Narratives of Confession in France from Musset to Zola

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Note: Impact of Covid-19 pandemic on presentation of thesis

Due to the ongoing health crisis and the impact it has had on access to libraries, some of my references are to the most readily available digitised version of texts, rather than to the first edition/ most recent critical edition. The texts particularly impacted by this are:

- Champfleury, *Confessions de Sylvius. Clémence. Mme André. Eugénie la blanchisseuse. Mariana la peintre*: edition used here is *Confessions de Sylvius* (Brussels: Meline, Cans et compagnie, 1857)
- Paul-Louis Courier, *Deuxième réponse aux anonymes:* edition used here is *Œuvres complètes de P.-L. Courier,* 4 vols (Brussels: J.-P. Meline, 1833)
- Alfonse de Lamartine, *Graziella*: edition used here is *Graziella* (Paris: Pagnerre, Furne and Hachette, 1862)
- Alfred de Musset, *La Mouche*: edition used here is *La Mouche* (Paris: A. Ferroud, 1892)
- George Sand, *Mauprat*: edition used here is *Mauprat,* 2nd edn (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1883)
- Mme de Staël, *Essai sur les fictions*: edition used here is *Zulma et Trois Nouvelles, précédé d'un Essai sur les fictions* (Londres: Colurn, 1813)
- Victor Hugo, *Odes et Ballades*: edition used here is *Odes et Ballades,* ed. by Pierre Albouy (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1964)

Table of Contents

Short Abstract ***5***

Long Abstract ***6***

Acknowledgements ***15***

Key Primary Texts: Publication Details and Timeline ***16***

Introduction ***17***

(i) The novel of confession as a genre 23
(ii) The Catholic paradigm of confession 30
(iii) The autobiographical paradigm : St Augustine, Rousseau and De Quincey 34
(iv) Novelistic predecessors: the erotic novel of confession 46
(v) *Vie privée* and *vie intime* 49
(vi) Anticlericalism and the polemic of confession 57
(vii) Scholarly contexts, theoretical contexts 65
(viii) Corpus, method, structure 71

Chapter One: The Transgression, or What Is Confessed? ***80***

Part One: *La Confession* by Jules Janin (1830) **82**
(i) Anatole's murderous crime, the gothic and the *fantastique* 86
(ii) Crime, agency and doubles 89
(iii) Crime and *le mal* 94
(iv) Crime and the act of confession 101

Part Two: *La Confession d'Antonine* by Marie Garcia (1864) **104**
(i) Antonine and the 'crime' of sex? 106
(ii) Antonine's revelations versus Catholic confession 108
(iii) What is *really* confessed? 113

Part Three: The changing nature of transgression **118**
(i) From criminal to emotional transgression 118
(ii) Cycles of transgression and the problem of responsibility 121
(iii) Frustrated desire 123
(iv) *Mal, mal du siècle* and *ennui* 126
(v) Transgression ≠ what is confessed 131

Chapter Two: The Self, or Who is Confessing? ***134***

Part One: *Confessions d'un bohême* by Xavier de Montépin (1849-1850) **136**
(i) 'Le marché de la confession' 138
(ii) The problem of names 141

Part Two: *Confessions d'un bohémien* by Arnould Frémy (1856) **145**
(i) Who, really, *is* confessing, to whom? 146
(ii) The confessant as sufferer 148
(iii) The confessant as outsider 151
(iv) Confessing as self-construction? 154

Part Three: *La Confession d'une jeune fille* by George Sand (1865) **159**
(i) The quest for selfhood 163
(ii) The linguistic crisis of identity 166
(iii) Confession and performance 169
(iv) Confession/ fission 171
(v) Confession as a performative utterance 174

Part Four: Enduring problems of selfhood **176**
(i) Fictionalised selves 176

(ii) Outcasts and orphans 180
(iii) Fragmented selves 183
(iv) Appropriated confessions 186
(v) A deeply unoriginal quest for originality 190
(vi) Selfhood unresolved 193

Chapter Three: The Confession(s) ***196***

Part One: *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* by Alfred de Musset (1836) **198**
(i) Intradiegetic confession: the manipulation and breakdown of confidences 198
(ii) Octave's extradiegetic confession and the problem of God 204
(iii) Octave's extradiegetic confession and the paradox of form 208
(iv) Octave's extradiegetic confession and the problem of self-justification 213
(v) Octave's extradiegetic confession and the problem of obfuscation 216
(vi) The failure of introspection 217
(vii) The failure of language 219

Part Two: *Confession générale* by Frédéric Soulié (1840-48) **224**
(i) A narrative of sin, cynicism and lost identities 226
(ii) Corrupted confessions on the metadiegetic level (and below) 229
(iii) The failure of confession as a narrative form 233
(iv) The subversion of Catholic confession 236
(v) A *confession générale* which is not one 242

Part Three: *Les Confessions d'une femme du siècle* by Madame la baronne M.-R. du Saule (1846) **243**
(i) Palimpsestic confession 243
(ii) The form(s) of confession 247
(iii) Confession as a trap 249
(iv) Confession as substitution 253

Part Four: Narratives of confession, narratives of confessional failure **255**
(i) Anti-sacramental acts: the novel of confession and Catholic confession 255
(ii) The sacrament transmogrified: the novel of confession and secular confessions 258
(iii) The breaking of the *acte de parole* 267

Conclusion ***270***
(i) 1865: A pivotal year 270
(ii) Zola's uneasy hybrid 271
(iii) Novels of confession after 1865 279
(iv) Last Judgements: Narratives of confession from 1828-1865 287

Appendix: Texts entitled 'confession', published in France in the nineteenth century ***294***

Select Bibliography ***300***

Short Abstract

This thesis argues that the novel of confession was a highly significant genre in early-to-mid-nineteenth-century France. This genre has identifiable traits, which are echoed in multiple novels, and even, at times, parodied. The thesis analyses these traits through a close and comparative study of both canonical and non-canonical writers, including Jules Janin, Alfred de Musset, Frédéric Soulié, Xavier de Montépin, Champfleury, Arnould Frémy, Mme du Saule, Marie Garcia, George Sand and Émile Zola. It argues that the genre both draws on the models of autobiographical confession offered by St Augustine, Rousseau and De Quincey (translated into French by Musset in 1828), and engages in an irreverent dialogue with Catholic confession, around which a polemic was raging in the period. The thesis takes the story as far as 1865, a pivotal year in which Zola's *La Confession de Claude* — an uneasy hybrid between confessional discourse and what the Goncourts call *enquête sociale* **—** signals the end of a chapter in the genre's development.

The first chapter — 'The Transgression, or What is Confessed?' — argues that the novel of confession consistently breaks Catholic rules about sinning and redefines the sphere of confession away from wrongdoing towards suffering and selfhood. The second chapter — 'The Self, or Who is Confessing?' — argues that the novel of confession centres around protagonists who are unsure of their (emotional, and sometimes, actual) identity, presenting characters who are fragmented within themselves, often on the point of suicide or madness. Far from confession resolving these characters' problems of selfhood, it tends to fragment the self further. The third chapter — 'The Confession(s)' — argues that these novels repeatedly stage acts of confession, in both religious and secular contexts. In so doing, they invariably challenge the principles of both Catholic confession and autobiographical confession, consistently showing acts of confession that 'fail' according to the models from which they draw. The novel of confession is thus a disruptive genre, which unmakes the act by which it is defined.

Long Abstract

The seed from which this thesis first grew was Alfred de Musset: both his 1828 rendering in French of De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium* and the novel of confession he published eight years later, *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle.* The thesis initially set out to investigate to what extent Musset's two works were emblematic of, or indeed engendered, a wider interest in confession as a novelistic form in the nineteenth century. From this starting point, it discovered that the century was a period in which there was a flourishing of literary confession, with over one hundred texts entitled 'confession' published. In novels specifically, confession as a form and theme was explored by canonical writers including George Sand (*La Confession d'une jeune fille*) and Émile Zola (*La Confession de Claude)*, by writers targeting a mass audience — including Frédéric Soulié — as well as by those who now lie outside the canon, including the actress Marie Garcia. Following these discoveries, the thesis sought to investigate to what extent this group of novels could be deemed to form a genre, and, if they could, what its generic traits might be.

Finding evidence of a significant number of shared, and identifiable, traits echoed across different novels, and even, at times, parodied, this thesis argues that these novels do indeed form a genre — the novel of confession — which was highly significant in France in the early-to-mid-nineteenth century. Musset's two texts of confession provide models with which later novels, more or less explicitly, often engage, in a genre that is highly self-referential. Through analysing, alongside Musset's work, a corpus of novels published between 1830 and 1865, including works by Jules Janin, Frédéric Soulié, Xavier de Montépin, Champfleury, Mme du

Saule, Arnould Frémy, Marie Garcia, George Sand, and Émile Zola, this thesis interrogates the nature, scope and development of the novel of confession. The thesis focusses on works which use the word 'confession' within their titles, seeing this act of framing as a generic marker chosen by the author which shapes the act of reading. This is by no means to suggest that it is the only significant generic marker: there are of course also novels not entitled 'confession' which share many of the generic traits analysed by this thesis; the novels of confession analysed by this thesis may pertain to other genres as well. By 'genre', this thesis understands that genres are by nature porous, and not exclusive, categories. Genre is a matter of 'family resemblances rather than strict codification' (Segal), where the 'classification générique est fondée sur des critères de similitude' (Schaeffer). Genres are 'des horizons d'attente pour des lecteurs' (Todorov). This thesis argues that the presence of repeated traits across a series of novels, which regularly also engage hypertextually with previous novels, is a strong indication of the presence of 'horizons d'attente'.

The thesis builds its analysis on the widest possible range of works, considering those which are canonical and non-canonical; those written by men and women; those aimed at a select readership and those which spoke to wider audiences. By reading these texts alongside each other as part of a genre, this thesis offers a new lens through which to analyse both individual novels, and more widely, this period of cultural history. Very little has previously been written on this network of novels. The novels that make up this thesis's corpus have tended either to be analysed in isolation, rather than understood as part of a highly popular trend — or not to be analysed at all. This thesis seeks to redress the balance by rigorous analysis of a thus

far critically neglected genre which, it argues, played a seminal role in the literary landscape of early-to-mid-nineteenth century France.

This thesis also sets out to examine how the novel of confession relates to the complex cultural context surrounding two different models of confession at the time: the autobiographical model offered by St Augustine, Rousseau and De Quincey, and Catholic confession, as part of the Sacrament of Penance. St Augustine and Rousseau's *Confessions* enjoyed great popularity in the period, whilst Musset's version of De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* was influential in a literary sphere. The period saw a significant number of autobiographical confessions, as well as a vogue for the 'discovered' confessions of historical figures; confession as a theme also dominated in short stories, plays, and poetry. A growth in interest in *la vie privée* and *la vie intime* fuelled this fascination with confession, which came to be closely associated with the expression of *intimité.* At the same time, a cultural war attended Catholic confession, which was subjected to various attacks, from those of the pamphleteer Paul-Louis Courier following the scandal surrounding the murderous priest Mingrat (1823), to those of Jules Michelet in *Du Prêtre, de la femme, de la famille* (1845). Confession was criticised for being invented by the Church as an instrument of power, for being a threat to family life — where priests had access to the most intimate marital secrets — and for being dangerous for women, who found themselves in close quarters with lustful priests. Anticlericalism, which flared throughout the period, was often — at least partly — expressed with reference to confession.

The thesis argues that the novel of confession is a disruptive genre, which engages in an irreverent dialogue both with the Catholic act of confession, and with the type of autobiographical confession offered by St Augustine and Rousseau. In its depiction of transgression, of selfhood and of the act of confession itself, it continually subverts confessional paradigms, in narratives that both constantly perform and consistently undermine the act of confession.

This thesis analyses the genre through the framework of three components which are essential to any confession, Catholic or secular. The 1835 *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* defines confession, at its most fundamental level, as 'l'aveu [...] que l'on fait de quelque chose': for a confession to take place, there needs to be the 'quelque chose' that is confessed, the 'on' who does the confessing, and the 'aveu' itself. This thesis's three main chapters are based on a tripartite structure inspired by this definition: 1) 'The Transgression, or What Is Confessed?'; 2) 'The Self, or Who Is Confessing?' and 3) 'The Confession(s)'. Each chapter centres around two or three emblematic texts, with reference to which the major arguments are developed, before providing a perspective on these themes within the genre more widely. The thesis thus balances focussed textual analysis with an examination of how different themes play out — and develop — across multiple novels.

Chapter One explores the relationship between 'what is confessed' and the notion of transgression. Looking at one novel from the start of the period (Janin's *La Confession* — 1830) and one from the end (Garcia's *La Confession d'Antonine* — 1864), it explores the changing framework of 'what is confessed', which shifts from a gothic-inspired macabre crime to amorous misdemeanours. Despite these very

different instances of wrongdoing, the novels share a portrayal of transgression in which Catholic teaching on sin is both invoked and undermined. Catholic confession centres upon the assumption that individuals are in control of themselves and, therefore, responsible for sin; by confessing, individuals both accept culpability for past wrongdoing and seek to prevent it in the future. By contrast, these novels — Janin's, Garcia's, and other novels of confession — tend to depict transgression as being outside the confessants' control, committed by a diabolical double or simply by a confessant who is passive and, seemingly, not responsible. Being conscious of their wrongdoing — indeed, even confessing it — does not stop these confessants from repeating their transgressions: they seem trapped in cycles of sin which they are incapable of breaking.

At the same time, the novel of confession tends to play with the reader's expectations about the confessional mode, often obfuscating around the moment of transgression rather than revealing it, gesturing towards sin rather than actually confessing it. Transgression, then, is not always confessed. Simultaneously, what *is* confessed is not always related to transgression. At the heart of these novels lies the depiction, not purely of sin, but also of sexual failure or frustration. Alongside this sense of sexual shame sits a sense of disillusionment and unhappiness. Indeed, early novels of confession — specifically Janin's *La Confession* and Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* — were central to defining the 1830s expression of *mal du siècle.* This group of novels thus appropriates confession away from the Catholic model of the expression of sin, towards the confession as the expression of (often psychological) suffering.

Chapter Two asks 'who is confessing?' with reference to three novels, from Montépin's hyper-commercialised *Confessions d'un bohême* (1849-50)**,** which, in its opening chapter celebrates 'le marché de la confession', to Frémy's *Confessions d'un bohémien* (1856), described by *Le Figaro* as 'l'œuvre d'un artiste et non pas d'un faiseur', and Sand's *La Confession d'une jeune fille* (1865)*.* The confessant is invariably an outsider in some way, hence the ease with which the novel of confession draws on the popular theme of Bohemia in the period following Murger's *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (serialised from 1845 onwards). Confessants are often isolated, without family. Novels commonly examine problems around naming, with confessants sometimes unsure of their true identity. The question 'who is confessing' contains a central tension: at times, characters are confessing that they do not know who they are.

If confessants sometimes literally do not know who they are, so confessants are often also unsure of who they are on an emotional level. Feeling at odds with themselves, unable to explain their behaviour, they are fragmented or doubled, in conflict with their era, worried about being unoriginal, and, on occasions, suicidal or mad. The novels tend to posit these characters' acts of confessions as a potential answer to their problems, before systematically undermining that very proposition. Unlike the model of St Augustine or Rousseau, in the novel of confession, the act of confessing does not create cohesion: rather the reverse — it alienates the self, fragmenting it further. Characters who seek self-construction in confession find instead self-destruction. And those who seek ownership over their story find it appropriated by others, through the common *mise en abyme* structure, which

introduces an editor figure who ultimately controls the narrative. 'Who is confessing' is thrown into doubt: the words may not even be the confessants' own.

Chapter Three, 'The Confession(s)', argues that these novels tend to present not just one, but multiple, acts of confession, which occur on the intradiegetic, extradiegetic, and, in some cases, metadiegetic levels of the narrative. Focussing on Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* (1836), Soulié's *Confession générale* (1840-48) and Mme du Saule's *Les Confessions d'une femme du siècle* (1846), the chapter explores how the novel of confession constantly performs the act by which it defines itself. However, almost without fail, when moments of confession — be they religious or secular — occur within the narrative, they do not achieve what the confessants seek. Catholic confession appears as either futile — with confessants continuing to sin immediately after confessing — or actively dangerous: one character goes mad after confessing. Secular confessions — where characters make a high-stakes, emotional revelation to another character — are equally problematic. At times, the confessional mode is exploited by those who use it to simulate remorse and manipulate; at others, a confession is dismissed entirely by its recipient who negates the need for such revelations; at further moments, characters find themselves unable to confess as language breaks down when the stakes are highest. Far from achieving any emotional sense of absolution, confessing characters tend to feel worse, not better, after attempting a confession.

This problematic representation of confession continues on the extradiegetic level, which regularly both invokes and rejects Catholic confession. The novels reclaim confession from Catholicism, most often presenting characters as undergoing their

extradiegetic act of confession to their peers, not God. Furthermore, confession is appropriated, often explicitly so, from a Catholic discourse of secrecy, to the public sphere of revelation. Moreover, by their very nature, these narrative confessions immortalise, rather than erase, the actions of their confessants; they also create a narrative about wrongdoing which invariably leads to exactly the sort of self-justification that Catholicism forbids. Occurring currently with this reclaiming and subverting of Catholic confession is a separate development, that consistently breaks the principles of both Catholic and autobiographical confession. Introspection — required both for the *examen de conscience* which precedes Catholic confession, and for any act of writing about the self — is shown in these novels to fail repeatedly. Characters find themselves, at the end of a confession, still unable to understand themselves. Indeed, the confession becomes a lasting documentation of their lack of self-comprehension. Introspection fails these confessants; language does too, on occasions breaking down to the extent that the confession goes into the third person, as confessant becomes distanced from his/her own narrative. On every level — and in various ways — the novel of confession undermines the principles of the confessional paradigms on which it draws, showing confession as unrealisable or, in some cases, utterly redundant.

The conclusion argues that 1865 is a pivotal year for the novel of confession. Zola's *La Confession de Claude,* published in this year, is an uneasy hybrid, drawing both on Musset and the Goncourt brothers. It is a text that looks out — in a brutal depiction of Parisian poverty and child prostitution — as much as it looks in to the affairs of the heart. Drawing on discourses of *intimité,* it equally is part of the inauguration of the gritty discourses and sombre, social themes that would come to dominate a new

focus in the novel. The novel of confession did not end with *La Confession de Claude*, but it did enter a different mode after it. The novels of confession published in the late 1860s, 1870s, 1880s and 1890s largely eschew the detailed introspection of their predecessors; they tend to be written for the mass-market, driven by plots of gothic themes and erotic encounters. The commercial side of the genre — present in Montépin's and Soulié's work — wins out.

However, this thesis shows that, in the period dating from the start of the July Monarchy, through the Second Republic, and well into the Second Empire, the novel of confession was a genre reflecting the century's cultural trends — central, for instance, to the expression of *mal du siècle,* echoing the fascination with Bohemia and, in a different way, with madness. Whilst it responds to these shifting interests and literary trends, at the same time generic traits are established by the early novels that remain constant throughout: a depiction of transgression that revolts against the Catholic model; a portrayal of selfhood that undermines the knowledge required for either Catholic confession or for self-writing; a constant, subversive performing of the act of confession on multiple levels of narrative. At a time when Catholic confession was the subject of a polemic, the novel of confession engages irreverently with the model it provides; at a time when self-writing was in vogue, the novel of confession remains deeply ambivalent about whether the self can ever, really, be put into words.

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Key Primary Texts: Publication Details and Timeline

The timeline and publication details of the first editions of the major works examined by this thesis are as follows:

1828 Alfred de Musset, *L'Anglais mangeur d'opium, traduit de l'anglais par A.D.M* (Paris: Mame et Delaunay-Vallée, 1828)
1830 Jules Janin, *La Confession,* 2 vols (Paris: Alexandre Mesnier, 1830)
1836 Alfred de Musset, *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle,* 2 vols (Paris: Félix Bonnaire, 1836)
1840-48 Frédéric Soulié, *Confession générale* (Paris: Boulé, 1848)*
1846 Mme du Saule, *Les Confessions d'une femme du siècle,* 2 vols (Paris: Ledoyen et Giret, 1846)
1849-50 Xavier de Montépin, *Confessions d'un bohême,* 5 vols (Paris: Alexandre Cadot, 1849-50)
1856 Arnould Frémy, *Confessions d'un bohémien* (Paris: Librarie nouvelle, 1857)**
1864 Marie Garcia, *La Confession d'Antonine* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1864)
1865 George Sand, *La Confession d'une jeune fille,* 2 vols (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1865)
1865 Émile Zola, *La Confession de Claude* (Paris: Librarie internationale, 1865)

*Soulié's *Confession générale* was published in separate volumes between 1840 and 1848, with the first full edition (including previously unpublished material) appearing in 1848.
**Frémy's *Confessions d'un bohémien* appeared in *feuilleton* form in 1856 and was published as a volume in 1857.

In all cases except Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* and Zola's *La Confession de Claude,* the editions listed above are those cited in the text. In the case of Musset and Zola, as scholarly modern editions exist, the following editions have been cited instead of the first editions. The editions used are:

Alfred de Musset, *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle,* ed. by Gérard Barrier (Paris: Gallimard, 1973)
Zola, *La Confession de Claude* ed. by François-Marie Mourad (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 2013)

References to the editions detailed above are cited in brackets within the main body of the text; all other texts and editions are footnoted.

Introduction

J'ai longtemps hésité à laisser mon livre, ou une partie de mon livre, m'exposer nu aux yeux de tout le monde; et ce n'est qu'après avoir mûrement réfléchi [...] que je me suis décidé à me confesser avant ma mort [...] Le crime ou la misère s'écartent du grand jour: ce qu'ils doivent aimer, c'est la solitude. [...] Mais puisque mes confessions ne sont pas des révélations de crimes, et que d'ailleurs, même dans cette hypothèse, il peut en résulter quelque bien pour autrui, j'ai dû faire violence à ces sentiments reçus, et compenser l'exception à la règle par l'utilité d'une expérience que le lecteur peut acheter à si bon marché.

Alfred de Musset, *L'Anglais mangeur d'opium, traduit de l'anglais par A.D.M,* pp.vii-viii.[1]

So writes Alfred de Musset in 1828, early in his rendering of Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*. This passage encapsulates some of the major themes that came to dominate a genre which emerged in France in the years following the publication of *L'Anglais mangeur d'opium*: a genre this thesis terms 'the novel of confession'. In this passage, the act of confession itself is *translated*: from a religious act within the Catholic sacrament of penance, to a secular and commercial one; from a private act to a public one; from an act associated with sin and wrongdoing to one which is no longer purely operating within this moral framework.

Significantly, Musset mistranslates De Quincey's original in several ways. Musset weights more heavily the transactional nature of publication: the reader 'peut acheter [le livre] à si bon marché', whilst De Quincey is not writing of the price of the

[1] In De Quincey's original, the passage reads: 'I have for many months hesitated about the propriety of allowing this or any part of my narrative to come before the public eye until after my death […] Guilt and misery shrink, by a natural instinct, from public notice: they court privacy and solitude. […] But, on the one hand, as my self-accusation does not amount to a confession of guilt, so, on the other, it is possible that, if it *did*, the benefit resulting to others from the record of an experience purchased at so heavy a price might compensate, by a vast overbalance, for any violence done to the feelings I have noticed, and justify a breach of the general rule' (Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater and other writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.3-4).

book at all, but rather the heavy personal price he has paid for his experience. Furthermore, Musset adds in the image of nakedness, where to confess is to 'm'exposer nu aux yeux de tout le monde'. De Quincey's text is simply concerned with the 'narrative com[ing] before the public eye'; in Musset's text, it is not the document which is being exposed, but rather the opium eater *himself.* The text comes to represent the self — to publish the text is to reveal oneself. These themes — the deeply problematic nature of a published confession, and the link between confession and selfhood — become prominent in the novel of confession in France in the nineteenth century.

Throughout *L'Anglais mangeur d'opium*, Musset's departures from De Quincey are so regular that the work is a 'version' or 'rendering' rather than a 'translation' in the strict sense. Some differences may be genuine mistakes; Musset's English was hardly perfect.[2] However, others indicate strong authorial intervention: changing the order of the narrative, omitting sentences, paraphrasing others, and altering the style (including omitting many of De Quincey's addresses to the reader).[3] Most significantly, Musset adds his own entirely original material, including a more than twenty page-long episode where the opium-eater rediscovers Ann — renamed Anna by Musset — and rescues her from an evil Marquis who has imprisoned her (pp.137-157). The nature of Musset's mistranslation of De Quincey serves as a useful emblem of another issue regularly explored in novels of confession: appropriation.

[2] On occasions Musset mistranslates entirely; for instance, De Quincey's *'My gown* is by this time, I dare say, in the same condition with many thousand excellent books in the Bodleian' (p.50, italics added), becomes *'Mes livres* partagent la triste condition de beaucoup d'autres in-folio et in-octavo du Bodelian' (p.131, italics added).

[3] See Peltier, who provides a summary of Musset's 'résumés [...] supressions [et...] additions' (Paul Peltier, 'Musset et Baudelaire à propos des *Confessions d'un mangeur d'opium', Mercure de France,* 492 (1918), pp.637-647 (p.642)).

The French novel of confession regularly poses the question, how much ownership can a confessant have over his or her confession, once it is edited and published?[4]

Over thirty years after Musset's version, De Quincey's text underwent another French reincarnation, when, in 1860, Charles Baudelaire translated it as part of *Les Paradis artificiels,* which also examines hashish.[5] Basing his section on opium on De Quincey, he translates only select parts of De Quincey, alongside a summary and commentary on the rest. Baudelaire himself describes his endeavour thus:

> De Quincey est un auteur affreusement digressionniste, et ce n'était pas une petite affaire [...] d'y introduire l'ordre. De plus, il s'agissait de fondre mes sensations personnelles avec les opinions de l'auteur original et d'en faire un amalgame.[6]

Another appropriating translation — only translating parts of De Quincey, subsuming those into a wider whole, mixing in his 'sensations personnelles' — Baudelaire's text takes a very different approach to Musset's, not focussed on the opium eater's emotional story, but rather on the psychological effects of opium. In a sense, Musset's and Baudelaire's translations reflect different sides of de Quincey's text; to put it crudely, the former is more focussed on the man, the latter on the drugs.[7]

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[4] Musset's change of title to *L'Anglais mangeur d'opium* and the omission of De Quincey's name as the original author is a further act of appropriation. The title of 'confession' is absent in Musset's version of De Quincey only to reappear in Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle.*

[5] Charles Baudelaire, *Les Paradis artificiels, opium et haschisch* (Paris: Poulet-Malassis et de Broise, 1860).

[6] Charles Baudelaire, letter to Poulet-Malassis, 16 February 1860, quoted by Peltier, p.644.

[7] As Peltier highlights, Musset and Baudelaire's differing attitudes can be seen in their relationship to the story of Ann; Musset adds in an entirely new episode whilst Baudelaire cuts De Quincey's original down to a summary (Peltier, p.645). It is Musset's version of De Quincey that is most influential on the novel of confession as it develops; it is therefore Musset's version that receives analysis in this thesis. Baudelaire's work was however highly successful in its own right: looking back in 1866, Baudelaire writes, '*Les Paradis* ont eu un très grand succès littéraire' (Charles Baudelaire, letter to Narcisse Ancelle, 18 February 1866, quoted by Peltier, p.646).

The interest in De Quincey's text evidenced by Musset's and Baudelaire's versions is a microcosm of a wider engagement with literary confession. There are over one hundred French texts published during the nineteenth century, labelled 'confession(s)' in their titles: this figure alone suggests something historically important is happening.[8] Such works fall into several categories. Some are autobiographical, like the actor Paccard's *Mémoires et confessions d'un comédien* (1839), or Joanny's[9] *Ma Confession* (1846), a book-long 'auto-biographie [...] de l'homme d'intérieur',[10] written in verse, or, later in the century, Arsène Houssaye's *Les Confessions: Souvenirs d'un demi-siècle, 1830-1880* (1885-1891). Other confessions are works of historical fiction: Cléophan-Reimbold Dautrevaux's *Les Confessions du dernier septembriseur* (1853), Eugène de Mirecourt's *Les Confessions de Marion Delorme* (1852), or Adolphe de Lescure's *Les Confessions de l'abbesse de Chelles, fille du régent* (1863). Some texts are children's fiction, including Alexandre de Saillet's *Les Confessions d'un écolier* (1848), and the anonymous, playfully entitled, *Les Confessions d'un Loup, Manuscrit découvert par un bûcheron dans un arbre ayant servi d'habition à un hibou, ex-sténographe à l'Assemblée législative des Animaux* (1855), both of which had illustrated editions.[11]

Some texts which had previously been published under other titles were reformulated as confessions, suggesting that 'confession' in the title may have been a

[8] This figure has been calculated from searches of the *Gallica* database, analysis of the *Bibliographie de la France* archives, and use of Evanghélia Stead's article, 'Confessions sur un siècle, confessions fin-de-siècle', in *Autobiographie et fiction romanesque: Autour des Confessions de Jean-Jacques Rousseau : actes du colloque international,* ed. by Jacques Domenech (Nice: Publications de la faculté des lettres, arts et sciences humaines de Nice, 1996), pp.351-386.
[9] Stage name of Jean-Bernard Brisebarre. (J.-M. Quérard*, Les Supercheries littéraires dévoilées,* 2nd edn (Paris: Paul Daffis, 1870) p.411).
[10] Quérard*,* p.304.
[11] The latter was particularly popular, being republished in 1858, 1861, 1862, 1865 and 1869 (Stead, p.381).

selling point. Louise de la Vallière's writings (*Les Réflexions sur la miséricorde de Dieu* and *Lettres*), which had already had numerous editions from the seventeenth century onwards, were republished by the scholar Romain Cornut as *Confessions de Mme de la Vallière repentante*;[12] as Cornut explains in the introduction, 'nous ne publions rien d'inconnu', but the text is now published 'sous un titre créé par nous'.[13] Alexandre Dumas's work about Madame du Deffand, originally published as *Madame du Deffand* (1856-1857), was reformulated in 1862 under two titles, *Mémoires d'une aveugle* and *Les Confessions de la marquise.*[14]

Confession bridges different literary forms. Some confessions are short fiction, as in Edmond Lafond's 1862 'La Confession du vetturino: souvenir d'un voyage en Italie'; whilst Ulysse Pic's *Don Raphaël, ou la confession* (1847) is a play. Baudelaire himself, prior to translating sections of De Quincey in 1860, had drawn inspiration from the theme of confession for his poem of that title, published in *Les Fleurs du mal* in 1857. In this poem, the confession is not words, but rather a 'note plaintive' which escapes from the speaker's lover as they walk through Paris at night. Hearing this sound, the speaker interprets it (indeed, perhaps misinterprets and certainly appropriates it), to give it a specific meaning: 'Que rien ici-bas n'est certain [...] Que c'est un dur métier que d'être belle femme'.[15]

[12] *Dictionnaire universel des contemporains,* ed. by Louis-Gustave Vapereau, 3rd edn (Paris: Par. & c., 1865), p.416.
[13] Roman Cornut, 'Préface', to *Les Confessions de Mme de La Vallière repentante, écrites par elle-même et corrigées par Bossuet,* ed. by Romain Cornut (Paris: Didier, 1855), pp.i-xxxiv (p.i).
[14] Susan Levin, *The Romantic Art of Confession: De Quincey, Musset, Sand, Lamb, Hogg, Frémy, Soulié, Janin* (London: Camden House, 1998), p.128.
[15] Charles Baudelaire, 'Confession', in *Les Fleurs du mal,* ed. by Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), pp.74-76 (p.75).

Within this wide range of texts which explore confession as a theme or a form, this thesis focuses on a series of 'novels of confession', published between 1830 and 1865. It argues that, during the nineteenth century, the novel of confession became an important genre, in which both canonical and lesser-known authors wrote: these include Alfred de Musset (with the hugely successful *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle,* 1836), George Sand (with *La Confession d'une jeune fille,* 1865) and Émile Zola (with *La Confession de Claude* — also 1865); as well as Jules Janin (*La Confession,* 1830), Frédéric Soulié (with *Confession générale,* 1840-48), Mme du Saule (*Les Confessions d'une femme du siècle,* 1846), Xavier de Montépin (*Confessions d'un bohême,* 1849-50), Arnould Frémy (*Confessions d'un bohémien,* 1856) and Marie Garcia (*La Confession d'Antonine,* 1864).[16]

This thesis thus seeks to bring to the fore a hitherto largely critically neglected group of novels, examining them both individually and as a genre. It argues that these novels have recognisable traits, which are reflected across different texts and parodied in others. The novel of confession was dominant in exploring and interrogating many of the period's concerns about transgression, selfhood, communication and Catholicism. This genre was not only highly significant but also subversive, testing and challenging the very act from which these texts take their names. This is a genre that draws, often irreverently, both on the Catholic model of auricular confession — the subject of a raging polemic during the period — and on the paradigm of autobiographical confession provided by St Augustine and Rousseau. In its depiction of transgression, of selfhood and of the act of confession

[16] For a complete list, see the Appendix of this thesis, pp.294-299.

itself, it continually subverts confessional paradigms, in narratives which both constantly perform and undermine the act of confession.

This introduction begins by analysing the concept of 'genre'. It next examines the confessional frameworks on which the novel of confession draws: Catholic confession, autobiographical confessional writing, and the eighteenth century's erotic novel of confession. It contextualises further the development of the novel of confession by examining two wider trends in French society and writing in the early-to-mid-nineteenth century: the cultures of *intimité,* and of anticlericalism, specifically in terms of attacks on Catholic confession. The introduction ends by reviewing previous scholarship and outlining the thesis's corpus and structure.

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(i) The novel of confession as a genre

The novel of confession will be studied specifically with reference to a group of texts self-defined, in their titles, by 'confession(s)'. The term 'novel of confession' here designates a broad corpus. The novels examined vary significantly in length — emblematic of the rapidly evolving and almost anarchic nature of the novel in France at the time: from Montépin's *Confessions d'un bohême,* which stretches over five volumes, to Marie Garcia's *La Confesson d'Antonine,* of only eighty pages. Yet even at the extremes, each work fits under the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1835) definition of *roman*: 'Toute histoire feinte, écrite en prose, où l'auteur cherche à exciter l'intérêt, soit par le développement des passions, soit par la

peinture des mœurs, soit par la singularité des aventures'.[17] The term 'novel of confession' has been selected instead of the more commonly-used term 'confessional novel'. The word 'confessional' has become overshadowed by two associations that are not helpful here: first 'confessional novel' tends to imply a first-person narrative form in which a character confesses his or her story, either to another character or directly to the reader; and secondly, 'confessional novel' often carries the association of the novel also functioning on some level as the author's confession. Whilst many of the novels considered are indeed first-person narratives, and whilst some have autobiographical links to the authors' lives, the phenomenon of fictional confession exists more widely in France than these two criteria would permit. 'Novel *of confession*' endeavours to avoid such associations, and in turn, gestures towards the manner in which these novels employ confession not just as a form but also as a theme.

Genre in France had historically been prescriptive, centred around the rules of Classicism, as exemplified by Boileau's *L'Art poétique* (1674). However, the novel, comparatively so new, had developed freely, arriving in the nineteenth century 'with only the vaguest sort of accepted rules or limitations'.[18] Furthermore, notions of genre were changing. Victor Hugo, in his 1826 preface to *Odes et ballades,* attacks the generic conventions inherited from Classicism:

> On entend tous les jours, à propos des productions littéraires, parler de la *dignité* de tel genre, des *convenances* de tel autre, des *limites* de celui-ci, des *latitudes* de celui-là […] L'auteur de ce livre a le malheur de ne rien

[17] 'Roman', *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française,* 2 vols (Paris: Imprimerie de l'institut de France, 1835), II, p.672.
[18] Marguerite Iknayan, *The Idea of the Novel in France: The Critical Reaction 1815-1848* (Paris: Librarie Minard, 1961), p.106; also see p.11.

> comprendre à tout cela. […] La pensée est une terre vierge et féconde dont les productions veulent croître librement [...] sans se classer.[19]

With the battle of *Hernani,* the dominance of Hugo's *cénacle,* and the ushering in of a new wave of literature associated with freedom and originality rather than rules and emulation, the traditional boundaries of genre were breaking down. Genre was no longer prescriptive. When terming the novel of confession a genre, this thesis is thus not suggesting it was a codified genre, but rather one which grew organically.

Jean-Marie Schaeffer argues that 'Si les objets naturels ont certaines caractéristiques communes, *c'est parce qu'ils appartiennent à une même classe* […] À l'inverse, si des objets artificiels peuvent former une classse, *c'est parce qu'ils ont certaines caractéristiques communes*'.[20] One consequence of Schaeffer's observation is that it becomes essential that any conception of genre is drawn from the texts in question and their shared characteristics: this thesis is governed by an approach that works outwards from the material. As Schaeffer expresses it, 'toute classification générique est fondée sur des critères de similitude';[21] generic definition is, as Naomi Segal observes, 'a matter of family resemblances rather than strict codification';[22] it is governed by traits, not laws.[23] However, there is an intrinsic difficulty: any understanding of the traits that form the genre must be drawn from the material, yet how is one to select that material, without already making assumptions about what defines the genre? This thesis's analysis concentrates upon those novels

[19] Victor Hugo, 'Préface', to *Odes et Ballades* (1826), ed. by Pierre Albouy (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1964), pp.33-38 (p.34).
[20] Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Qu'est-ce qu'un genre littéraire* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1989), p.71.
[21] Schaeffer, p.8.
[22] Naomi Segal, *Narcissus and Echo: Women in the French récit* (Manchester; Manchester University Press, 1988), p.9.
[23] Also see Marielle Macé, 'tout trait de genre n'est pas une loi de genre', *Le Genre littéraire* (Paris: Flammarion, 2004), p.32.

entitled ‘confession’, seeing the act of entitling as a generic marker chosen by the author — and one which was particularly significant, given the presence of famous confessional predecessors and the increasing network of contemporary texts of confession. Tzvetan Todorov sees genres as ‘des horizons d’attente pour des lecteurs’.[24] Genre is in part created by how writers frame their work and by how readers read it; genres are a matter of conception and practice.[25] A title plays a significant role in this act of framing, in creating this 'horizon d'attente'. As Genette states, 'il y a donc dans le titre une part, très variable, bien sûr, d'allusion transtextuelle, qui est une ébauche de "contrat" générique'.[26]

This is by no means to argue that the title of ‘confession’ is the only significant generic marker, nor indeed that there are not texts which contain 'confession' within their title but which can hardly be deemed novels of confession. It is equally not to argue that there are not novels without this marker in their title which nonetheless share many of the traits present in this genre; this thesis does not contend that the texts studied in detail here exclusively constitute the genre. It similarly does not seek to suggest that the texts examined in this thesis could not be argued to belong to other genres in addition;[27] as Schaeffer observes, 'une œuvre littéraire, comme tout acte discursif, est une réalité sémiotique complexe et pluridimensionnelle; de ce fait, la question de son identité ne saurait avoir de

[24] Tzvetan Todorov, *La Notion de littérature et autres essais* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1987), p.34. 'Horizon d'attente' is also applied by Hans-Robert Jauss to refer to how genres condition reading in *Pour une herméneutique littéraire,* trans. by M. Jacob (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), p.281.
[25] See Tim Farrant, *Balzac’s Shorter Fictions,* 'Genre […] the expression of an intention, and a set of pointers towards reception'; also ‘Genre is a question of conception—the writer's, and the reader's’ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.3.
[26] Gérald Genette, *Palimpsestes: la littérature au second dégré* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), p.36.
[27] See Schaeffer, ‘On admettra facilement que souvent un texte peut appartenir à deux ou à plusieurs classes’ (p.69) and ‘Ce n’est jamais le texte *total* qui est identifié par un nom de genre’ (p.130).

réponse unique'.[28] Genres are fundamentally porous and are not a matter of clear-cut definition.[29] Derrida indeed argues that texts should be seen as *pertaining to,* rather than *belonging to* a genre: 'Un texte ne saurait *appartenir* à aucun genre. Tout texte *participe* d'un ou de plusieurs genres [...] mais cette participation n'est jamais une appartenance'.[30]

In claiming that these novels can be considered to form part of a specific genre, this thesis's argument is based on an understanding of genre as having permeable rather than hard and fast boundaries, of texts often engaging in more than one genre and of genres overlapping. In this conception of genre that sees it as founded on 'critères de similitude', 'confession' in the title is just one — though a highly significant one, as an act of generic self-definition by the authors which shapes the act of reading.

The other 'critères de similitude' for the novel of confession include a combination of the following traits. These novels focus on the interior, on thoughts and feelings; they contain a portrayal of transgression of some sort, often emotional; some sort of failure (often sexual or romantic) or loss; the depiction of a character who is isolated and conflicted within himself/herself; and an often ambiguous relationship to responsibility or guilt. Above all, these works all include an act of confession, or multiple acts of confession. This does not mean that they are all written in the first person — indeed, many of them are not. In some cases, the act of confession occurs within the narrative (as in Janin's *La Confession*) rather than being the narrative act itself. On another occasion, a character's original act of confession has been

[28] Schaeffer, p.79.
[29] Also see Genette, *Palimpsestes,* p.557: 'la porosité des cloisons entre les régimes tient surtout à la force de contagion, dans cet aspect de la production littéraire, du régime ludique'.
[30] Derrida, 'La loi du genre', in *Parages* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1986), pp.249-287 (p.264).

appropriated by an editor figure, who writes the protagonist's story in the third person (Montépin's *Confessions d'un bohême*), whilst, elsewhere, characters choose to write *their own* story in the third person, creating a distancing effect which denies responsibility (*Confession générale*). Other novels, including Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle,* Sand's *La Confession d'une jeune fille* and Mme du Saule's *Les Confessions d'une femme du siècle*, move between the first and third persons. As will be seen over the course of the thesis, these moments of paradoxical 'third-person confession' are one of the ways in which this genre interrogates and challenges the act of confession. Indeed, fundamentally, confession in these novels is not merely a device or technique through which the narrative emerges, but is rather essential to the *problématique*: these novels explore acts of confession which are difficult, destructive, or, paradoxically, even impossible.

