme: Analyse und Dokumentation der intellektuellen Subkultur vom 19. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, Stuttgart: Metzler, 1971; Wolfgang Eßbach, *Die Junghegelianer: Soziologie einer Intellektuellengruppe*, München: Wilhelm Fink, 1988; Laura Morowitz, William Vaughan (eds), *Artistic Brotherhoods in the Nineteenth Century*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000; Nathalie Heinich, *L'Elite artiste: excellence et singularité en régime démocratique*, Paris: Gallimard, 2005.

The ‘German’-type associations were all based on a set of ideas that were felt to be true and indispensable to humanity. These were embedded in a concept of historical progress that made their realization both scientifically certain and morally just. As Sergej Nečaev, Bakunin’s one-time companion, said, the old world was dying, “Its end is inevitable, we must act to hasten that end!” Only the revolutionary elite is capable to do so, or as Buonarroti wrote, “Beaucoup de gens veulent renverser ce qui existe; peu s’élèvent aux pensées du véritable ordre social”.⁶³ The gradualism of the organizations extends beyond them: they create or penetrate other, public organizations, which become in a way their lowest grade and whose purpose it is to serve as propaganda channels, recruiting grounds, and political instruments. A certain moral ambiguity with regard to these subordinate groups is common: different standards of conduct are typically applied from the top grades down, much like in manichean sects that forbid their elite to marry, but accept procreation of lesser members.

In contrast, organizations of the ‘French’ type were geared to the conquest of political power in the short run, if necessary through a pronunciamiento. Accordingly, in France, Spain and Italy, liberal officers were long over-represented in the secret societies, and all-military conspiracies were far from rare. To be sure, these associations – from the Charbonnerie to the Blanquists and from the United Irishmen to Young Italy – held strong political ideas, but their programs were of a quite different style. Their membership was always larger, and often much larger, than that of the ‘German’-type associations. They were in many ways the still-clandestine forerunners of the modern political party. They were also symbols of national independence and national unity over much of Europe.⁶⁴

What ‘French’ and ‘German’-type associations had in common, however, was that, from their very beginnings at the end of the eighteenth century, they always were tied to some of the most divisive issues of their days. They marked the hinges of European political life in the nineteenth century. This they did in spite of the fact that their life was often poor, nasty, brutish and short. Roberts was right to say that much of their existence was filled with myths; but perhaps he underestimated how much myths can achieve. As Bakunin once wrote to an old fellow-conspirator, “Tu sais mieux que moi que certaines existences imaginaires sont très utiles – et qu’il ne faut pas les dédaigner du tout. Tu sais que dans toute l’histoire il y a sur un quart de réalité, trois quarts au moins d’imagination, et que ce n’est point la partie imaginative qui a agi de tout temps le [moins] puissamment sur les hommes”.⁶⁵

⁶³ B. Koz’min, ‘Proklamacija S.G. Nečaeva k studentam’, *Krasnyj Archiv*, 33 (1929), pp 211-3, here 212 (“‘Gibel’ ego neizbežna! Budem sodejstvovat’ ej”), transl F. Haskel, in Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution: a history of the populist and socialist movements in nineteenth century Russia*, New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1966, p 383); Saitta, *Filippo Buonarroti*, II, p 156.

⁶⁴ See David MacKenzie, *Violent Solutions: revolutions, nationalism, and secret societies in Europe to 1918*, Lanham, MD etc: University Press of America, 1996; Theodor Schieder, Otto Dann (eds), *Nationale Bewegung und soziale Organisation*, I, München etc: Oldenbourg, 1978; Johannes Rogalla von Bieberstein, ‘Geheime Gesellschaften als Vorläufer politischer Parteien’, in Peter Christian Ludz (ed), *Geheime Gesellschaften*, Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1979, pp 429-60; Helmut Reinalter (ed), *Politische Vereine, Gesellschaften und Parteien in Zentraleuropa 1815-1848/49*, Frankfurt/Main etc: Peter Lang, 2005.

⁶⁵ ‘Lettre à Johann Philipp Becker’, 4 December 1869, *Bakounine: oeuvres complètes* (see above, n 53); Bakunin wrote, in an obvious slip of the pen, “le plus puissamment”.