Significantly, the novels not only share traits, but also regularly reference other novels of confession, either obliquely or directly. The writers have an awareness of certain ur-texts, or *hypotextes*[31] (most often, Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle*) to which they respond. In so doing, they engage in a series of what Genette terms 'relations transtextuelles'.[32] Some of these transtextual relationships match Genette's definition of 'intertextualité' — the practice of quoting, plagiarising or alluding.[33] Others engage in 'hypertextualité', of more or less explicit forms:

> toute relation unissant un texte B (que j'appellerai *hypertexte*) à un texte antérieur A (que j'appellerai [...] *hypotexte*), sur lequel il se greffe d'une manière qui n'est pas celle du commentaire [...] J'appelle donc hypertexte

[31] Genette, *Palimpsestes,* p.13.
[32] Genette, *Palimpsestes* p.8,
[33] Genette, *Palimpsests,* p.8. Soulié, for instance, explicitly references Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* when describing the relationship between a younger man and an older woman (*Confession générale,* pp.240-241).

> toute texte dérivé d'un texte antérieur par transformation [....] ou par [...] imitation.[34]

One such instance would be Mme du Saule's *Les Confessions d'une femme du siècle*, with its extensive hypertextual relationship to Musset's novel.[35] Other texts parody, not specifically one text, but generic tropes more broadly. [36] From the 1840s onwards, these parodic confessions start to emerge, as is well illustrated by the tellingly entitled *Les Confessions de Bambochinet, ouvrage taciturne et ennuyeux, contenant un tas de bêtises plus stupides les unes ques les autres, orné d'absurdités et enrichi de balourdises de plus en plus embêtantes* (1848)[37] or Champfleury's *Confessions de Sylvius. Clémence. Mme André. Eugénie la blanchisseuse. Mariana la peintre* (1849), which engages in an irreverent dialogue with the confessions of heartbroken protagonists that preceded it.[38] Other texts reconfigure the tropes of previous novels of confession into different contexts: Ourliac's *La Confession de Nazarille* (1840) exploits generic tropes to create a comic *mille-et-une nuits* of confession; whilst Montépin's *Confessions d'un bohême* (1849-50) remoulds the genre's traits into a fast-paced narrative of crime and fraudulent identities. In each case, these works strongly indicate the presence of a series of generic expectations which can be exploited, reworked or broken.

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[34] Gentte, *Palimpsestes,* pp.13-16.
[35] See Chapter III of this thesis, pp.245-246.
[36] Whilst some twentieth scholars have limited the definition of parody to the transformation of a specific work — 'la transformation ludique, comique ou satirique d'un texte singulier' (Daniel Sangsue, *La Parodie* (Paris: Hachette, 1994), pp.73-4) — the nineteenth-century understanding of the phenomenon is broader. Littré allows for parody to include the imitation of multiple works, defining parody as 'Ouvrage, en prose ou en vers, où l'on tourne en raillerie d'autres ouvrages, en se servant de leurs expressions et de leurs idées dans un sens ridicule ou malin' (Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française,* 4 vols (Paris: Hachette, 1872-1877), III, p.960). Larousse's definition is even more open — 'imitation, reproduction burlesque d'un objet quelconque'(*Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle,* 15 vols (Paris: Adminstration du Grand dictionnaire universel, 1865-1877), XII (1874), p.313).
[37] Leduc, *Confessions de Bambochinet, ouvrage taciturne et ennuyeux, contenant un tas de bêtises plus stupides les unes ques les autres, orné d'absurdités et enrichi de balourdises de plus en plus embêtantes* (Nantes: imprimerie de Busseuil, 1848). The work had another edition in 1851, suggesting popularity.
[38] Champfleury, *Confessions de Sylvius. Clémence. Mme André. Eugénie la blanchisseuse. Mariana la peintre,* 2nd edition (Brussels: Meline, Cans et compagnie, 1857).

Whilst arguing for this group of novels — which shares this series of paratextual,[39] thematic, formal, and transtextual traits — to be understood as a genre, this thesis thus also explores texts that sit on the edge of the genre, echoing certain elements, whilst subverting or parodying others*:*

> Que l'œuvre 'désobéisse' à son genre ne rend pas celui-ci inexistant; on est tenté de dire: au contraire. [...] Parce que la transgression, pour exister comme telle, a besoin d'une loi — qui sera précisément transgressé. On pourrait aller plus loin: la norme ne devient visible — ne vit — que grâce à ses transgressions.[40]

A text may very well both subscribe to a genre and parody it. Indeed, it is often in such parodies that one can feel the genre most strongly: the very fact that generic parody occurs helps to underline, and identify, the presence of generic traits.[41]

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(ii) The Catholic paradigm of confession

Todorov writes that all genres stem from an 'acte de parole' which undergoes 'plusieurs transformations' to become a literary genre.[42] The *acte de parole* from which the novel of confession stems is religious: Catholic confession. The word confession enters French from ecclesiastical Latin, in the late tenth century.[43] In that period, confession was far from the strictly regulated act it was to become. Confession had in fact evolved fairly organically during the first centuries of the

[39] Specifically in terms of their titles.
[40] Todorov*, La Notion de littérature,* p.29.
[41] See Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp.74-75: 'parody posits, as a prerequisite to its very existence, a certain aesthetic institutionalisation which entails the acknowledgemnt of recognisable, stable forms and conventions [....] Even in mocking, parody reinforces; in formal terms, it inscribes the mocked conventions onto itself, thereby guaranteeing their continued existence'.
[42] Todorov, *La Notion de littérature,* p.35, p.39.
[43] *Trésor de la langue française* cites *confession* as entering usage in French in ca.980 in *Passion du christ* with the sense of 'aveu de ses péchés fait à un prêtre' (*Trésor de la langue française*, available online < https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/confession>, [accessed 7 January 2020]).

Church, often being a public act before a community.[44] It only became codified as part of the Sacrament of Penance in 1215, by the fourth Lateran Council, which also compelled Christians to confess at least once yearly.[45] In the sixteenth century, the Council of Trent codified the sacrament further, encouraging Christians to confess more regularly, and placed a firm emphasis on the privacy of confession: following the Council, the confessional box was introduced. By the eighteenth century, confession was defined in the *Encylopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, specifically with reference to its private nature:

> La *confession,* dans un sens théologique, est une partie du sacrement de pénitence : c'est une déclaration que l'on fait à un prêtre de tous ses péchés pour en recevoir l'absolution. La confession doit être vraie, entière, détaillée, & tout ce qui s'y dit doit être enseveli dans un profond silence.[46]

The practice of Catholic confession in the nineteenth century continued to be governed by the framework set down in the Council of Trent: confession took place within a confessional, privately to a priest, with the aim of achieving absolution. In this model, the articulation of sin exists in order to erase the sin. Confession was argued to bring other benefits beyond absolution; as summarised by Chateaubriand in *Le Génie du christianisme* (1802), it could act both as a deterrent ('tous les hommes […] ont regardé le sacrament de Pénitence comme une des plus fortes barrières contre le vice')[47] and a source of hope ('sans cette institution salutaire, le

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[44] Jeremy Tambling, *Confession: Sin, Sexuality, The Subject* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p.35.
[45] 'Que tout fidèle de l'un et de l'autre sexe, qui est parvenu à l'âge de discrétion, confesse seul fidèlement ses péchés à son propre prêtre, au moins une fois l'an', Canon XXI du quatrième Concile de Latran, 1215, quoted by l'Abbé Ambroise Guillois, *Le Dogme de la confession vengé des attaques de l'hérésie et de l'incrédulité,* 3rd edn (Paris: Librarie Catholique et Liturgique, 1850), p.30.
[46] Edme-François Mallet and Antoine-Gaspard Boucher d'Argis, 'Confession', in *L'Encylopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* ed. by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, 17 vols (Paris: Briasson, le Breton, Durand, 1751-1772), III (1753), pp.848-9.
[47] François René de Chateaubriand, *Le Génie du christianisme,* ed. by Pierre Reboul (Paris: Flammarion, 1966), p.77.

coupable tomberait dans le désespoir').[48] Larousse's *Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle* explains that confession can be 'particulière' ('lorsqu'on n'accuse que les péchés commis depuis une *confession* précédente') or 'générale ('lorsqu'on accuse les péchés qu'on a commis pendant toute sa vie').[49] Larousse cites the Biblical verses regularly used by the Church in the nineteenth century as the theological basis for confession: 'Confessez vos péchés les uns aux autres' (Jacques 5:16) and,

> les péchés seront remis à ceux à qui vous les remettrez, ils seront retenus à ceux à qui vous les retiendrez […] si nous confessons nos péchés, Dieu juste et fidèle dans ses promesses nous les remettra (Jean 3:22).[50]

These verses are revealing precisely because of how little they reveal. The Bible is not prescriptive at all about confession: this was to become a major point of contention in the nineteenth century.

Significantly, the Council of Trent makes clear that not only sinful actions but also sinful thoughts and emotions must be confessed.[51] Furthermore, the confessant must take time alone prior to the confession for self-examination, to identify his/her sinful behaviour.[52] As Alain Corbin remarks, 'sans cesse, le chrétien est invité à traquer et à scruter ses pensées, ses désirs ainsi que la façon de s'en délecter et de

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[48] Chateaubriand, *Le Génie du christianisme,* p.78. Chateaubriand elsewhere articulates the great joy of his first confession: 'Si l'on m'avait débarrassée du poids d'une montagne, on ne m'eût pas plus soulagé: je sanglotais de bonheur' (Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe,* 12 vols (Paris: Eugène et Victor Penaud Frères, 1849-50) I, p.156).

[49] Pierre Larousse, 'Confession', *Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle*, IV (1869), pp.897-901 (p.898).

[50] Larousse, 'Confession', *Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle,* IV, p.898.

[51] The Council of Trent makes the importance of the revelation of thoughts clear in several places. The Catechism quotes Saint Cyprien: 'Quoique ces personnes n'aient point commis, en effet, le crime [...] néanmoins parce qu'elles en ont eu la pensée, elles doivent s'en confesser avec douleur au prêtre de Dieu' (*Le Catéchisme du Concile de Trente: Traduction nouvelle,* trans. by L'Abbé Doney (Dijon: Victor Lagier, 1840), p.503). Elsewhere, it states 'nous offensons Dieu par nos pensées, par nos paroles, et par nos actions' (p.475) and specifies that the Sacrament of Penitence concerns 'tous les péchés commis après le Baptême, par volonté ou par action' (p.466).

[52] The faithful must 'examiner souvent leur conscience et à rechercher s'ils ont gardé fidèlement les commandements de Dieu et de l'Église' (*Le Catéchisme du Concile de Trente,* p.491).

consentir au mal; cela afin de voir clair en lui'.[53] Peter Brooks argues this focus on the inner as well as the outer,

> both reflects and instigates the emergence of the modern sense of selfhood and the individual's responsibility for his and her actions, intentions, thoughts — and for the acts of speech that lay them bare.[54]

In *Histoire de la sexualité,* Foucault argues that confession played a major role in re-focussing literature away from recounting acts of heroism towards 'la tâche infinie de faire lever du fond de soi-même, entre les mots, une vérité'.[55]

If Catholic confession forges the way for articulating selfhood, then it also focusses the discourse around another topic, sex:

> Depuis la pénitence chrétienne jusqu'aujourd'hui, le sexe fut matière privilégiée de confession. Ce qu'on cache, dit-on. Et si c'était au contraire ce que, d'une façon toute particulière, on avoue? [...] La mise en discours du sexe [...] la dissémination et le renforcement du disparate sexuel sont peut-être deux pièces d'un même dispositif: elles s'y articulent grâce à l'élément central d'un aveu qui contraint à l'énonciation véridique de la singularité sexuelle aussi extrême qu'elle soit.[56]

Confession thus becomes essential to the articulation of sex, the major means by which it is given verbal form. What is hidden in society becomes what is articulated in confession. This focus on sex within Catholic confession is certainly substantiated by nineteenth-century Catholic texts: theologian and cardinal Thomas Gousset, writing in *Théologie morale à l'usage des curés et des confesseurs* (1844) comments,

> Les pensées déshonnêtes, les désirs impurs, les regards immodestes, les paroles obscènes, les baisers lascifs, les attouchements impudiques [… fournissent] la matière la plus ordinaire, la plus abondante des confessions.[57]

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[53]Alain Corbin, *L'Harmonie des plaisirs: Les manières de jouir du siècle des Lumières à l'avènement de la sexologie* (Paris: Éditions Perrin, 2008), p.292.
[54] Peter Brooks, *Troubling Confessions* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 2000), p.5.
[55] Michel Foucault, *L'Histoire de la sexualité: La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p.80.
[56] Foucault, p.82.
[57] Thomas Gousset, *Théologie morale a l'usage des curés et des confesseurs,* 5th edn (Paris: Lecoffre, 1848) p.284. Also see Alain Corbin, *L'Harmonie des plaisirs,* p.309: 'L'ensemble de ces processus conduit, en outre, à privilégier tout ce qui concerne la chair'; also see p.291, p.323.

The Catholic paradigm of confession is a major model with which novelists of confession engage. In the novel of confession, the *acte de parole* of Catholic confession undergoes various acts of transformation. It tends to be translated from a religious context to a secular one; from an oral act to a written one; from a private act to a public one; whilst the confessor is often transformed from being a priest to being a reader. As will be seen, these transformations reshape the act of confession entirely, to the extent that the novel of confession goes further than merely transforming Catholic confession: it subverts and destabilises the notions on which this *acte de parole* is built.

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(iii) The autobiographical paradigm : St Augustine, Rousseau and De Quincey

The 1835 edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française,* following its definition of confession in the singular, defines 'confessions' in the plural: *'*confessions, au pluriel, a été donné par différents auteurs, à des mémoires où ils font l'aveu des erreurs de leur vie. *Les Confessions de saint Augustin. Les Confessions de J.-J. Rousseau'*.[58] St Augustine's *Confessions* (397-400 AD) and Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782-9) were both widely read in nineteenth-century France; the works offered important models with which novelists engage. Whilst the *Dictionnaire* distinguishes between confession in the singular (denoting the Catholic act) and in the plural (referring to the Augustine/ Rousseau model), the novel of confession in the nineteenth century blurs these lines. Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* starts this hybridity: the singular 'la confession' in the title brings strongly into play

[58] 'Confession', *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française,* 2 vols (Paris: Imprimerie de l'institut de France, 1835) I, p.373.

the Catholic act of confession, whilst the narrative which emerges is, in some ways, a fictionalised version of the narratives of experiences, thoughts and emotions, created, in their different ways, by St Augustine, Rousseau and De Quincey.

St Augustine's *Confessions* are addressed to God, detailing the sins of his youth, his conversion to Christianity, before, in the final four books, embarking upon a theological analysis of the Bible, especially Genesis. For Augustine, 'confession' did not have the same specific and codified connotations it had for later writers: auricular Catholic confession did not exist then. St Augustine's use of confession involves both confessing his past transgressions and confessing his faith.[59] Using 'profession' and 'confession' interchangeably, his confessions are also a declaration of religious belief.[60] In the nineteenth century, translations of Augustine were published by eminent publishers, including Garnier Frères and Charpentier, signifying that his work was deemed a literary, as well as religious, text; during the century, over fifty new translations, re-editions, reprints, or versions of St Augustine's *Confessions* were published[61] — exceptional even when compared with other theological writings with wide readerships.[62] There was an avid demand for St Augustine's work amongst readers, including those who were also writers, like Sainte-Beuve, Musset, and Sand,[63] all of whom admired St Augustine.

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[59] Chloe Taylor, *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault: A Genealogy of the 'Confessing Animal'* (London: Routledge, 2009), p.27.
[60] Taylor, p.45.
[61] *Catalogue général des livres imprimés de la Bibliothèque nationale,* 231 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1897-1981), V, pp. 402-411.
[62] Thomas à Kempis's *Le Petit Jardin des roses et la Vallée des lis* (also called 'Hortulus Rosarum') saw fourteen editions over the course of the century; François de Sales's *Traité de l'amour de dieu* saw twenty-nine editions or reprints. François de Sales's *Introduction à la vie dévote* was one of the only religious texts that was more popular than Augustine's *Confessions* (it saw eighty-two editions or reprints). (*Catalogue général des livres imprimés de la Bibliothèque nationale*, LVI, pp.769-774 and LXXXI, pp.35-6).
[63] Pierre Courcelle, *Les Confessions de Saint-Augustin dans la tradition littéraire* (Paris: Études

Early translations of Augustine into French, for example Arnauld d'Andilly's in 1649, had recommended Augustine's *Confessions* primarily for their moral 'utilité'.[64] Significantly, nineteenth-century interpretations of St Augustine often focussed largely on what his text revealed about his (and by reflection, the reader's) selfhood. Félicité de Lamennais, in the preface to Saint-Victor's translation (1821), briefly pays tribute to the text as 'utile',[65] before shifting the focus onto the way that 'il n'est personne qui ne se reconnoisse dans ce tableau si frappant et si animé;'[66] Louis-Ignace Moreau, in his translation (1840) writes that,

> Cette Confession est le miroir le plus fidèle de toutes nos faiblesses, de toutes nos perplexités. Un homme, en parlant de lui-même, ne peut rien dire de vrai qui ne soit aussi vrai de tous les hommes; et le portrait de cet homme est le vivant portrait de notre siècle.[67]

This likening of St Augustine's work to a mirror echoes a metaphor which had become common in the 1830s to describe *novels.*[68] The image is reconfigured in a variety of ways across different works, where either the novel is deemed to act as a mirror (as in Stendhal's statement in *Le Rouge et le noir,* according to which, 'un roman est un miroir qui se promène sur une grande route')[69] or the writer is: an idea employed both by Balzac, writing in the preface to *La Peau de chagrin* in 1831,

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augustiniennes, 1963), p.467 and p.511. Also see George Sand, *Histoire de ma vie,* 20 vols (Paris: Victor Lecou, 1854-5), I (1854), p.22.

[64] Arnaud d'Andilly, *Les Confessions de Saint Augustin, traduites en français,* 2nd edn (Paris: Jean Camusat, 1649), p.i. Andilly mentions in passing how Augustine sheds light on the soul (p.i) but for Lammenais and Moreau this is much more central to their analysis.

[65] Félicité de Lammenais, 'Préface', to *Les Confessions de Saint Augustin, traduction nouvelle par M. de Saint-Victor,* 2nd edn (Paris: Charpentier, 1841), p.i.

[66] Lammenais, p.i.

[67] Louis-Ignace Moreau, *Les Confessions de Saint Augustin, Traduction nouvelle* (Paris: Debécourt, 1840), p.xx.

[68] In Moreau's comment regarding St Augustine, the mirror has become specifically a mirror of the soul, reflecting interiority. As will be seen later, this image of the mirror as revealing the life within is found regularly in novels of confession (see pp.183-185 of this thesis).

[69] Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le noir,* ed. by Anne-Marie Meininger, 2nd edn (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), p.479.

where the writer 'est obligé d'avoir en lui je ne sais quel miroir concentrique',[70] and Sand, who writes in the preface to *Indiana* (1832) that 'l'écrivain n'est qu'un miroir'.[71]

Saint-Marc Girardin, writing on Augustine in the *Revue des deux mondes* in 1840, uses the nineteenth-century discourse of *intimité* to write about his work: 'la décence du style du Saint Augustin tient à une qualité […] intime';[72] later, Girardin comments that, 'il semble qu'à travers ces récits pleins de gravité et de repentir circule je ne sais quel roman touchant et gracieux'.[73] Girardin's remark is again indicative of the extent to which Augustine's *Confessions* have acquired a literary, rather than purely religious, status. Furthermore, Girardin's comment reveals another central point, developed below:[74] the novel is now implicitly associated with the revelation of thoughts and emotions, a vehicle for accessing what is *intime.*

Several times in his article Girardin compares Saint Augustine's *Confessions* to Rousseau's[75] — a common comparison. As Alexandre Saint-Albin notes in *Une Confession publique* (1851): 'J'ai nommé tout à l'heure saint Augustin et Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Je n'ai pas besoin de m'excuser d'avoir fait ce rapprochement: tout le

[70] Balzac, *La Peau de chagrin* (Paris: C. Gosselin, 1831), p.21.
[71] George Sand, *Indiana* (Paris: J.-P. Roret, 1832), p.11. Abrams argues that the image of the mirror, which compares 'the mind to a reflector or external objects' and which was 'characteristic of much of the thinking from Plato to the eighteenth century', was largely replaced in the nineteenth century by the metaphor of the poetic mind being like a lamp, 'a radiant projection which makes a contribution to the objects it perceives' (M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition,* 2nd edn (New York: Norton and Company, 1958), p.vi.). However, these examples from the 1830s suggests that the mirror continues to persist prominently in the discourse surrounding the novel.
[72] Saint-Marc Girardin, 'Les Confessions de Saint Augustin', *Revue des deux mondes: nouvelle série,* vol 23 (1840), pp.609-621, (p.612).
[73] Saint-Marc Girardin, p.613.
[74] See pp.52-56 of this thesis.
[75] Girandin, pp.610-612.

monde l'avait fait avant moi'.[76] However, attitudes towards Rousseau were much more ambivalent than towards St Augustine. Rousseau's *Confessions*, published posthumously in two parts (1782, 1789) sold well in the nineteenth century, seeing over thirty-five editions or reprints;[77] yet Rousseau was a highly controversial figure, his *Confessions* both widely read and widely criticised. As Sainte-Beuve states, 'on a beaucoup dit du mal de Rousseau et de ses *Confessions,* tout en les goûtant'.[78]

Chateaubriand and Lamartine, who earlier in their careers had some admiration for Rousseau, ended up criticising him; Lammenais, Proudhon and Michelet all attacked him severely.[79] Janin describes Rousseau as 'un phenomène d'orgueil' for having written *Les Confessions.*[80] The Catholic Moreau, translator of Augustine's *Confessions*, attacks Rousseau's work as the 'crime d'une âme véritablement pétrie de boue':[81] far from confession absolving a crime, for Moreau, Rousseau's confession has itself *become* the crime. The major criticism levelled against Rousseau was indiscretion: Barbey d'Aurevilly, writing to Trebutien, comments,

> Faire une confidence à un ami comme vous […] n'est pas une Révélation à la Rousseau, dans un livre destiné à tout le monde. J'ai toujours méprisé Rousseau et ses façons de dire et de faire.[82]

Rousseau has become almost synonymous with revelation. Criticisms of Rousseau often revolved around what he revealed about others: 'on a demandé s'il avait le

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[76] Alexandre de Saint-Albin, *Une Confession publique* (Paris: C. Douniol, 1851), p.7.
[77] Data taken from *Catalogue général des livres imprimés de la Bibliothèque* nationale, CLVII, pp.475-478.
[78] Sainte-Beuve, '*Raphaël* par M. de Lamartine', *Causeries du lundi*, 15 vols (Paris: Garnier frères, 1851-1862), I (1851), pp.59-73 (p.69).
[79] Christine Planté 'Introduction', to 'À propos de Charmettes' by George Sand, in *George Sand critique,* ed. by Christine Planté (Tusson: Editions du Lérot, 2006), pp.623-627 (p.623).
[80] Jules Janin, *Histoire de la littérature dramatique,* 6 vols (Paris: Michel-Lévy, 1853-58), V (1855), p.13.
[81] Quoted by Raymond Trousson, *Rousseau et sa fortune litteraire* (Paris: Nizet, 1977), p.95.
[82] Barbey d'Aurevilley, letter to Rebutien, March 1854, quoted by Philippa Lewis, *Intimacy and Distance: Conflicting Cultures in Nineteenth-Century France* (Legenda: Cambridge, 2017), p.77.

droit d'écrire les *Confessions* des autres en écrivant les siennes'.[83] Catholics were outraged by the fact that Rousseau had made public an act, and information, that should be private, a point dramatised by George Sand's dialogue in 'À propos de Charmettes' (1863).[84] Oscar Wilde might well comment, 'humanity will always love Rousseau for having confessed his sins, not to a priest, but to the world',[85] but this was far from true in nineteenth-century France.

It is in this public confession that Rousseau is most radical; Rousseau appropriates a doctrine of confession kept secret by the Church from the sixteenth century and makes it open. Rousseau mentions God very briefly at the beginning ('Que la trompette du Jugement dernier sonne quand elle voudra, je viendrai, ce livre à la main, me présenter devant le souverain juge'),[86] but, after this, the framework of divine judgement disappears. *Les Confessions* at times seem addressed to 'a reader' (with whom Rousseau sometimes 'engages in fictive dialogue'); at times, to 'a putative witness […] reduced most often to an indefinite *on'*.[87] The act of confession becomes essentially secular, confessing to his fellow man. Rousseau's influence is so strong that, following him, it is not possible to write a confession (autobiographical or novelistic) in a purely religious context. Rousseau's *Confessions* do detail his transgressions, but they are, more widely, a narrative of his life, experiences, thoughts and feelings: Rousseau's act of confession is as much about subjectivity and selfhood as it is about confessing wrongdoing in a Catholic sense.

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[83] G.-H. Morin, 'Rousseau', *Nouvelle Biographie générale depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à nos jours,* ed. by Ferdinand Hoefer, 46 vols (Paris: Firmin Didot frères, 1866), XLII, p.762.
[84] George Sand, 'A propos de Charmettes', in *George Sand critique,* pp.623-656.
[85] Oscar Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist' (first published under the title, 'The True Function and Value of Criticism' in 1890), reprinted in *Literary Criticism of Oscar Wilde,* ed. by Stanley Weintraub (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), pp.197-228 (p.197).
[86] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Confessions,* ed. by J.-B. Pontalis (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p.33.
[87] Jean Starobinski ,'The Style of Autobiography' in *Literary Style: A Symposium,* ed. by Seymour Chatman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp.285-96 (p.291).

Whilst Rousseau's *Confessions* were subject to intense criticism, he was also lauded by many. Alfred de Musset's father, Musset-Pathay was an eminent Rousseau scholar and a fierce defender of Rousseau against the Restoration's attacks on his character[88] — Rousseau would have been omnipresent for a young Alfred. Sainte-Beuve, acknowledging Rousseau's influence, writes to George Sand of Rousseau, 'Nous sommes après tout ses enfants, et nous, il ne nous a pas rejetés, il nous a faits'.[89] Later in the century, Larousse describes Rousseau's *Confessions* as 'un des chefs-d'œuvre de notre littérature, et le monument le plus extraordinaire, par son originalité et sa hauteur, qu'un écrivain ait jamais tenté d'élever à sa mémoire'.[90] Rousseau's *Confessions* spawned many nineteenth-century autobiographical confessions, making an irony of Rousseau's claim 'je forme une entreprise qui n'eut jamais d'exemple et dont l'exécution n'aura point d'imiteurs'.[91] Indeed, in the opening to *Mémoires et confessions d'un comédien* (1839), Jean-Edme Paccard humorously rewrites Rousseau's claim of originality: 'je forme une entreprise qui a déjà eu nombre d'exemples et qui, sans doute, aura beaucoup d'imitateurs',[92] whilst Proudhon wryly remarks in his *Les Confessions d'un révolutionnaire*, 'puisque tout le monde se confesse […] je veux, moi aussi, parler à mes concitoyens'.[93]

De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* offers a third frame of influence; the work was available for the period here only in the versions by Musset and (from

[88] Trousson, p.85, p. 77 (n.).
[89] Sainte-Beuve, letter to George Sand, 9 June 1863, quoted by Christine Planté in 'George Sand: Fils de Jean-Jacques', in *George Sand: Palimpsestes, échanges, réécritures*, ed. by Nigel Harkness and Jacinta Wright (London: Peter Lang, 2011), pp.23-46 (p.42).
[90] Larousse, 'Confession', *Grand Dictionnaire universel,* IV, p.901.
[91] Rousseau, p.33.
[92] Jean-Edme Paccard, *Mémoires et confessions d'un comédien* (Paris: A. Pougin, 1839), p.i.
[93] Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Les Confessions d'un révolutionnaire, pour servir à l'histoire de la révolution de février* (Paris: au bureau du journal "la Voix du peuple", 1849), p.3.

1860) by Baudelaire: a full translation finally appeared in 1890, translated by Victor Ducreux.[94] De Quincey's *Confessions* continue the secularisation started by Rousseau. However, unlike Rousseau (and unlike Augustine), De Quincey makes confession about part, not the whole, of a life. De Quincey's confession is characterised by fragmentation, focussed around the opium eater's relationship to the drug. De Quincey's text raises difficult questions about selfhood: the self is largely portrayed as other, paradoxically only really accessible through opium.[95] Furthermore, the confessant finds himself unable to control himself: the opium-eater desires change but is unable to implement it:

> le mangeur d'opium [...] reste à souhaiter tout ce qu'il devrait faire, justement comme un homme qu'une langueur mortelle contraint à garder le lit [..] Il maudit les chaînes qui paralysent ses mouvements. Il donnerait sa vie pour se lever et marcher; mais aussi faible que le plus faible enfant, il ne peut même l'essayer. (*L'Anglais mangeur d'opium,* pp.178-9)[96]

In De Quincey's text, the topos is ontological rather than ethical. The relationship to transgression is problematic, with opium-eating even framed as a 'paradise'[97] (perhaps thus inspiring the title for Baudelaire's *Les Paradis artificiels).* The confession is not about the opium-eater trying to rid himself of sins so as to go to heaven, but rather, telling the story of his creation of an artificial paradise on earth. For De Quincey's opium eater, the creative possibilities of opium completely eclipse any moral framework.[98] Opium — initially at least — offers the antidote to pain (both that of toothache and of being alive) and inspires the creative spirit. When the

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[94] *Les Confessions d'un Anglais mangeur d'opium, première traducton intégrale,* trans. by Victor Ducreux (Paris: Savine, 1890).
[95] Tambling, p.124.
[96] 'The opium eater [...] lies in sight of all that he would fain perform, just as a man forcibly confined to his bed by the mortal languor of a relaxing disease [...]: he curses the spells which chain him down from motion; he would lay down his life if he might but get up and walk; but he is powerless as an infant, and cannot even attempt to rise' (De Quincey, p.66).
[97] De Quincey, p.45.
[98] Damian Catani, 'The "Spleen" and "Ideal" of Opium: Baudelaire and Thomas De Quincey', *Dix-Neuf* , 17 (2013), pp.237-250 (p.238).

negative side of the opium eater's addiction is represented, it is not portrayed as a crime, but rather as a source of suffering.[99] The ending further undermines any moral framework: De Quincey declares both that 'the moral of this narrative is addressed to the opium-eater […] if he is taught to fear and tremble, enough has been effected'[100] — and yet also that 'opium is the true hero of the tale'.[101] In Musset's version, the moral is even less clear. He does not translate De Quincey's claim that the moral is addressed to the opium eater; instead, the only mention of a moral is, 'je passai quatre mois à me débattre, à crier […] à m'agiter sans pouvoir fermer l'œil. Telle est la morale de l'histoire' (p.221). In this more elliptical version of De Quincey, the moral seems to be that opium withdrawal is awful (not, don't use it in the first place). As will be seen, a problematic relationship to transgression becomes a major theme in the novels of confession of the 1830s, 40s, 50s and 60s.

Prior to Musset's version, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* had been virtually unknown in France.[102] There are conflicting narratives around the reception of Musset's translation. Paul de Musset, in his biography of his brother (1877), claims Musset's version was not commercially successful, disappearing 'dans un flot de nouveautés littéraires'. [103] However, there is significant evidence to the contrary.

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[99] Opium is a double-edged sword: it might relieve pain but it also causes it. De Quincey has a section entitled 'The Pains of Opium' (p.61); Musset writes about the 'peine' (p.91), a translation which brings into play a psychological, as well as physical, meaning.
[100] De Quincey, p.78.
[101] De Quincey, p.77.
[102] *La Pandore* had previously published several extracts in its issues from 29 and 30 September 1827, but 'cette traduction partielle semble être passée inaperçue' (Michèle Stäuble-Lipman Wulf, 'Introduction', to *Charles Baudelaire: Un mangeur d'opium* (Neuchâtel: Baconnière, 1976), p.33); besides these select fragments, Musset's version was the first (see Liz Constable, 'Balzac's Golden Triangles' in *Disciplining Modernism,* ed. by Pamela L. Caughie (London: Palgrave, 2009) p.109-126 (p.126)).
[103] Paul de Musset, *Biographie de Alfred de Musset, sa vie et ses oeuvres, par Paul de Musset, avec fragments inédits en prose et en vers et lettres inédites* (Paris: Charpentier, 1877), p.90.

Balzac, in *Les Litanies romantiques* (published in *La Caricature,* December 1830), references Musset's work alongside other well-known texts of the time:

> M. S.... qui jouit en ce moment à Paris de la singulière célébrité qu'y donne une grande fortune, ne sachant par quelle spécialité se spécialiser, s'est constitué le Mécène de la littérature [...] Parlez-lui du *Mangeur d'opium,* des *Contes d'Espagne,* de *Melmoth,* de *Smarra* [...] Oh! alors, il s'émeut, il s'anime.[104]

Indeed, as G.A. Astre argues, Balzac himself must have read Musset's work soon after its publication: it is almost certainly the catalyst for the reference to a 'mangeur d'opium' in *La Physiologie du mariage.*[105] Balzac also uses *L'Anglais mangeur d'opium* as the basis for sections of his short story, *Opium* (November 1830),[106] and as an inspiration for a passage describing the antiques shop in *La Peau de chagrin* (1831).[107] Gautier too was familiar with *L'Anglais mangeur d'opium,* with echoes of the opium-eater's nightmare visions present in *Albertus* (1831),[108] with the opium eater's depiction of the Piranesi staircases finding an echo in *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835)[109] and with Gautier's short story *La Pipe d'opium*

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[104] Honoré de Balzac, *Les Litanies romantiques,* published in *La Caricature,* December 1830; reproduced in Balzac, *Œuvres diverses,* ed. by Pierre-Georges Castex, Roland Chollet and René Guise, 2 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1990), II, pp.822-827 (p.822). Also see G.A. Astre in 'Honoré de Balzac et l'Anglais mangeur d'opium', *Revue de littérature comparée,* 15 (1935), pp.755-772 (p.756); see too Constable, p.118; and Stäuble-Lipman Wulf, p35.

[105] 'De même que le mangeur d'opium doit toujours doubler ses doses pour obtenir le même rêsultat, de même notre espirit [...] veut que les sentiments les idées et les choses aillent en croissant' (Balzac, *Physiologie du mariage,* ed. by Samuel S. de Sacy (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p.186**,** quoted by Astre, p.757).

[106] Astre, pp.757-760; Stäuble-Lipman Wulf, p35. As Astre (p.756) and Constable (p.118) both note, Balzac could not read English, so he had most certainly read De Quincey in Musset's version, rather than in De Quincey's original. Furthermore, certain sections of *Opium* derive from parts of Musset's version that Musset added himself and that therefore do not appear in De Quincey's original (Astre, p.758).

[107] See R. Hughes, 'Vers la contrée du rêve: Balzac, Gautier et Baudelaire disciples de Quincey', *Mercure de France,* 293 (1939), pp.545-593 (pp.545-6). The passage in question appears in *La Peau de Chagrin,* ed. by André Pieyre de Mandiargues (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), p.41 and in *L'Anglais mangeur d'opium,* p.188.

[108] Hughes, p.565.

[109] Stäuble-Lipman Wulf, pp.35-36.

(1838) further suggesting awareness.[110] Furthermore, Musset was part of Hugo's *Cénacle* and knew Vigny, Nodier, Mérimée, Sainte-Beuve and Dumas; it seems likely that at least some of the members of the *Cénacle* would have read the first major published work of one of its youngest members.[111] Despite Paul de Musset's comments, his brother's version of De Quincey did not disappear. Alfred de Musset reworked a section of it himself (the passage relating to the Piranesi staircases) into a passage in *La Mouche* (1853).[112] *L'Anglais mangeur d'opium* saw two further reappearances after its first publication. An extract was reprinted in the magazine *Le Magasin pittoresque* in 1840;[113] *Le Moniteur du bibliophile* published a new edition of the full text in 1878.

Musset's version of De Quincey did not only impact through those who read it directly; arguably its most significant influence came through its deep effect on Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle,* which was a seminal text for the development of the novel of confession. The focus on only part of a life filters into Musset's novel*:* Octave's confession is focussed on 'un certain temps de l'existence d'un homme [qui] a été blessé et gangrené par une maladie morale' (p.19). Like De Quincey, *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* explores 'plaisirs... sensuels' (*L'Anglais mangeur d'opium,* p.ix), in Octave's case, alcohol and women. Both confessions explore experiences which, whilst not illegal, are social transgressions. The opium-

[110] Stäuble-Lipman Wulf remarks on the similarity between the moment in which Gautier's 'rêveur apperçoit dans un coin de la chambre la figure blanche et douce d'une jeune inconnue et, croyant la reconnaître, se lance à sa poursuite' and Musset's portrayal of 'la rencontre inattendu d'Ann' (p.36).
[111] See *Correspondance d'Alfred de Musset: 1826-1839,* ed. by Marie Cordroc'h; Roger Pierrot; Loïc Chotard (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985), pp.29-34. By March 1830, he was also writing to Lamartine (p.45). Also see Hughes, p.562.
[112] See Musset, *La Mouche* (Paris: A. Ferroud, 1892), pp.32-35, a direct reworking of *L'Anglais mangeur d'opium,* pp.191-2. Also see Lucius Keller, *Piranèse et les romantiques français* (Paris: J. Corti, 1966), p.54.
[113] *Le Magasin pittoresque,* ed. by Édouard Charton (Paris: aux bureaux des abonnements et des ventes, 1840), p.110-12.

eater's ambiguous relationship to guilt and framing of his experiences in terms of suffering finds an echo in Octave's emphasis on psychological pain and his shying away from responsibility. Like the opium eater, Octave finds himself incapable of fighting his darker side: 'plus je voulais lutter avec l'esprit de ténèbres qui me saisissait en ce moment, plus l'épaisse nuit redoublait dans ma tête' (*La Confession d'un enfant du siècle,* p.183).

The resonances of De Quincey can be felt also on a micro-scale in *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle.* Octave's fears — 'Je ne sortais plus; le monde m'apparaissait comme peuplé de monstres, de bêtes fauves et de crocodiles' (p.51) — echo the opium eater's nightmares ('je sentais les baisers froids et hideux des crocodiles', p.199).[114] Elsewhere, the opium-eater dreams of the apocalypse:

> des figures de femmes avec des visages dont la vue valait pour moi le monde entier et qui ne restaient qu'un moment, et puis, c'était des adieux déchirants, et puis adieu pour jamais! [...] — Adieu pour jamais! Et encore et encore répété —Adieu pour jamais. (p.219)[115]

Octave's final words to Brigitte, who could be described as a 'femme [...] dont la vue valait pour moi le monde entier', are 'adieu pour jamais' (p.307). Musset can also be seen to develop ideas in his translation of De Quincey that he furthers in own novel. In *L'Anglais mangeur d'opium,* Musset invents a passage where the opium-eater describes a dissection at medical school:

> La première fois que j'entrai dans les salles de l'École de Médecine [...] il y avait sur la table un grand cadavre étendu dans un drap blanc, on n'en voyait

[114] In De Quincey's English, 'I was kissed, with cancerous kisses, by crocodiles' (p.73). Also see Claude Duchet on the shared reference to crocodiles ('Preface', to *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle'* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1968), pp.i-xxvii (p.viii)).

[115] In De Quincey,'s English: 'female forms, and the features that were worth all the world to me, and but a moment allowed—and clasped hands, and heart-breaking partings, and then—everlasting farewells! [...] the sound was reverberated—everlasting farewells! And again and yet again reverberated —everlasting farewells!' (p.76).

> que les pieds; et à côté sur la table, un bras écorché qui nageait dans un sang caillé [...] La leçon commença. (p.209-210)

Octave compares the process of confessing a part of one's life to the way that,

> un blessé atteint de la gangrène s'en va dans un amphithéâtre se faire couper un membre pourri; et le professeur qui l'ampute, couvrant d'un linge blanc le membre séparé du corps, le fait circuler de mains en mains par tout l'amphithéâtre, pour que les élèves l'examinent. (p.19)[116]

Shared between the texts is of course the image of the dissection class, the teacher and the students, the 'bras' or the 'membre', and the 'linge blanc' or 'drap blanc'.[117] In Octave's image, the corpse has (disturbingly) morphed into a living human, and Octave, the speaker, far from being the perceiver of the dissection, becomes the dissected himself.

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(iv) Novelistic predecessors: the erotic novel of confession

The very nature of religious confession — revolving around the avowal of acts of transgression — means that confession as a *literary* form can easily become transgressive itself, reliving the illicit (and often sexual, as Foucault argues) acts that it depicts. Françoise Simonet-Tenant notes that, searching the term 'confessionnal' in the database *Frantext* in the period between 1600 and 1800 (1130 texts in total) yields twenty-nine occurrences, of which the vast majority date from the eighteenth century. In the majority, it is a woman who undergoes the act of confession, and, in a significant number, the act of confession occurs 'dans une atmosphère de

[116] This was one of the passages that Musset then removed from his novel for the one-volume re-edition by Charpentier in 1840 (see Gérard Barrier, 'Notice' in his edition of *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle,* pp.321-325 (p.324)).
[117] Also see Maija Lehtonen, *Essai sur* La Confession d'un enfant du siècle (Helsinki : Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1982), p.77 and Duchet p.viii, both of whom also mention this episode.

voyeurisme qui nous renvoie au roman érotique et libertin'.[118] The most extreme example of the phenomenon described by Simonet-Tenant lies in the Marquis de Sade's *La Nouvelle Justine* (1797). Justine, desperate to confess the sexual sins of which she has been the victim, confesses to the monk Severino, who finds her confession deeply arousing and who is accompanied on his side of the confessional by 'un jeune garcon de quinze ans', whom he proceeds to sodomise whilst listening to Justine's confession.[119] Sade's obscene portrayal of a confession encapsulates a significant point: there is the potential for the avowal of sexual sin to be erotic for those who hear (or read) it.

Eighteenth-century novels entitled 'confessions' — these novels tend to use the plural form — invite the reader to take pleasure in the recounting of sexual sin. They situate the reader in the role of an unscrupulous, sinning confessor, finding arousal in the confession he receives. Charles Duclos's *Confessions du Comte de **** , published in 1742[120] and centring on the amorous adventures of the philandering protagonist, had a substantial legacy: by 1776, it was already in its eighth edition. The anonymous *Confessions de Madame la Comtesse de ***, écrites par elle-même à une ami*e (1744) quickly followed the publication of Duclos's novel. The text, offering a female protagonist's perspective on matters of love and sex, is framed as a response to the earlier work — the confessions 'étoient faites pour servir de

[118] Françoise Simonet-Tenant, 'À la recherche des prémices d'une culture de l'intime', in *Pour une histoire de l'intime et de ses variations,* ed. by Anne Coudreuse and Françoise Simonet-Tenant (Paris: l'Harmattan, 2009), pp.39-62 (p.42).
[119] Marquis de Sade, *La Nouvelle Justine ou Les malheurs de la vertu,* 4 vols (Holland: 1797), II, pp.54-55. Also see Corbin, *L'Harmonie des plaisirs,* p.314.
[120] Charles Duclos, *Confessions du Comte de **** (Amsterdam, 1742).

contraste au *Confessions du comte de ****'[121] — and as a sort of correction of it: the confessant opens her confession by claiming, 'je puis, à plus juste titre que le comte imaginaire, soutenir à mon tour, qu'il n'est point d'hommes dignes d'un attachement parfait de notre part'.[122] Over the course of the following decades, further salacious confessions were published, including Jean-Baptiste-Michel Magny's *Mémoires de Justine, ou Les Confessions d'une fille du monde, qui s'est retirée en province* (1754);[123] Jean-Louis Galtier's *Les Confessions de Mademoiselle de Mainville, Duchesse de ***, à la Comtesse de N *** son amie* (1768);[124] as well as the anonymous *Les Confessions d'une courtisane devenue philosophe* (1784),[125] and the more strongly erotic novel by Mathieu-François Pidansat de Mairobert, first published as *Confession de Mademoiselle Sapho ou La Secte des Anandrynes* in 1784, and republished under the title *La Jolie Tribade, ou Confessions d'une jeune fille* in 1797.[126] The trend for titillating confessions continued into the early nineteenth century, with the anonymous *Les Confessions de Clémentine, écrites par elle-même* (1817)[127] recounting multiple amorous encounters. Some of these erotic depictions of confession disappeared fairly rapidly; others, like Sade's, were banned and hence only known to a limited readership (though, in the case of Sade, that readership included Janin, who wrote a small volume on Sade, published in 1834).[128] Duclos's novel was referenced in *Confessions de Madame ***: Principes de morale pour se*

[121] Anonymous, *Confessions de Madame la Comtesse de ***,* 2 vols (London: Samuel Harding, 1744), I, p.vi.
[122] Anonymous, *Confessions de Madame la Comtesse de ***,* I, p.2.
[123] Jean-Baptiste-Michel Magny, *Mémoires de Justine, ou Les confessions d'une fille du monde, qui s'est retirée en province* (London: Jean Norse, 1754).
[124] Jean Louis Galtier. *Les Confessions de Mademoiselle de Mainville, Duchesse de ***, à la Comtesse de N *** son amie* (Paris: Dufour, Lyon: Cellier, 1768).
[125] *Les Confessions d'une courtisane devenue philosophe* (London, 1784).
[126] *La Jolie Tribade, ou Confessions d'une jeune fille* (Paris, 1797).
[127] *Les Confessions de Clementine, écrites par elle-même* (Paris: Guillaume, 1817).
[128] Jules Janin, *Le Marquis de Sade* (Paris: Marchands de nouveautés, 1834).

conduire dans le monde (1817),[129] indicative of its durable influence; it then had a new edition in 1889.

The novel of confession as it develops from 1830, like its erotic predecessors, often focusses on sexual or romantic love. However, far from a catalogue of conquests recounted for the purpose of eroticism, these nineteenth-century novels of confession often explore moments of sexual failure. Sex and sexual desire are not employed as devices designed to arouse the reader, but rather as keys into the — often difficult — world of the *intime.*

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(v) *Vie privée* and *vie intime*

A further ingredient was present in shaping the novel of confession besides those already discussed: a wider culture surrounding *la vie privée* and *la vie intime* that dominated in public interest and discourse. The concept of private life had taken shape in the eighteenth century, where the concept of *privé* 'jadis insignifiant et négatif [s'est] révalorisé au point de devenir synonyme de bonheur'. [130] The nineteenth century then became 'un âge d'or du privé, où les mots et les choses se précisent et les notions s'affinent'.[131] *La vie privée* was associated with family life, with the home, often specifically with rooms like the *boudoir* and the *salon.*[132] It

[129] Anonymous, *Confessions de Madame ***: Principes de morale pour se conduire dans le monde* (Paris: Librarie Maradan, 1817), p.v.
[130] Michelle Perot, 'Avant et ailleurs', in *Histoire de la vie privée: de la Révolution à la Grande Guerre,* ed. by Philippe Ariès and George Duby, 2nd edn (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990), pp.15-18 (p.15).
[131] Michelle Perot, 'Avant et ailleurs', p.9.
[132] Michelle Perot, 'Les Acteurs', in *Histoire de la vie privée,* pp.79-80 (p.79).

exists behind closed doors, as Littré's definition makes clear: 'la vie privée doit être murée'.[133]

The converse of the refining of the notion of *la vie privée* in the period and the emphasis on protecting it, is the desire to penetrate such spaces, clearly manifested in the literary landscape. Balzac's *Scènes de la vie privée* encapsulates the duality of the private and its literary disclosure. The vogue for biography — from the biographical dictionary,[134] to the more commercially-driven journalistic portraits, such as those in Mirecourt's weekly *Les Contemporains*[135] — is another indication of this interest in *la vie privée.* There was simultaneously a growing culture of celebrity and of staging the self for public consumption.[136] *Mémoires* flourished, especially during the Restoration: those of Fouché, chief of police (1824), the arch-criminal-turned-detective, Vidocq (1828-1829), and the executioner Sanson, part ghost-written by Balzac and published in 1830, long after Sanson's death in 1806. Later, Chateaubriand continued the trend of *mémoires* with *Mémoires d'outre tombe* (1849-50). It was not only the famous who engaged in the vogue, as Janin, who is particularly scathing about 'ces publications honteuses'[137] makes clear: 'en ce temps-là [la Restauration], quiconque avait été non pas *quelqu'un* […] mais seulement quelque chose [...] écrivait [...] ses mémoires, impunément et

[133], Émile Littré, 'Privé', *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, III (1874), p.1325, quoted by Michelle Perot, 'Manières d'habiter', in *Histoire de la vie privée,* pp.281-297 (p.281).
[134] Like the fifty-two-volume *Biographie universelle ancienne et moderne*, published between 1811 and 1828, by Louis-Gabriel Michaud. Other instances of these biographies included Théophile Gautier's *Les Grotesques* (1844), which united the individual pieces about writers that had appeared in in *La France littéraire* from 1834, and Sainte-Beuve's *Portraits contemporains* (1846) (Anne Jefferson, *Biography and the Question of Literature in France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.84, p.86).
[135] The first edition of *Les Contemporains* dates from 1857. It comprised biographies of living, and normally, literary, figures (Jefferson, pp.85-6).
[136] See Antoine Lilti, *Figures publiques: L'Invention de la célébrité 1750-1850* (Paris: Fayard 2014), p.297-304.
[137] Jules Janin, *Histoire de la littérature dramatique,* III, p.119.

impudemment'.[138] The novel of confession draws on this interest in the personal, taking readers into its characters' private lives, examining how they behave in their closest relationships and behind closed doors.

However, the novel of confession does more than take us into private physical spaces: it also takes its readers into the spaces of the mind. In this it is inspired by the parallel culture of *intimité.* 'Intime' refers to the life within the self. The *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* defines *intime* as, 'intérieur et profond. Il se dit surtout de ce qui fait l'essence d'une chose [...] De ce qui existe au fond de l'âme'.[139] *Intimité* is defined by the *Académie* as 'qualité de ce qui est intime', including 'liaison intime',[140] and by Littré as 'le fond caché de l'intérieur de l'homme'.[141] Like *privé,* the concept of the *intime* developed in the eighteenth century but came to dominate in the nineteenth. Lewis argues that a 'self-conscious culture of intimacy' reigned;[142] whilst Brigitte and José-Luis Diaz state, 'incontestablement, le XIXe siècle a été le siècle de l'intime: sinon celui de sa naissance [...] du moins celui de son invention et

[138] Janin, *Histoire de la littérature dramatique,* III, p.115. It should be noted that, in the French consciousness of the time, the scope and outlook of *mémoires* differs somewhat from that of autobiographical *confessions*. The 1835 *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* defines *mémoires* as: 'relations écrites par ceux qui ont eu part aux affaires publiques, ou qui en ont été les témoins oculaires' (II, p.187). *Mémoires* are a personal account of history; they are fundamentally outward looking — a point well illustrated by the subtitle of Sanson's memoirs: *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la Révolution française*. By contrast, *confessions* are inward-looking. If *mémoires* offer the *histoire du temps,* then confession attempts to offer the *histoire du cœur.* Signficantly, the novel of confession tends to engage very little with contemporary events: these narratives often centre on characters who feel themselves to be cut off from society and from history (as Octave expresses in Chapter II of *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle*). Novels of confession tend to depict emotional, not political, turmoil.

[139] 'Intime', *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française,* II, p.53. *Intime,* over the course of the nineteenth century, came also to be used as a noun to 'evoke the sense of an inner life which can be shared with, or withheld from, others' (Philippa Lewis, *Intimacy and Distance: Conflicting Cultures in Nineteenth-Century France* (Legenda: Cambridge, 2017), p.18).

[140] 'Intimité', *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française,* II, p.53.

[141] Émile Littré, 'Intimité', *Dictionnaire de la langue française,* III (1874), p.143.

[142] Lewis, p.1.

de son sacre comme valeur à la fois existentielle et esthétique'.[143] Philippa Lewis's research reveals a relative increase of 183% in the use of *intime* in the nineteenth century, and a relative increase of 328% in *intimité.*[144] *Intimité* dominates as a discourse and as a theme. George Sand frames her monumental *Histoire de ma vie* (1854-5) through the prism of *intimité:* 'Je raconte ici une histoire intime. L'humanité a son histoire intime dans chaque homme'.[145] In another manifestation of the culture of *intimité,* diary writing became an avid nineteenth-century practice — espoused by, amongst others, Stendhal, Constant, Vigny, Michelet and Barbey d'Aurevilley[146] — offering commercial potential later in the century, most significantly with the publication of Eugénie de Guérin's *Journal et lettres, publiés avec l'assentiment de sa famille par G.-S Trebutien*.[147]

The *goût* for *intimité* was strongly manifested in novels. Goethe's *Passions du jeune Werther* (first translated into French in 1777 and enormously popular during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries) had brought readers a literature driven by interiority, subjectivity and emotion. In 1795, Mme de Staël would declare that novels could teach more about humanity than history: 'l'histoire n'atteint point à la vie des hommes privés, aux sentiments',[148] whilst, when novels are at their best, 'rien ne donne une connaissance aussi intime du cœur humain, que ces peintures de

[143] Brigitte and José-Luis Diaz, 'Le siècle de l'intime', in *Pour une histoire de l'intime et ses variations*, pp.117-146 (p.117).
[144] Relative in the sense that she takes account of the different corpus sizes of published works between each century (see Lewis p.19).
[145] George Sand, *Histoire de ma vie,* IV (1854), p.252-3.
[146] Brigitte and José-Luis Diaz, p.133.
[147] Eugénie de Guérin, *Journal et lettres, publiés avec l'assentiment de sa famille par G.-S Trebutien* (Paris: Didier, 1862).
[148] Mme de Staël, *Essai sur les fictions,* in *Zulma et Trois Nouvelles, Précédé d'un essai sur les fictions* (Londres: Colurn, 1813), p.38.

toutes les circonstances de la vie privée et des impressions qu'elles font naître'.[149] In the early nineteenth century, a number of novels appeared which portrayed a protagonist not in terms of 'les aventures de sa vie, [...] mais les sentiments secrets de son âme':[150] Chateaubriand's *Atala* (1801) and *René* (1802), Staël's own *Delphine* (1802) and *Corinne* (1807); Krüdener's *Valérie* (1803); Senancour's *Oberman* (1804); Constant's *Adolphe* (1816), Duras's *Ourika* (1824) and *Édouard* (1825).[151]

Popular in the century's early years, it was 'in the 1830s that intimacy came into public and critical consciousness fully as a category and quality of writing'.[152] Sainte-Beuve focusses on the 'roman intime' in his 1832 essay, 'Du roman intime ou de *Mademoiselle de Liron*';[153] commending *Mademoiselle de Liron* for its emotional authenticity: it is 'une histoire touchante qui [....] bien qu'offerte sous la forme du roman, garde à chaque ligne les traces de la réalité observée ou sentie'.[154] *Oberman* found public favour from 1830 onwards, partly thanks to Sainte-Beuve and Sand's praise in articles of 1832 and 1833.[155] Sand saw the start of a new style of literature emerging in *Oberman*: a literature which 'se prépare et s'avance à grands pas, idéale, intérieure, ne relevant que de la conscience humaine'.[156] Nodier, in 1833, urges

[149] Mme de Staël, *Essair sur les fictions,* p.42.
[150] Chateaubriand, *René,* ed. by Jean-Claude Berchet (Paris: Librarie Generale francaise, 1989), p. 156.
[151] As Jann Matlock argues, these novels (she refers specifically to *Delphine, Valérie* and *Oberman*) depict 'their characters' elaborate explorations of their own individual selves in a world that no longer offers the consolation of Christianity' (Jann Matlock, 'Novels of Testimony and the "Invention" of the Modern French Novel' in *The Cambridge Companion to the French Novel,* ed. by Timothy Unwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp.16-25 (p.22)).
[152] Lewis, p.10.
[153] See Lewis, p.31.
[154] Sainte-Beuve 'Du roman intime', *Revue des deux mondes,* 1832, reprinted in Sainte-Beuve, *Nouveaux portraits et critiques littéraires,* 5 vols (Brussels: Hauman & Cattoir**,** 1836), I, pp.3-30 (p.6).
[155] Fabienne Bercegol, 'Présentation' to *Oberman,* (Paris: Flammarion, 2003), pp.5-56 (p.6).
[156] George Sand, 'Oberman', *Revue des deux mondes*, 3rd series, vol 4, (1833), pp.677-690 (p.689), reprinted in George Sand, *Questions d'art et de littérature,* ed. by Henriette Bessis and Janis Glasgow (Paris: Des Femmes, 1991), pp.49-66 (p.66).

writers 'il faut frapper aujourd'hui du coin de la méditation et du sentiment'.[157] Chateaubriand's *René* and Constant's *Adolphe* had a growing popularity, especially from the mid-1820s onwards; both texts were often mentioned when the *roman intime* — or other terms to designate such texts, like *roman sentimental* or *roman d'analyse* — were mentioned.[158] The *littérature de l'intimité*[159] developed further through Sand's own novel *Lélia* (1833); Sainte-Beuve's *Volupté* (1834), and Balzac's *Le Lys dans la vallée* (1836), the latter written with the aim of improving on Sainte-Beuve's text.[160] Later, followed Nerval's *Sylvie* (1854) and Fromentin's *Dominique* (1862). Especially from 1830 onwards, critics start to see this focus on the *intime* as the role of the novel, differentiating it from other literature. Raymond Brucker, in 1839, calls the novel 'l'histoire secrète du cœur humain, un élan téméraire dans la science inexplorée de la psychologie'.[161] In the *Revue des deux mondes* in 1843, F. de Lagenevais comments, 'quand une littérature est vraiment active et vivante [...] ce qui en fait le fonds, n'est-ce pas surtout le tableau des passions humaines, des sentiments éternels de notre nature?';[162] in *L'Artiste* in 1844, Guénot-Lecointe writes that 'le vrai roman est celui qui s'attache à reproduire des phases diverses et

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[157] Nodier, writing in the *Temps,* 21 June 1833, quoted by Marguerite Iknayan, *The Idea of the Novel in France: The Critical Reaction 1815-1848* (Paris: Minard, 1861), p.129.
[158] Iknayan, pp.31-32.
[159] It should be noted that if *intimité* is an emerging concept, so is that of *littérature.* The term *littérature* had historically tended to refer to 'a knowledge of books rather than to their production [...] The term more commonly employed to refer to written works was "lettres", or [...] "bonnes lettres" and "belles lettres"' (Jefferson, p.8). It was only in the mid-eighteenth century that *littérature* started to 'refer to works of an aesthetic character' (p.9). Jefferson argues that Rousseau's *Confessions* lie at the root of the development of the concept of *littérature* in France: 'Rousseau's attempt to write the story of his life inaugurates a kind of language that, on the one hand, has come to acquire institutional recognition as 'literature': being an expression of feeling, pointing beyond what it is able explicitly to convey' (p.56).
[160] Nigel Harkness, 'The *roman personnel'* in *Cambridge History of French Literature,* ed. by William Brugwinkle, Nicholas Hammond and Emma Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp.441-449 (p.445).
[161] Raymond Brucker, '*Le médecin du Pecq* par Léon Gozlan', *L'Artiste,* 2nd series, vol 2 (1839), pp.349-352 (p.350), quoted by Iknayan, p.130.
[162] F. de Lagenevais, 'Le roman dans le monde', *Revue des deux mondes: nouvelle série,* vol 2 (1843), pp.586-614 (p.589), quoted by Iknayan, p.136.

éternellement jeunes de la passion humaine';[163] whilst Planche, in 1846, advocates 'le roman fondé sur l'analyse et le développement des passions humaines'.[164]

Catholic confession demands that an individual reveal both his/her *vie privée* and — essentially — his/her *vie intime*. The Council of Trent argues that by confessing sinners can 'faire connaître les maladies et les plaies de leur âme au prêtre';[165] whilst Adrien Gambart's confessing manual instructs confessants 'ouvrez bien votre cœur pour en faire sortir les péchés par la confession'.[166] At the same time as the novel becomes associated with the culture of *intimité* — indeed its chief expression — confession enters the discourse, both for writing about the novel, and for writing about the *intime.*[167] De Staël brings this link between the novel, interiority and confession into focus at the start of the century in the Preface to *Delphine* (1802): 'Cherchons donc toutes les ressources du talent [...] dans la connaissance approfondie des affections de l'âme, et *n'estimons les romans que lorsqu'ils nous paraissent [...] une sorte de confession'.*[168] Confession is claimed here as *the* means of revealing interiority within a fictional context. Mme de Staël's ideas endure; in 1863, L.-X Richard expresses a similar sentiment, arguing that when novels are 'des analyses intimes du coeur humain, le lecteur est plus saisi, plus ému lorsqu'ils sont écrits sous forme de confession'.[169] Alfred de Vigny, in his *Journal* in 1838 pushes

[163] G. Guénot-Lecointe, '*Madame de Favières* par Arsène Houssaye', *L'Artiste,* 4th series, vol 1 (1844), pp.253-255 (p.254), quoted by Iknayan, p.135.
[164] Gustave Planche 'M. Jules Sandeau', *Revue des Deux Mondes,* 16 (1846), p.1107-1119 (p.1109), quoted by Iknayan, p.136.
[165] *Catéchisme du concile de Trente,* p.495.
[166] Adrien Gambart, *La véritable conduite de S. François de Sales, pour la confession et la communion* (Avignon: Seguin, 1819), p.22.
[167] See Lewis, p.77: 'this language of confession [is] central to nineteenth-century intimacy'.
[168] Mme de Staël, *Delphine,* ed. by Aurélie Foglia (Paris: Gallimard, 2017), p.39, italics added.
[169] L.-X Richard, 'Un penseur, ou l'oeuvre de trois femmes', *Revue du progrès* (March 1863), quoted by Colette Becker, *Les Apprentissages de Zola: du poète romantique au romancier naturaliste, 1840-1867* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1993), p.187.

further the connection between confession and the novel, by creating a causal link between Catholic confession and the emergence of the *roman intime*: 'Le roman intime moderne est né du christianisme, parce que le christianisme a enfanté la confession, l'examen détaillé du soi-même, l'analyse de son cœur'.[170] By the century's end, in *Sixtine, roman de la vie cérébrale* (1890) Remy de Gourmont would pursue this link between Christian introspection and the novel further, appropriating St Augustine's *Confessions* to a literary, indeed novelistic, context:

> Les premières histoires d'une âme, le premier roman analytique naquit spontanément dans le génie nouveau d'un esprit christianisé et ce fut saint Augustin qui l'écrivit: la littérature moderne commence aux *Confessions*. [171]

Early novels of the *intime* often included narrative acts of confession: whether René's spoken revelation to Père Souël and Chactas in *René*, or Chactas's own to René in *Atala,* or written revelation, including the letters Amaury writes to his friend in Sainte-Beuve's *Volupté*, or Félix writes to Natalie in Balzac's *Le Lys dans la vallée*.[172] The feeling of intimacy in these novels is inextricably linked to the act of sharing it. What is being confessed is largely emotion, not action — most often, unconsummated love. The act of confession functions as a substitution for this

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[170] *Œuvres complètes d'Alfred de Vigny,* ed. by F. Baldensperger, 2 vols (Paris: Pléiade, Gallimard, 1948), II, p.1107.

[171] Remy de Gourmont, *Sixtine, roman de la vie cérébrale* (Paris: Union Générale d' Editions, 1982), p.279.

[172] See Matlock, pp.17-18. Tellingly, the act of confession is far from uncomplicated in these novels. René's confession, as Diana Knight has outlined, 'both is and is not a full one, in that it is offered and then retracted, and for that reason alone retains a tantalising ambiguity' ('The Readability of René's Secret', *French Studies*, 37 (1983), pp.35–46 (pp.39-40)). Furthermore, his confession is met with hard criticism by his priestly confessor (*René,* p.198; also see Matlock p.19). In *Le Lys dans la vallée,* Natalie's response to Félix's confession rejects his act of revelation: she breaks off her relationship with him following it, warning him against such revelation in the future, 'gardez-vous de recommencer de pareilles confidences qui mettent à nu votre désenchantement, qui découragent l'amour et forcent une femme à douter d'elle même' (Balzac, *Le Lys dans la vallée,* ed. by Anne-Marie Meininger, 2nd edn (Paris: Gallimard, 2004) p.352). Also see Fabienne Bercegol on the presentation of confessional acts in *René, Atala, Édouard, Volupté, Le Lys dans la vallée* and *Dominique,* who argues that confession often proves unsatisfactory for the confessants ('L'Expérience romanesque au crible des romans confessions du XIXe siècle', in *Romanesques: L'Expérience romanesque au XIX^e siècle,* ed. by Catherine Mariette-Clot (Paris: Garnier, 2013), pp.169-182).

failure to consummate: consummation is displaced into confession. Because the affairs are unconsummated, the novels live in the realm of the psychological, entering into the topos of the subjective.

The novels of confession analysed in this thesis are a further manifestation of this culture of *intimité;* they foreground the relationship between confession and interiority that is present both in other novels and more widely in the critical discourse for writing about novels. The novel of confession takes us behind the doors of the *privé* and into the emotions and soul of the *intime;* in so doing, it unpacks the private and the intimate into a public space. 'Confession' is thus a term with an interlinking series of associations: it brings into play a Catholic framework of transgression and penance and evokes a context of *intimité* and selfhood. Acts of confession staged within the novels of confession analysed here range from Catholic confession to a priest, to secular, narrative confession to a reader, whilst also including the revelations of thoughts, feelings or past experiences between characters within the narrative.

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(vi) Anticlericalism and the polemic of confession

There is a central tension in the nineteenth-century relationship to confession. On the one hand, there is a vogue for the autobiographical confessions of St Augustine, Rousseau, and multiple nineteenth-century figures; confession becomes central to conversations about the *intime,* and there is a fascination with confession as an expression of interiority, to the extent that it becomes seen, by Louis d'Apilly, as a fundamental human need: 'toute bouche qui parle est astreinte à la confession, et si

la parole était retirée à l'homme il se confesserait par signes et par gestes'.[173] On the other hand, this was a period in which Catholic confession was the subject of a culture war; where anti-Catholic sentiment and anticlericalism tended to be manifested largely with regard to confession. Théodore Perrin, the Catholic author of *Plaidoyer religieux* (1830), laments how,

> Jamais peut-être on ne s'est tant plu que de nos jours à décrier la religion et ses pratiques saintes […] La confession particulièrement [...] s'est vue en butte aux attaques mutipliées des impies qui, soutenues par l'insouciance des indifférents, ont failli ébranler cette pierre fondamentale de l'église de Jésus-Christ.[174]

Perrin's *Plaidoyer religieux* attempts to encourage readers of the value of confession. It sold quickly, with its six editions leading to a sequel in 1840,[175] and another work in 1842.[176] Each of Perrin's works presents its argument through a debate between an officer (anti-confession) and a lawyer (pro-confession), who always ultimately wins. The *Plaidoyers* are a defence; the argument for confession is made by responding to the common criticisms against it. The number of editions and a demand that merited two sequels indicate both Perrin's commercial success and, perhaps, the failure of the pro-confession camp to win the argument definitively. A similar story is echoed by Abbé Ambroise Guillois's *Recherches sur la confession auriculaire,* first published in 1836. It saw three editions, becoming increasingly engaged in the controversy: by its third edition (1850) its title was *Le Dogme de la confession vengé des attaques de l'hérésie et de l'incrédulité*.[177]

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[173] Louis d'Apilly, *Les Confessions involontaires* (Paris: Louis Clauet, 1866), p.vii.
[174] Thomas Perrin, *Plaidoyer religieux ou le dogme de la confession attaqué par un vieil officier et défendu par un jeune avocat* (Lille: Lefort, 1830), pp.ix-x.
[175] See Thomas Perrin, *Deuxième plaidoyer religieux ou la pratique et la nécessité de la confession* (Lille: Lefort, 1840), p.vi.
[176] Thomas Perrin, *Troisième plaidoyer religieux ou les avantages de la confession* (Lille, Lefort, 1842).
[177] Abbé Ambroise Guillois, *Le Dogme de la confession vengé des attaques de l'hérésie et de l'incrédulité* (Paris: Librarie Catholique, 1850).

Perrin's first *Plaidoyer religieux* was published at a time when anticlericalism flared particularly strongly around the July Revolution; it is the same year as Janin's anticlerical *La Confession* was published.[178] However, whilst the century's relationship to Catholicism was as turbulent as its changes in political regime,[179] criticisms of confession tended to be fairly constant, and not solely limited to moments where anticlericalism exploded. The positions around confession were entrenched, and the arguments did not go away. Whilst Catholic confessional practice varied somewhat over the period — moving between different levels of severity and leniency[180] — the attacks on it remained fairly similar in nature. Such criticisms tended not to respond to contemporary confessional practice, but the fundamental principles of confession, or the most lurid examples of terrible priests. The virulent criticism of confession spans the entire period considered by this thesis and beyond it. Three texts in particular, from just before, in the middle of, and just after the period of 1830 to 1865, embody the phenomenon: Paul-Louis Courier's *Deuxième réponse aux anonymes* (1823), Jules Michelet's *Du Prêtre, de la femme, de la famille* (1845), and Pierre Larousse's entry on confession in the *Grand Dictionnaire universel* (1869).

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[178] See Robert Gildea, *Children of the Revolution: The French 1799-1914* (London: Penguin, 2009), p.8.
[179] Indeed, the two are linked: as René Rémond makes clear, there is a 'constant dépendance du sentiment anticlérical à l'égard des vicissitudes politiques'; the history of anticlericalism in France in the ninteenth century is closely tied to 'celle des révolutions et des changements de régime' (*L'Anticléricalisme en France de 1815 à nos jours* (Paris: Fayard, 1976), p.61). Whilst 1830 was surrounded by an outburst of anticlericalism, in the aftermath of 1848, 'l'anticléricalisme est au plus bas de sa courbe' (Rémond p.123). However, anticlericalism grew over the course of the Second Empire, ultimately boiling over in the massacre of 1871 (See Rémond, pp.124-170).
[180] The Restoration was marked by a rigorous attitude towards confessions, where confessors often denied absolution to confessants. In the July Monarchy a more relaxed attitude dominated, where the views of Alphonsus Liguori, translated by Thomas Gousset, became more popular; such views encouraged the confessor to avoid causing despair in their confessant and to take a gentler approach to confession. The Second Empire saw a return to rigorism amidst its Catholic revival. (Alain Corbin, 'La relation intime ou les plaisirs de l'échange' in *Histoire de la vie privée,* ed. by Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1999), pp.461-518 (p.507-8)).

Courier was a key influence in perhaps the biggest confession-related scandal of the century. In Saint-Quentin in 1822, a young woman who had gone to confess to her priest, Mingrat, was raped, murdered, and dismembered by him.[181] Or, at least, it was assumed both that she had gone to confession and that she was raped — though neither was actually proven. As Andrew Counter argues, the assumption that rape occurred is indicative of anti-clerical attitudes concerning salacious priests and women's vulnerability during confession.[182] In his pamphlet, Courier argues that a male, celibate priest confessing a woman is an inevitably dangerous — and in some cases fatal — combination.[183] Playing into the image of a *prêtre séducteur,*[184] he makes Mingrat's behaviour appear both 'monstrous *and* natural, as shockingly excessive *and* logically necessary'.[185] Courier's impact was long lasting, his words still quoted by Larousse in his *Grand Dictionnaire universel*, over forty years later[186] — a sign of how the arguments around confession saw no simple resolution, and of how ingrained Mingrat's image remained in French consciousness.

[181] See *Causes criminelles célèbres du XIX siècle,* 4 vols (Paris: 1848), II, p.307; also see Andrew Counter, *The Amorous Restoration: Love, Sex, and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.174.
[182] Counter, p.206: 'Tellingly, the various pamphlets give no sense of what evidence led investigators to accuse Mingrat of rape as well as murder [...]. But Restoration readers needed no such explanations: they were, so to speak, culturally preconditioned to see male violence as an expression of male sexuality, and — at least in many cases — politically predisposed to regard priests as being less able than most men to control their "natural" urges'. See also *Causes criminelles célèbres du XIX siècle*, 'elle était belle; Mingrat était passionné [...] Pénétrer chez elle n'était pas difficile, la visite du curé est un honneur pour les paroissiens […] Marie viendra se confesser à Saint-Quentin' (II, pp.307-208). Also see Corbin, *L'Harmonie des plaisirs,* p.310.
[183] 'D'ailleurs je ne suis pas si animé que vous contre ce curé de Saint-Quentin. Je trouve dans son état de prêtre de quoi, non l'excuser, mais le plaindre' (*Deuxième réponse aux anonymes* (1823), reprinted in *Œuvres complètes de P.-L. Courier,* 4 vols (Brussels: J.-P. Meline, 1833), II, pp.54-73 (pp.55-6)).
[184] See Corbin on the *prêtre séducteur,* 'La relation intime ou les plaisirs de l'échange', p.468.
[185] Counter, p.206.
[186] Larousse, 'Confession', *Grand Dictionnaire universel,* IV, p.898.

Jules Michelet's argument, in *Du Prêtre, de la femme, de la famille* is that confession breaks the family institution. By confession, 'ce terrible instrument d'enquête',[187] priests gain power over wives: 'le prêtre tient l'âme', whilst a husband only possesses the body of his wife.[188] The association between *intimité* and Catholic confession is the target of Michelet's strongest criticisms, especially as the priest's access to private lives and thoughts concerns not only the wife, but by extension, the husband (and his sexual conduct):

> Chose humiliante […] d'être vu, suivi dans l'intimité la plus intime par un témoin invisible[…] de rencontrer dans la rue un homme qui connaît mieux que vous vos plus secrètes faiblesses, qui salue humblement, se détourne et rit.[189]

Michelet's work sold quickly, with another edition printed within ten days. The text prompted fury amongst Catholic writers,[190] but became a kind of talisman for the anticlerical camp.

The anticlerical Larousse attacks confession from various angles. Crucially, he argues that the Biblical verses the Church uses to justify confession are not convincing, especially as confession was not part of early Christian practice .[191] Rather, the Church cynically uses confession to increase its own influence:[192] confession is 'cette sorte de poule aux œufs d'or', a 'source, principe de puissance, d'autorité et de

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[187] Michelet, *Du Prêtre, de la femme, de la famille,* 2nd edn (Paris: Hachette, 1845), p.213.
[188] Michelet, p.221.
[189] Michelet, pp.221-222.
[190] Especially Alfred Nettement in *Études critiques sur le feuilleton-roman* (Paris: Librarie de Perrodil, 1845), p.254 and Charles Menche de Loisne in *Influence de la littérature française de 1830 à 1850 sur l'esprit public et les mœurs* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1852), p.28.
[191] 'Non seulement ces textes n'ont rien de plus convaincant que la plupart de ceux qu'invoquent les théologiens à l'appui de leurs assertions, mais les faits prouvent invinciblement qu'on ne leur donna pas d'abord le sens que leur préta plus tard l'Église' (Larousse, 'Confession', *Grand Dictionnaire universel,* IV, p.898).
[192] 'Nous avons vu comment le clergé a pu être conduit, par le désir d'accroître son influence et ses richesses, à étendre de plus en plus l'importance religieuse de la *confession'* (Larousse, 'Confession', *Grand Dictionnaire universel,* IV, p.898).

richesse'.[193] In this remark, Larousse reflects a criticism which dominates throughout the period. Writing in 1828, Charles Bedot in *Dissertation sur la confession auriculaire* (1828), attributes the Church's doctrine of secret confession to a desire for control:

> Il n'y a rien de plus efficace que cette confession pour s'ingérer dans les secrets des familles, et pour savoir des choses qui auraient dû rester ensevelies dans les ténèbres les plus épaisses; il n'y a rien de plus favorable à l'autorité des prêtres, qui peuvent ainsi se soumettre à la longue les esprits faibles, et les façonner à la dépendance.[194]

Writing in 1845, Francisque Bouvet condemns the church 'd'avoir [....] retenu l'homme et la société dans les ténèbres d'un tribunal secret et dans l'esclavage du péché'.[195] With secret, auricular confession seen as an instrument of power, there was a renewed interest in the period in early, public forms of confession. George Sand, writing in *Histoire de ma vie,* criticises private confession but elevates the public confession of Antiquity:

> les premiers chrétiens [...] faisaient à la porte du temple une confession publique avant de se croire lavés de leurs fautes [...] Ainsi entendue, la confession pouvait et devait transformer un être et faire surgir véritablement l'homme nouveau de la dépouille du vieil homme.[196]

As will be seen, the novel of confession engages forcefully in this debate between private and public acts of confession.

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[193] Larousse, 'Confession', *Grand Dictionnaire universel,* IV, p.900. A similar argument is found made by Franscique Bouvet in 1845: 'loin d'être d'institution divine et chrétienne [...] [la confession] est, au contraire, une subversion du dogme divin' (Francisque Bouvet, *De la confession et du célibat des prêtres* (Paris: Comptoir des imprimeurs unis, 1845), p.24).

[194] Charles Bedot, *Dissertation sur la confession auriculaire* (Geneva: P.A. Bonnant, 1828), pp.117-8.

[195] Bouvet, p.62.

[196] Sand, *Histoire de ma vie,* XIII (1855), p.130. The interest in public confession finds a fictional manifestation in Balzac's *Le Curé de village,* appearing in 1839 in *La Presse,* and then reprinted as a separate volume in 1841. Véronique, on her death-bed, wants to confess publicly rather than privately: 'Laissez-moi confesser publiquement ma honte, à genoux. Ce sera le redressement de mes torts envers le monde' (Honoré de Balzac, *Le Curé de village,* 2 vols (Paris: Hippolyte Souverain, 1841), II, p.345).

Larousse's criticisms of confession also focus on the potential dangers it poses to (female) confessants: echoing Michelet, he objects to 'l'intimité forcée'[197] of confession. He makes a further common criticism of confession: confession might even encourage people to sin: 'un esprit faible ne peut-il pas aisément se laisser entraîner au vice quand on lui apprend qu'il est si facile de s'en purifier?'[198] He concludes his entry with a series of comedic anticlerical 'anecdotes': 'une jeune fille, interrogée par son confesseur lui avouait qu'elle avait eu beaucoup d'estime pour un jeune homme, "combien de fois", lui demandait son confesseur'.[199] Here, he again echoes a common criticism of confession: it gives women ideas about sinning that they would not otherwise have.[200]

Portrayals of the misuse of religious confession became a regular theme in literature. Two examples — one from the beginning of the period and another from the end — will suffice here. In *Le Rouge et le noir* (1830) confession first becomes a form of manipulation: Élise, bitter at Julien's love for Mme de Rênal, 'avait eu l'excellente idee d'aller se confesser à l'ancien curé Chélan et [...] au nouveau, afin de leur raconter à tous les deux le détail des amours de Julien'. As a result, Julien is sent to Besançon.[201] Later, Mme de Rênal's confessor oversteps his remit by composing a letter he makes Mme de Rênal copy and send to M. de la Mole, with devastating consequences: 'Quelle horreur m'a fait commettre la religion?', Mme de Rênal

[197] Larousse, 'Confession', *Grand Dictionnaire universel,* IV, p.899.
[198] Larousse, 'Confession', *Grand Dictionnaire universel,* IV, p.900. Bouvet also argues that confession has made man more, not less, immoral (p.263).
[199] Larousse, 'Confession', *Grand Dictionnaire universel,* IV, p.900.
[200] Franscique Bouvet challenges readers of his *De la confession et du célibat des prêtres* (1845)*:* 'demandez confidentiellement aux femes si la première idée du mal ne leur est pas venue par l'indiscrétion du confesseur' (p.263).
[201] Stendhal, p.232.

asks.[202] Finally, whilst in prison, Julien is disturbed by a hypocritical confessor: 'cet homme s'etait mis en tête de confesser Julien et de se faire un nom parmi les jeunes femmes de Besançon, par toutes les confidences qu'il prétendrait en avoir reçues'.[203] The novel is indicative of a distrust of confession — and of how it can be manipulated by confessants and confessors alike.

In 1863, George Sand published *Mademoiselle la Quintinie*, the story of a man trying to free the woman he loves, Lucie, from the obligation she feels to confess**.** Discovering she attends confession, he is horrified, using an image redolent of Michelet, whilst quoting Courier:

> Je n'avais pas encore mis dans ma pensée l'image du prêtre entre Lucie et moi. Quand elle se présenta, elle fit passer une sueur froide dans tout mon corps. Je me rappelai ce passage de Paul-Louis Courier […]: "On leur défend l'amour, et le mariage surtout; on leur livre les femmes".[204]

His efforts become concentrated on wresting her from the influence of one particular priest: M. Moréali. Moréali has been, it emerges, the confessor of Lucie's mother, Blanche, with disastrous consequences. Moréali has interfered in Blanche's emotional life, dissuading her from sexual love to the extent that she is unable to love her husband. Blanche instead develops a passionate obsession with Moréali. When she confesses this to him, he himself feels sinful desire ('elle portait le délire dans mes sens')[205] and cuts her out completely. Dying of her suffering, Blanche accuses Moréali:

> Vous m'avez défendu d'aimer alors que j'aurais pu céder à mon premier instinct […] Je rêvais de vous, je vous voyais étendu sur cette croix à la place du Christ, et dans mes songes je baisais vos blessures […] Vous ne vous êtes pas soucié de moi, vous disiez m'aimer si tendrement, et vous m'avez

[202] Stendhal, p.640.
[203] Stendhal, p.642.
[204] George Sand, *Mademoiselle la Quintinie,* 2nd edn (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1963), p.42-43.
[205] Sand, *Mademoiselle la Quintinie,* p.299.

> abandonnée! — Et à présent que vous savez mes troubles et mes douleurs, vous me chassez du confessionnal en me disant que vous ne voulez pas vous damner avec moi'.[206]

The novel depicts a destructive relationship between male confessor and female confessant, with the line between love of God and of a priest, and between platonic and sexual love, dangerously blurred.

Mademoiselle la Quintinie, published two years before Sand's *La Confession d'une jeune fille,* encapsulates a wider point: many of the writers of novels of confession were writing from an anti-confession perspective; the novel of confession engages closely with the controversy. Todorov writes, 'les genres communiquent avec la société où ils sont en cours [...] les genres mettent en évidence les traits constitutifs de la société à laquelle ils appartiennent'.[207] The novel of confession is not just responding to Catholic confession within its theological framework, but also within the highly politicised and polemical context in which it operated in nineteenth-century France. As this thesis will argue, even those novels which represent confession purely in a secular context often interrogate or subvert aspects of the Catholic model of confession, feeding off the context of anticlericalism out of which many of them grew.

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(vii) Scholarly contexts, theoretical contexts

Three critical works were particularly instrumental in orientating the topic of this thesis. Firstly, this thesis was inspired by Richard Terdiman's interrogation of how, in Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle*, novelistic confession relates to and

[206] Sand, *Mademoiselle la Quintinie,* pp.302-303.
[207] Todorov, *La Notion de littérature,* p.35.

differs from Catholic confession. In his essay 'The Mnemonics of Musset's *Confession'*, Terdiman argues that the sacramental model undergoes some 'form of tropological displacement in the self-conscious literary "confession"', and that, as a result, the confessional text 'works to ironize the genre that forms its intertextual referent'.[208] Whilst a Catholic confession exists to 'obliterate' itself and the past,[209] a literary confession memorialises it. Terdiman argues that memory works in a particularly problematic way in *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle,* where 'individual subjectivity is overwhelmed by the persistence of the past and comes to seem dominated, indeed possessed, by it'.[210] Ultimately, 'in the peculiarly strained form and rhetoric of this text […] what is narrated in the *Confession* is a mnemonic disaster, a catastrophe inherent in memory'.[211] This thesis draws on Terdiman's work by exploring the relationship between Catholic and novelistic confession across a wider group of novels, analysing specifically how the Catholic model relates to themes of transgression and the novels' staging of acts of confession themselves.

The second major influence was Susan Levin's *The Romantic Art of Confession.* Levin's analysis of a group of English and French works entitled 'Confession' was significant in informing this thesis's scope (her work centres on De Quincey, Musset, Sand, as well as Charles Lamb's 'Confessions of a Drunkard', Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner,* with a final chapter exploring Soulié, Frémy and Janin alongside each other). Levin's research was also inspiring in its exploration of how texts are shaped both by a Catholic model and Rousseau's

[208] Richard Terdiman 'The Mnemonics of Musset's confession', *Representations,* 26 (1989), pp.26-48 (p.27).
[209] Terdiman, p.26.
[210] Terdiman, p.30.
[211] Terdiman, p.45.

Confessions. Ultimately, whilst Levin's work has proved valuable in these ways, this thesis's conclusions differ from her own. Levin sees this group of texts as working, through 'revelation and analysis, set out in language, [...] to establish a coherent self'.[212] By contrast, this thesis will argue that the novel of confession fundamentally destabilises the notion both of coherent selfhood and of language's expressive ability.

Thirdly, Evanghélia Stead's article 'Confessions sur un siècle, confessions fin-de-siècle' is a survey of 130 years of texts of confession, examing the scope and chronological journey of these texts, and focussing particularly on the last three decades of the nineteenth century and the start of the twentieth century (it stops at 1930).[213] It is the only critical work to examine the full extent of confession in the nineteenth century, and her article's appendix, which lists all the texts of confession she has discovered, has proved a valuable resource. Her article, like this thesis, sees this group of texts as having enough weight and significance to be deemed a genre.[214]

Despite the large number of nineteenth-century French novels of confession, very little has otherwise been written on this corpus. Critical works on similar themes tend to focus on autobiographical, rather than fictional confessions, or on the group of novels regularly termed '*roman personnel*'.[215] Sophie Sango's PhD thesis, *Le*

[212] Levin, p.128.
[213] As cited in footnote 8 of this introduction, p.20.
[214] Stead, p.353.
[215] Including Chateaubriand's *Atala* and *René*, Staël's *Delphine* and *Corinne*, Krüdener's *Valérie*, Senancour's *Oberman*, Constant's *Adolphe*, Duras's *Ourika* and *Édouard.* Sand's *Lélia*, Sainte-Beuve's *Volupté*, Balzac's *Le Lys dans la vallé*, Nerval's *Sylvie* and Fromentin's *Dominique* (See Harkness, p.441).

Roman confession au XIXe siècle, provided a helpful overview of themes of confession across a largely different corpus from this thesis's: Sango analyses *René, Emile, Aloys, La Peau de Chagrin, Lélia, Volupté, La Confession d'un enfant du siècle, Le Lys dans la vallée, Jocelyn, Novembre, Raphaël, Dominique,* Sand's *La Confession d'une jeune fille, La Confession de Claude* and Proust's *La Confession d'une jeune fille.* Fabienne Bercegol's essay, 'L'Expérience Romanesque au crible des romans confessions du XIXe siècle'[216] proved valuable in its analysis of the problematisation of confession as a narrative form in *Atala, René, Édouard, Volupté, Le Lys dans la vallée* and *Dominique*. Jann Matlock's 'Novels of Testimony and the "Invention" of the Modern French Novel' examines the significance of confession as a narrative mode in *René* and *Atala, Oberman, Valérie, Corinne* and *Adolphe*,[217] whilst Henri Godin's essay 'Variations littéraires sur le thème de la confession' focusses on Janin's *La Confession,* Balzac's *Le Curé de village,* the Goncourts' *Germinie Lacerteux* and Maupassant's 'La Confession'.

Elsewhere, Paul Peltier's 'Musset et Baudelaire à propos des *Confessions d'un Mangeur d'Opium'* provided a useful starting point for working on Baudelaire's and Musset's vastly different translations of De Quincey. On other themes, Lewis's *Intimacy and Distance* provides a revealing analysis of the wider context of *intimité.*[218] Alain Corbin's *L'Harmonie des plaisirs* offers vital background for the relationship between sex and confession in the period.[219] Paul Bénichou's *L'École du*

[216] As cited above in footnote 172, p.56.
[217] As cited above footnote 151, p.53.
[218] As cited above in footnote 139, p.51.
[219] As cited above in footnote 53, p.33.

désenchantement: Sainte-Beuve, Nodier, Musset, Nerval, Gautier[220] provides crucial insight into 1830s *mal du siècle*.

There has been a tendency to consider some of the works analysed by this thesis through the lens of fictionalised autobiography.[221] This approach is exemplified by Levin's work, who sees the authors she analyses as 'correct[ing] what they considered as Rousseau's disgusting frankness'.[222] The title 'confession' is sometimes understood to imply a veiled confession by the author: as Élise Hugueny-Léger comments, with reference to Zola, 'le fait que ce [...] roman soit une 'confession' pose nécessairement la question de la teneur autobiographique'.[223] This approach is not unfounded. Several novels (specifically Musset's, Garcia's and Zola's) do indeed create narratives that bear strong similarities to the lives of their authors; the way in which these novels frame and explore their relationship to real events will be examined in Chapter Two, in the section entitled 'Fictionalised selves'. However, beyond this specific section, this thesis avoids a broader biographical approach. This is firstly because such an approach, which tries, as it were, to peer through the material to see a biographical truth, risks losing focus on this thesis's primary concern: the texts themselves, and the network of connections and generic traits they share. Secondly, the texts that do display strong biographical resonances are only a small percentage of the total of novels of confession published. Whilst

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[220] Paul Bénichou's *L'École du désenchantement: Sainte-Beuve, Nodier, Musset, Nerval, Gautier* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992).

[221] Joachim Merlant's study of the group of novels he termed 'roman personnel' (including Chateaubriand's *René,* Constant's *Adolphe,* and Sainte-Beuve's *Volupté*) saw such texts as, in part, the vehicles for expressing their authors' own stories and emotions; such a way of reading extended, over the twentieth century, to include, especially, Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle,* but also, to a lesser extent, Sand's *La Confession d'une jeune fille,* and Zola's *La Confession de Claude*. (Joachim Merlant, *Le Roman personnel de Rousseau à Fromentin* (Paris: Hachette, 1905)).

[222] Levin, p.7.

[223] Élise Hugueny-Léger 'Le "je" le double et son ombre dans *La Confession de Claude*', in *Les Cahiers naturalistes: bulletin officiel de la société littéraire des amis d'Émile Zola'*, 81 (2007), pp.121-134 (p.123).

early readers may have read certain individual novels with an awareness of the authors' lives (given, for instance, the scandals surrounding the breakup of the relationship between Musset and Sand, and that between Marie Garcia and Arsène Houssaye), this was by no means a way of reading *necessarily* implied by the genre as a whole. Giving undue weight to the autobiographical elements of some texts would blind us to the much wider system of connections and characteristics that bind the novels together.

In terms of the theoretical framework, Schaeffer, Todorov and Genette have been central to shaping this thesis' understanding of 'genre'. The focus of this thesis is the reading of cultural texts — of the primary literary texts of the corpus, alongside other cultural documents, which are used to establish an understanding of what Catholic confession meant at the time. Documents used include a nineteenth-century translation of the Catechism of the Council of Trent (still the foundation of teaching on confession in the nineteenth century),[224] nineteenth-century editions of the teachings of François de Sales (who based his work on the Council's teachings and whose writings on confession saw many reprints and re-editions at the time), and several confession manuals published in the period.

[224] For instance, see Abbé Louis de Sambucy: 'Le saint concile de Trente enseigne qu'il y a six dispositions nécéssaires à celui qui veut recevoir la grâce de la justification' (*Manuel du pénitent ou conduit pour la contrition et la confession, nouvelle édition,* 2nd edition (Paris: A.D le Clere, 1834), p.112. The first edition of this text was in 1814. Also see the anonymous *Instructions et prières recueillies par un prêtre* (Vienna: Imprimerie de la Veuve Strauss, 1829), p. 178, for an identical quotation.

The other significant theoretical framework is that of narratology, specifically Genette's and Rimmon-Kenan's work on levels of narrative.[225] The first level is extradiegetic*:* the act of telling from narrator to reader — the level on which M. de Renoncour writes his fictional memoirs in *Manon Lescaut,*[226]*,* or indeed, Octave tells the story of his younger self's relationships in Musset's novel*.* The narrative level beneath this is intradiegetic*.* In *Manon Lescaut,* this includes 'les événements racontés dans ces *Mémoires* [de Renoncour] (dont l'acte narratif de des Grieux)';[227] in Musset, events on this level include Octave's mistress's betrayal and Octave meeting Brigitte, as well as the *acte narrative* of Brigitte in telling the story of her own past. The next level down is metadiegetic*:* in *Manon Lescaut,* 'les événements racontés dans le récit de Des Grieux';[228] in the case of Musset*,* the events Brigitte's *acte narrative* describes, like being abandoned by her first lover. These narratological terms will be particularly prominent in the third chapter.

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(viii) Corpus, method, structure

Larousse, in his *Grand Dictionnaire universel* (1867), gives individual entries to the following French novels of confession: Jules Janin's *La Confession* (1830)*,* Alfred de Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* (1836)*,* Frédéric Soulié's *Confession générale* (1840-48)*,* Champfleury's *Confessions de Sylvius* (1849)*,* Xavier de Montépin's *Confessions d'un bohême* (1849-50)*,* Arnould Frémy's *Confessions d'un*

[225] In Gérard Genette, *Figures III* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972), and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Methuen, 1983).
[226] Genette, *Figures III,* p.328.
[227] Genette, *Figures III,* p.328.
[228] Genette, *Figures III,* p.328.

bohémien (1856) and George Sand's *La Confession d'une jeune fille* (1865).[229] These works, which had sufficient lasting influence to be included by Larousse, all receive analysis here. The corpus is widened to include other works, including Madame du Saule's *Les Confessions d'une femme du siècle* (1846), Marie Garcia's *La Confession d'Antonine* (1864) and Émile Zola's *La Confession de Claude* (1865), as well as, in less detail, Édouard Ourliac's *La Confession de Nazarille* (1840), the anonymous *Combats et victoire ou Confessions d'un officier français* (1846), Emile Souvestre's *Confessions d'un ouvrier* (1851), Nicolas de Séménow's *La Confession d'un poète* (1859), the anonymous *La Confession d'un étudiant. Estaminets, bouges et ruisseaux: par un bohème* (1860) and Charles Dollfus's *La Confession de Madeleine* (1863). As can be seen, many of the novels of confession published after Musset's also use the singular form of confession in their titles, thus strongly evoking the Catholic act, whilst others draw on the plural form of the title seen in St Augustine and Rousseau. In reality, as the genre develops following Musset, the singular and plural forms become interchangeable: the hybridity, where 'confession' evokes both the Catholic act and autobiographical confessional writing, becomes a major feature of the genre.

This thesis does not pretend in any way to offer an exhaustive study of novels of confession — such a task would be impossible within the scope of a doctoral thesis. However, it does attempt to give an account of the genre, by using the works listed above as representative of wider tropes at play. Several criteria have been used to select the corpus of works. The full corpus of texts entitled 'confession' and published within the time period was examined; those which were novels, rather

[229] Larousse, *Grand Dictionnaire universel,* IV, pp.904-905. Montépin's and Frémy's novels receive treatment, not in the section on confession, published in the fourth volume, but rather in the section on Bohemia, published in the second volume (II (1867), p.867).

than autobiographies, plays, or poems were studied more closely. Within that group, those works which most fruitfully illustrated characteristics noted across the majority of the texts were selected for particular study. Works have been selected from across the full period and as evenly spaced as possible during that period; works have been chosen by both male and female authors. It is central to this thesis's purpose to examine not only the canonical or most commercially successful novels (a group represented largely by Larousse's list), but also non-canonical works: to understand the genre as it emerged and grew, it is essential to transcend traditional understandings of the canon and to respond to the huge range of works which were being published and read at the time. As many of the novels discussed in this thesis are not widely known, a summary of major plot points is included for each novel that receives substantial treatment.[230]

This thesis covers the period 1828-1865. The era of confession analysed by this thesis grows out of several foundational texts. It starts firstly in 1828, with Musset's rendering of De Quincey bringing into French culture (and establishing in Musset's own consciousness) a fragmented confession of subjectivity, transgression and alienation. Musset's version of De Quincey is followed by a second catalyst, in the shape of Janin's *La Confession,* which contains strong linguistic echoes of Musset's rendering of De Quincey, specifically in its depiction of a Piranesi-like staircase.[231] *La Confession* was written in the cusp year of 1830, in an era when anticlericalism was running high. The novel plays into this anti-Catholic culture, with its depiction of priests who are incompetent, salacious or sinisterly exploitative, and of a constantly

[230] The exceptions are Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* and Zola's *La Confession de Claude* which are widely known and readily available, and thus require no such summary.
[231] See pp.101-102 of this thesis for a full analysis of this passage and its links to Musset.

deferred and ultimately destructive confession. In its narrative of confessional failure, it foregrounds a theme that was to become a defining feature of later novels of confession. Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* was published in 1836. Whilst there is no concrete proof that Musset read Janin's *La Confession,* there are such strong similarities between the two texts, including linguistic and thematic echoes, that it seems very likely he did.[232] Both texts contain an early chapter which explores the cultural phenomenon of *mal du siècle,* depicting a generation's lack of faith and lack of role; both novels contain moments where the male protagonist finds his would-be lover has fallen asleep before he can consummate the relationship; both contain a destabilising encounter between the protagonist and a mirror, where the protagonist cannot recognise himself in the reflection; Janin's novel contains the murder of a wife in her bed, Musset's novel climaxes at the near-murder of a lover in hers.

Whilst the initial critical reception to Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* was somewhat mixed,[233] the novel remained a topic of critical discussion in the years that followed, lauded for its depiction of psychology: ten years after publication, Henri Vermont, writing in *L'Artiste*, excused any structural faults of the novel on the basis of its emotional integrity, which followed 'la logique des

[232] See Duchet, p.viii.
[233] *La Revue de Paris* praised the work highly, calling it 'ce livre enchanteur', comparing it favourably to both St Augustine and Rousseau's *Confessions*, and seeing it as echoing 'la sentimentalité naïve de Werther' ('B.Z.', '*La Confession d'un enfant du siècle', Revue de Paris: nouvelle série,* vol 26, (1836), pp.53-61 (p.61)). Sainte-Beuve, who knew Musset, gave a generally positive, though less effusive, review in the *Revue des deux mondes* (Sainte-Beuve, 'La Confession d'un enfant du siècle par Alfred de Musset', *Revue des deux mondes,* 4th series, vol 5, (1836), pp.483-493). *L'Indépendant* criticised the novel's 'peu de profondeur' and lack of 'logique': it claimed that, whereas a character like Richardson's Lovelace 'est un type, une unité, une idée', Octave, with his inconsistencies, 'ne sera rien' (Anonymous, 'La Confession d'un enfant du siècle par Alfred de Musset', *L'Indépendent,* 25 February 1836, pp.1-2 (p.2)).

battements du cœur et de la vérité'.[234] The novel was widely read over the following decades: originally published by Bonnaire, it had a new edition, published by the Bibliothèque Charpentier in 1840, with alterations made by Musset.[235] A further seven reprints or re-editions appeared before 1865.[236] However, even this number of editions scarcely does justice to the wider impact of Musset's novel, which provided a model with which many future novels engaged, either explicitly or implicitly.

1865 is a Janus-faced year. It is the year that sees the publication of both Sand's *La Confession d'une jeune fille,* a text that is emblematic of the novel of confession, and Zola's *La Confession de Claude.* Whilst Zola echoes many of the generic traits of the novel of confession — not least in his exploration of subjectivity and selfhood — at the same time he creates a story pervaded with gritty cynicism around the life of a poor prostitute in Paris. In its style, his novel echoes the work of the Goncourt brothers, whom Zola admired. *Germinie Lacerteux* had indeed been published the previous year; with its focus on 'les misères des petits et des pauvres' came a call for the novel to look outwards rather than inwards: 'qu'il [le roman] fasse voir aux gens du monde ce que les dames de charité ont le courage de voir'.[237] *La Confession de Claude* is an uneasy hybrid: the model offered by the novel of confession does not sit well with the focus the Goncourt brothers advocated, nor with the novels Zola would go on to write. In the years following 1865, confession becomes a less pertinent mode: the novels of confession published in the 1870s, 80s and 90s tend to exist in a

[234] Henri Vermont, 'M. Alfred de Musset', *L'Artiste,* 4th series, vol 5, (1846), pp.180-183 (p.182).
[235] Gérard Barrier, 'Notice', to Alfred de Musset, *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle,* ed. by Gérard Barrier (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), pp.321-325 (p.322).
[236] *Catalogue général des livres imprimés de la Bibliothèque nationale,* CXXII, p.166.
[237] Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux,* ed. by Nadine Satiat (Paris: Flammarion, 1990), p.56.

predominantly commercial sphere, more driven by plot, melodrama and erotic exploits, and less focused on the knotty questions of interiority and communication that dominated the genre in its earlier years.

This thesis's purpose — the analysis of a genre — is best served by a thematic approach, which privileges the exploration of generic traits and enables most readily the examination of these traits across multiple novels. The 1835 *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* defines confession, in its broadest sense, as 'l'aveu [...] que l'on fait de quelque chose'.[238] On the most fundamental level, in order for confession (secular or religious) to take place, there needs to be 'quelque chose' to confess, the 'on' who does the confessing, and the 'aveu' itself. The thesis is structured around these three components: firstly, 'The Transgression, or What Is Confessed?'; secondly, 'The Self, or Who Is Confessing?' ; and thirdly, 'The Confession(s)'. Each of the three thematic chapters is structured around two to three central texts, which are analysed in chronological order. Each chapter ends with a synoptic section which explores the themes of the chapter more widely across the full corpus of novels covered by the thesis and across time, up to and including Zola's *La Confession de Claude*: the novels which comprise the corpus of this thesis thus appear in multiple chapters. Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle,* so central to the genre, receives significant analysis in the first two chapters, with the most detailed examination deliberately reserved for the final chapter: the thesis's argument builds to the point where Musset's text can be given its fullest treatment. This third chapter is longer than the others, not least because Musset's novel raises

[238] 'Confession', *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française,* 2 vols (Paris: Imprimerie de l'institut de France, 1835) I, p.373.

so many significant points that it receives proportionally more analysis.

The first chapter looks at the notion of wrongdoing, examining one work from the beginning (Janin's *La Confession* — 1830) and one from the end of the period (Garcia's *La Confession d'Antonine* — 1864). In a synoptic section, it explores how notions of transgression evolve during the period, including the central role of Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* in focussing the genre around emotional transgressions and psychological suffering. The second chapter — 'The Self, or Who is confessing?' — considers in detail three works published in the 1840s, 1850s and 1860s. Through studying Montépin's *Confessions d'un bohême* (1849-50), Frémy's *Confessions d'un bohémien* (1856) and George Sand's *La Confession d'une jeune fille* (1865), it examines how such works develop and explore questions of selfhood and identity; a final section reflects on how the genre more widely develops these themes, examining characters who are isolated and divided within themselves, for whom the act of self-construction via confession proves ultimately unsatisfactory. The third chapter, entitled 'The Confession(s)', analyses the depiction of both intradiegetic and extradiegetic acts of confession in Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* (1836), Soulié's *Confession générale* (1840-48) and Du Saule's *Les Confessions d'une femme du siècle* (1846), before exploring the representation of both Catholic and secular acts of confession across the full corpus.

Whilst the decision was taken to structure the thesis thematically, it is crucial also to consider the development of the genre over time. From 1828 to 1865, the number of novels published per year soared; literacy increased, particularly amongst women; the *feuilleton* became a prominent part of the literary landscape, really taking hold

from the late 1830s and early 1840s onwards, with texts including Soulié's *Les Mémoires du diable* (1837-8) and Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842-3) bringing fiction to a mass readership;[239] the burgeoning form of the novel also encountered challenges, not least in the censorship ushered in by the Second Empire.[240] Cultural trends — such as the fascination with *mal du siècle,* or the vogue for Bohemia following Murger's stories — had their impact on the novel of confession as it developed. The synoptic section of each chapter enables the discussion of how generic traits changed and grew over the period considered. The conclusion provides further chronological perspectives, through exploring 1865 as a pivotal year, and through considering what happened to the novel of confession in the later decades of the century. This conclusion returns to Zola's *La Confession de Claude,* considered across the preceding three chapters from the perspective of the ways in which it espouses the novel of confession's generic traits, and argues that this novel is also, in its very hybridity, the end of a chapter in the development of the novel of confession.

It is this thesis's contention that the novel of confession constituted a significant and dominant genre in the early-to-mid-nineteenth century, at a time when the novel itself was a comparatively new form, developing rapidly. The novel of confession cuts to the heart of some of the early-to-mid nineteenth century insecurities about identity and status, selfhood and stability, communication and Catholicism. These

[239] Lise Dumasy-Queffélec, 'Le feuilleton', in *La Civilisation du journal: histoire culturelle et littéraire de la presse française au XIX^e siècle,* ed. by Alain Vaillant, Dominique Kalifa, Philippe Régnier, Marie-Ève Thérenty (Paris: Nouveau Monde éditions, 2011), pp.925-936 (p.933).
[240] Pierre Caselle, 'Le Régime législatif', in *Histoire de l'édition française: Le temps des éditeurs,* ed. by Henri-Jean Martin, Roger Chartier and Jean-Pierre Vivet (Paris: Promodis, 1985) pp.47-55 (p.50); Michèle Fizaine, 'Procès de presse en 1850-1851 : la défense de la littérature par Victor Hugo' in *Presse et Plumes: Journalisme et littérature au XIXe siècle,* ed. by Marie-Ève Thérenty and Alain Vaillant (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2004), pp.261-272 (p.265).

novels are formally innovative and self-conscious, interrogating, challenging and even undermining the *acte de parole* from which they grow. Western society, Foucault claims, has become 'une société singulièrement avouante';[241] this genre is a highly significant, and thus far overlooked, episode not only in the story of the act of confession, but in the development of the novel.

[241] Foucault, p.79.

Chapter One: The Transgression, or What Is Confessed?

For there to be confession there has to be something — or some things — to be confessed. The Catholic origins of confession mean that what is confessed, was, from the earliest entry of the word confession into the French language, associated, at least on some level, with transgression,[1] and, specifically, with a series of Catholic rules as to what sin is and how it must be articulated. This chapter will investigate the ways in which the Catholic model of sin and confession relates to these novels' exploration of transgression — and what happens when the novels deviate from the Catholic model. It will further analyse the moments when the novels' focus moves beyond wrongdoing: as has been argued in the introduction, confession in the nineteenth-century also draws on a culture of *intimité*. Indeed, the two titles of this chapter are deliberately in conflict with each other: what is confessed is not always transgression, and transgression is not always confessed.

This chapter will focus on two texts, to explore the question of 'what is confessed': Janin's *La Confession* (1830) and Marie Garcia's *La Confession d'Antonine* (1864). The

[1] *Trésor de la langue française* cites *confession* as entering usage in French in ca. 980 in *Passion du Christ* with the sense of 'aveu de ses péchés fait à un prêtre': it is inextricably connected to the idea of wrongdoing. The wider sense 'aveu d'une faute' emerged slightly later, in ca. 1265; the *Trésor* cites Brunet Latin's *Trésor,* which contains the phrase 'la confiession dou malfaitour *[sic]*' ('Confession', *Trésor de la langue française*, available online < https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/confession>, [accessed 7 January 2020]). Jean-Charles Laveaux in his *Nouveaux dictionnaire de la langue française* of 1820 defines confession as 'aveu, déclaration que l'on fait d'une chose, dont on a quelque honte, et qu'on se repent d'avoir faite. *La confession d'une faute, d'un tort que l'on a eu*' (Jean-Charles Laveaux, 'Confession', *Nouveau dictionnaire de la langue française,* 2 vols (Paris: Deterville, 1820), I, p.419). The *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* of 1835 has a slightly more complex system of meanings: it defines confession in its widest sense as 'aveu, déclaration que l'on fait de quelque chose', listing then amongst the primary usages of *aveu, 'Faire l'aveu de sa faute, d'un crime'. Dictionnaire de l'Académie française,* 2 vols (Paris: Imprimerie de l'institut de France, 1835) I, p.373.

novels differ enormously in the nature of the transgression they depict, in the nature of the confession (*La Confession* focuses explicitly on religious confession; *La Confession d'Antonine* on secular); and they are published at opposite ends of the period. Nonetheless, these novels share crucial common features that start to build a picture of a genre of confession. Beginning with Janin's *La Confession,* the chapter examines how the novel's depiction of Anatole's criminal action draws on a gothic context. It then argues that the presentation of Anatole's transgression sits uncomfortably with the Catholic framework that the novel explicitly brings into play: Anatole does not seem in control of his action at all and is thus unable fully to claim responsibility for it. The chapter then proceeds by arguing that alongside Anatole's act sit two other sites of conflict for him: his sexual insecurities and his experience of *mal du siècle.* Further, the act of confession offers Anatole no respite: neither absolution for his crime nor relief from his suffering. The next part of this chapter will examine how, in *La Confession d'Antonine,* Antonine's 'crime' is both a crime of the heart and a sexual misdemeanour. Antonine's transgression, whilst vastly different from Anatole's, also undermines Catholic notions of sin and repentance. Furthermore, for Antonine too 'what is confessed' transcends transgression itself: the novel is as much about selfhood as it is about wrongdoing. The final section of the chapter will explore how the notion of transgression evolves over the course of the period examined by the thesis, considering in particular the role of Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* in reorientating the scope of confession away from the criminal towards other forms of transgression.

Part One: *La Confession* by Jules Janin (1830)

La Confession, published on the 3rd April 1830, was soon 'dans les mains de tout le monde'.[2] According to a letter Janin wrote his father, the first edition sold out within fifteen hours;[3] a second edition quickly followed.[4] Janin was then a young journalist and the author of the immensely successful *L'Âne mort et la femme guillotinée,* (1829). The earlier novel, which received rave reviews and which, following its initial print run, went on to have seventeen further editions,[5] was clearly a selling point for *La Confession*: *La Confession'*s full title was *La Confession par l'auteur de L'Âne mort et la femme guillotinée*. Whilst ultimately *La Confession* was not as great a commercial success as *L'Âne mort*,[6] it certainly made a resounding impact upon the literary consciousness of 1830.[7] Balzac indeed classed it next to Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le noir,* Nodier's *Histoire du roi de Bohême* and his own *Physiologie du mariage,* as one of that year's seminal texts.[8]

The driving force of *La Confession,* as summarised by the reviewer in *Le Temps,* 'peut être renfermée dans ces deux mots: un coupable cherche un prêtre'.[9] The novel, written in the third person, focusses on specifically Catholic confession. Anatole, the protagonist, is 'coupable', not just socially or morally, but criminally.

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[2] Anonymous, '*La Confession'*, *Le Constitutionnel,* 28 April 1830, p.3.
[3] Jules Janin, letter to his father, 18 April, 1830, cited in *Les Amours de Jules Janin et 'Le Mariage du Critique': une correspondance inédite,* ed. by Mergier-Bourdeix (Paris: C. Klincksieck, Paris, 1968), pp.24-25.
[4] The second edition was published on 29 May 1830.
[5] Jacques Landrin, *Jules Janin conteur et romancier* (Paris: Société les belles lettres, 1978), p.61.
[6] After *La Confession*'s prompt second edition, it did not have another one until 1860 (Landrin, p.133).
[7] Indeed, Pierre Barbéris asserts that it 'fit encore plus de bruit' than *L'Âne mort* (*Balzac et le mal du siècle,* 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), I, p.921).
[8] Balzac, 'Lettres sur Paris', 'Lettre XI, 'À M…., À Tours', first published in *Le Voleur*, 10 janvier 1831, reprinted in *Œuvres diverses,* ed. by Pierre-Georges Castex, Roland Chollet and René Guise, 2 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1990), II, pp.933-940.
[9] Anonymous '*La Confession', Le Temps,* 10 April 1830, p.3.

For reasons which are never fully articulated, he murders his bride, Anna — the namesake of the character in De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*[10] — on their wedding night. He is immediately consumed by guilt and falls into despair. Unlike the criminal in Hugo's *Le Dernier Jour d'un condamné* (1829), Anatole does not have to face retribution from human justice: no one suspects him of the murder. Janin thus sidesteps the debate raging about the justice system following Hugo's work, and focuses on another topic: religion, which he explores alongside an interrogation of subjectivity and individual consciousness. Anatole decides that confessing will give him the absolution he fervently desires, but none of the priests he approaches will hear his confession.

In what is a parody of a quest narrative, Anatole's quest works backwards.[11] The harder he tries, the further he is from his goal: towards the end of the novel, Anatole is 'beaucoup moins avancé que le premier jour' (vol II, p.114). In its episodic structure, *La Confession* echoes *L'Âne mort*, which is structured around acts of storytelling; *La Confession* is structured around acts of not telling, as Anatole is constantly refused the chance to confess. This structure led Eugène de Mirecourt to dismiss the novel as 'cette guenille encyclopédique',[12] and the *Globe* review to comment that 'ce tableau […] n'offre qu'une réunion de points de vue séparés, de vignettes semées au hazard'.[13] However, the individual encounters with priests are

[10] She is called Ann in the original and Anna in Musset's version.
[11] See Landrin, p.153 on *La Confession* and parody.
[12] Eugène de Mirecourt, *Jules Janin* (Paris: Gustave Havard, 1857), p.71.
[13] 'K.', *'La Confession', Le Globe,* 16 April 1830, pp.3-4 (p.3).

not simply 'vignettes semées au hazard', but rather a trajectory in which Anatole's quest for a confessor grows increasingly absurd.[14]

Janin's novel supports anticlerical attitudes which were particularly present in the lead-up to the July Revolution.[15] Janin portrays priests — of every rank — as failing in their priestly duties, in almost every imaginable way. Anatole's local priest l'abbé Paul is afraid of the gravity of the task: 'je ne suis pas investi d'un caractère assez sacré pour oser soutenir face à face l'aveu terrible que vous voulez me faire' (vol I, p.136). Another priest ends up going for dinner, rather than hearing Anatole's confession,[16] whilst the Cardinal Amalfi, simply cannot be bothered to go himself to hear the confession of a dying man and sends someone else in his stead.[17] Anatole witnesses the priest José failing to respond to another (female) confessant's needs: he banishes the confessant Juana from his cell because he is too attracted to her to trust himself to spend more time in her presence. Janin hereby not only creates another example of a priest failing to receive confession, but gives credence to the image of the 'prêtre séducteur'.[18] Tellingly, though only a short section of the novel, it

[14] Also see Maurice Ménard who offers an illuminating analysis of the relationship between vouloir/pouvoir within Anatole's search for a confessor, 'Jules Janin et 'l'école du désenchantement', in *Jules Janin et son temps: Un moment du Romantisme*, ed. by Pierre-Georges Castex (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1974) pp.103-124 (p.114). *La Confession* in some ways echoes the tradition of the quest novel, which, since *Don Quixote,* had always been an anarchic genre. Cervantes' work, as well as in Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste* (1796), and Nodier's *Histoire du roi de Bohême* (1830), published the same year as *La Confession,* are simultaneously quest novels and anti-quest novels: they revolve around a quest but the quest does not work.

[15] Also see Jacques Landrin on this: '*La Confession* fait, en réalité, partie de toute une campagne anti-religieuse qui se développe surtout après 1825', p.156.

[16] *La Confession,* vol I, p.190.

[17] *La Confession,* vol II, p.5.

[18] A type discussed by Corbin, 'La rélation intime ou les plaisirs de l'échange' in *Histoire de la vie privée,* p.510. The type of the 'prêtre séducteur' finds one of its most extreme manifestations in the previous century, in Sade's representation of the monk Severino in *La Nouvelle Justine,* who, aroused by Justine's confession, engages in sexual acts with a teenage boy during that confession. (Marquis de Sade, *La Nouvelle Justine ou Les malheurs de la vertu*, pp.54-55). This episode would have been known to a small sector of French society at the time — to a Parisien/libertin, and often artistic élite, who

is this moment which is depicted on the frontispiece,[19] in an image of sexuality penetrating the confession, which situates the woman as a source of desire, both temptress and vulnerable to the priest. *La Confession* was published only eight years after the Mingrat affair:[20] this representation of desirous priests still sold. It is a moment (in the text and illustration) that further adds to the novel's anticlericalism.

It is not just that Anatole is failed by priests: he is also failed by the whole system of confession. Anatole thinks that his crime is too great to confess; he thinks of the women he knows who go to confession, and laments 'quelle différence entre lui et ces bonnes femmes, entre son crime et ce qu'elles vont dire' (vol I, p.124). He fears that confession is designed for the avowal of small sins, and not a massive crime such as his. In this fear, he is proved right. His crime does not even appear in the *Dictionnaire des cas de conscience* he discovers in a presbytery*;* there is 'pas un mot qui le regarde comme possible' (vol II, p.25). Apparently, the specifics of what Anatole has done are outside the Church's conception of sin; the categorisation offered by such a book fails him. The *Dictionnaire des cas de conscience* disappoints Anatole in more ways than one: he searches in it to try to understand what absolution is, but the book only defines absolution by what it is not, proceeding through a series of 'propositions' which are undermined by 'censures' and which fail to elucidate. The essence of absolution in the *Dictionnaire* — as in Anatole's quest — remains elusive. The *Dictionnaire* becomes symbolic of the problems with confession, which is both institutionalised and yet seemingly impossible to achieve.

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accessed Sade's censored works clandestinely. Amongst those who read Sade were Janin, Baudelaire, Flaubert and the Goncourt brothers (John Phillips, *How to Read Sade* (London: Granta, 2005), p.3).

[19] See image at the end of this chapter, on p.133.

[20] See p.60 of the introduction to this thesis.

Finally, Anatole's quest ends, not in his finding a priest, but rather in *being found* by one, who visits Anatole to demand his confession. This final priest is a tyrant — 'un homme assez fort pour dominer tout son être' (vol II, p.190). Deeply ironically, what Anatole has so desired now terrifies him; he tries to delay his confession, but the priest insists. Humiliated, Anatole performs a *confession générale,* which drives him mad. In a final twist of anticlerical irony, after six months he recovers sufficiently (which, Janin implies, might mean not very much at all) to become a priest himself. Thus Anatole, a madman and a murderer, takes holy orders — something that scandalised the reviewer in *L'Universel.*[21]

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(i) Anatole's murderous crime, the gothic and the *fantastique*

Anatole's crime is a *péché mortel*: a sin which contravenes the Ten Commandments and 'qui fait perdre la grâce de Dieu, et qui donne une espèce de mort à l'âme'.[22] The murder of a wife in her wedding bed is reminiscent of the dark environment presented by Janin in *L'Âne mort.* Janin thus draws for a second time upon the period's fascination with gothic literature. It is a trend upon which Musset's *L'Anglais mangeur d'opium* also draws: Musset's addition of the story of Anna, according to which Anna has been imprisoned by an evil *marquis,* brings into the opium eater's narrative of subjectivity a macabre world (pp.137-157). The vogue only intensified around 1830,[23] partly due to the popularity of E.T.A Hoffmann,

[21] 'F.', *'La Confession', L'Universel,* 24 April 1830, cited by Landrin, p.155.
[22] 'Mortel', *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1835), II, p.233. By contrast, a 'péché véniel is categorised as 'Des péchés légers, et qui [...] ne font point perdre la Grâce' ('Véniel', *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* (1835), II, p.916). According to the *Catéchisme du Concile de Trente*, mortal sins must be confessed, whilst venial sins do not need to be confessed but may be (pp.502-3).
[23] See Jean-Pierre Saïdah, 'La représentation parodique du mal autour de 1830', in *Puissances du mal*, ed. by Pierre Glaudes and Dominique Rabaté (Bordeaux: P.U.B., 2009), pp.97-108 (p.107). Also see

whose twenty-volume complete works, translated by François-Adolphe Loève-Veimars, started to appear in 1829. George Sand, wrote to Jules Boucoiran in 1831, 'les monstres sont à la mode. Faisons des monstres'.[24] Contemporary novels that indulged in the criminal had immense commercial success;[25] the *conte fantastique,* especially Gautier's and Mérimée's, grew and flourished in the 1830s, whilst there was a growing, albeit clandestine, fascination with the Marquis de Sade — about whom Janin would write a short volume.[26]

The narrator of *La Confession* delights in telling his readers 'ce que je raconte est atroce' (vol I, p.71). Janin presents a gothic world where heinous acts happen behind closed doors (and where the novel takes readers behind those doors).[27] His work offers echoes of Matthew Lewis's *Le Moine* (translated into French in 1797), which Janin particularly admired. [28] Both novels present worlds in which women are vulnerable even as — indeed, especially as — they sleep, to the violence of men: in Lewis's novel, the evil priest Ambrosio twice uses moments when Antonia is asleep to attempt his rape of her;[29] in *La Confession* Anna is vulnerable as she sleeps to (possibly) rape, and certainly, to murder. In *Le Moine* and *La Confession,* rape and murder are intermingled and human justice does not figure at all. Furthermore,

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Damian Catani, *Evil: A History in Modern French Literature and Thought* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), especially pp.1-49.

[24] George Sand, Letter to Jules Boucoir, 9 March 1831, quoted by Louis Maigron in *Le Romantisme et les moeurs* (Paris: 1910), p.171.

[25] Barbey d'Aurevilly's early work, Charles Lassailly's *Les Roueries de Trialph* (1833)*,* Frédéric Soulié's *Mémoires du Diable* (1837-8*)* offer three such examples from the 1830s. (See Saïdah, p.107).

[26] Saïdah, p.107. Janin, in his 1834 article on the Marquis de Sade, commented on the attitudes towards the writer: 'Voilà un nom que tout le monde sait et que personne ne prononce' (Jules Janin, *Le Marquis de Sade* (Paris: Marchands de nouveautés, 1834), p.1.

[27] What happens in the private space — especially in bedrooms — was to become a concern of the *conte fantastique* as it developed in the 1830s*,* which often explores the penetration of horror or the supernatural into private, often sexual, moments. Gautier's *La Morte amoureuse* (1836) offers one such example.

[28] See Janin's article 'Le Moine', reprinted by him in his *Histoire de la littérature dramatique,* I (1853), p.43.

[29] Including once in an almost-coma, brought about by a poison he arranges for her to take.

subversively, Janin's priest who finally confesses Anatole is reminiscent of Lewis's Ambrosio: Ambrosio has '[une] taille haute et [un] aspect imposant' (p.22); 'on remarquait encore dans son regard vif et pénétrant une sorte de sévérité [...] dont peu de personnes pouvaient soutenir l'aspect';[30] whilst Anatole's confessor is of an 'haute taille et d'un visage redoutable' (vol I, p.88), 'un regard vif et ferme' (vol II, p.177), and a 'regard de feu' (vol II, p.190). Morever, in linking the gothic world he depicts with the act of confession, Janin also draws on a connection that is present in *Le Moine,* where confession (and the exploitation of it) is a central theme,[31] and Ann Radcliffe's *L'Italien ou le Confessionnal des pénitents noirs,* also published in French in 1797.[32]

La Confession has elements of the fantastic too*:* indeed, it is described in Larousse's *Dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle* as 'cette œuve étrange, fantastique'.[33] The priest who ultimately confesses Anatole has already appeared mysteriously at Anna's funeral, telling Anatole that they will meet again (vol I, p.89). He appears omniscient, already knowing Anatole's crime (vol II, p.184). The fantastical priest is depicted with the same level of reality as the other priests. By introducing the *fantastique* in this way, Janin echoes Hoffmann's style, where 'there is no question concerning the reality of the fantastic element; it is evoked concretely and inserted into a

[30] Matthew Lewis, *Le Moine,* trans. by Jacques-Marie Deschamps, 3 vols (Paris: Maradan, 1819), I p.22, p.23.
[31] From Raymond's long confession to Lorenzo about having impregnated his sister, to Ambrosio's exploitation of his role as priest, acting as confessor to Antonia's mother, as part of his plot to rape her daughter.
[32] See Michèle Hecquet, 'Aspects du roman gothique: la confession féminine dans les romans de Sand', in *Mélodrames et romans noirs, 1750-1890,* ed. by Simone Bernard-Griffiths et Jean Sgard (Toulouse: Presses unviersitaries du Mirail, 2000), pp.449-459 (p.450-1): 'La confession est bien un thème gothique majeur: le moine Ambrosio dans le roman de Lewis reçoit la confession de la religieuse Agnès, l'intimide, la menace de l'*inpace;* son rôle de confesseur lui permet des tête-a-tête prolongés et répétés auprès d'Antonia. Le thème est plus discret, quoiqu'exhibé par le titre, dans *Le Confessionnal des pénitents noirs* d'Ann Radcliffe'.
[33] Larousse, '*La Confession', Grand Dictionnaire universel,* IV, p.904.

mimetically accurate representation of everyday reality'.[34] As in Todorov's description of the *fantastique*, so in Janin's novel,

> dans un monde qui est bien le nôtre […] se produit un événement qui ne peut s'expliquer par les lois de ce même monde familier […] Le fantastique, c'est l'hésitation éprouvée par un être qui ne connaît que les lois naturelles, face à un événement en apparence surnaturel.[35]

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(ii) Crime, agency and doubles

The novel spends little time analysing Anatole's motivations: the murder comes out of nowhere. This lack of clarity was indeed one of the controversies that surrounded the novel: *Le Constitutionnel* declares that 'M. Janin aurait bien fait de nous mieux expliquer cet Anatole et son épouvantable délire, qui change un lendemain de noces en un jour funèbre'.[36] The narrator in *La Confession* frequently emphasises how Anatole's crime cannot be explained: 'Je serai très simple et j'irai vite: à quoi bon s'appesantir sur un fait qu'on ne peut pas expliquer?' (vol I, p.63). The narrative certainly does move quickly. Within one sentence, Anatole goes from calling his wife's name, to murdering her — as if one could just accidentally fall into murder: '"Anna!" dit-il enfin, "Entendez-moi, Anna! C'est moi, Anna!" et en même temps ses deux mains robustes entouraient le cou de la malheureuse fille' (vol I, p.78). The sentence's structure reduces Anatole's responsibility for his act: rather than Anatole being the subject of the clause, his hands are, apparently having a life of their own. By the next sentence Anna is dead. Having given detailed access to Anatole's

[34] Gary Cummiskey , *The Changing Face of Horror: A Study of the Nineteenth-Century French Fantastic Short Story* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), p.95.
[35] Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris: Seuil, 1976), pp.28-29.
[36] 'La Confession', *Le Constitutionnel,* p.3.

thoughts throughout, the narrator at this very moment excludes the reader from them, describing only his actions.

Indeed, Anatole has so little control that his crime is represented almost as an act of madness. Just previously, at the wedding ball Anatole feels at odds with himself: 'il est devenu étranger à lui-même, il n'est plus lui, lui Anatole' (vol I, p.68). The self is transformed: 'il n'est plus lui'. The common nineteenth-century word for a madman, 'aliéné', contains within its etymology the idea of being divided from oneself — its roots lie in the Latin verb *alienare* (to part with, to estrange) and *alienus*, (meaning 'of or belonging to another person or place'). On one level, in becoming 'étranger à lui-même', Anatole is showing signs of madness. From another perspective, the description of Anatole suggests a second self, a double, who commits this heinous, inexplicable act. This Anatole is totally out of character with the 'other' Anatole, the character prior to the marriage, or indeed he whom we meet, racked with remorse, after the murder. Otto Rank articulates the tropes of the double:

> We always find a likeness which resembles the main character down to the smallest particulars [...] always, too, this double works at cross-purposes with its prototype; and, as a rule, the catastrophe occurs in the relationship with a woman.[37]

For Karl Miller, the double is 'the dynamic metaphor of the second self [...] the hypothesis of a supervention within the individual, of autonomous and adversary selves';[38] whilst Naomi Segal defines it as 'a piece of self masquerading as other [who] acts for him [the protagonist] and carries out inadmissable impulses for him'.[39] Whilst most commonly the double is a figure outside the protagonist, who

[37] Otto Rank, *Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*, trans. by Harry Tucker (University of Nevada Press, 1971), p.42.
[38] Karl Miller, *Doubles* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p.vi.
[39] Segal, p.14.

appears like his mirror image,[40] for Anatole it is almost as if he has become his own double; he is taken over by another version of himself.

The double is another strong gothic trope, coming particularly significantly into French consciousness with Hoffmann's *L'Elixir du diable, histoire tirée des papiers du frère Ménard, capucin,* translated into French by Jean Cohen and published in 1829, the year before *La Confession* appeared, by Mame et Delaunay-Vallée, who also published *L'Anglais mangeur d'opium*. It tells the story of a monk, Médard, who, drinking the devil's elixir, finds himself both fragmented and doubled:

> Je me voyais exister sous deux formes différentes [...] Je suis ce que je parais, et je parais ce je que ne suis pas; énigme inexplicable à moi-même, ma personne est en quelque sorte partagée en deux'.[41]

Like Anatole, he cannot control his actions, committing a series of heinous acts, including stabbing Aurélie, the woman he loves, on their wedding day:

> les esprits de l'enfer [...] s'emparènt de mon esprit [...] Je saisis Aurélie avec une telle fureur que ses membres se contractèrent [...] "C'est moi… moi... ton amant, ton époux... " Je tirai de mon sein le couteau fatal... je frappai Aurélie.[42]

This violence of a bridegroom towards his bride, its suddenness and unpredictability, and even the words he says (compared to Anatole's 'Anna, Anna, entendez-moi, c'est moi, Anna', vol I, p.78) find an echo in Anatole's actions in *La Confession.*[43] The concept of the double, suggested by Anatole's behaviour in *La*

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[40] Rank, p.42. Also see Andrew J. Webber *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp.23-54.
[41] E.T.A Hoffmann, *L'Elixir du diable, histoire tirée des papiers du frère Ménard, capucin,* trans. by Jean Cohen, 4 vols (Paris: Mame et Delaunay-Vallée, 1829) I, p.159.
[42] E.T.A Hoffmann, *L'Elixir du diable,* III, p.181.
[43] E.T.A. Hoffmann's novel was almost certainly an influence on another gothic novel of confession: James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), where Robert Wringhim has a double, Gil-Martin, who convinces him to commit various acts of murder, including of his own brother, and who commits many more himself. The English translation of Hoffmann's work appeared in the same year as Hogg's novel, translated by a friend of Hogg's, so it is likely he would have been aware of the German work, even if he had not read it in full (Elizabeth W. Harries,

Confession, was to become a trope in many later novels of confession: sometimes the double is, as it is for Anatole, associated specifically with transgressive acts; sometimes rather with a deeply unstable, unhappy sense of self**.**

By entitling the novel *La Confession,* and dedicating the majority of it to Anatole's search for a priest, Janin brings into play a Catholic system of morality which sits far from harmoniously with his depiction of the crime. The lack of explanation for Anatole's actions — and the suggestion of madness or a double — means that Anatole has little ownership over the crime. Catholic confession depends upon the confessant being able to take responsibility for his/her sin — to articulate it and own it. The *Manuel du pénitent ou conduite pour la contrition et la confession,* first published in 1814, tells penitents, as well as confessing the sin itself, to declare 'les motifs que vous vous êtes proposés en péchant'.[44] Anatole cannot do this — there is no motive, it just happens. Indeed, Janin directly undermines the idea that one can articulate the reasons behind sin — a process which lies at the heart of confession: 'sans doute il existe une cause au moindres mouvements des hommes, mais cette cause qui peut la dire?' (vol I, p.61). Furthermore, central to Catholic confession is contrition: 'une douleur et une détestation des péchés commis, accompagnée de la résolution de ne plus pécher à l'avenir';[45] one must be able to promise to God, 'j'éviterais avec soin le péché, les sources, et les occasions du péché'.[46] But how can anyone be sure not to sin again if the sin has been, as it is for Anatole, outside his

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'Duplication and Duplicity: James Hogg's Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner', *The Wordsworth Circle* 10 (1979), pp.187-196 (p.192); also see Miller, p.2, on this influence). Hogg's novel was not translated into French until 1949, so the similarities it shares with Janin's *La Confession* in terms of murderous doubles most probably stem from the joint Hoffmann influence.

[44] Sambucy, p.166.

[45] *Catéchisme du concile de Trente,* p.479.

[46] Sambucy, p.119.

control in the first place? Janin thus presents a mortal sin, framed in a Catholic context, in a way that is irreconcilable with Catholic doctrine on sin.

On one level, what is confessed is Anatole's crime, which sits uncomfortably with its Catholic framework. On another level, behind Anatole's crime lies another source of shame: sexual failure. In this, 'le sexe [est] matière privilégiée de confession':[47] closely intertwined with Anatole's actions, and underwriting his need to confess, is the catastrophe of his wedding night prior to the murder. Anatole finds himself unable to reach Anna physically. This failure is in part linguistic: just when they should be consummating their relationship, he forgets her name (vol I, p.75). This failure to make verbal contact renders consummation impossible, 'elle était modestement couchée comme dans le lit de sa petite chambre verte à côté de son père; elle était là sans désir, sans peur, et elle s'arrangeait pour dormir' (vol I, pp.75-6). He has failed sexually before he has even tried. His efforts at physical contact as she sleeps — his 'étreintes' (it is unclear whether they amount to rape) — fail to create the connection he seeks: 'Il était seul en effet, seul en proie au plus violent déséspoir' (vol I, p.78). In one interpretation, it is this sexual failure that leads to the murder — the attempted embrace is replaced by 'ses deux mains robustes' which 'entouraient le cou' (vol I, p.78). Seconds before, 'il voulut faire battre son cœur' (vol I, p.78) — having failed, he makes her heart stop beating. Murder becomes a substitute for sex; emasculated sexually, he reasserts his masculinity by killing her.[48] The house, hearing Anna's dying cry, misinterprets it as 'le signal attendu de l'amour heureux' (vol I, p.79), but *la petite mort* has been replaced by actual *mort*. Rank's

[47] Foucault, p.82.
[48] Albeit in a distinctly unvirile, and unphallic way, by strangling rather than by stabbing her.

analysis of doubles emphasises the double as the manifestation of psychological insecurities, amongst them anxiety over sexual failure.[49] On one level, the 'double' of Anatole who murders Anna is the embodiment of his fear of impotence.

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(iii) Crime and *le mal*

On another level, the root of the murder lies further back than Anatole's sexual failure. Anatole, like many of his era, suffers from profound disillusionment: 'par ces goûts, par ses mœurs [....] par son peu de penchant à l'enthousiasme, Anatole appartenait tout entier à cette génération nouvelle' (vol I, p.4). *La Confession* explores this 'mal européen' (vol II, p.114), as Janin terms it. This 'mal' is a reference to a sentiment which is now in scholarship most commonly referred to as *mal du siècle,* though in the nineteenth century, it was sometimes just *le mal,* or *la maladie du siècle* or even, so closely linked was the sentiment to *René* and *Oberman*, *le mal de René,* or *le mal d'Oberman.*[50] The specific term *mal(adie) du siècle* did not actually emerge in *René* or *Oberman*, but some years later. It is difficult to date precisely when but the terms were certainly present by midway through the second decade: *maladie du siècle* is evoked by Constant in a draft preface to *Adolphe* dating from 1816:

> J'ai voulu peindre dans *Adolphe* une des principales *maladies morales de notre siècle*, cette fatigue, cette incertitude, cette absence de force, cette

[49] See Rank, p.63, and Segal, p.14.
[50] Simone Bernard Griffiths, 'Liminaire: Ecriture du moi et difficulté d'être dans la première moitié du XIXe siècle: esquisse d'une anthropologie du mal du siècle', in *Difficulté d'être et mal du siècle dans les corréspondances et journaux intimes de la première moitié du XIXe siècle,* ed. by Simone Bernard-Griffiths, with the collaboration of Christian Croisille (Aubière: Centre de recherches révolutionnaires et romantiques de l'université de Blaise-Pascal, 1998), pp.5-27 (p.5). Janin himself never uses the term 'mal du siècle' itself — instead he simply uses the phrase 'mal européen' (p.114).

> analyse perpétuelle, qui place une arrière-pensée à côté de tous les sentiments, et qui par-là les corrompt dès leur naissance.[51]

Mal du siècle contains lexical complexity. The *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1835) defines *mal* as both 'ce qui est contraire au bien, ce qui est mauvais, nuisible, désavantageux, préjuciable' and also 'douleur physique, maladie'. S*iècle* can mean both 'espace de temps composé de cent années' and 'l'état de la vie mondaine, en tant qu'il est opposé à l'état d'une vie chrétienne, de la vie religieuse'.[52] The phrase therefore contains resonances both of wrongdoing and of pain, of the century and of the earthly. It refers to the sense of sadness and disillusionment experienced especially by young adults. Larousse's *Grand Dictionnaire universel* describes *le mal du siècle* as 'le doute et la désillusion, le scepticisme en toutes choses'.[53] *René* had created a link between this emotional *mal* and the need to confess — a link that *La Confession* only deepens and that was to become one of the defining traits of subsequent novels of confession, explored in Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle,* Soulié's *Confession générale,* and Frémy's *Confessions d'un bohémien,* amongst others.

The very early nineteenth-century manifestation of *mal du siècle* — that seen in *René* — has often been interpreted as Catholic and Monarchist, and oriented

[51] Constant ultimately deleted these words from the preface to the second edition before publication, but they can be found reprinted in *Œuvres de Benjamin Constant*: *Écrits littéraires* (1800-1813), ed. by Paul Delbouille and Martine de Rougemont De Gruyter (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1995), p.196 (italics added). Also see Armand Hoog, 'Who invented the Mal du Siècle? A Study in Responsibilities', *Yale French Studies*, 13 (1954), pp. 42-51 (p.44), and Bernard Griffiths, 'Liminaire', (p.5).
[52] 'Mal' and 'Siècle' in *Dictionnaire de l'Académie francaise* (1835); 'mal' in volume II, p.152, 'siècle', vol. II, pp.741-2. Also see Barbéris, p.56.
[53] Larousse, *'La Confession d'un enfant du siècle', Grand Dictionnaire universel,* IV, p.904. Larousse uses the term 'maladie du siècle'.

towards the past,[54] a reaction again the Revolution of 1789.[55] This first form of *mal du siècle* gave way to a second manifestation, particularly dominant in the year of the July Revolution;[56] an 'école du désanchantement', as Balzac terms it, characterised by 'la senteur cadavéreuse d'une société qui s'éteint'.[57] This second manifestation was still inspired by René and Oberman; George Sand writes of a whole generation, who gave in to the temptation to 's'enfermer dans une douleur égoïste, de se croire René ou Oberman'.[58] However, this second *mal du siècle* was also subtly different; it has been termed by some a '*mal du siècle* bourgeois',[59] by others, the *mal du siècle* of 'la génération liberale'.[60] It is no longer the *mal du siècle* of those who felt the victims of history, but rather of those who felt shut off from history entirely.[61] This second bout of *mal du siècle* tended to be orientated towards the future — as Balzac phrased it 'impatience d'avenir'.[62] In *La Confession,* Janin indeed differentiates his portrayal of *mal du siècle* from that of Chateaubriand: 'Heureux non-seulement celui qui trouve René […] mais encore qui trouve un monde où le produire! Qui rencontre […] assez de mouvement et d'émotion pour que l'on croie à l'ennui de René' (vol I, p.xxxv). By contrast, Janin's society is devoid of

[54] Barbéris, I, p.59.
[55] Fabrice Lascar, 'Mal du siècle, mal de lettres: les médécins français au chevet de l'écrivain romantique', in *Difficulté d'être et mal du siècle,* pp.349-271, (p.362).
[56] Lascar, p.362.
[57] Balzac, '*Lettre XI: À M…., À Tours*', in *Œuvres diverses,* p.937. The term *école du désanchantement* itself is redolent of a disenchanted cynicism: the idea of a *school* of disenchantment undermines any notion of authenticity within *mal du siècle.*
[58] George Sand, *Histoire de ma vie,* XVII (1855), p.186.
[59] Barbéris, I, p.88.
[60] Lascar, p.362.
[61] Also see Lascar, p.362.
[62] Balzac, writing in 1830 in *Complaintes satiriques sur les mœurs du temps présent,* quoted in Paul Bénichou, *L'École du désenchantement: Sainte Beuve, Nodier, Musset, Nerval, Gautier,* 2 vols, (Paris: Gallimard, 1992) I, p.54.

emotion.[63] In this world of 1830, one can even be disillusioned by the type of disillusion one experiences.

Balzac sees Janin's *La Confession* as a central text of 'l'école du désenchantement' of 1830 — citing it alongside *Le Rouge et le noir, Histoire du roi de Bohême* and *Physiologie du mariage.*[64] The anonymous reviewer of *La Confession* in the *Journal des débats* similarly identifies the novel's disillusionment :

> [La] pensée [de Janin] semble en proie à ce désenchantement de toutes les choses de ce monde, à ce deuil intime qui tient dans la littérature nouvelle la place que l'illusion, l'espoir, la foi, [...] avaient tenue jusqu'à présent dans les écrits faits pour parler à l'esprit et à l'âme des hommes.[65]

This review not only indicates the extent to which Janin's text was read as one of disillusionment, but also other crucial features of *mal du siècle.* Firstly, the reference to a 'deuil intime' is reflective of how *mal du siècle* and *intimité* emerged alongside each other and, in part, depended on each other. Secondly, according to the reviewer, disillusionment has replaced 'la foi'**;** *mal du siècle* is associated with lack of belief. Given the double meaning of *siècle*, on one level, *mal du siècle* literally means the disease of the earthly/a lack of belief. Janin introduces this theme in the opening to the novel: 'Aujourd'hui on ne croit plus à rien' (*La Confession,* vol I, p.3). Anatole is doomed to try to seek solace in religion (confession) but in a world where he no longer has access to such forms of belief: he tries to find comfort in something in which he does not know how to believe. Indeed, the *mal du siècle* which prompts his need to confess is also what makes a successful confession impossible. As his encounter with the *Dictionnaire des cas de conscience* shows ('voyons donc ce que

[63] Janin writes for instance about a lack of passion — which makes it impossible for Anatole to love Anna — 'il n'y a plus d'amour' (vol I, p.17).
[64] Balzac, '*Lettre XI: À M…., À Tours*', *Œuvres diverses* , p.937.
[65] 'S.', 'La Confession', *Journal des débats,* 17 April 1830, p.5.

c'est que l'absolution', vol II, p.17), Anatole does not even know what it is he seeks so desperately: he is looking for a solution in an outdated practice he does not even understand.

A further source of Anatole's *mal du siècle* is his struggle to find a role in society. Anatole is in a hiatus in life. Despite the fact that Janin's novel was published a few months before the July Revolution, the society in it appears to be far more one which has stagnated than one on the brink of change. Anatole marries, because he does not know what else to do. This society offers nothing to young people: 'le temps d'être jeune est passé' (vol I, p.12). Balzac, in his review, draws particular attention to this aspect of *La Confession*: **'**grâce à la gérontocratie qui nous opprime, l'enfance de cette vie ne commence qu'à quarante ans'.[66] The present may be bleak, but the future is a further source of anxiety. It is this fear that prompts Anatole to see in an old woman at his wedding an image of his wife: 'voilà pourtant comment sera ma femme un jour' (vol I, p.68). His horror at the future occupies his thoughts just before he murders Anna: 'il comprit […] quel triste avenir lui était réservé […] des nuits sans amour et sans sommeil, et des jours sans repos! "Jusqu'à ce qu'elle meure elle et moi"' (vol I, p.76). By using the phrase, 'il *comprit',* the narrative validates Anatole's vision. His *mal du siècle* leaves him disillusioned with married life before he has even experienced it, and makes him fear what is to come to the extent that he will take drastic means to escape it. Alongside his sexual failure, this disillusionment is another cause of his crime.

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[66] Balzac, *'La Confession',* 14 April 1830, in *Le Feuilleton des journaux politiques*, reprinted in *Œuvres* diverses, II, pp.697-701 (p.697). *Gérontocratie* is a term which was ubiquitous in the 1830s, associated with the fact that, whilst demographically France was getting younger, power still lay with the older generation (See Fazy's 1828 work, *De la gérontocratie, ou abus de la sagesse des vieillards dans le gouvernement de la France* (Paris: Delaforêt, Ponthieu et Delaunay, 1828), p.11: Fazy accuses 'la génération de 1789' of having 'déshérité ses enfants'[66]).

In a novel that contains almost no dialogue, Anatole is completely isolated, even before the murder. Janin opens his novel by claiming that for an honest man, 'aujourd'hui […] [il n'y a] plus d'abandon et d'amitié parmi ses semblables' (vol I, p.2.). After the marriage, Anatole feels more alone than ever, fully conscious of 'l'abîme qui sépare cette vie de [sa] vie, cette âme de [son] âme' (vol I, p.63). In the build-up to the murder, he feels increasingly separate from Anna. Seeing her dancing at the ball, 'd'abord il ne la reconnut pas' (vol I, p.66). Not being able to place her visually is quickly followed by not being able to place her linguistically, forgetting her name. Just as his fear of the future is a catalyst for his murder of Anna, so is his isolation.

Though the narrator describes the murder as 'un fait qu'on ne peut pas expliquer' (vol I, p.63), and though he refuses to provide a direct cause and effect or clear motivations, he nonetheless depicts myriad psychological circumstances around it: the murder appears simultaneously completely inexplicable, totally disproportionate, utterly unforeseen, and yet, in retrospect, horribly inevitable. By presenting Anatole as a victim of his era, the narrative reduces the sense of his individual responsibility for his crime — a theme that also emerges in Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle.* Furthermore, *La Confession* is as much dedicated to depicting the context in which Anatole lives and its effect on his psychology as it is focused on the crime itself. In portraying the various manifestations of Anatole's disillusion alongside his crime, the novel explores different types of *mal. Mal* as evil (the act of murder) and *mal* as a (mental) sickness*.* The latter causes the former; the former then prompts more of the latter. Ostensibly about an evil act, the discourse of

the novel actually focuses more on the other 'mal'. Anatole experiences the 'grands maux' of his era (vol I, p.4); 'mal à l'aise' (vol I, p.64), he commits murder, which makes him experience 'épouvantable mal' of remorse (vol I, p.82) and 'tous les maux qu'il avaient à souffrir' (vol I, p.123). He briefly contemplates suicide as a 'remède à tous les maux' (vol II, p.113), but ultimately it is through confession that he tries to escape his suffering.

Alina Clej, writing about De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater,* argues that,

> The modern subject is no longer the sinner, but the one who suffers or laments a loss […] Confession is thus redefined as a form of mourning in which echoes of personal and universal grief, not to mention literary echoes, are inextricably mixed'.[67]

Her comment also stands for *La Confession*. What Anatole needs to confess is not just sin, but above all suffering. Sin, suffering and selfhood are deeply interconnected — which is why the next chapter will look at the link between confession and the self. As is apparent in Anatole's journey, there is something of a paradox in confession being used as a medium to explore *mal du siècle*: the disillusionment of *mal du siècle* is bound up with a lack of faith, whereas confession stems from a Catholic sacrament. The tension is reflected in the way that many of the acts of confession in these novels founder, as will be explored in the third chapter.

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[67] Alina Clej, *A Geneology of the Modern Self* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p.33.

(iv) Crime and the act of confession

For Anatole, there is no relief from his psychological suffering: neither that prior to the murder, nor occasioned by it. There is no absolution for Anatole's crime. Firstly, contemporary France does not provide the structures that would enable Anatole to confess. Having started off trying to confess to his local priest, Anatole finally ends up in a mysterious house 'vis-à-vis un labyrinthe de portes' (vol II, pp.130). Anatole's difficulty in finding a priest has now become starkly literal — José's location is so elusive that Anatole literally cannot find him, and then when he does, it is a physical struggle to reach him (José's room is at the end of a ladder). Even when he arrives there, the confession is again deferred; and when Anatole returns to confess to José the next day he finds he has left. The attempt to find José assumes a nightmarish quality. Anatole, following the woman Juana through the house, is faced with a Piranesi-like staircase, in what is a very close echo of *L'Anglais mangeur d'opium.* In Musset's rendering of De Quincey, the opium eater describes Piranesi's *Dreams* paintings, where there are 'vastes salles gothiques' (p.191) and where Piranesi undergoes 'tourmens [*sic*] et efforts' to climb the staircases; Anatole is in a 'vaste maison' (vol II, p.138), where Juana is forced to climb an 'escalier tortueux et élevé' (vol II, p.138). In the Piranesi picture, there are ever more levels to climb:

> suivez l'édifice un peu plus haut, et vous voyez [...] un précipice escarpé [...] Mais levez les yeux et voyez une séconde echapée plus haute encore. Levez encore les yeux, et encore Piranesi sur un plateau plus élevé; et ainsi de suite. (pp.191-2)

Juana is faced with 'un escalier sans fin' and even when 'arrivée au sommet de la maison; […], elle n'avait pas fini de monter. Une échelle était appliquée contre le mur' (vol II, p.138). Piranesi is described as 'sur le bord de l'abîme' (p.192); Juana is

'suspendue sur l'abîme' (vol II, p.138). The opium eater uses Piranesi as a simile for his opium dreams: 'avec le même pouvoir de s'agrandir et de se multiplier, l'architecture s'introduisit dans mes songes' (p.192); for Anatole it instead serves as a metaphor for the impossibility of finding redemption for transgression.

When Anatole does finally confess, the act of confession is brutal, an exploitation of power on the part of the priest[68] — far from providing absolution, it drives Anatole mad. Anatole's confession is represented as an act of violence — a rape of the mind.[69] Anatole is asleep, vulnerable as Anna was. The priest arrives unannounced, waking him and demanding his confession. During the forced confession Anatole is 'prosterné, sa poitrine rendait de sourds gémissements' (vol II, p.189). The description appropriates the discourse of sexuality surrounding anticlerical portrayals of priests as a sexually rapacious threat, translating the language to a psychological framework. The power the priest exerts over Anatole is also, perhaps, a comment on the rigorism that dominated the practice of confessors in the Restoration.[70] As Anatole performs his *confession générale*, he starts to see his whole life as one of sin: 'quand il vint à dire son crime et la mort de sa femme, ce ne fut qu'une faute de plus dans sa vie […] tant il venait de se voir criminel' (vol II, p.189-90). As he confesses, his act of transgression multiplies, moving far beyond his crime

[68] Janin returns to the theme of religious confession as an exploitation of power in *La Religieuse de Toulouse* (1850). Mme de Modonville, who runs a nunnery, is convinced that she has a traitor within the nuns. She forces Mlle de Verduron to perform 'une confession entière, dans toute l'étendue et la rigueur exigées par le concile de Trente' (*La Religieuse de Toulouse,* 3 vols (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1850), III, p.85.). Usurping a role only allowed for priests, she abuses confession as a means of gaining the upper hand. Like the priest in *La Confession,* she actually already knows her confessant's secret before making her confess — again, confession has become about power, rather than knowledge.
[69] The analogy of confession as a form of rape has a long history in anti-confessional texts, dating back to the Reformation, where Martin Luther, in *On Confession: Whither the Pope has Power to Command It* likens confession to rape, and claims that the Pope is an Antichrist 'breaks open the bridal chamber of Christ and makes all Christian souls into whores' (quoted by Taylor, p.63).
[70] Alain Corbin, 'La relation intime ou les plaisirs de l'échange', pp.465-6.

of murder. Rather than confession articulating transgression, it actually *produces* it, transforming all of Anatole's past acts into sins. In a direct inversion of Catholic doctrine, instead of confession bringing absolution and thus erasing the transgression, rather, the act of speaking brings into being *more* sins. Anatole has previously decided against suicide to end his suffering, choosing confession instead (vol II, pp.113-114). Yet his confession, rather than healing him, proves to be another destruction of the self, destroying mind rather than body. As will be examined in more detail in Chapter Two, many novels of confession link confession and/or madness and suicide.[71] *La Confession*'s pattern is typical: a character is unhinged, fragmented within his self, and seeks a confession that he thinks will make him whole, but that in turn further fragments him.

This novel, then, which presents one macabre act of transgression, redolent of gothic fiction, ostensibly offers a simple answer to the question of what is being confessed: the great mortal sin of murder. However, the novel is actually highly complex in its exploration of transgression. On one level, by presenting Anatole's act as unplanned and outside his control, either the act of a madman or just a ridiculous mistake, Janin undermines Catholic notions of responsibility for sin. On another level, what the novel really explores is not this act of murder but what is behind it — sexual failure, disillusionment, isolation. This novel of confession — and Anatole's act of confession itself — is as much about Anatole's selfhood as about his crime. But whilst creating this link between suffering and confession, the novel equally suggests confession cannot provide the answer — either to suffering or to the guilt experienced following crime. Far from offering a way to control the psychological

[71] See pp.186-187 of this thesis.

consequences of committing a transgression, confession worsens them. Far from providing absolution for the crime committed, it rather makes even the innocent parts of a life seem criminal.

Part Two: *La Confession d'Antonine* by Marie Garcia (1864)

La Confession d'Antonine, written by the actress Marie Garcia, was published posthumously in 1864 by Michel Lévy, with a preface by Léon Gozlan. Written at the end of the period considered here, it offers many points of contrast to *La Confession*, published at the very start: in some ways, it is indicative of how the genre has evolved. At the same time, in its exploration of the way in which transgression relates to selfhood and to confession, there are significant similarities between the novels.

In the preface, Gozlan recommends the novel's literary value, describing it as a 'perle littéraire' (p.xviii), to be treasured: 'on le [le livre] relit après l'avoir fermé; on le lira donc toujours' (p.xx). Gozlan's praise offers a particular point of comparison to *La Confession,* marketed in part for its macabre appeal.[72] Instead, Garcia's text is framed in terms of literary quality, suggesting, perhaps, that the novel of confession has achieved a certain literary status by this point. Writing at the end of the century, Houssaye echoes Gozlan's praise, describing the novel as 'un petit roman qui est un

[72] In terms of the title which refers to Janin's previous work, *L'Âne mort et la femme guillotinée.*

chef-d'œuvre de simplicité dans l'émotion', whilst at the same time revealing that Garcia has not had a lasting legacy: 'Qui se rappelle Marie Garcia si ce n'est moi?'.[73]

La Confession d'Antonine, according to an unattributed introduction before the preface, has its foundations in reality — Antonine is based on a real person whom Garcia met:

> Dans une de ces premières stations aux Eaux-Bonnes [...] elle [Garcia] avait raconté ça et là dans ses lettres à un ami l'histoire d'une jeune fille, dont un beau sacrifice avait couronné la vie. Ce fut dans ces lettres retrouvées que, l'hiver suivant, elle prit l'idée de cette histoire (p.vii).

The novel preserves the epistolary form: Marie, appearing as a character in the novel, writes to her lover in Paris. The novel moves between Marie's first-person voice in these letters, and Antonine's first-person confession, recounted within the letters. In *La Confession d'Antonine*, the subject matter is the intricacies of the human heart: 'la main d'une femme a des délicatesses infinies pour peindre les choses du cœur' (p.viii). Antonine, like many female characters of novels of confession that precede this one, from Brigitte in *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* (1836), to Noël's mother in *Confession générale* (1840-48), to Alix in *Les Confessions d'une femme du siècle* (1846), is eaten up by a secret. As for these other women, Antonine's confession centres upon a transgressive sexual feeling or experience: Antonine is, she admits, in love with her sister's husband. Whereas Anatole's confession becomes about his whole life, the scope of Antonine's confession is limited to the part of her life that relates to this emotion.

[73] Arsène Houssaye, *Les Confessions : souvenirs d'un demi-siècle, 1830-1880* 4 vols (Paris: E. Dentu, 1891), IV, p.29-30. Houssaye's personal relationship with Garcia, discussed below (pp.177-9) explains his lasting memory of her.

Marie meets Antonine at Eaux-Bonnes and they start a friendship. Antonine is ill, dying of a broken heart. She confesses the reason for her suffering to Marie. In her confession, she meets George at a ball and falls in love. Soon, he tells her he loves her. However, realising her sister Julia also loves him, she rejects him, then pretends to Julia that George is in love with her (Julia) instead. The first confession ends there: it seems that all Antonine has to confess is her transgressive love. However, it becomes apparent that there is more: 'je ne vous ai pas tout dit' (p.58), she tells Marie. In her second confession, Antonine reveals transgressive action as well. George starts courting Julia; one night, Antonine is playing the piano in a dark room; George enters and, mistaking her for her sister, starts to embrace her. Rather than correcting his mistake, she goes along with it — how far is unclear. There, her confession ends. Marie then recounts how Julia and George, now married, arrive to visit the sick Antonine in Eaux-Bonnes. Antonine dies soon after, in George's arms.

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(i) Antonine and the 'crime' of sex?

The word 'crime', where it appears in this novel, refers to amorous transgression, rather than actual crime: Marie describes Antonine's encounter with George as a 'crime' (p.67). Significantly, though, it is never clear what exactly that 'crime' is. The depiction of what happened between Antonine and George is cloaked in ambiguous language and characterised by ellipses. On one level, the answer to 'what is confessed?' is that it is impossible to say. The passage which follows starts with Antonine telling the story herself, and is then followed by Marie's narrative:

> "Je sentis tout à coup ses lèvres sur les cheveux. Je tressaillis, je voulus parler ou fuir, mais il semblait que mon âme n'eût alors aucune action sur mon

> corps [….] une seconde fois, je sentis les lèvres de George; ce n'était plus mes cheveux qu'il embrasssait, c'était mon cou.
> – Oh, ma chère Julia, murmura-t-il tout ému, quelle adorable soirée nous avons passée hier! Comme c'est doux de nous aimer ainsi!
> Et il m'embrassait toujours."
> . . . . . .
> Tu comprends que je n'irai pas plus loin dans le récit de cette scène, je m'arrête juste au point où je m'arrêterais si je la jouais au théâtre; tu vois tout de suite ce qu'il y eut de terrible, de charmant, d'insensé pour cette pauvre Antonine; on lui apprenait les joies de l'amour [...] mais on croyait aimer sa sœur! (pp.64-65)

The text frustrates the reader's expectations by its failure to describe the encounter, whilst titillating the reader with its suggestion of something more. The narrative may not go 'plus loin', but Antonine and George almost certainly do. The movement down her body from her hair to her neck to the unspecified place in 'il m'embrassait toujours' hints at some degree of consummation — as does Marie's use of the phrase 'les joies de l'amour'. The ellipses, above all, point to what has been omitted. Andrew Counter, writing about the use of ellipses to avoid censorship under the Restoration, argues that writers often use ellipses in a way that 'might [...] be better thought of as expanding rather than narrowing the effect of the hypothetical, unmutilated original proposition'.[74] These blanks, or 'sexual ellipses'[75] as Counter terms them, work in a similar way in this later novel: ellipses have become a very signifier of sex, one that, as Counter argues with reference to the Restoration, readers have become adept at reading. Sex is connoted by absence of description: it is Garcia's use of ellipses above all — even more than the suggestive language — that implies consummation. Presence of sexual transgression is implied by absence of language. The novel titillates through what is unsaid.

[74] Counter, p.16.
[75] Counter, p. 16.

One explanation for this ellipsis may have been the need to navigate the restraints of the censorship of the Second Empire — indeed, the reference to stopping the story where she would stop playing it in the theatre may even be a veiled reference to the censorship that dominated there too.[76] However, other novels of confession, published at times less inhibited by censorship, also employ obfuscation, sometimes by ellipses, sometimes by language which conceals, rather than reveals, the act described. Indeed, as will be explored in the third chapter,[77] this obfuscation becomes a generic trait, working subversively against the framework of revelation assumed by 'confession'.

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(ii) Antonine's revelations versus Catholic confession

Before confessing to Marie, Antonine has been suffering in silence; like Anatole, she is without a priest to whom she can confess: she has spoken of her love for George, 'pas même à Dieu, car à Paris mon confesseur est un ami, qui aurait peut-être empêché le mariage de ma sœur' (p.43). Like *La Confession, La Confession d'Antonine* implies that the structures of confession in France are failing: confessants find themselves unable to confess, in Antonine's case because she cannot trust her priest not to act on the information (something priests are supposedly forbidden to do by Catholic doctrine).[78] The confidences Antonine offers to Marie are a displacement of

[76] Indeed, the theatre was particularly strongly censored. See Robert Justin Goldstein, 'Fighting French Censorship: 1815-1881', *The French Review,* 71 (1998), pp.785-796 (785-6).
[77] See pp.216-7, pp.236-7, and pp.265-7.
[78] Antonine's questioning of a priest's ability to keep what is heard secret undermines one of confession's fundamental principles. Catholic doctrine forbids priests to act on what they hear, or to let any knowledge of what they learn within confession impact on relationships outside the confessional. As Abbé le Favre writes, 'hors du confessionnal, un confesseur vous parle et vous traite comme s'il ne vous avait jamais confessé. Vous pouvez donc [....] vous confesser aux prêtres qui vous connaissent [...] sans le moindre inconvénient'. (Abbé Favre, *Le Ciel ouvert par la confession sincère et la communion fréquente,* 2nd edn (Paris: Librarie Catholique de Perisse Frères, 1837), p.217.

the confession she has not made to a priest. The sense of substitution is heightened by Marie's framing of these secular confidences linguistically in a Catholic framework, describing Antonine's revelation in her letters, as well as in the title, as 'la confession d'Antonine' (p.61), and saying to Antonine, 'dis-moi donc tout, puisque je suis votre confesseur' (p.58).

At the novel's end, just before dying, Antonine does finally confess to a priest. Yet all three of Antonine's confessions in the novel (the first two to Marie, the third to a priest), become problematic when considered alongside Catholic doctrine. Firstly, Antonine, like Anatole, is depicted as not in control at the moment of sinning. Anatole is out of touch with himself, Antonine is out of touch with reality, or at least so she claims. Marie writes that Antonine 'm'a juré que ç'avait été pour elle un rêve étrange ' (p.65). But this denial of reality is also a denial of responsibility. Antonine represents herself as passive ('j'étais immobile comme une statue'); all of her description is of what George does to her and not how she reciprocates: 'je sentis tout à coup ses lèvres sur mes cheveux [...] ce n'était plus mes cheveux qu'il embrassait, c'était mon cou' (p.65). As *La Confession* represents Anatole's hands moving as if he had no control over them, so Antonine claims, 'il me semblait que mon âme n'eût alors aucune action sur mon corps' (p.64). She distances herself from her transgressive act: she does not deny the act itself, but denies she is fully responsible. As has been seen above, taking responsibility is essential to Catholic confession. Confession is an act of self-accusation,[79] where excuses are prohibited, yet Antonine displaces responsibility from herself and onto a combination of

[79] See Gambart in *La Véritable Conduite de S. François de Sales, pour la confession et la communion* in which there is a section entitled, 'de la manière de se bien accuser' (p.56).

George, the weakness of her own nature, and circumstance. Furthermore, the dominant feeling of Antonine's confession to Marie is not so much contrition for what she has done but rather heartbreak that she cannot do it again.

Secondly, as the *Manuel du pénitent* declares, 'la sincérité', absolutely essential to confession, 'vous oblige, dans l'aveu que vous faites de vos fautes, à n'en retenir aucune voltontairement; ce qui seroit mentir'.[80] Indeed, the Council of Trent stipulates that, if someone deliberately omits information, 'non-seulement il ne tirait aucun fruit de cette confession, mais encore il commettrait un nouveau péché'.[81] However, *La Confession d'Antonine* shows a consistent failure to confess transgression: Antonine's confessions are driven by omission. When she first confesses to Marie, she omits her amorous encounter with George. When Antonine finally does confess to a priest, just before her death, there is another crucial omission: as she tells Marie afterwards, 'j'ai oublié de dire que j'avais voulu mourir dans les bras de George' (p.75). Catholic doctrine does allow that sometimes confessants may forget certain sins by mistake,[82] and Antonine's omission is ostensibly innocent. However, far from this being a desire situated in the past which she just forgets to mention, it is rather something she goes on to engineer as she dies: she has felt this sinful desire prior to confessing, and continues to feel it (and act upon it) after confession. Catholic doctrine requires 'une sincère résolution de ne plus pécher'.[83] Indeed, the purpose of confession is to stop one from sinning again:

[80] Sambucy, p.149.
[81] *Catéchisme du Concile de Trente,* p.505.
[82] Sambucy, p.149.
[83] Sambucy, p.145. Also see *Instructions et prières, recueillies par un prêtre* (Vienna: Imprimerie de la veuve Strauss, 1839), which includes as one of the prayers 'Résolution de bien vivre' where the confessant should say to God 'je veux prendre de si fortes résolutions pour l'avenir, qu'avec votre grâce, j'éviterai avec soin le péché, les sources et toutes les occasions du péché' (p.199).

'C'est un abus de se confesser de quelque péché que ce soit, mortel ou véniel, sans vouloir s'en corriger, puisque la confession n'est instituée que pour cela'.[84] Antonine's omitted sinful desire, upon which she acts, runs the risk of invalidating her whole confession.

In showing Antonine acting on her desire, *La Confession d'Antonine* depicts an ongoing cycle of sin. Antonine continues to pursue her passion all the way until her death, finding any way she can to be held in George's arms: "portez-moi là haut," a-t-elle dit à son beau-frère' (p.75). Her wish to die in George's arms is fulfilled:

> Elle dit tout à coup:
> - J'ai froid.
> Et elle s'abrita sur le sein du jeune homme.
> Elle mourut dans ses bras. (pp.79-80)

Unable to receive (again?) *la petite mort* in his arms, she receives true death. As in *La Confession,* albeit in a less macabre way, death becomes a substitute for sex. Indeed, Marie suggests that Antonine's transgression continues beyond her death. George, speaking of Antonine, tells Marie in another linking of sex and death, 'je la sentirai toujours sur mon cœur toute brûlante et toute glacée' (p.81): quite a legacy for Antonine to leave her sister's conjugal bed. In an inversion of any Catholic moral code, rather than Antonine feeling guilt for her transgressive feelings, she continues to pursue them after confessing them, up to her death, and with impacts beyond it.

When Marie encourages Antonine to confess to her, she claims, 'Quand vous aurez pleuré sur le sein d'une amie, l'orage fondra et vous reviendrez à vous' (p.37). Such a comment echoes Catholic teaching on confession, where confession alleviates

[84] Gambart, p.56.

suffering. However, the novel proves quite the opposite to be true. Marie's prediction that a confession will save Antonine is completely unfounded: Antonine dies a few days later. Her act of confession seems completely futile. Articulating sin does not prevent future sin; and articulating suffering does not provide comfort. Though confession does not have an actively negative impact on Antonine, as it does for Anatole, it rather has no impact whatsoever. Janin's novel, by presenting such a negative portrayal of the effects of confession, reaffirms its power, though as a destructive, rather than constructive, force. Garcia's text suggests that confession is completely impotent. Indeed, it is only in the legacy of forbidden love that there is any sense of consolation for Antonine: as Marie reflects on George's comment that he will always be able to feel Antonine dying in his arms, she imagines, 'Si elle [Antonine] a entendu cette parole, elle est consolée' (p.81). The pursuit of the transgressive desire consoles where confession cannot.

If Antonine constantly fails as a confessant to work within a Catholic framework, so does Marie as confessor. Far from keeping Marie's confession private, she documents it in a letter to her lover. Marie draws attention to this tension/ betrayal: 'Si je n'avais pas la mauvaise habitude de tout te dire et de penser tout haut devant toi, je garderais ce secret dans mon cœur' (p.61). Through her own failing love affair, her desire to keep writing to a recipient who is not writing back, Marie appropriates Antonine's story, sharing a secret that she knows she should keep. Of course the making public of the private exists on another level too, through the highly public form of the novel. By Marie-the-character's reporting of Antonine's confession, Marie-the-author foregrounds a problem present in all novels of confession: the novel of confession is itself a sort of paradox — a Catholic confession is private, a

novel is public.[85] This tension between public and private is felt particularly keenly in Garcia's text: the fact that the introduction tells readers that Antonine is based on a genuine woman whom Marie-the-author really met enhances the sense of illicit revelation.[86]

Both Antonine's 'crime' and Marie's narrative of it consistently undermine Catholic doctrine on confession and transgression. Antonine omits essential information, claims reduced responsibility and, rather than seeking to prevent future transgressions in this vein, continues to pursue physical contact with George until she dies. The novel presents a transgressive act and emotion in a way that cannot be reconciled with Catholic teaching on the sacrament which the novel, by its title and by its linguistic framing of Antonine's revelation, brings into play. Confession thereby becomes a deeply imperfect medium for expressing either transgression or suffering.

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(iii) What is *really* confessed?

There is a further complication in the relationship between Antonine's transgression and her act of revelation: the answer to the question 'what is confessed?' is not as simple as Antonine's 'crime' with George and her illicit love. Alongside this 'crime', Antonine presents a parallel source of culpability: her 'faute' (p.36) in rejecting George in the first place. The novel creates contradictions in Antonine's testimony. Antonine claims that sparing her sister — whose health was delicate — was her motivation: after having told George she does not love him and

[85] This will be explored in the third chapter, pp.211-212, pp.239-242 and pp.264-266.
[86] See p.vii of *La Confession d'Antonine.*

having told her sister he loves her instead, she tells herself, '*Cela la fera vivre'* (p.55). Indeed, from the start of her confession, she has been eager to emphasise her sister's physical vulnerability: 'elle fut longtemps si faible que le premier chagrin de sa vie devait la tuer' (p.44). However, in the vibrant young girl who sweeps George off to waltz with her at the ball, it is difficult to see the ill, weak Julia that Antonine has described. The contradiction becomes clear in the juxtaposed sentences: '"Elle l'aime," me dis-je, "elle l'aime à en mourir". Et pourtant, elle se serait consolée, elle' (p.52). On one level, the second sentence is Antonine commenting in the act of telling rather than at the moment of the sacrifice: perhaps the reader is meant to assume that Antonine has only realised her mistake later. However, Antonine is portrayed as aware of Julia's fickle nature from the beginning: she describes her sister as 'comme ma mère' (p.42) — who is so devoid of deep feeling that according to Antonine she would not mourn the loss of her own daughter for more than a week (p.40).

The novel invites readers to perceive Antonine's choice as, at best, a misplaced, self-destructive gesture, and at worst, an act of self-indulgence from someone who deliberately chooses the most difficult path. Antonine herself says, 'J'ai mieux aimé le sacrifice que l'amour lui-même' (p.49). She describes herself, even prior to her sacrifice, as a melancholy individual, sad by disposition rather than circumstance: 'je suis triste: comme dans la légende, mon âme est un oiseau qui ferme toujours ses ailes' (p.49). Whilst in *La Confession* Anatole's feelings are characterised by the combination of disillusionment, scepticism, lack of purpose and dislike of the world that shape the *mal du siècle* of the 1830s, Antonine's feelings are presented as growing from her very nature: she presents herself as doomed to suffering, not

because of when she lives, but rather because of who she is. Her unhappiness becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, as she selects romanticised self-sacrifice rather than romance itself. Anatole's *mal du siècle* causes his crime; Antonine's inherent sadness causes her 'faute' — both mistake and transgression — of rejecting George. What Antonine confesses above all is her unhappiness — the unhappiness that causes her rejection of George in the first place and the unhappiness that stems from it.

Indeed, the language of suffering and heartbreak dominates the novel far more than the discourse of sin. 'Mal' appears purely in the context of illness or suffering, rather than being associated with wrongdoing: 'j'avais compris que le mal de cette jeune fille [Antonine] était une peine de cœur et un secret caché' (p.29). This heartbreak is characterised not just by the loss of George but also by Antonine's frustrated sexual desire: she dies because of her unrealisable passion. In her amorous encounter with George, 'elle se sentait étreinte dans les flammes vives' (pp.65-6). When she finally flees to her room 'la fièvre s'empara de ce pauvre roseau' (p.66). The flames of passion, lit but unable to be realised a second time, manifest themselves in the form of fever. Even as she dies she is 'toute brûlante et toute glacée' (p.81), burnt up by a desire that she cannot fulfill. What is killing Antonine — and what is prompting her confession — is not having given into that desire in the first place but, rather, not being able to pursue it again. Confession is driven by frustrated desire, rather than by guilt; it is driven by suffering more than transgression.

The question 'what is confessed?', has another layer of complexity in this novel. What is confessed is not purely the events portrayed by Antonine's act of revelation,

but also the indirect confession that emerges through Marie-the-character's letters. Marie is thus not only the narrator of Antonine's story but also her double. In the parallel narrative that emerges through Marie's letters to her lover, the novel becomes as much about Marie's heartbreak as Antonine's. It becomes increasingly clear that Marie's relationship is disintegrating in her absence. Antonine's 'mal' and Marie's are the same. She pines for her lover: 'je meurs deux fois, mais surtout du mal de l'absence' (p.67). But, he is not pining back: 'je suis peut-être mourante, qu'est-ce que cela vous fait? Vous respirez, sans doute, à Paris, un bouquet de jeunesse' (p.32). Indeed, he is not even writing back: 'Vous savez, monsieur mon ami, que vous ne m'écrivez pas' (p.31). With their correspondence purely one-sided, Marie is left only with questions: 'Te souviens-tu de mon histoire d'Antonine? Te souviens-tu de moi?' (p.73). Marie finds some alleviation by her appropriation of Antonine's confession of love, using it as a veiled confession of her own emotions. The final words of the novel, which again link sex and death and in which she begs her lover to come to visit, are an indication that she will go the same way as Antonine: 'N'oublie pas que c'est toi qui as écrit: *Les grandes passions prennent leur source dans l'amour et se jettent dans la mort'* (p.82)'.[87] *La Confession d'Antonine* also contains, then, a confession of love and suffering from Marie-the-character. The novel is a double confession, with both those confessions being driven by loss of a loved one.

[87] This quotation, from Arsène Houssaye's writing (Arsène Houssaye, *L'Amour comme il est* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1860) p.315), situates Houssaye, Marie Garcia's real-life ex-lover, as the recipient of Marie's letters. The novel thus assumes a level of reality, where not only is it the confession of Marie-the-character, but also of Marie-the-author: what is confessed is also, (not very) obliquely, the tempestuous end to Garcia's real-life relationship with Arsène Houssaye, which had caused a scandal in Paris. The relationship between fact and fiction in the novel's exploration of emotion and selfhood will be examined in more detail in Chapter II, pp.177-179.

In *La Confession d'Antonine,* the relationship between transgression and confession is thus complex. Whilst the novel is a confession of transgression, it is also a confession of suffering, operating across two levels. Furthermore, it is a confession in which the transgression is not fully confessed. Antonine's confession, as reported by Marie to the recipient of her letters (and to the reader of the novel), is characterised by omission — by ambiguity and ellipsis — and ultimately the refusal to tell: 'je m'arrête juste au point où je m'arrêterais si je la jouais au théâtre'. There is a blank at the centre of the confession – what is confessed to Marie is not confessed to the reader. The work called *La Confession d'Antonine* is an edited version of the 'confession' at its heart, which remains elusive.

Whilst Antonine's revelations are presented within the discourse of Catholic confession, they consistently break with Catholic doctrine on confession, being driven by omission and excuse, failing either to alleviate suffering or to prevent further wrongdoing. In the novel, Catholic morals are inverted. Sacrifice is presented as a bad thing, abstinence as destructive; the penitent continues to sin even at moment of death, and indeed, is forgiven for it by her secular confessor: 'Dieu pardonne ces choses là', Marie tells her confidently (p.75). Both *La Confession* and *La Confession d'Antonine* thus explore the fraught relationship that novels of confession have to transgression. These novels bring into play a dialogue with Catholicism and Catholic codes as regards transgression and the confession of it — by their titles, by staging acts of Catholic confession within their narratives, and, in the case of *La Confession d'Antonine,* by the religious discourse surrounding even secular acts of revelation — and yet this is a framework that they consistently challenge.

Part Three: The changing nature of transgression

(i) From criminal to emotional transgression

The analysis of two novels from opposing ends of the period considered here has indicated a difference in focus: from *La Confession,* which focusses on a criminal act, to *La Confession d'Antonine,* which depicts transgression in affairs of the heart. The contrast between these novels is emblematic of the shifting scope of the genre.

A moment in Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* (1836) contains a strong echo of *La Confession*. Octave watches a sleeping Brigitte as Anatole observes a sleeping Anna; he is on the point of killing her in her bed. However, the sight of her crucifix stops him. Musset brings Octave to the point of a criminal act, and then draws him back. *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* only flirts with the criminal — largely, it is dedicated to exploring other kinds of transgressions. The novel depicts the debauchery of Octave, betrayed by his first mistress and led astray by his friend Desgenais, a sort of diabolical double, who encourages Octave to follow decadent desires. Octave's confession portrays the lasting impact of these transgressions, and how they lead to further transgressions. When with Brigitte, Octave finds he cannot escape his old life: as Sainte-Beuve expresses it, 'la vieille plaie du libertin se rouvre, elle saigne au sein de ce bonheur et le corrompt'.[88] Haunted by memories of debauchery, he bullies and humiliates Brigitte, destroying their love. Octave's behaviour is certainly sinful, from a Catholic perspective, engaging in debauchery in

[88] Sainte-Beuve, '*La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* de M. Alfred de Musset', *Revue des deux mondes,* 4th series, vol. 5, (1836), pp.483-493 (p.485).

all forms, as well as a relationship with Brigitte outside marriage; such behaviour is also socially transgressive, turning him and Brigitte into outsiders. However, above all the novel is dedicated to portraying Octave's emotional transgressions: his love which is destructive and cruel towards Brigitte.

Musset's novel is crucial in orientating the sphere of transgression towards the social and the emotional. After Musset, some novels do continue to engage with the criminal: murder in Séménow's *La Confession d'un poète* (1859), and both murder and rape in Soulié's *Confession générale* (1840-48) and Montépin's *Confessions d'un bohême* (1849-50). However, after *La Confession,* never again in the novels of confession published in this period from 1830-1865, does one crime form the centrepiece of the confession. Eugène (*La Confession d'un poète*) commits murder in a duel, but this seems almost incidental: just one episode in his turbulent love affair with Inez which is the real topic of his confession. The rape in *Confession générale* is the root of the novel — but not because the novel is an examination of the crime itself (and indeed, none of the rapists confess) but rather because this rape prompts Noël to question his own identity as he does not know who his father is. In *Confessions d'un bohême,* Louis, the protagonist, mentions briefly that he has previously raped and murdered; but these events occur before the narrative starts and there is little focus on them; they are merely representative of his past wayward lifestyle, rather than affecting Louis's psychology in any way.

Indeed, in many later novels of confession, the macabre landscape of *La Confession* has completely disappeared; the transgressions are, as in *La Confession d'Antonine,* largely related to amorous exploits. These are often social transgressions, related to

a relationship that is prohibited by social mores and Catholic rules, often because it is outside marriage (Inez and Eugène in *La Confession d'un poète,* Octave and Alix in *Les Confessions d'une femme du siècle*). The 'emotional' transgression continues to lie in the portrayal of the love as obsessive, addictive or dangerous. In *Confessions d'un bohémien*, Jacques's obsession with the young circus star Cyprienne uproots his life and he starts to exist purely for her*;* Eugène, in Séménow's *La Confession d'un poète,* is so addicted to the object of his love, Inez, that he forsakes all family and friendship for her. In *La Confession de Claude,* Claude's relationship with Laurence is both a social and an emotional transgression: social, as he takes a prostitute as a mistress, and emotional, because — despite his own wishes — he falls obsessively, desperately in love with her.

The broad shift from confession focussed on crime to confession concentrated on love is parodied in Champfleury's *Confessions de Sylvius. Clémence. Mme André. Eugénie la blanchisseuse. Mariana la peintre* (1849)*,* where the novel is structured around the four women with whom Sylvius is, always disastrously, in love. At the start, Sylvius writes a series of heart-felt letters to his friend, Tony, about the first object of his affections, Clémence. Champfleury parodies all the tropes of being in love: 'Quelle nuit j'ai passé! Je me suis levé, recouché sans pouvoir dormir. Je ne pense qu'à elle, je ne vois qu'elle'.[89] Tony, does not even read the letter himself but gives it to his wife, Trompette, to read, who dismisses it with the words, 'c'est du sentiment: il y en avait cinq pages'.[90] Confession has become a genre of sentiment: in

[89] Champfleury, p.26.
[90] Champfleury, p.14.

Champfleury's parody, Trompette's comment, on a metatextual level, both summarises the genre and dismisses it.

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(ii) Cycles of transgression and the problem of responsibility

Whilst the nature of transgression depicted shifts over the period, these novels' presentation of transgression is consistently problematic when considered within a Catholic framework. Garcia's novel's presentation of a cycle of sin, rather than one sole act, is emblematic of a wider trope of the genre as it develops after Janin's novel — characters are doomed to keep making the same mistakes. As the De Quincey/ Musset opium eater finds himself incapable of enacting the change he seeks,[91] so Musset's Octave is unable to behave as he desires. Octave finds that he cannot escape depravity when most he wants to: he treats Brigitte as if she were another conquest on a night of debauchery. Jacques in *Confessions d'un bohémien* finds himself caught in the bind of his transgressive love for Cyprienne, repeatedly trying to move on before being sucked back into the relationship; Eugène in *La Confession d'un poète* is again trapped in a descending spiral with his lover Inez. The confessant of *Confessions d'un officier français* wants to change but finds he cannot: 'je regrettais d'avoir passé ma vie dans l'insouciance et la débauche [....] Malheureusement toutes ces réflexions disparaissaient bien vite, et je n'en devenais pas meilleur'.[92] A few pages later the cycle of wishing and failing is repeated with the confessant seemingly incapable of change: 'que je voudrais devenir sage [...]Hélas, tout en désirant la sagesse, je courais après la folie'.[93] One of the purposes of Catholic

[91] See p.40 of introduction to this thesis.
[92] Anonymous, *Combats et victoire ou Confessions d'un officier français* (Paris: L.R Delay, 1846), p.81.
[93] *Confessions d'un officier français* , p.95.

confession is preventative: by recognising previous sin, the individual is able to move beyond it. But these novels of confession suggest the opposite: the individual cannot help but sin — however conscious he is of wrongdoing.

Eugène in *La Confession d'un poète* attempts to explain away his repeated transgressions by reducing the sense of his own agency in the process of sinning. According to Eugène's subversive moral code, if the temptation is strong enough, the sinner's culpability is reduced: 'Il est des tentations auxquelles résister est difficile, presque impossible'.[94] He goes further, arguing that whether one is virtuous or sinful lies not within the individual's control, but is rather contingent upon circumstance: 'ceux qui ont aimé, ceux qui ont souffert [...] me comprendront et m'excuseront. Bien des gens ne restent honnêtes toute leur vie que parce qu'ils n'ont pas connu la misère'.[95] Suffering not only explains wrongdoing, it excuses it. According to Eugène's depiction of transgression, the individual cannot prevent it, because the individual is not really responsible for it in the first place.

If transgression is hard to avoid, it is also hard to understand. As in both Janin and Garcia, so in the genre more widely, the causal link between sinner and sin is undermined: wrongdoing is portrayed as occurring almost of its own accord, incomprehensible to the wrongdoer himself. Octave, trying to explain his terrible behaviour towards Brigitte, finds he cannot: ‘J’ai à raconter maintenant ce qui advient de mon amour et le changement qui se fit en moi. Quelle raison puis-je en donner? Aucune, sinon que je raconte, et que je puis dire: C’est la vérité’ (p.181). In

[94] Nicolas de Séménow, *La Confession d'un poète* (Paris: Amyot, 1859), p.108.
[95] Séménow, p.108.

Confessions d'un bohême, the only reason Louis can give for his actions is, 'C'est le diable qui s'en mêlait' (vol II, p.181). He rejects any notion of responsibility, using the language of Christianity as a get-out clause, rather than as an assumption of sinning and guilt. Transgressive actions and emotions are outside an individual's control, and beyond an individual's (character's or narrator's) efforts to explain — a direct contradiction of the narrative of analysis, explanation and responsibility established by Catholic confession.

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(iii) Frustrated desire

These novels problematise the relationship between transgression and confession not purely in the way in which they question notions of the sinner's responsibility or agency, but also in the way that they suggest that 'what is being confessed' is actually more complicated than the apparent crime or social or emotional transgression. The theme of sexual failure recurs, especially in those novels with a male protagonist. *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle,* despite Octave's claims of debauchery, is far more a narrative of sexual failure than of sexual conquests. At the beginning, Octave is emasculated by losing one mistress to his childhood friend; at the end, he is emasculated by losing another mistress to *her* childhood friend. Even the passages which supposedly depict Octave's sexual debauchery portray further failure. Octave's encounter with Marco starts promisingly. In one of the few truly sensual passages of the novel, Marco dances with Octave:

> Au moindre mouvement de mon bras, je la sentais plier comme une liane des Indes, pleine d'une mollesse si douce et si sympathique, qu'elle m'entourait comme d'un voile de soie embaumée. (p.118)

He goes home with her, but when she invites him to bed, he instead looks out of the window:

> L'aspect des allées du Luxembourg me fit bondir le cœur, et toute autre pensée s'évanouit […] Là, quand j'avais dix ans, je m'étais promené avec mon frère et mon précepteur, jetant du pain à quelques pauvres oiseaux transis. (p.126)

Returning to the room, he sees Marco has fallen asleep. This bathos is all the more potent given the sensuality at the passage's start. Instead of consummating her marriage with Anatole, Anna goes to sleep; when Octave hesitates over consummating their flirtation, Marco falls asleep. Octave's deep sexual insecurity permeates the novel.

Jacques (*Confessions d'un bohémien*) equally confesses his sexual insecurity. His mistress, Cyprienne, is unfaithful; when he confronts her, she emasculates him further by comparing him unfavourably with her new lover: 'Il est jeune, brilliant, merveilleusement beau, et vous ne comprenez pas pourquoi je l'aime?' (p.207). Jacques reflects on her cruelty in highlighting a sexual inferiority of which he was already painfully aware: 'Venir m'opposer la jeunesse et la beauté de ce brilliant écuyer, comme si je ne savais pas que ces dons-là m'ont été réfusés' (p.207). Jacques's emasculation continues as he takes her back when she needs him, nurses her back to health, and is left by her again. Eugène in *La Confession d'un poète* follows a similar trajectory —unable to satisfy his mistress, and unable to forsake her, Eugène is trapped by sexual shame and failure, sacrificing everything for Inez and taking her back even when he knows that she has duped him. Zola's Claude again has an unfaithful mistress. He is obsessed with and terrified by female sexuality: 'Lorsque les lèvres de la femme connaissent d'autres lèvres, lorsque les

seins ont frémi sous d'autres étreintes, l'amour ne peut être qu'une angoisse chaque jour' (p.192). His desire to understand his mistress, Laurence, is framed in the language of sexual frustration. His epistemological failure also linguistically hints at his sexual failure: 'J'ai besoin de *pénétrer* Laurence' (p.182); 'Voilà que je ne pressais qu'un cadavre sur ma poitrine, qu'une chose inconnue qui m'était étrangère, dont je ne pouvais *pénétrer* le sens' (p.190); 'cette femme était plus *impénétrable* encore' (p.230, all italics added). He fails to *know* her, in either the Biblical or epistemological sense. Instead of penetrating her, *he* is penetrated: 'la réalité me *pénètre,* me secoue; ma chair souffre ou *jouit* puissamment de ce qui est' (p.168, italics added). These male characters, unable to 'control' the women in their lives, resort to trying to control their narrative of them (and of themselves).

In novels with a female protagonist, what is being confessed again tends to relate to sex, but whilst the men tend to confess some sexual inadequacy or insecurity, the women tend to confess a sexual desire that is frustrated or impossible to realise: again Antonine's confession is emblematic. In *Les Confession d'une femme du siècle,* the 'femme du siècle' Alix is prevented from achieving consummation with the one person she loves (Octave) because of a chequered past. The novel only ends when she is finally on the point of consummation. In Sand's *La Confession d'une jeune fille*, Lucienne's story, like Alix's, is of a young woman growing up emotionally and sexually. The very title of Sand's novel frames Lucienne as a character to whom consummation has thus far been denied. Lucienne, desiring MacAllen, feels she cannot be with him until she has told her full story. Her confession is the transference of her desire: instead of sharing her body with him, she shares her confession. Like Alix's, Lucienne's confession ends just before final consummation.

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(iv) *Mal, mal du siècle* and *ennui*

The theme of psychological suffering, present in different ways both in *La Confession* and *La Confession d'Antonine,* exists more widely in the genre. In the early years of the genre, the sentiment of *mal du siècle* dominates. *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* crystallises the link between *mal du siècle* and confession present in Janin's novel, making these novels of confession dominant not only in depicting, but also in defining the characteristics of *mal* (or *maladie* as Octave calls it) *du siècle* in its 1830s manifestation. Both Janin's *La Confession* and Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* have chapters specifically dedicated to exploring the theme: Janin's preface and first chapter; Musset's Chapter Two, also published separately in the *Revue des deux mondes* on 15 September 1835.[96] Octave describes a young generation trapped in a present where 'tout ce qui était n'est plus; tout ce qui sera n'est pas encore [...] Ne cherchez pas ailleurs le secret de nos maux' (p.35). Having grown up with dreams of grandeur, they are now 'condamné[s] au repos par les souverains du monde […] à l'oisivété et à l'ennui' (p.27). If Anatole marries because he does not know what else to do, then Octave needs love because he does not know what else to do: 'Je n'avais point d'état, aucune occupation […] étant devenu amoureux en sortant du collège, j'avais cru sincèrement que c'était pour ma vie entière, et toute autre pensée avait disparu' (pp.47-8). His reaction to his mistress's infidelity further supports this: 'le lendemain [...] la première pensée qui me vint fut de me demander: *Que ferai-je* à present?' (p.47, italics added).

[96] Also see Duchet, p.viii on the potential connection between Musset and Janin.

According to the representation of *mal du siècle* in Chapter Two, for Octave, as for Anatole, passion is dead: 'il n'y a plus d'amour [...] Quelle épaisse nuit sur la terre!' (p.31). Feelings are defined by what they are not: 'au lieu d'avoir l'enthousiasme du mal nous n'eûmes que l'abnégation du bien; au lieu du désespoir, l'insensibilité' (Musset, p.32). Like Anatole, too, the generation Octave describes is suffering from a lack of belief: in an echo of *La Confession'*s opening — 'Aujourd'hui on ne croit plus à rien' (vol I, p.3) — Octave comments that, 'la jeunesse de France' would respond to the question 'à quoi crois-tu?' with 'à rien' (pp.30-31).[97]

In Chapter Two, Octave describes *mal du siècle* as if it were the inherited curse of his generation, unable, in the Restoration, to live up to the dreams they had believed in their childhood. It is experienced by the time that the young are in 'collège' (p.32). However, this understanding of *mal du siècle* does not, upon closer analysis, sit comfortably with the rest of the novel. Octave's *maladie du siècle* has a very specific cause, in his mistress's betrayal: he opens the chapter that directly follows his description of this inherited *mal du siècle* with 'J'ai à raconter à quelle occasion je fus pris d'abord de la maladie du siècle' (p.37).[98] As Sainte-Beuve describes it in his review, Octave 'prend à l'instant même la maladie du siècle, comme on prenait autrefois la petite vérole après un brusque saisissement'.[99]

[97] It should be noted that, whilst in many ways the presentation of Octave's *mal du siècle* seems to be of the 1830s variety, like that experienced by Anatole, Octave is actually writing about a generation who are 'fils de l'empire et petits fils de la Révolution' (p.25). The Jeunes France of the 1830s are not the generation that would have grown up with dreams of fighting with Napoleon. Eliding history and contemporary sentiment, he creates a hybrid *mal du siècle.*

[98] D.G. Charlton also explores this contradiction in 'Musset as Moral Novelist: *La Confession d'un enfant du siecle',* in *Mélanges de littérature française moderne offerts à Garnet Rees, par ses collègues et amis,* ed. by Cedric E. Pickford (Librarie Minard: 1980), pp.29-46 (pp.33-4).

[99] Sainte-Beuve, '*La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* de M. Alfred de Musset', p.485.

Chapter Two becomes yet more problematic in the wider context of the novel in terms of its portrayal of emotion. In Chapter Two, Octave implies that the problem for the generation he describes is that love does not exist anymore; Octave's problem is that he loved his first mistress too much. On another level, the cynicism towards emotions expressed in Chapter Two contains the seeds that undercut Octave's own narrative. According to Octave in Chapter Two, emotions are not real — they are just playacting by a bored youth: 'l'affectation du désespoir' is 'une grande consolation, pour ceux qui ne savent que faire' (p.33). All Octave's claims of great pain in the chapters that follow can be undermined by the simple phrase of Chapter Two: 'Il est doux de se croire malheureux, lorsqu'on n'est que vide et ennuyé' (p.33). Octave undermines his own story, before even telling it.

La Confession d'un enfant du siècle, therefore, rather than presenting one model of *mal du siècle*, presents two: one caused by the era, the other by human behaviour. These are two models which coexist with difficulty. In this contradiction lies the greatest disillusion of all: the cynicism and *mal du siècle* Octave feels do not only exist within the story — they also exist within his act of telling. He effectively sabotages his story, proclaiming it as self-indulgence from the start — just a cover for his emptiness and boredom.

In Soulié's *Confession générale* (1840-48), the feeling of *mal du siècle* is again pervasive. Valvins, with his 'humeur chagrine' and 'vues moroses sur l'humanité' (p.60), is disgusted with society:

> ce qui est honnête et ce qui ne l'est pas, ce qui est juste et ce qui ne l'est pas, ce qui est beau et ce qui ne l'est pas, qui le sait? [...] Malheur à qui se voue à la recherche de ces fallacieuses vérités! (p.60)

The novel is in part the joint confession of this group of friends, confessing, amongst other things, their *mal du siècle.* The whole novel is indeed infused with disillusionment and a distaste for the world. In reviewing the first volumes of the novel, a journalist only identified as A.B. comments:

> Le monde s'est fait bien vieux! Voilà que nous parlons de l'amour comme des vieillards, qui le couvrent d'anathème parce qu'ils ne le peuvent plus goûter. Puisque nous en sommes venus à ce point de décrépitude, que nous reste-t-il à faire en effet que de nous confesser?[100]

Confession is linked to disillusionment: it is seen as the direct response — indeed the only response — to this disgust with the world. Confession, as this reviewer sees it, is the effect of that sentiment and the expression of it.

Following the Revolution of 1848, the cultural phenomenon of *mal du siècle* diminished. Sainte-Beuve, writing in 1849, is ready to proclaim the end of its dominance: 'la maladie de René a régné depuis quarante-huit ans environ; nous l'avons tous eue plus ou moins et à divers degrés. Vous, jeunes gens, vous ne l'avez plus'.[101] A few years later, in 1853, Maxime du Camp writes in *Mémoires d'un suicidé*:

> Grâce à Dieu, elle s'éteint chaque jour davantage, cette race maladive et douloureuse qui a pris naissance sur les genoux de René […] cette génération rongée par des ennuis sans remède […] attirée vers l'inconnu par les désirs des imaginations déréglées.[102]

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[100] 'A.B.', 'Critique littéraire: *Une fin de siècle. Le Bracelet. Confession générale', Revue de Paris,* 1st series, vol 13 (1840), pp.277-284 (p.284).
[101] Sainte-Beuve, *Chateaubriand et son groupe litteraire sous l'Empire*: *Cours professé à Liége en 1848-1849,* 2 vols (Paris: Garnier, 1861), I, p.383. Having proclaimed its death, Sainte-Beuve would, in 1857, see an echo of the sentiment in Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal,* referring to 'cette tristesse particulière qui ressort de vos pages [...] où je reconnais le dernier symptôme d'une génération malade'. Yet even whilst acknowledging its presence, he proclaims its end, seeing it as a 'dernier symptôme'. Sainte-Beuve, Letter to Charles Baudelaire, 20 July 1857, quoted in André Guyaux, *Baudelaire: un demi-siècle de lectures des Fleurs du mal, 1855-1905* (Paris: Presses Paris Sorbonne, 2007), p.176.
[102] Maxime du Camp, *Mémoires d'un suicidé* (Paris: E. Girard and A. Boitte, 1890), p.22-3.

Significantly, the following decade, Frémy's *Confessions d'un bohémien* (1856) seems to depict a return to the *mal du siècle* of the 1830s, in Jacques's distaste for the world, sentiments of disillusionment, and feeling of being born too late. Jacques's outdated *mal du siècle* is indicative of just how much he is living in the past[103] — and of how strongly the feeling of *mal du siècle* is intertwined with the novel of confession.

As the term *mal du siècle* becomes less culturally dominant, there is a shift in emphasis towards another phenomenon: *ennui.* By 1867, Barbey d'Aurevilly would declare that it was 'le mot de tout le monde'.[104] Whilst *ennui* and *mal du siècle* share key traits (including a similar distaste for life and a profound sense of melancholy and disillusionment), and whilst, in the earlier novels of the period, they often co-exist,[105] they have a slightly different focus. *Ennui* has a stronger connotation of unpleasant languor than *mal du siècle*;[106] it places less weight on the relationship between the individual and an era, of the feeling of being born at the wrong time, than *mal du siècle.* In *La Confession de Claude,* Claude's mental state is framed initially in terms of *ennui*: 'je sens peser sur moi un ennui morne et glacé', he writes on the very first page (p.49). There are, however, many similarities between Claude's emotional state and that of previous confessants. Claude's confession is again driven by emotional trauma: as Zola describes Claude's experiences, '[Claude] nous conte sa jeunesse désolée, il nous montre ses plaies, il cri ce qu'il a souffert'

[103] See pp.149-151 of this thesis for further analysis of this point.
[104] Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Les Ridicules du temps,* 7th edition (Paris: Rouveyre et Blonde, 1883), p.246
[105] See Guy Sagnes, *L'Ennui dans la littérature française de Flaubert à Laforgue, 1848-1884* (Paris: A. Colin, 1969), especially pp.90-130. Like *mal du siècle, ennui* was regularly linked back to Chateaubriand and *René,* where the word is used on five occasions (see Sagnes, p.11). Baudelaire writes, 'Chateaubriand a chanté la gloire douleureuse de la mélancholie et de l'ennui' (*Théophile Gautier* (Paris: Poulet-Malassis et de Broise, 1859), p.38), quoted by Sagnes, p.97).
[106] It is a 'sorte de vide qui se fait sentir à l'âme privée d'action ou d'intérêt aux choses', Émile Littré, 'Ennui', *Dictionnaire de la langue française,* 4 vols (Paris: Hachette, 1872-77) II (1874), p.1406.

(p.47). Crucially, what he suffers is not solely related to his catastrophic relationship with Laurence, but rather to a profound disillusionment that exists within him before he even meets her. Claude finds his dreams cannot match reality, remembering how, 'nous rêvions l'amour et la gloire' (p.50), but now, 'je ne fais que commencer à vivre et je suis déjà bien triste' (p.53). He seems incapable of being happy, feeling a deep distaste for himself: 'Je ne sais [...] quelle âme misérable habite en moi' (p.168).

Evolving in relation to cultural trends of *mal du siècle* and *ennui,* the novel of confession from 1830 to 1865 consistently explores psychological dissatisfaction — and circumstances where a character's unhappiness is caused, not so much by his or her own actions, but rather by the unavoidable: the era into which one is born, the mind with which one is born. In this way, this group of novels redefines the parameters of Catholic confession, appropriating the act from which it takes its name as a means for exploring selfhood, *intimité,* psychology and emotions.

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(v) Transgression ≠ what is confessed

Novels of confession consistently question Catholic notions of sin and responsibility for it, often depicting transgression in a way that directly contravenes Catholic teaching, showing characters who seem incapable of preventing wrongdoing — either in the first place, or in its reoccurrence. By failing to explain the reasons behind transgression — by refusing, in the case of *La Confession d'Antonine,* even to depict the act of transgression in its entirety — these novels break the relationship

between confession and transgression. Transgression is often not fully confessed by these novels.

Furthermore, in these novels, 'what is confessed' is often not purely related to transgression but rather to desire (failed or frustrated) and to the character's complex and pained relationship to themselves and the world around them. These novels are as much about selfhood as they are about sin; they are as much about the *mal* of suffering as they are about the *mal* of evil. In this, these novels are themselves a transgression of Catholic confession. The model of confession they present is deeply subversive: where the confessant is not only a sinner but also a victim — of the era in which they live, of a society that shuts them out, of events beyond their control, of their own unhappiness. Furthermore, what is wrong, for these confessing characters, is not so much something they have done, but rather their fundamental selves. This is a notion that is fundamentally anti-Christian — the sin cannot simply be confessed and absolved because the problem is not so much the sin as the self. There is no more redemption.



Frontispiece to *La Confession,* illustrator unknown (Paris: A. Mesnier, 1830), p.ii.

Chapter Two: The Self, or Who is Confessing?

On the ironically self-referential final page of Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe* (1816), the publisher writes in response to the manuscript the editor has sent him, 'Je hais cette vanité qui s'occupe d'elle-même en racontant le mal qu'elle a fait […] et qui […] s'analyse au lieu de se repentir'.[1] Though written fourteen years before the first of the novels analysed in this thesis, this comment foreshadows a tension that the novel of confession would go on to explore. As the previous chapter argued, novels of confession are as much dedicated to exploring selfhood as to portraying transgression. Indeed, in many novels of confession the question of 'who is confessing' and 'what is confessed' are inextricably linked. The person who is confessing becomes the very topic of the confession, subject becomes object. Confession is a confrontation with the self.

Through Rousseau's *Confessions* is introduced a crucial trope that the novel of confession goes on to develop: the idea of the confessant as other, not just because of his or her actions, but rather by his or her very nature. As Rousseau writes, 'Je ne suis fait comme aucun de ceux que j'ai vus; j'ose croire n'être fait comme aucun de ceux qui existent. Si je ne vaux pas mieux, au moins je suis autre'.[2] The novel of confession is dominated by characters who are isolated, lonely or different, confessing, in part, their otherness. This chapter will consider how, in an age

[1] Constant, *Adolphe,* ed. by Michel Simonin (Paris: Librarie Générale, 1995), p.220.
[2] Rousseau, p.33. In this, Peter Brooks suggests, Rousseau distinguishes himself from his autobiographical predecessors. For Montaigne, 'chaque homme porte la forme entière de l'humaine condition' (Michel de Montaigne, 'Du Repentir' *Essais* ed. by André Tournon, 3 vols (Paris: Imprimerie nationale éditions, 1998), III, pp.43-63 (p.44). As Brooks notes, this offers 'an assurance that in studying the one man he knows best — Michel de Montaigne — he produces knowledge of humanity in its entirety' (Peter Brooks, *Troubling Confessions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p.110).

obsessed with *intimité*, the novel of confession came to be a dominant mode for interrogating selfhood, in all its complexities and contradictions. It will explore three works in particular — Xavier de Montépin's *Confessions d'un bohême* (1849-50), Arnould Frémy's *Confessions d'un bohémien* (1856), and George Sand's *La Confession d'une jeune fille* (1865) — asking 'who is confessing?'.

Firstly, it will analyse the way in which Montépin's novel presents certain central tropes, specifically revolving around the confessant as unsure of his identity or even his family name. The second part of the chapter will interrogate how Frémy's novel explores the theme of the confessant as an unhappy outsider, at odds with himself, disillusioned with the world around him, terrified of being unoriginal and unable to live up to the bohemian version of himself that he seeks. This section will argue that, whilst the text posits the possibility that confession might become a means by which one might try to discover, or perhaps even construct, a knowledge of the self that one does not previously have, the novel simultaneously undermines that possibility. The third part of the chapter analyses how George Sand's Lucienne, like her confessional predecessors, experiences an identity crisis that is both literal (she does not actually know who she is) and metaphorical (she is unsure of her emotional identity). Lucienne's identity becomes a series of linguistic paradoxes that cannot be resolved by confession: confession is presented as a sort of performance which fails to get the confessant any closer to the truth she seeks.

The final part of the chapter analyses how the genre more widely grapples with questions of fictionalised and fragmented selfhood, isolation, *mal du siècle,* madness and suicide. It will argue that, across the full genre, the confrontation with the self

brought about by confession tends to reveal deeply troubled selfhood. Confessing characters are not only exploring their own contradictions, but also their unknowability. Foucault argues, 'le XIXe siècle a déplacé l'aveu; il tend à ne plus porter seulement sur ce que le sujet voudrait bien cacher; mais sur ce qui lui est caché à lui-même'.[3] Previously, confession might have been associated with something shameful, but knowable: the confessing subject is in a position of knowledge. In the nineteenth century, by contrast, the self becomes an epistemological problem — one which the act of confession seems incapable of resolving.

Part One: *Confessions d'un bohême* by Xavier de Montépin (1849-1850)

In the late 1840s, a young Xavier de Montépin turned his hand to the novel of confession. First published in five volumes between 1849-50, *Confessions d'un bohême*'s popularity rapidly led to a theatrical adaptation, *Le Vol à la duchesse.* Written by Montépin and Eugène Grangé, it opened at the Théâtre de la Porte-Saint-Martin in 1851. A sequel to the novel, *Le Vicomte Raphaël,* followed in 1851. *Confessions d'un bohême* remained sufficiently in favour to be deemed worthy of an illustrated edition, almost thirty years after it first appeared.[4] Montépin continued to exploit the popularity of the genre of confession across his career, writing *Une Confession* in 1861, which poses as the deathbed confession of a woman who, after a

[3] Foucault, p.89.
[4] Paris: Degorce-Cadot, Bibliothèque des bons romans illustrés, 1878.

life being abused and exploited by men, commits suicide. In 1873, he would write *Les Confessions de Tullia,* the eventful story of an actress.

Confessions d'un bohême popularises and commercialises many of the traits that had become generic features of the novel of confession, both using and subverting them. In this way, the novel is indicative of a genre of confession, with tropes that could be drawn upon and exploited for commercial means. Montépin makes the selfhood-related concerns of the genre not the material of substantial psychological or emotional exploration but rather of a fast-paced, plot-driven novel, set in a criminal world.[5] Louise, a young aristocrat, starts an affair with Martial, her father's secretary, and becomes pregnant. She begs Martial to let her confess to her father, but in the first of several instances where confession is either prevented or exploited, Martial emotionally blackmails her to say nothing. Martial organises Louise's abduction; she gives birth in a secret house. Martial ensures the midwife's silence by forcing her at gunpoint to write a false confession in which she claims she offered to kill the baby. He then steals the baby away, placing it in a home for foundlings. He plans ultimately to blackmail Louise's family but the plot backfires when he is killed by two other criminals. Louise tries to find her son but there is no trace.

The narrative moves forward to the moment when the young Louis (Louise's son but unaware of the fact) is about to commit suicide, but is stopped by a stranger, the Baron de Maubert. The Baron takes Louis home, persuading him to share his life

[5] In some ways, Montépin's macabre world is redolent of Janin's *La Confession,* or Soulié's *Confession générale*.

story. Louis confesses that he has lived a vagrant existence, driven by crimes, including gang rape, murder and theft. He has just run out of money. The Baron, a perverted confessor, persuades Louis that he should feel no guilt, bearing no responsibility for his crimes. Convincing Louis to become his adopted son, the Baron (who is not really a Baron after all) persuades Louis to seduce Mathilde, a rich aristocrat's wife. The Baron gains possession of Mathilde's love letters and, disguised as a moneylender called Van Gripp, blackmails her. Mathilde commits suicide; Louis kills her husband in a duel, and, moneyless again and on the run, tries to commit suicide but survives.

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(i) 'Le marché de la confession'

Before the events of the plot discussed above, the novel opens with the chapter, 'le marché de la confession' (vol I, p.1), in which the narrator — a young author, not quite yet a rising-star — describes how he discovers Louis's story. One day, the narrator has an unexpected visitor, a *bohême,* who proposes a 'collaboration' (vol I, p.27) to him. This stranger — Louis, it emerges — has written his memoirs and wants to sell them for the narrator to rework as he wants.[6] In a moment that indicates the value of a title as a commercial entity, the *bohême* makes the narrator pay a *louis* before letting him see his book's title: 'mon titre indique l'idée de mon

[6] Souvestre's novel, *Confessions d'un ouvrier,* also draws upon the trend of *mémoires*, claiming in its opening chapter to be based on the memoirs of Pierre Henri: 'nous devons la communication des Mémoires suivantes à un ami [...] En 1846, des travaux d'art [...] lui firent rencontrer Pierre Henri' (p.3). A visit to Pierre's house by chance means that this friend comes across a document entitled 'tout ce que je me rapelle de ma vie, depuis 1801, par Pierre Henri'; when asked about it 'le maçon avoua, en souriant, que c'était les espèces de Mémoires écrits autrefois pendant les soirées pluvieuses ou les dimanches d'hiver' (Souvestre, *Confessions d'un ouvrier, publiées par Emile Souvestre* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1851, p.6). Other novels, specifically *Confession générale, La Confession d'un poète* and *Confessions d'un bohémien* claim to be based on genuine manuscripts, though do not define themselves specifically as *mémoires*.

livre, et, rien que sur les quatres mots qui le composent, vous pourriez bâtir dix volumes' (p.34). Once he sees the title, the narrator echoes Louis's sentiments on its potential: 'ce titre seul m'ouvrait des horizons inconnus et me ramenait dans le tourbillon de ces idées — séduisantes pour moi' (p.49).

Combining 'confession' with 'bohême' was a popular ticket in the late 1840s. In the previous decade, Bohemia had been associated with the coterie around Gautier and Les Jeunes Frances;[7] this was a Bohemia of 'parodic performances, elaborate disguises and carnivalesque gestures'.[8] Murger's *Scènes de la bohème,* published in serial from 1845-1849, had recently given Bohemia a different focus — and huge commercial potential.[9] What readers hear of Louis's vagrant and criminal lifestyle is of course a very different version of 'bohemia' from that of the struggling artists of Murger's depiction of the Latin Quarter. As scholars including Seigal, Wilson and Gluck have pointed out 'bohemia' is a slippery concept at the time:[10] on one level 'an

[7] Miranda Gill, *Eccentricity and the Cultural Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.170.
[8] Mary Gluck, *Popular Bohemia: Modernism and Urban Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p.21. Another significant reference for 1830s expressions of Bohemia is Nodier's *Histoire du roi de Bohême* (1830), a novel which 'ouvre à l'idée de la bohème un vaste espace de liberté: l'errance n'est plus celle du comédien, ballotté de ville en ville ni celle du marginal incapable de se fixer nul part, elle devient mode de vie et de pensée librement assumé, riche de toutes les promesses' (Loïc Chotard, 'Introduction', to Henri Murger, *Scènes de la vie de bohème,* ed. by Chotard (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), pp.5-25 (p.7)).
[9] The first story of Murger's studies of a bohemian lifestyle had been published in *Le Corsaire-Satan* in 1845 (with the subtitle *Scènes de la bohème* introduced the following year). In total, twenty stories were published in *Le Corsaire-Satan.* A theatrical adaptation, *La Vie de bohème* (1849) brought the work to an even larger audience. A full volume of the stories — published under the title *Scènes de la bohème* — appeared in 1851, and included a preface, epilogue and first and last chapters written specifically for it (see Chotard 'Histoire du texte', in *Scènes de la vie de bohème,* ed. by Chotard, pp.438-444; also see Gluck, p.16).
[10] Bohemia is 'is notoriously difficult to grasp as a concrete social or cultural reality' (Gluck, p.8). Also see Jerrold Seigal, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1930-1930* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), p.12 and Elizabeth Wilson, *Bohemians: The Glamorous Outcasts,* (New Brunswick NJ, Rutgers University Press, 2000), p.2.

apparent rejection of and challenge to bourgeois society',[11] it contained 'within its borders disaffected youth on the verge of serious careers, marginalised types with problematic livelihoods, and outright criminal elements'[12] — the latter group encompassing Louis and his friends. Significantly, what matters to Montépin — and indeed to Louis in his act of selling his story — is not actually the depiction of bohemia itself (as will be discussed below, the novel barely portrays Louis's bohemian experiences at all), but rather its commercial potential.

The chapter's heading, 'le marché de la confession', indicates that 'confession' too is a selling point[13] — a vogue that both Montépin, and the fictional narrator of the novel, can exploit. 'Le marché de la confession' not only indicates the significant popularity of confessions and demand for them: it also suggests how confession can be bought and sold — one man's confession can make another man rich. Confession has become a commodity and the text describes in minute detail the nature of the bargain that the narrator strikes with the *bohême*. The novel presents the commercialisation of the personal — where a character's confession is simply a transaction, in exchange for which, as Louis explains, 'J'aurai bien des petits verres, bien des pipes de tabac, et autre chose encore....' (p.38). Apparently, drink, tobacco and (probably) prostitutes are a just exchange for one's own life story.

Selling his confessions, Louis renounces ownership over his experiences. In the narrative Montépin builds around the narrator's process of developing Louis's

[11] Wilson p.2; at the same time, in the case of Murger, this rejection of bourgeois life is, according to Gluck only superficial: 'Murger's stories not only affirmed, but also neutralised, the potential of the bohemian life. Bohemia [...] could only be a transitional phase in an artist's life' (p.18)
[12] Gluck, p.10.
[13] Also see Stead on this point, 'Comme il [Montépin] le dit, il existe bien un "marché de la confession"', p.353.

material, there is a central contradiction: the narrator simultaneously portrays his own work as a 'humble travail d'arrangeur' (vol I, p.41), and undermines this claim by describing what his process actually entailed: 'j['ai] décidé à fouiller dans ce chaos de matériaux, précieux mais confusément entassés, et à emprunter à l'œuvre originale, son titre — sa donnée générale — ses enseignements et ses détails caractéristiques' (vol I, p.40). Far from simply arranging the material, he has essentially written it, borrowing from the original but making it his own. Written in third, not first, person, Louis's voice is completely written out of his story. The narrator may have borrowed the title from the *bohême's* text, but, the *mise en abyme* makes clear, the text is no longer, really, the confessions of a bohemian. Those confessions are lost, subsumed within the narrative the narrator chooses to craft.

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(ii) The problem of names

Montépin's commercial exploitation of generic characteristics can be seen particularly in his portrayal of Louis's identity. Louis is isolated and without family. Whilst in Janin or Musset, the protagonist's emotional and social isolation become the meat of psychological analysis, for Montépin, they become the linchpin of the plot. Because Louis is utterly alone, he is the perfect target for the Baron's manipulation. Because he has no connections, the Baron can pass him off as anyone he chooses. By the novel's end, any friends Louis has gained in his new life, as staged by the Baron, have disappeared (they are either dead or desert him). His story is circular — he is friendless and on the point of suicide both at the start and end. The final words of the novel highlight this cycle of isolation: 'Ainsi Raphaël [Louis] se trouvait *de nouveau* sur la pavé de Paris — seul — sans argent — sans vêtements —

sans logis et sans protecteurs. ' (vol V, p.259, italics added). Louis is defined by what he is without.

Louis's problems of identity are encapsulated in questions of naming. Louis struggles to introduce himself.:

- Je m'appelle Louis Annibal, — répondit le jeune homme.
- *Louis* est le nom de baptême sans doute, et *Annibal,* le nom de famille?
- Je le suppose.
- Vous le supposez!! Vous n'en êtes donc pas sûr?
- Non. (vol II, p.162)

The literal translation of 'Je m'appelle' has never been more fitting; Louis Annibal is just a name he calls himself — but he cannot be sure of the two elements that comprise his name, or what they signify. With no real name, it is easy for the Baron to rebaptise him, as one empty signifier is replaced by another: 'il serait bon que tu modifies ton nom […] ainsi tu peux remplacer *Annibal* par *Raphaël'* (vol II, p.312). It is easy also to lay claim to titles: 'Il convient encore que tu prennes un titre quelconque [….] *Vicomte* t'irait-il?' (vol II, p.312). Identity becomes assumed and performed, rather than innate.[14] Montépin's narrative wryly continues this performance of identity established by the Baron: 'Le baron quitta son protégé, que désormais nous appellerons le vicomte Raphaël' (vol II, p.313). The narrative reinforces the fluidity of names, renaming its characters within the narrative as they

[14] Goffman's theory of performance suggest that, 'a [social] status [...] is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished, and well-articulated' (Ervin Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin, 1990), p.81). Such a remark applies closely to the world of the Montépin's novel, where status becomes, not unlike Butler's theory of gender, performative — a 'stylised repetition of acts'. (Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.140). Butler argues that individuals do not normally have autonomy over their performance; Goffman, that they do not know they are performing. In Montépin's world, by contrast, performance is often deliberate: the Baron and Martial, for instance, are highly conscious of the systems of signification through which status is created, and manipulate them expertly. Social roles therefore become not only intrinsically performative but deliberately performed.

rename themselves. Names fail as signifiers for Louis Annibal — they give him no indication of his identity, they can be swapped as easily as his clothes can be.

The problem of naming proliferates. Martial is not really Martial — he is both more (Monsieur Fabuleux, for instance, is one of his other personas) and less (he is actually Antoine, who has murdered his friend Martial, in order to usurp his identity). The Baron is not really a Baron; this is purely a title he has assumed. He also plays other identities, including the moneylender Van Gripp. In his performance of various roles, he is reminiscent of Balzac's mastermind criminal, Jacques Collin, whose many other personas included Carlos Herrera and Vautrin; indeed, in his *Grand Dictionnaire universel,* Larousse accuses Montépin of copying Balzac.[15] In the stage adaptation of *Confessions d'un bohême,* an extra melodramatic twist was added: it is revealed that the Baron is actually Martial.[16] This encapsulates something of the slipperiness of identity in Montépin's original novel: both the Baron and Martial play so many parts that it is not a leap to imagine that the Baron has become another role of Martial's. In this narrative, Montépin is drawing on a contemporary fascination with the fluidity — and indeed performance — of identity: a reflection, perhaps, of a political climate where traditional hierarchies have been razed to the ground and where status and power, have been, in part, constructed through language.[17]

[15] Larousse, '*Confessions d'un bohême', Grand Dictionnaire universel,* II, p.887.
[16] Xavier de Montépin and Eugène Grangé, *Le Vol à la duchesse* (Paris: 1851, D. Giraud and D. Dagneau), Act 4, Scene 2.
[17] As Sandy Petrey argues, by calling himself Louis XVIII, Louis rewrites history as he assumes power, asserting an unbroken line of inherited monarchy (Sandy Petrey, *Realism and Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p.135). Napoleon I creates a new role for himself, with the word Emperor bypassing previous French power structures, whilst evoking the Roman. Louis-Philippe's rise to power also occurred through a role constructed through language (the creation of lieutenant-général and constitutional monarch).

In Montépin's world, saying you are someone seems almost enough to become that person — but at the same time this fluidity of naming fails to help with the real identity issue beneath. Identity is assumed — because it has to be. Behind the performance lies a void. Montépin's exploration of naming is two-fold, exploring identity in its plurality and in its absence. On the one hand, he depicts how easily names can be assumed and identity can be performed. On the other, he explores a dearth of identity: what happens when a character has no idea what to call himself, because he has no idea of who he is.

In framing Louis as a *bohême,* Montépin links the genre of confession — often about outsiders — to the cultural phenomenon of the *bohemian,* a social outsider with whom contemporary culture was obsessed.[18] Yet this theme of isolation is not the subject of psychological analysis, but rather a device that drives Montépin's — and the Baron's — plot. Louis's isolation makes him the perfect target for the Baron's outlandish criminal plans; his new performed identity becomes central to those plans. Using themes of isolation, suicide, and uncertain identity, Montépin commercially exploits confession, making the genre's central traits the material of melodrama rather than introspection.

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[18] See Wilson, who describes the bohemian as 'the "Other" of bourgeois society', p.240.

Part Two: *Confessions d'un bohémien* by Arnould Frémy (1856)

Frémy's novel appeared first as a *feuilleton* in the *Revue de Paris* between April and June 1856,[19] and was published in book-form a year later, by the Librarie Nouvelle. The title of Frémy's *Confessions d'un bohémien* (1856) might suggest a similar subject matter to Montépin's book — certainly both novels attempt to take advantage of the interest in Bohemia. Like Montépin's, Frémy's text explores issues of identity and isolation, and interrogates questions around the ownership of a confessional text, but it does so in a completely different style. Where these themes have been used largely as plot devices in Montépin's novel, Frémy's work interrogates them in depth, in a manner much more in tone with the psychological focus of Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle*. In Frémy's novel, the topos of selfhood again becomes the ground for detailed exploration. Indeed, as a review in *Le Figaro* highlights, there is very little plot at all: 'les incidents ici ne viennent pas s'enchevêtrer et compliquer l'action; mais l'observation est profonde, le style et la pensée y sont également châtiés'.[20] Frémy's novel is, according to *Le Figaro,* 'l'œuvre d'un artiste et non pas d'un faiseur'.[21]

Three years before, Frémy had employed the diary form in his *Journal d'une jeune fille,* another novel driven by subjectivity and emotions.[22] In *Confessions d'un bohémien,* Frémy returns to the diary, but now framing the text as a confession.

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[19] François Marotin, 'L'inspiration noire et mélodramatique des Jules Vallès', in *Mélodrames et romans noirs: 1750-1890,* ed. by Simone Bernard-Griffiths, Jean Sgard (Toulouse: Presses universitaires de Mirail, 200), p.499-p.513, (p.500).
[20] J. Habans, 'Petit Bulletin', *Le Figaro,* 15 January 1857, pp.4-5 (p.5).
[21] Habans, p.5.
[22] Framing the novel as authentic, in the note which precedes the opening of what is supposedly the diary, Frémy describes his text as 'un simple Mémoire sans incidents qui n'offre que le procès-verbal de certains sentiments, d'une situation morale toute particulière' (*Journal d'une jeune fille* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1853), p.6).

Confessions d'un bohémien is about 'la déchéance physique et morale d'un professeur de philosophie épris d'une écuyère de cirque forain'.[23] Living with his sister and niece, Jacques is bored with life, when suddenly he falls desperately in love with the star of a circus show. Jacques decides to follow his heart — and the show, as it tours. Cyprienne regularly is unfaithful to him, only to return when she needs him. At one point, Jacques briefly manages to tear himself away, staying in the house of a wealthy aristocrat, M. de Sinneville — who greatly admires Rousseau and his *Confessions* and see Jacques and his diary as a modern-day equivalent. Jacques's stay comes to an end when Cyprienne, very ill, comes to find him. He takes her back and nurses her back to health, only for her to leave him. This final abandonment tips him over the edge: he goes mad.

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(i) Who, really, *is* confessing, to whom?

The diary-form thrusts the reader into the heart of Jacques's experiences: rather than looking back with some degree of distance, like Musset's Octave, Jacques has no sense of perspective. The diary often serves to reveal Jacques's lack of self-knowledge: he regularly makes claims about his present feelings that are proved to be completely untrue by his future behaviour. At one moment, he declares 'je n'ai plus pour elle [Cyprienne] qu'un attachement calme [...] dont je suis bien sûr, dans tous les cas, d'être le maître' (p.233). Yet claims of indifference last for only six pages and within ninety he has gone mad because of her. At other points, he is painfully aware of his mistakes, and yet cannot bring himself to act differently: 'Oh! Oui, tout cela, encore une fois est une faiblesse insigne, impardonnable; mais puis-je

[23] Habans, p.5.

donc agir autrement?' (p.212). He moves between having no self-knowledge and having self-knowledge but no self-control. In the narrative's cyclical structure, even self-knowledge does not prevent him from repeating the same mistakes.

Whilst Jacques is supposedly writing a diary, he not infrequently addresses a reader. Jacques does not have any clear idea of who this might be: 'ces pages [....] tomberont peut-être dans d'autres mains que les miennes' (p.93). At one point, these two perspectives of writing for himself and writing for a future reader meet in a paradox: 'Oh! vous qui lirez un jour ces pages que j'écris pour moi, rien que pour moi' (p.93). These addresses to future readers give his words a double perspective, at once private and public. Future readers become Jacques's imagined confessors, who will make a moral judgement on him: 'vous qui m'accablerez sans doute un jour de vos dédains et de vos reproches' (p.226).

If the recipient of Jacques's writing is double (on one level, just himself, on another, future readers as imagined confessors), then the answer to the question, 'who is confessing' is also dual. Jacques is confessing. Yet, in the Preface, an unidentified voice explains work of a fictional editor in bringing together Jacques's 'véritables confessions'. Initially, this work sounds fairly minor: 'On lui a remis des notes, des fragments qui se rattachaient à un ensemble qu'il n'a eu qu'à diviser et à mettre en ordre' (p.2). However — as in Montépin's novel, so here — the next sentence suggests more substantial involvement, bowdlerising certain material: 'Il a dû élaguer des répétitions, des longueurs, adoucir certains détails qui eussent sans

doute été trop crus pour la pruderie de quelques lecteurs' (p.2).[24] Not even the title is Jacques's own, having been imposed by the editor. Frémy's use of this preface as a self-conscious framing device foregrounds the issue of appropriation, meaning that a reader can never be quite sure who *is* confessing: Jacques or the editor. In Montépin's novel, Louis's story is told in the third person, through the narrator's voice and not Louis's. In Frémy's novel, the fictional editor's involvement is less easy to distinguish — he becomes an invisible presence. This preface therefore has a double effect. Ostensibly part of the common trope where a preface makes claims of authenticity about the text which follows,[25] on closer examination it rather problematises that very notion, making it clear that the 'confession' that follows is not 'authentically' Jacques's.

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(ii) The confessant as sufferer

In a similar way to how Janin's *La Confession* portrays Anatole's suffering as pre-existing, and indeed causing, his transgressive act, Frémy's novel shows Jacques's psychological ill-being existing prior to his relationship with Cyprienne. The novel may in part represent the unhappiness brought to Jacques by his relationship with Cyprienne, but she is not the root cause: he falls for her because he is already unhappy. Before he even meets her, he has a disillusioned outlook: watching his

[24] The reference to 'certains détails [...] trop crus' gestures both towards the censorship of the time — which, in reality, would have restricted what Frémy could write — and towards the titillating side of confession, where the signified is so often sex but where the signifier tends to be omission. The phrase 'certain détails' works in a similar way to the ellipsis in Marie Garcia's novel (see pp.107-108 of this thesis).

[25] See *Le Topos du manuscript trouvé: Hommages à Christian Angelet,* ed. by Jan Herman et Fernard Hallyn and Kris Peeters (Paris: Louvain, 1999) on this tradition, described by Herman as 'un des plus anciens motifs de la litterature occidentale' (Jan Herman, 'Introduction: Manuscrits trouvés à Saragosse, c'est-à-dire nulle part', pp.ix-xxx (p.ix)). Also see Michel Brix on the evolution of this trope in the nineteenth century ('Le "manuscrit trouve" a l'époque romantique: metamorphose et significations', pp.353-361).

five-year-old niece, he thinks 'quelle longue carrière il lui reste encore à parcourir!.... Heureusement, il se passera bien des années encore avant qu'elle sache au juste ce qu'est la vie!' (pp.15-16). What he seeks in Cyprienne is 'l'espérance, c'est la vie qu'elle me rapporte' (p.212). Cyprienne is a consequence of his sickness, not the main disease; his misplaced love is a symptom, not the cause, of his suffering.

The real cause, as for previous characters, is *mal du siècle.* Whilst the full term *mal du siècle* is not used in the novel, the world 'mal' regularly is: 'je me trouve dans un état d'abattement extrême [...] je pense pourtant guérir de ce mal-là' (p.86); 'le mal que j'éprouve' (p.164-5); 'ce tourment qui me fait chercher la mort comme la seule remède à mes maux' (p.214); 'je suis atteint [...] d'un mal incurable' (p.296). Jacques's depression is existential: 'd'où vient [...] ce malaise intérieur? Que me manque-t-il?' (p.21), he asks. One of the central traits of *mal du siècle* in the 1830s is the paradox that, whilst individuals are sick of the world, disenchantment does not kill a desire for the ideal,[26] be that the hope of a transcendental truth, or of realising personal dreams: 'malgré moi l'infini me tourmente', as Musset phrases it.[27] Jacques too is trapped between his sense of the ideal — 'Je médite et je rêve' — and reality: 'Je n'ai rien réalisé de ce que j'ai dans l'esprit' (p. 21). Jacques is caught in a trap, where he can escape neither his idealism, nor his cynicism. He even realises his cynicism is as much a *cause* of unhappiness as it is the effect of it: 'C'est en criant sans cesse que tout est éteint, desséché, inanié, qu'on arrive à semer le néant et la mort autour de soi' (p.162). This brief moment of lucidity, however, does nothing to reduce his feelings of depression.

[26] Gisèle Séginger, 'Tout est mort, tout vit: Musset, Nerval : la double figure d'une generation', *Romantisme,* 147 (2010), pp.55-68 (p.56).
[27] Musset, *L'Espoir en dieu* (1838), in *Poésies complètes,* ed. by Maurice Allem (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1933), p.341.

Jacques pushes to the extremes the line of *Rolla* (1836), 'Je suis venu trop tard dans un monde trop vieux',[28] or Octave's argument in *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* of being a victim of history, born too late. Jacques wishes he had lived earlier — much earlier, not so that he could have experienced the glory of the Napoleonic Wars as Octave wishes, but rather so that he could have lived through Antiquity:

> C'était alors qu'il faisait bon chercher, inventer, découvrir. Les sciences, jeunes encore, n'avaient pas engendré le mensonge et les déceptions dans le cœur de l'homme détaché de tout comme aujourd'hui. (p.64)

Jacques's distaste at the age of the world is closely linked to the impossibility of being original: 'Que faire au milieu de ce perpétuel dédale de redites, nous, hommes de bonne volonté, qui tenons absolument à payer à notre siècle notre dette de nouveauté et d'indépendance?' (p.64). Such a comment offers and echo of the narrator's opening to *La Confession*, 'Toutes les inventions ont été faites, tous les personnages à créer sont crées, tout est dit et redit dans les deux sens' (p.xi). Ironically, Jacques's fear of not being original, is, in itself, entirely unoriginal: the idea that it is impossible to be original had been articulated and re-articulated twenty years earlier.[29] Jacques is not only stuck in the past in terms of the literary giants of previous centuries (he is intimidated by Aristotle, Homer, Milton), but also in terms of his own century, still trying to live the life of a disillusioned youth of the 1830s, trying to be a latter-day Octave. By the time that *Confessions d'un bohémien*

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[28] Musset, *Rolla,* in *Poésies complètes,* p.274.

[29] Lack of originality is a regular trope in Musset's poetry, with which Musset engages playfully. *La Coupe et les lèvres* (1831) offers a prime example. In it, the speaker claims — 'on m'a dit l'an passé que j'imitais Byron' — before defensively finishing the couplet, rhyming 'Byron' with 'non': 'vous qui me connaissez, vous savez bien que non' (*La Coupe et les lèvres,* in *Poésies complètes,* p.155). His next lines make further claim to originality –'Je hais comme la mort l'état de plagiaire', adding 'je n'exhume rien' — and yet only a few stanzas later he paraphrases Shakespeare: 'Vous me demandez si j'aime quelque chose./ Je m'en vais vous répondre à peu près comme Hamlet: Doutez, Ophelia, de tout ce qui vous plait [.....] mais non de l'amour même' (*La Coupe et les lèvres* p.157.). A few lines later, and the poet subverts his own imagery of 'je n'exhume rien' by claiming that 'notre littérature [….] est un mort que nous galvanisons' (*La Coupe et les lèvres,* p.158).

was published, *mal du siècle* was largely considered a thing of the past.[30] Even Jacques's fear of being *passé* is *passé.* In this way, Frémy's text consistently ironises its confessant.

Unable to pursue his dreams of being a prominent writer, Jacques instead writes a diary. The self becomes the subject matter for someone who cannot find his own voice on any other subject matter; the diary is a product of this inability to write anything else. Writing becomes for Jacques, almost by definition, the expression of unhappiness: 'Oh qu'on a bien raison de dire souvent qu'on ne raconte pas le bonheur' (p.122). His diary both describes his *mal du siècle* and offers an outlet for it.

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(iii) The confessant as outsider

Jacques sees himself as a man alone against the world: 'Que me fait le monde, après tout? S'est-il jamais occupé de moi?' (p.112). Jacques easily forgets that he actually has a family in his readiness to declare his isolation: 'moi, pauvre abandonné [...] seul [...] sans un ami, sans une famille à qui je puisse allller demander ces quelques heures de joie' (p.34). Jacques's feeling of loneliness is prompted by feeling emotionally alone: he finds himself unable to confide in those closest to him. He longs to confess and imagines doing so, but stops just short:

> Comme elle [ma sœur] me parle, avec quelle sublime et délicate intelligence de tous mes instincts secrets! Un peu plus, et je me serais jeté à ses genoux; *je lui aurais tout avoué*, *confessé que j'aimais cette fille* [....] *Je n'ai pas eu la force de lui faire cet aveu-là*. (p.100-101, italics added).

[30] See pp.129-30 of the this thesis.

He confesses to his diary (and its future readers) because he finds himself unable to confess to her. The confession that we read is a transferred act of confession. His written confession is both about his (self-imposed) isolation and prompted by it.

Jacques also feels isolated because he is doomed to be a 'spectateur' in a world of performers. His role as a regular audience member of the troupe's shows becomes a metaphor for his being a spectator in other respects, not least to Cyprienne's infidelity. When he witnesses signs of her affair with Dominique, another circus-artist, he is 'navré pendant cette *scène*' and 'ne sachant comment me contenir à la vue du *spectacle* qui s'offrait à moi' (p.193, italics added). When Jacques confronts Cyprienne about her affair, she suggests a solution to Jacques's jealousy: 'un partage' of her (p.203) — an offer he completely rejects. Despite his decision to run away and follow the circus, Jacques cannot bring himself to live a bohemian lifestyle. The Preface defines Jacques as a specific type of bohemian: 'il n'y a pas seulement dans ce monde les bohémiens d'aventures, de fait et d'action [....] il y a aussi des bohémiens moraux, les aventuriers [....] des sentiments et du cœur' (p.2). However, his attitudes towards Cyprienne show that he is the opposite of a 'moral bohemian'; far from an 'aventurier du cœur', what he actually wants from Cyprienne is something very conventional, even repressive: 'Quittez votre odieux métier... Je ne veux plus que vous paraissiez jamais en public, [...].... je réponds de vous à tout jamais' (p.209). The title of the novel is deeply ironic: these are the confessions of someone who is incapable of the 'free love' of a bohemian.[31] Again, the question, 'who is confessing?' becomes multi-layered: the text reveals the confessant is hardly the bohemian the title claims.

[31] See Gill, p.173, on the free love portrayed in Murger's work.

Indeed, this conflict between title and text, between bohemian and conventional Jacques, is at the centre of the novel: Jacques's self is fragmented between the person he wants to be and the person he is. The scholar longs to be the bohemian, and simultaneously hates himself for what this desire leads him to do. He cannot recognise himself in his actions: 'Que de fois […] je me suis demandé si c'était bien moi qui m'étais jeté autrefois dans ce gouffre de passion et de délire' (p.304). This inability to come to terms with himself leads him to the point of suicide, but an interruption by his sister and niece prevents him executing his plans. Finally, Jacques's internal divisions manifest themselves in the ultimate fragmentation of the self: madness. By the novel's end, Jacques, now mad, can write his diary only in snippets, driven by a mixture of fleeting images and persistent delusions. Frémy's novel thus draws on the contemporary scientific and wider cultural interest in madness and the means by which the mad try to express themselves; the final words of the novel are like a fictionalised version of the texts reproduced by Palluy in his 'Une visite à Charenton' (1832), in which the doctor published the words of mad patients. [32]

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[32] For a study of nineteenth-century attitudes to madness, see Juan Rigoli, *Lire le délire: Aliénisme, rhétorique et litterature en france au XIXe siècle* (Geneva: Fayard, 2001). Reading the words of madmen became central to the study of madness. Palluy claims in 'Une visite à Charenton' that, 'Il faut lire les lettres de quelques aliénés pour concevoir jusqu'à quel point leurs idées sont perverties par la maladie' (Maurice Palluy, 'Une visite a Charenton' in *Paris, ou le livre des cent-et-un,* 15 vols (Paris: Ladvocat, 1832-34), V (1832), pp.155-185 (p.177)). Leuret, writing in 1840, claims that in order to understand madness, it is necessary to 'pénétrer entièrement dans [l']esprit [d'un aliéné], pour connaître toutes les idées folles qui l'obsèdent' (Francois Leuret, *Du traitement moral de la folie* (Paris: L J.-B. Baillière, 1840), p.328).

(iv) Confessing as self-construction?

Chateaubriand, in the Prologue to the *Mémoires de ma vie* (1826) — the first version of what would later become *Mémoires d'outre tombe* (1849-50) — writes, 'j'écris principalement pour rendre compte de moi à moi-même [...] je veux expliquer mon inexplicable cœur'.[33] For Chateaubriand, writing is a reflexive, as well as reflective, action. He is at once the contemplator ('j'écris'), the object of study ('moi'), and the recipient of the writing ('à moi-même'). Jacques expresses a similar sentiment:[34] 'j'ai commencé à écrire mes pensées de chaque jour, afin de pouvoir me rendre un compte exact de ce qui se passerait en moi' (p.14). In Jacques's formulation, the act of writing pluralises the self, into subject and object, present and future. The self exists at the time of writing, as both the subject, the 'I' who writes ('J'ai commencé à écrire'), and as the object ('mes pensées'); and in the future, as an imagined future reader (an idea contained in 'pouvoir me rendre') and, more loosely, as an ongoing, changing entity, between the time of writing and the time of future contemplation (an idea contained in 'ce qui se passerait en moi'). In this reflexive action of writing, the diary plays the role of a mnemonic.[35] It will help his future self access his past self; it will crystallise his present to preserve it for the future.

Lamartine, writing in 1852**,** suggests another aim of self-writing: it can aid self-comprehension. For Lamartine,

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[33] Chateaubriand, *Mémoires de ma vie (manuscrit de 1826),* ed. by J.M. Gautier (Generva: Librarie Droz, 1976), p.20.
[34] The echo is of course not direct: this passage from *Mémoires de ma vie* did not make it into *Mémoires d'outre tombe,* and *Mémoires de ma vie* was not published until the twentieth century.
[35] See Richard Terdiman writing on confession as a mnemonic, in 'The mnemonics of Musset's confession', as cited in footnote 208 of introduction, p.66.

> l'homme se tourmente jusqu'à ce qu'il ait produit au dehors ce qui le travaille au-dedans. Sa parole écrite est comme un miroir dont il a besoin pour se connaître lui-même et pour s'assurer qu'il existe.[36]

On the one hand, writing sheds light on the self; words act like a mirror, revealing an interiority that could not otherwise be perceived. On the other hand, self-writing is a way not only of understanding the self, but also of affirming it: writing creates an existential certainty which is, Lamartine implies, not there in reality. Writing affirms selfhood — indeed, it perhaps creates it. Significantly, Chateaubriand's statement expresses a similar idea. Whilst positing the idea that writing facilitates understanding — 'je veux expliquer mon inexplicable cœur' — Chateaubriand implies that self-understanding is *created* by words (je veux *expliquer*). Words can explain the inexplicable, not necessarily by a process of discovery within (what is inside, is, after all, inexplicable), but by the process of narrative. As Philippe Lejeune indeed reflects on self-writing, 'écrire son histoire, c'est essayer de se construire'.[37]

This same process of self-construction and self-affirmation can be seen in Jacques's fictional act of self-writing. Writing enables him to turn himself into something precise — something of which a 'compte exact' can be written. On one level, writing is an attempt to compute the self; on another, it is an attempt to construct: through translating himself into tangible form, he can, perhaps build a cohesion and a unity that is not there within. In another way, the diary is an attempt to gain control of a narrative over which he, in life, has no control; it is an attempt to place himself at the

[36] Alfonse de Lamartine, *Graziella* (Paris: Pagnerre, Furne and Hachette, 1862), p.109. The text was serialised as part of *Les Confidences* in 1849 and published as a novel in 1852. This passage is also quoted by Véronique Dufief-Sanchez, *Philosophie du roman personnel de Chateaubriand à Fromentin*, 1802-1863 (Geneva: Droz, 2010), p.7.
[37] Philippe Lejeune, *L'Autobiographie en France*, (Paris: Armand Colin, 1971), p.84.

centre of a story in which he is really just a spectator. For Jacques, writing is an attempt to answer the problems of selfhood that he is experiencing.

However, if Jacques's diary is a response to his *mal du siècle* and his isolation, an attempt to understand and ultimately construct himself, then it fails on multiple levels. One major cause of Jacques's *mal du siècle* is his fear of being unoriginal. Unfortunately, rather than the diary offering an escape from this unoriginality, it compounds it. Frémy has M. de Sinneville repeatedly compare Jacques to Rousseau — 'L'idée des *Confessions* de Jean-Jacques me revient sans cesse dans l'esprit' (p.264). Jacques's attempt to make a literature from his life has already been done, and Jacques cannot escape that shadow. He is just plain Jacques, not Jean-Jacques. The preface to the novel even playfully draws attention to this lack of originality: 'ce sont encore de véritables *confessions* qu'on va lire' (p.1). With the word 'encore', *Confessions d'un bohémien* places itself within a wider framework of confessional writing, gesturing not only towards the genuine confessional texts that were so popular (from St Augustine, to Rousseau to the many autobiographical confessions published in the nineteenth century) but also towards the many novels of confession which also claim authenticity. Jacques's attempt to claim individuality is situated by its very own preface as merely part of a trend. In a brutal irony, Frémy's novel presents a character trying to express his originality in the least original form possible.

The problem goes even deeper. Whilst Jacques hopes writing will help him formulate a 'compte exacte' of himself, instead it pushes him further from, rather than closer to, self-understanding. Early in the novel he finds a diary entry he wrote

eight years before, and rather than this diary helping him to comprehend his past self, he finds these 'pages [...] bien étranges et presque incompréhensibles' (p.10). When he writes later in his diary, 'Que de fois […] je me suis demandé si c'était bien moi qui m'étais jeté autrefois dans ce gouffre de passion et de délire' (p.304), he is experiencing the same problem: his sense of otherness is specifically related to the act of self-contemplation, which just highlights the divide between past and present self. Far from providing clarity, writing alienates the self from itself, to the extent that he feels like a different person.

Introspection leads not to clarity, but to further confusion. When he is alone, Jacques sees less, not more, clearly. After arguing with Cyprienne when she suggests the 'partage' (p.203), he is finally alone and he writes:

> Non, cela ne peut se passer ainsi, c'est impossible!... A présent que me voilà seul en face de moi-même, que je puis délibérer de sang-froid, je me dis qu'elle ne peut m'avoir accablé ainsi, bravé impunément. Il faut dans tout cela qu'il y ait quelque malentendu' (p.205).

There is no such 'malentendu', but when he is alone Jacques loses perspective, and is able to convince himself of anything. The act of self-writing only occurs when one is 'seul en face de moi-même' — indeed, 'seul en face de moi-même' is a good description of the act of written confession. Yet Frémy's novel suggests that the mind, when it tries to record itself, ends up deceiving itself.

Jacques is incapable of writing a diary that can accurately depict him or make him comprehensible. By the novel's end, the diary formally breaks down. His fragmented selfhood becomes reflected in his fragmented writing. Now mad, he omits major events — like trying to attack his sister and his niece. Instead he writes about

dreams and hallucinations. He has completely lost control of himself — and of his story. His writing becomes dominated by questions. Now reporting second-hand what he has been told he has done, he can only ask, 'est-il possible'? (p.329). He does not realise he has been put in a mental institution: 'Où suis-je donc, et dans quel lieu nouveau m'a-t-on transporté?'(p.329). He often does not even realise that he is mad: 'Je me demande pourquoi on a jugé à propos de faire venir un médecin' (p.327). As his language breaks down so does the reader's access to him, leading the reader to question whether madness can ever be truly penetrated, or expressed. As a fictionalised version of the kind of writing that the *aliénistes* advocated for understanding madness, it fails, suggesting that there is something unsignifiable about madness that cannot be represented by the structures of language.[38]

Throughout the novel, the highly personal form of a diary has failed Jacques as a tool for introspection. Now, this failure of the diary is pushed to the extremes**.** In Jacques's madness, the confession becomes deeply unreliable as a source of information — but then, it always has been. The problems with writing when the subject is mad are, the novel suggests, not different in kind, but only in degree, from those Jacques experiences earlier in the text: Jacques has always struggled to reconcile his perception with reality. Writing — indeed, *confessing* — has, the novel suggests, always been a flawed medium for expressing selfhood. Jacques has set himself an impossible task from the start: to try to create a cohesive self in writing, through a process which inevitably fragments him as he contemplates himself. It is a paradox to try to create a unified self by an act of writing which, as has been seen, intrinsically pluralises the self. On one level, the ultimate fragmentation of the self —

[38] See footnote 32 of this chapter, p.153.

madness — is the physical manifestation, pushed to the extremes, of the fragmentation inherent in the process of self-writing.

In its presentation of Jacques's problems with selfhood — *mal du siècle,* isolation, fragmented selfhood, suicidal thoughts, madness — Frémy's novel encapsulates many of the tropes that define novels of confession. By both offering up the act of self-articulation as a potential answer to these problems and then undermining it as a solution, the novel explores a tension at the heart of novels of confession.

Part Three: *La Confession d'une jeune fille* by George Sand (1865)

Thirty years after Musset wrote to Sand of his intention to write the novel that would become *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle*,[39] Sand tackled the genre of confession herself. Sand's earlier novel, *Elle et lui* (1859) is generally seen as Sand's response to Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* — this is certainly how it was interpreted in her own time, including in vicious, personal attacks on Sand for impropriety.[40] *La Confession d'une jeune fille* is another response. It is not in any way

[39] In a frequently cited letter to George Sand, Musset wrote, ''Je m'en vais faire un roman; j'ai bien envie d'écrire notre histoire; il me semble que cela me guérirait, et m'élèverait le cœur. Je voudrais te bâtir un autel, fût-ce avec mes os'. (Alfred de Musset, Letter to George Sand, 30 April 1834, in *Sand et Musset: Lettres d'amour,* ed. by Françoise Sagan (Paris: Hermann, 1985), pp.68-9).

[40] See for instance, Barbey d'Aurevilly, *'Elle et lui*, par Mme George Sand; *Lui et elle* par Paul de Musset', *Le Pays,* 15 June 1859, pp.1-2, or Hippolyte Babou, 'Les Confessions de deux enfants du siècle'*, Revue contemporaine,* 4th series, vol. 10 (1859), p.411. Barbey d'Aurevilly, describes Sand as having 'rien de plus dantesque que Caroline Lamb (maintenant oubliée) quand elle publia son petit roman contre Lord Byron' (p.2). He wrote with horror of the dangerous precedent that he thought Sand's novel was setting by its basis on her private life: ' Que va devenir la littérature? De quels livres, de quelles escopettes ne sommes-nous pas ménacés?... Tout le monde voudra vendre après la mort la peau de quelqu'un' (p.2).

an echo of Sand's relationship with Musset, but it is her version of a novel of confession: about a *fille* rather than an *enfant* growing up, trying to negotiate different types of love, forming her identity.

La Confession d'une jeune fille was published in 1865 by Michel Lévy, who had published *La Confession d'Antonine* the year before, as well as many of Sand's previous works. Whilst *La Confession d'une jeune fille* was not amongst Sand's bestselling novels, a second edition nonetheless followed quickly (both being published in 1865), and Larousse describes it in his *Grand Dictionnaire universel* as 'une des œuvres les plus remarquables de G. Sand'.[41] In the novel, Sand explores many of the themes that had dominated novels of confession, specifically with relation to questions of identity.

Sand's exploration of confession in *La Confession d'une jeune fille* grows from a long-standing interest in (and criticism of) the Catholic act of confession, on which she had regularly written. In *Histoire de ma vie* (1854-5), she touches upon the potential dangers of confession (claiming that she was lucky that her confessor when she was young was 'un digne prêtre [...] Si j'avais eu affaire à un fanatique, je serais morte ou folle')[42] and sees Catholic confession as easily undermined by confessors exploiting their power (writing of another confessor, she remarks, 'je trouvai qu'il avait confondu la curiosité de l'homme avec la fonction du prêtre').[43] At other moments, she deems Catholic confession an 'usage détestable qui violentait la conscience et

[41] Larousse, 'La Confession d'une jeune fille', *Grand Dictionnaire universel,* IV, p.905.
[42] Sand, *Histoire de ma vie,* XIII (1855), p.134.
[43] Sand, *Histoire de ma vie,* XIV (1855), p.144

condamnait à l'hypocrisie celles qui n'avaient pas le courage de la résistance';[44] elsewhere calling secret confession a 'vain simulacre';[45] and describing Michelet's anti-confession *Du prêtre, de la femme, de la famille* as a 'beau livre terrible de vérité'.[46] Confession preoccupies Sand in her fiction, too,[47] most significantly in *Mademoiselle la Quintinie* (published just two years before *La Confession d'une jeune fille*) — a novel which is highly critical of Catholic confession, as the young Émile tries to wrestle the woman he loves, Lucie, from the undue influence of a confessor who is also largely responsible for the death of Lucie's mother.

La Confession d'une jeune fille can also be seen to grow out of Sand's relationship to Rousseau, whom she both praised and criticised. As a younger writer, she had greatly admired him; she was indeed regularly termed a 'fille de Jean-Jacques'.[48] Her admiration was largely focussed on his *Confessions,* writing of them in 1841 that 'J'y ai vu Jean-Jacques tout entier, se connaissant, se jugeant et se dévoilant lui-meme comme aucun homme ne s'est jugé, connu et confessé'.[49] With time, she became more critical. In *Histoire de ma vie,* she expresses grave reserves about Rousseau's

[44] Sand, *Histoire de ma vie,* XIII, p.13.
[45] Sand, *Histoire de ma vie,* XIII, p.130.
[46] Sand, *Histoire de ma vie,* XIII, p.133.
[47] Also see Michèle Hecquet on this ('Aspects du roman gothique: la confession féminine dans les romans de Sand', in *Mélodrames et romans noirs, 1750-1890,* ed. by Simone Bernard-Griffiths et Jean Sgard (Toulouse: Presses unviersitaries du Mirail, 2000), pp.449-459 (p.451)): 'Le mot de confession, le geste de l'aveu sont tres fréquents dans l'univers de Sand'. Sand's novel *Mauprat* (1837) also interrogates confession, in both its secular and religious versions. The central question of the novel (does Edmée love Bernard Mauprat?) obsesses Bernard in the space between two confessions: the partial confession of her feelings that Bernard half-overhears Edmée making to her confessor (George Sand, *Mauprat,* (Paris: Calman Lévy, 1883), pp.148-156) and the full confession of it he receives at the end (p.375). On another level, the novel shows confession being appropriated and misused. At one point, Jean Mauprat, the evil uncle of Bernard, dresses up as a Trappist monk and pretends to seek forgiveness from Edmée and her father by an act of confession that is in reality designed to intimidate them (p.282).
[48] Christian Planté, 'Introduction à 'A propos de Charmettes', in *George Sand critique,* ed. by Christian Planté (Tusson: Editions du Lérot, 2006), pp.623-627 (p.625).
[49] Sand, 'Quelques reflexions sur Jean-Jacques Rousseau', *Revue des deux mondes,* 1 June 1841, reprinted in *George Sand Critique*, ed. by Christian Planté (Tusson, Editions du Lérot, 2006), pp.145-162 (p.158).

attempt to silence his enemies with his *Confessions*: 'Qu'on soit pur ou impur, petit ou grand, il y a toujours vanité, vanité puérile et malheureuse, à entreprendre sa propre justification'.[50] A few years later, her attitude had shifted again. Her essay 'A propos de Charmettes' (1863),[51] written as a dialogue, defends Rousseau's *Confessions* against the criticisms of a devout Catholic. Sand's essay excuses Rousseau his public confession, claiming this is more in line with original Christian confessional practices than secret confession is,[52] whilst also exonerating him of many of his faults.[53] Written less than two years before publishing *La Confession d'une jeune fille,* 'A propos de Charmettes' is indicative of a certain *rapprochement* between Sand and Rousseau. The same year as 'A propos de Charmettes' appeared, she wrote in a letter to Sainte-Beuve of a new project, entitled *Le Fils de Jean-Jacques.*[54] Sand never actually wrote that book, but her project to do so indicates Rousseau's presence in her mind at the time she was planning and writing *La Confession d'une jeune fille.* The model of writing about the self that she had at the start of her career lauded in Rousseau — 'se connaissant, se jugeant, se dévoilant lui-même' — is one echoed in Lucienne's fictional self-narrative in *La Confession d'une jeune fille.*

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[50] Sand, *Histoire de ma vie,* I (1854), p.29.
[51] It appeared on 15th November 1863 in the *Revue des deux mondes.*
[52] Sand, 'A propos de Charmettes', p.640.
[53] Sand, 'A propos de Charmettes', p.641.
[54] A project discussed in a letter to Sainte-Beuve on 8 June 1863, cited by Christian Planté, 'Introduction' to 'A propos de Charmettes', p.625.

(i) The quest for selfhood

La Confession d'une jeune fille is, therefore, in part a response to other novels of confession, especially Musset's, in part an exploration (in secular form) of a topic (Catholic confession) that had interested her across the course of her career, and in part a response to Rousseau's (and her own) act of self-writing. The novel is an investigation of the subjectivity, psychology and sensibility of its confessing character, Lucienne; indeed, Larousse would go so far as to describe it, in his *Grand Dictionnaire universel,* as 'beaucoup moins un roman qu'une étude psychologique'.[55] Her confession is secular, not religious; it is an attempt to create a narrative of selfhood, rather than specifically focussed around a particular moment or transgression. The majority of the novel takes the form of a long letter, addressed to 'Monsieur M A'. Lucienne is writing with a specific purpose, in response to an 'offre' that Monsieur M A has made her: 'je veux vous rendre compte de ma vie et de moi-même avec la plus scrupuleuse sincérité [...] avant de prendre la sérieuse détermination à laquelle vous me conviez' (vol I, p.1). No further information about the nature of this 'offre' is given.

After this brief introduction, the text tells the story of its narrator, Lucienne de Valangis — or rather, this is the story of the narrator trying to work out whether or not she really *is* Lucienne de Valangis. Lucienne is abducted when still a baby. The narrator is then 'found' when she is a toddler, assumed to be Lucienne, and returned to her family home. Like many confessing characters, she is separated from her parents (Lucienne's mother is dead; her father lives in England with his new wife

[55] Larousse, *'La Confession d'une jeune fille'*, *Grand Dictionnaire universel,* IV, p.905.

and never replies to her letters). Nonetheless, she grows up initially happily with her paternal grandmother, her tutor Frumence, and Jennie, the woman who brought her home following the abduction.

As she gets older, she starts to wrestle with her own sense of self. Initially these concerns manifest themselves in a fear of being alone. As a child, she emotionally and psychologically depends upon her cousin, Marius:

> Il ne m'aimait certes pas [...] mais il était toujours avec moi, il m'arrachait à ma personnalité. Il m'empêchait d'être moi, et je n'aurais su que faire de moi sans lui. (vol I, p.95)

It is not that she dislikes any specific aspect of herself; indeed, she does not seem to be sure what her personality is, or who she would be if she were alone. Her fear of herself is rather that she is uncomfortable with the very concept of her selfhood, with the idea of herself as an independent being. As she gets older, she becomes more concerned with the idea that her personality is unknowable. As a teenager, she finds she cannot know what she feels: she simultaneously feels that she has and does not have feelings for her tutor, Frumence. Trying to distinguish between imagination and reality, she finds definitions are slippery:

> Dans ce rêve [...] j'entrevoyais un ami, un compagnon, un époux tel que Frumence [...] Ce fantôme semblable à Frumence, ce n'était pas lui pourtant, ce ne pouvait pas être lui, puisqu'il aimait Jennie, et, d'ailleurs, je ne voulais pas que ce fût lui; mais quiconque ne lui ressemblait pas à s'y méprendre ne me paraissait pas digne de ma confiance et de mon estime. (vol I, p.252).

She does not know how she perceives him — moving rapidly from 'ami' to compagnon' and 'compagnon' to 'époux'. The language becomes dominated by equivocation and paradox: she loves a dream, entirely modeled on him. The constant use of negatives only adds to this confusion — she is trying to define what she feels by what she does not feel. However, the repetition of 'Frumence' and 'lui'

suggests the obsession in her mind, and undermines the strength of her denial. Even with retrospect, she cannot understand her feelings: at the end of the novel, she asks, 'ai-je aimé Frumence? je n'en sais rien' (vol II, p.313).

As the novel progresses, her identity crisis deepens, moving from Lucienne's metaphorically being unsure of who she is, to literally being unsure who she is. Because of the mystery surrounding her abduction and return, she can never be quite sure if she really is Lucienne de Valangis. Her fears start when she by chance meets Denise, the (mad) nurse with whom baby-Lucienne was at the time she was 'lost', who claims that she killed the baby: 'J'ai jeté l'enfant dans l'eau pour voir s'il a des ailes [...] mais il n'en avait pas, car il s'est noyé' (vol I, p.141). The terrifying thought that Lucienne-the-narrator might not be who she believes herself to be is compounded when the lawyer MacAllen arrives. Sent by her stepmother to challenge Lucienne-the-narrator's identity, he tries to take away both her inheritance and her name. Lucienne's identity crisis is such that she can only define herself by absences: 'J'étais sans nom, sans âge, sans famille, sans passé, sans avenir, sans protection et sans responsabilité' (vol I, p.309).

It becomes clear that it is impossible to prove whether Lucienne-the-narrator is the same as baby-Lucienne. However, some more details about baby-Lucienne emerge: she is illegitimate, the product of her mother's affair; her mother's husband arranged the abduction in rage. The crisis reaches some resolution when a half-brother (the son of the man Lucienne-the-narrator thought was her father and his English wife, Lady Woodcliffe), turns up to reinstate Lucienne-the-narrator's name (vol II, p.293). In so doing, he accords her name an emotional truth, rather than a

legal entity — as her true identity can never be confirmed. MacAllen, the lawyer, returns to ask Lucienne to marry him. The third person form with which she has designated MacAllen throughout is now switched to second person – he is the thinly veiled 'Monsieur M A', the addressee of the letter; the 'offre' referred to at the start is this proposal.

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(ii) The linguistic crisis of identity

There is something lodged in Lucienne's past which she is too young to remember — a truth just on the edge of her consciousness that she cannot reach. When she writes about the abduction, she employs the third person: 'l'enfant avait disparu' (vol I, p.4). She cannot accurately use the first person as she can never be sure that 'I' and baby-Lucienne are indeed the same. She can only claim her selfhood once she talks about the child who has been returned: 'l'enfant retrouvé, c'était moi' (vol I, p.11). As Lucienne starts to question her origins, she undergoes not only an existential crisis but also a 'semiotic crisis',[56] where paradox becomes the dominant mode for self-expression.

Language constantly fails to express Lucienne's situation. She asks Jennie if she thinks that 'j'ai été tuée'. It is a nonsensical question, playfully dismissed by Jennie's, 'je ne peux pas le penser [...] puisque vous voilà ici' (vol I, p.142), but it makes complete sense to Lucienne. Lucienne's 'je' has split, containing within it the two possible Luciennes: the abducted baby and the teenager talking to Jennie, who may

[56] See Susan White, 'The Sign of Illegitimacy: Language and Identity in *La Confession d'une jeune fille*', *George Sand Studies,* 23 (2004), pp. 44-56 (p.43).

not be one and the same. The first 'je' could have been killed and leave the second 'je' still there. The same duality of 'je' exists in another paradoxical phrase, 'mais si je n'étais pas moi?' (vol I, p.141). Her self multiplies, splitting into 'la vraie Lucienne' (who was abducted) and 'la fausse Lucienne' (who might not be the same as the baby) (vol I, p.146). The possibility of a double appears, but in Sand's use of the trope, the parameters are switched: Lucienne is concerned that she is herself a double, a false version of the real Lucienne; a fake who has replaced her. She starts to describe herself as 'une fausse Lucienne' (vol I, p.142); later, she fears she is a 'fantaisie' (vol II, p.269). Struggling to think of her existence with any certainty, her language becomes dominated by structures requiring the subjunctive: 'en supposant que je fusse une fausse Lucienne' (vol I, p.145).

Lucienne's identity crises become focussed around names. Like Louis in *Confessions d'un bohême,* she finds herself lacking a signifier. MacAllen, arriving to question Lucienne's identity, refuses to call her 'mademoiselle de Valangis', opting instead for, 'mademoiselle Lucienne' (vol I, p.305). And yet even 'Lucienne' becomes a problematic signifier, for if she is not a de Valangis, then she is not a Lucienne — as MacAllen himself highlights:

> Mademoiselle Lucienne [….] hélas! Vous ne vous appelez peut-être pas même Lucienne: [...] Rien ne prouve, rien ne pourrai peut-être jamais prouver que vous soyez cette fille (vol I, p.305).

Continuing to search a name for her, but only further highlighting the uncertainity of her identity, MacAllen suggests, 'Gardez le nom de Lucienne, ajoutez-y [….] un *de* au commencement, une *s* à la fin: soyez mademoiselle de Luciennes' (vol I, p.304). She is indeed left no choice but to renounce her family name, and in doing so, creates a paradox in which she can proclaim her own lack of existence: 'Lucienne de Valangis

n'existe plus, et vous ne devez plus chercher à la faire revivre' (vol II, pp.265). Her lost name prompts another loss: 'Je perdais tout [...] le passé m'apparaissait tellement fini, que je ne cherchais plus à m'y rattacher' (vol II,p.194). She starts to feel geographically lost: 'Quel beau pays [...] bien qu'il ne soit peut-être pas le mien' (vol I, p.173). Losing her name, she loses her anchor, and feels she is floating in space and time.

As the novel progresses, the paradoxes of naming go even deeper. The man she thought was her father is only a 'soi-disant Marquis' (vol II, p.327): 'il était émigré. Il faisait comme tant d'autres qui, n'ayant que leur nom, y ont ajouté un titre à l'étranger' (vol II, p.320). Like the Baron in *Confessions d'un bohême,* the 'marquis' has found that naming, like confession itself,[57] has become a sort of performative utterance. Apparently, saying you are a marquis, or a Baron or a vicomte is enough to make you become one. There is thus a bitter irony at the heart of the novel: this is a world where one man can happily live with a title that does not belong to him, whilst Lucienne's having spent all her conscious years living the life of mademoiselle de Valangis is insufficient for her to keep that title. The novel has one further irony in store. Lucienne truly is not mademoiselle de Valangis, even if she is the child who was lost — because her mother's affair means she is illegitimate. The events of the novel consistently distance her from the name she thought she could inhabit.

In *La Confession d'une jeune fille*, as in many novels of confession, concerns about naming are one crucial way of exploring the troubled and uncertain selfhood many of these characters experience. The problems of literally not knowing who one is is

[57] See section v below: 'Confession as a performance utterance' (p.174 of this thesis).

one manifestation of the deeper soul-searching for identity that is intrinsic to the confessants in these novels.

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(iii) Confession and performance

As a young teenager, Lucienne decides to confide in Frumence that 'je ne suis plus heureuse comme je l'ai été' (vol I, p.166). The older Lucienne, looking back, comments on these 'confidences' that

> C'était une occasion de me manifester, de me résumer vis-à-vis de moi-même, de me connaître, d'entrer dans la vie comme une petite personne, et de cesser d'être une petite chose. (vol I, p.166)[58]

For young Lucienne, articulating her thoughts and emotions leads to subjecthood.[59] It enables her to gain control of the narrative by defining it herself ('de me résumer vis-à-vis de moi-même'); it allows her to claim an identity ('de me manifester'). It is a form of creation, taking her from 'petite chose' to 'petite personne'. Here, identity seems to be constructed (performed, almost) by the act of articulating it. The same desires — gaining control of the narrative, claiming an identity — could be seen to be driving forces behind her confession to MacAllen. Lucienne's act of self writing is an attempt to create something concrete from an identity that feels elusive: a 'compte' of herself (vol I, p.1), just as Jacques tries to create a 'compte' of himself (p.14). Lucienne's act of articulation also enables her to create and make tangible a

[58] Also see Levin on this: 'The act of confession becomes equated with being a person, with the chance to show the world what she is, to know herself, to establish herself in the world as a person, not a thing' (p.62) and Ruth Carver Capasso, who uses Bakhtin's notion that 'to be is to communicate' to examine the construction of voice and identity in *La Confession d'une jeune fille* ('Female Voice in *La Confession d'une jeune fille', George Sand Studies* 13 (1994), pp.55-62 (p.56)).

[59] Susan White describes Lucienne's act of writing as, 'a tool of self-affirmation, a 'devenir sujet' as Isabelle Naginski terms it' (White, p.45, referring to Naginksi writing in 'La Comédie féminine. Constances et movement dans l'œuvre sandienne', in Jeanne Goldin (ed.), *George Sand: L'écriture du roman, actes du Xie colloque international George Sand* (Montreal: Paragraphes, 1996), pp. 231-239 (p. 232)).

past she has seen as lost (vol II, p.194). By writing, Lucienne makes the past live on in the present.

However, the very idea that identity is constructed, far from solving the problems of selfhood, rather reinforces them. Confiding in Frumence not only offers Lucienne an opportunity to '[se] manifester', but also (inadvertently) to misrepresent herself, expressing *more* than she has actually felt:

> Je redevins tout à fait la petite fille qu'il avait gâté [...] Je pleurai dan son sein sans bien savoir pourquoi; car miss Agar ne me maltraitait en aucune façon, et l'ingratitude de Marius ne m'avait jamais empêchée de dormir. (pp.165-166)

It is not a deliberate performance designed to mislead, but rather an inevitable one, where the act of confiding, more than expressing feelings, actually *generates* them. The inadvertent performance distances her from what she was originally trying to articulate. Furthermore, far from making her into an adult who can define herself, this act of telling actually makes her regress to a child.

It might initially seem that the ability to perform a self — to become one's own creator — is empowering. However, self-construction does not lead to self-knowledge — and self-knowledge is something Lucienne desperately desires. Looking back at herself at the moment after she has confided to Frumence, she comments, 'je me comprenais si peu' (vol I, p.166). Lucienne is not alone in her struggle for self-knowledge. Barely a few pages later, she finds a (written) confidence of Frumence's own: a note, left in a book, which asks 'mais d'où vient ce besoin de s'interroger soi-même [....] Que sais-je de moi?' (vol I, p.188). Frumence interrogates the very nature of self-exploration; his realisation that he cannot know

himself suggests the basic human need to self-analyse is, at best, flawed, at worst, doomed to failure.

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(iv) Confession/ fission

'Que sais-je de moi?' encapsulates a question at the heart of the novel. Though it is Frumence who writes this note, the comment comes to stand for Lucienne's experiences. Even at the end of her long confession to MacAllen, she is not any closer to the truth of what she has felt: 'Ai-je aimé Frumence? Je n'en sais rien' (vol II, p.313). Selfhood in the period was often defined particularly in relation to feeling. In *Du suicide et de la folie suicide* (1856), the psychiatrist A Brierre De Boismont rewrites Descartes:

> Sentir et réagir, voilà les deux grands leviers de la vie, et bien qu'un philosophe illustre ait eu raison de dire: *Je pense, donc je suis,* la formule suivante: *Je sens, donc j'existe,* n'est pas moins évidente.[60]

In a completely different field, writing in *Histoire de ma vie,* Sand makes clear, that the story of her life is 'l'histoire de son propre esprit et de son propre cœur'.[61] But this is precisely the story that Lucienne finds she cannot tell. Her inability to understand what she has felt strikes right at the heart of her selfhood. If she does not know what she has felt, then her search for selfhood remains an epistemological failure.

Lucienne engages directly with this problem, writing at the very end of her letter to MacAllen,

[60] A Brierre De Boismont, *Du suicide et de la folie suicide,* 2nd edn (Paris: Librarie Germer Baillière, 1865), p.8.
[61] George Sand, *Histoire de ma vie,* I (1854), p.19.

> Je me rappelle à peine et je peux à peine définir la nature des agitations que j'ai éprouvées: elles me semblent inouïes, inexplicables, insensées, ridicules, ressenties par une personne qui n'existe plus, qui n'a jamais été moi. (vol II, p.313)

This firstly suggests a crisis of knowledge at the heart of her confession: it is just not possible to remember sufficiently to find the complex answers desired. Secondly, this epistemological problem leads to a linguistic one: 'je peux à peine définir'. Thirdly, and more profoundly troublingly, her written confession cannot help her because, looking back at her past self she finds that she is 'inexplicable'. Like Jacques, who looking back finds himself 'bien étrang[e] et presque incompréhensibl[e]' (p.11), Lucienne cannot understand who she was before. Lucienne feels even more distanced from her past self than Jacques does: the past self that she tries to depict feels like 'une personne qui n'existe plus, qui n'a jamais été moi' (vol II, p.312). Again, she becomes two people: not *la vraie Lucienne* and *la fausse Luciennne,* but rather present self and past self. Lucienne's act of confession inevitably splits the self: divorcing the present, confessing self from the past, confessed self. The notion of becoming a subject is indeed a paradox: how can she construct herself as a subject whilst making herself an object? By trying to be simultaneously both subject and object, her self cannot but fragment further. Far from unifying a self that feels divided, her confession divides it yet further.

Lucienne's experience contrasts radically with the Catholic sacrament that she herself invokes by describing her letter to MacAllen as a 'confession' (vol II, p.314). Catholic confession depends on the confessant being able to judge her actions, thoughts and feelings. Prior to attending Catholic confession, confessants are advised to undergo an 'examen de conscience': a period of solitary contemplation

where the individual assesses his or her thoughts and actions since the last confession and identifies instances of sin.[62] But this does not work for Lucienne — she cannot make a judgement of herself because she cannot know herself. The notion of an *examen de conscience* utterly fails: it does not even feel like *her* conscience she is examining. Lucienne's inability to understand her feelings also renders her confession problematic according to another model of confession: Rousseau's. Rousseau claims,

> Je puis faire des omissions dans les faits, des transpositions, des erreurs de dates; *mais je ne puis me tromper sur ce que j'ai senti,* ni sur ce que mes sentiments m'ont fait faire; et voilà de quoi principalement il s'agit.[63]

Yet Lucienne's problem is precisely that: what has she felt? Lucienne finds herself lost where Rousseau is most certain. She is unable to live up to her confessional predecessor.

Lucienne's uncertainty does not only exist as regards her past self — but also her present self. She asks MacAllen at the end,

> Dois-je dire que je vous aime encore? Non, je ne le puis ni ne le dois, car je ne sais pas si mon âme est assez vierge de toute autre affection pour accepter votre confiance illimitée dans le passé. (vol II, p.311)

The fear of herself and her own unknowability that she had as a young child still exists. Rather than allaying such a fear, the confession proves it to be true — even

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[62] This 'examen de conscience' is listed as the first of three fundamental conditions, necessary for confesssion (Anonymous, *Conduite pour la confession et pour la communion pour les âmes soigneuses de leur salut* (Lyon: Rivoire, 1820), p.4). There were multiple texts published during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the title *Conduite pour la confession et pour la communion*. They were based on the teachings of François de Sales whose writings were highly influential on confessional practice during the nineteenth century. One of the versions of *Conduite pour la confession et la Communion* has longer passages on how to confess and is structured around a series of *maximes;* the other version is structured largely around prayers for confession on communion, with some commentary on best practice. This thesis will be using the 1778 edition for the first version, and the 1820 edition for the second version (in each case, these editions are the most readily available editions).

[63] Rousseau, p.348, italics added.

enhances it. Even after three months and 600 pages of introspection, Lucienne is hardly closer to self-knowledge than she was at the start. Her aim of being able to 'rendre compte de ma vie et de moi-même' (vol I, p.1) resolutely fails.

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(v) Confession as a performative utterance

Lucienne's confession is destined for MacAllen, who serves as her confessor. Lucienne is telling MacAllen facts that he largely already knows. The act of confessing goes beyond the purely constative. The words transcend her recording of past events; they are an action in themselves. To unpick this, it is helpful to return to the model of Catholic confession. Catholic confession is 'doing something as well as stating something'.[64] It is a perlocutionary act,[65] where the statement, 'I confess', carries not only the constative meaning of 'I have committed a sin', but also the performative meaning, of 'absolve me of my sin'.[66] As Maria Zambrono puts it, 'La confesión es una acción, la máxima acción que es dado ejecutar con la palabra' [confession is an act; the biggest act one can execute with words].[67] Lucienne's secular confession has not so much the performative meaning of 'absolve me', but rather of 'solve me'. At the end, she asks MacAllen, 'Suis-je l'être idéale dont la pureté vous enivre?' (vol II, p.313). Lucienne has written to MacAllen, not so much to ask to be forgiven (she is not sure, indeed, if she needs to be — that is part of the problem), but rather for him to provide a cohesion and an interpretation of her which she cannot provide herself.

[64] Brooks, p.176 (n.).
[65] J.L. Austin, *How To Do Things with Words,* edited by J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p.94.
[66] Brooks, p.21.
[67] María Zambrano, *La confesión: género literario* (Madrid: Mondadori,1988), p.18

MacAllen's response offers a final blow to Lucienne's quest for self-knowledge. He cannot offer any answers either: 'Lucienne, vous n'avez aimé que moi, voilà qui est dit, voilà ce qu'il faut toujours me dire à présent, et je le croirai' (vol I, p.315). This initially sounds like he is offering her an answer (that in his judgement, after what he has read, her feelings are clear to him) — but as one reads on, it becomes clear that he is simply telling her what to say. He refuses to engage in her quest for veracity: all he offers is a simplistic answer, which they both know to be simplistic. Failing to engage with her soul-searching, instead he dismisses the confession's impact on him altogether — and with it, the confession's significance: 'j'ai bien souffert en lisant, et je souffrirai peut-être encore en me souvenant. Qu'importe!' (vol II, p.315).

Partly an interrogation of selfhood, partly an investigation of the process of confession, George Sand's novel explores the questions that had dominated novels of confession for the previous thirty-five years. By concluding her novel with Lucienne's inability to take a clear judgement of herself, Sand refuses to resolve the problems of selfhood expressed in the novel. In so doing, she problematises the act of self-articulation, suggesting that it deepens rather than solves Lucienne's fragmented selfhood.

Part Four: Enduring problems of selfhood

(i) Fictionalised selves

In some novels, the question who is confessing has been interpreted, by both early readers and by subsequent scholars,[68] to have an extra level of complexity: according to such a way of reading, the confession of the character becomes the veiled confession of the author. Certainly, some of the novels interrogated here — specifically Musset's, Garcia's and Zola's — foreground the (often messy) relationship between fact and fiction, between author and character. Eschewing the model of direct confession which Musset criticises so strongly in Rousseau — telling Liszt, 'je n'ai jamais pu lire les *Confessions* de Rousseau sans dégoût'[69] — Musset opts instead for a transposition of his experiences, a confession displaced into a semi-fiction; a fiction that is semi-autobiographical, a work that is 'pas assez vrai pour des mémoires à beaucoup près, et pas assez faux pour [un] roman[]'.[70]

The first readers of Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* would have been well aware of the tumultuous relationship between *les amants de Venise*. Some may well have come to the text expecting a confession *à la Rousseau:* as Paul de Musset

[68] See pp.69-70 of this thesis.
[69] Alfred de Musset, Letter to Franz Liszt, 20 June 1836, *Correspondance d'Alfred de Musset: 1826-1839*, p.184. What disgusts him seems to be Rousseau's explicit and unveiled act of revelation, including about people who were still alive.
[70] Alfred de Musset, Letter to Franz Liszt, 20th June 1836, in *Correspondance (1826-1839*), p.184. The dichotomy established between 'vrai/ faux', implies an assumption from Musset concerning the 'roman'. 'Faux' is a revealing choice of word, perhaps gesturing towards the types of event- or adventure-driven novels, often drawing on the pittoresque or Scottian romance, which had flourished during the Restoration (see Ikanayan p.113). Instead, Musset opts for a model of narrative driven more by emotions than events, as found in previous novels including Chateaubriand's *René,* Constant's *Adolphe* and Sand's *Lélia.*

comments in his biography, amongst its first readers were 'ceux qui espéraient des révélations'.[71] Indeed, those readers might well have been surprised to find it was Octave confessing, not Alfred; many would have sought comparisons between the fictional debauched young man and the older woman whom he loves and their real life counterparts. The question of whose story is being written is one with which Musset teases the reader in the very opening words of the novel: 'Pour écrire l'histoire de sa vie, il faut d'abord avoir vécu; aussi ce n'est pas la mienne que j'écris' (p.19). To an 1836 reader, at this stage unaware that the voice is in fact that of the character Octave, these words take on an extra layer of meaning, seemingly being Musset's voice, and serving as a playful denial of autobiography.[72] There are of course strong correlations between the events of the novel and Musset's and Sand's relationship — and linguistically the novel even echoes their letters[73] — yet at the same time, any attempt by readers to read the novel as literal truth will inevitably fail: as Musset writes to Liszt, 'le lecteur doit chercher en vain l'attrait d'une réalité qui lui échappe à chaque instant'.[74] Looking for fact will prove an elusive quest in this hybrid of reality and fiction — but Musset is well aware that the reader will be looking.

Almost thirty years later, the disintegration of another famous love affair would shape the initial act of reading of another novel of confession: Marie Garcia's *La*

[71] Paul de Musset, *Biographie d'Alfred de Musset,* p.154.
[72] The opening words of Flaubert's *Mémoires d'un fou* are strongly redolent of Octave's words*: '*Ces pages [....] renferment une âme toute entière. Est-ce la mienne? est-ce celle d'un autre?' (Flaubert, *Mémoires d'un fou,* p.2).
[73] 'Tout cela, vois-tu, c'est un jeu que nous jouons. Mais notre cœur et notre vie servent d'enjeux, et ce n'est pas tout à fait aussi plaisant que cela en a l'air. Veux-tu que nous allions nous brûler la cervelle ensemble à Franchart? Ce sera plus tôt fait. (Letter from Sand to Musset, written at the end of January 1835, cited in *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle,* ed. by Gérard Barrier, pp.360-1 (n.)) transmutes into words said by Brigitte: 'tout cela, vois tu, c'est un jeu que nous jouons; mais notre cœur et notre vie servent d'enjeux, et c'est horrible. Veux-tu mourir? Ce sera plus tôt fait' (p.282).
[74] Musset, *Correspondance (1826-1839),* p.184.

Confession d'Antonine, written following the disastrous disintegration of her relationship with Arsène Houssaye — 'un scandale dans tout Paris'[75] — and published following her death of heartbreak (or so it was widely assumed).[76] Though Garcia's novel had a small print run, it was unusually expensive: according to Houssaye, most copies sold at 20 francs, with the final ones going for 50 francs.[77] This very high price suggests the profile of Garcia following the scandal and her death and the willingness to pay for what was perhaps perceived as exclusive access to intimate revelations. Whilst the opening words of Musset's novel, on one level, playfully deny autobiography, the paratext to Garcia's does quite the opposite. Indeed, Gozlan's preface, addressed to 'Madame Marie Garcia dans l'autre monde' (p.ix), states,

> Antonine, c'est vous [Marie], et vous, c'est elle. Les événements de sa vie ne sont pas les vôtres sans doute [...] Au fond qu'importent les événements, si les misères de l'âme sont les mêmes? Est-ce que vous n'avez pas aimé comme Antonine? Est-ce que vous n'avez pas reçu au cœur la nouvelle qui frappe et qui tue? (p.xviii)

The linking of the character of Antonine and the actual Marie continues into the appendix, where Jeanne Favre comments, 'Marie Garcia ne survécut guère à son hérïone' (p.86). *La Confession d'Antonine* would have been read, in part, as *La Confession de Marie.*[78]

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[75] According to Houssaye's sister-in-law, whom he quotes in his *Confessions* (Arsène Houssaye, *Les Confessions : Souvenirs d'un demi-siècle, 1830-1880* 4 vols (Paris: E. Dentu, 1891), IV, p.28).

[76] An interpretation of the event supported by Gozlan in the preface: though he does not name Houssaye, he writes, addressing the dead Marie Garcia, 'Est-ce que vous n'avez pas reçu au cœur la nouvelle qui frappe et tue?' (p.xix).

[77] By way of comparison, Lévy was selling other volumes for as little as 1 franc, from 1855 onwards (David Coward, 'Popular Fiction in the nineteenth century', in *Cambridge Companion to the French Novel,* pp.73-92 (p.74)); Gustave Droz's *Monsieur, Madame and Bébé,* published by Hetzel two years later, was sold for 3 francs a copy (Martyn Lyons, 'Les Best-sellers', *Histoire de l'édition française: Le Temps des éditeurs,* pp.365- 397 (p.385)); whilst in the early 1870s, Georges Charpentier was selling books on average for 3,50 francs (Jean Hébrard, 'Les Nouveaux Lecteurs', *Histoire de l'édition française: Le Temps des éditeurs* pp.471-506 (p.504)).

[78] There are distinct similarities between their experiences. According to Arsène Houssaye's depiction in his *Confessions* of the breakdown of his relationship with Garcia, the real Marie Garcia gave up the man she loved (Houssaye) in a proud act of self-sacrifice; like Antonine, she was

The relationship between fact and fiction is again complex in the novel. The paratext encourages the reader to read Antonine as Marie-the-author's double; the novel itself adds in another level of reality, where Marie herself is a character in the novel — who, like the real Marie Garcia, goes to Eaux-Bonnes to recover from an illness, and writes back to her lover in Paris. Indeed the text, for the knowing reader, establishes Houssaye as the recipient of Marie's letters: Marie writes, 'N'oublie pas que c'est toi qui as écrit: *Les grandes passions prennent leur sources dans l'amour et se jettent dans la mort'* (p.82) — a quotation from Houssaye's *L'Amour comme il est.*[79] The emotional experiences of the real Garcia are filtered into the novel through, not one, but two characters. Garcia's own selfhood is both fragmented and transposed: the author's fictional double is doubled.

La Confession de Claude too plays with the space between being 'pas assez vrai' and 'pas assez faux'. Zola's novel is based on his own personal experiences: in his case, those of living as an impoverished young Southerner newly arrived in Paris, falling into a relationship with a prostitute, and writing home to his friends in Provence. Like Garcia, Zola actually writes himself into the novel, though in his case, he transposes his role to that of 'editor'. Zola dedicates the text to Cézanne and Baille, playing with the line between fiction and reality as he tells them, 'vous avez connu [...] le misérable enfant dont je publie aujourd'hui les lettres' (p.45). The real friends

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consumed by jealousy at his marriage to someone else; like Antonine, Marie Garcia was certain she would die of her heartbreak (declaring so to Houssaye) and longed to die with her ex-lover beside her (Houssaye, *Les Confessions,* IV, pp.1-30). It was in fact to Houssaye that the novel *La Confession d'Antonine* was entrusted by its author, thereby passing on to him the semi-fiction which he had inspired: 'La veille de sa mort, elle me dit: 'Tu sais ce petit roman que j'ai écrit à Eaux-Bonnes, tu diras à Lévy de le publier. Le peu d'argent qui en viendra, on le donnera à mes pauvres'" (Houssaye, p.26).

[79] Paris: Michel Lévy, 1860. The quotation appears on p.315.

to whom he really wrote of his experiences, become the recipients of Zola's fictionalised version of that part of his life. Yet again this sentence works in two ways, both hinting at a personal reality behind the fiction of Claude (Baille and Cézanne really did know a young man writing letters about an unfortunate love affair), and also displacing the truth into a fiction, by claiming a reality for Claude. Once again, for a reader, the search for reality is inevitably elusive.

Some novels of confession thus inhabit a rich hinterland between fact and fiction: for those texts that explicitly play with their relationship to the author's lives (and, in the case of Musset and Garcia, where initial readers would have been aware of the scandal surrounding them), the contexts of *intimité* and questions of selfhood assume a further layer of meaning. At the same time, any level of biographical truth is layered behind fiction, ensuring that readers cannot read these novels in the same way as the autobiographical confessions of a St Augustine or a Rousseau. The hybridity between fact and fiction in Musset's work arguably led the novel of confession following him to develop in two ways: whilst Garcia and Zola would echo Musset's mixing of biographical truth, the majority (from Soulié to Montépin; from Frémy to Sand; from Ourliac to Dollfus) move more fully into the world of fiction.

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(ii) Outcasts and orphans

However closely related — or not — the confessing protagonists are to their authors, the characters share certain crucial traits. The novel of confession is inextricably linked to the theme of the outsider:[80] what the characters are

[80] See Levin, especially p.70, who also explores the connection between confession and outsiders.

confessing is, in part, their otherness. At the start of the period, Janin's *La Confession* explores the trope in its most extreme sense, depicting a character who excludes himself from society because of his heinous transgression. Anatole is, however, isolated even before the murder, both without friends and strangely distanced from his family. The theme continues in *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* (1836). Octave's mother is never mentioned, his father only appears in the narrative in order to die; his brother is mentioned in his memories[81] but never appears. His first mistress betrays him, as does his childhood friend, with his mistress. When Octave tries to inhabit the debauched reality he has created for himself, it only compounds his feeling of not fitting in, as he cannot reconcile himself to the role: 'Ma prétention était de passer pour blasé, en même temps que j'étais plein de désirs' (p.112). In the closing sentence of the novel, 'le jeune homme [….] était seul' (p.308); Octave is now literally alone, having been metaphorically been alone for the whole novel.

In the novels that follow Musset, not just Louis, Jacques, and Lucienne, but indeed almost all confessing protagonists find themselves isolated. In Soulié's *Confession générale* (1840-48), Noël discovers on his mother's death that the man he thought was his father is possibly not his father, as his father could be any one of four men. Noël's three friends are also all without family. This is a friendship group bound together only by their isolation; indeed, they call themselves 'l'association des enfants maudits' (p.591). Alix, in Mme du Saule's *Confession d'un femme du siècle* (1846) is an orphan, who finds herself completely shut off from society: having had relationships outside marriage, she is rejected by her wealthy childhood friends as a *fille de joie*; yet having now married well, she is shut off from other classes of society.

[81] In the episode with Marco (see p.124 of this thesis).

Other novels of confession published in the later part of the period continue to explore the link between confession, the theme of the outsider and the cultural phenomenon of the *bohemian*. *La Confession d'un étudiant: Estaminets, Bouges et Ruisseaux par un bohème* (1860) tells the story of the student Georges, who becomes sucked into a Bohemian lifestyle that is wildly different from what he imagined. Zola's *La Confession de Claude* similarly situates its confessing protagonist in a Bohemian environment that is far from Murger's romanticised image: as Zola comments,

> *La Confession de Claude* est un récit de [...] la bohème vraie, terrible dans ses misères et ses souffrances [....] Vous pouvez [...] montrer ma Laurence à côté de Musette et de Mimi, la vérité navrante à côté du mensonge caressant.[82]

For Claude, the bohemian lifestyle is a source of disillusion, and he finds himself ill-equipped psychologically to deal with the consequences of this way of living.[83] Claude is deeply uncomfortable with his status as a social outsider, a pariah: 'me voilà seul au monde, repoussé et misérable' (p.124). Claude is not just an outsider to society, but also at odds with his era: as Zola frames Claude's experiences in the Preface, 'Les temps sont mauvais pour les cœurs qui ressemblent au sien' (p.47).

As Louis and Lucienne do, so other characters find that their names are symbols of their outsider status,. Noël in *Confession générale* discovers that his name is a lie —

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[82] Émile Zola, letter to Édouard Fournie, 20 November, 1865, in *Correspondance,* ed. by Bard H. Bakker, Colette Becker and Henri Mitterand, 10 vols (Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal et Éditions de SNRS, 1978-1995), I (1978), p.422. Also see Mourad, who suggests that Zola may have even decided upon the name Claude to enter into a dialogue with Murger's novel of 1851, *Claude et Marianne*, in which a young student, also from the provinces, meets a prostitute. There is no concrete proof that Zola had read the novel, but Murger's works were very popular after his death in 1861 (François-Marie Mourad, 'Introduction', to Émile Zola, *La Confession de Claude,* ed. by Mourad (Paris: Les Livres de poche, 2013), pp.7-42 (pp.27-8)).

[83] In this portrayal of the dark side of bohemia, Zola is echoing a trend of the Second Empire 'when imagery of suffering bodies and unstable minds became central to representations of Bohemian life' (Gill, p.174).

he is not Noël Varneuil — or perhaps more accurately, he could be, but so could he be Noël Arvilliers / Gabarrou / Ambret. The name as a signifier of paternity breaks down; possibilities proliferate but he has no name he can fully inhabit. At one point, he is reduced to introducing himself with 'On me nomme Noël Varneuil' — he can only say what others call him, not what he is. Ultimately, he is rendered half nameless — when each of his potential fathers writes to him at the end of the novel, he is only addressed as 'M. Noël' (p.694). Noël's friends Valvins and Deville have names which are again failed signifiers; in a parody of aristocratic naming, their names are simply those of the village in which they grew up. The name thus becomes a signifier of a lack of identity, where that which should most identify them signifies that they can never hope to be identified. Alix too, in *Les Confessions d'une femme du siècle,* finds herself troubled by names — though for her it is a question of marital status rather than paternity. Alix's shame at her past relationship with the character of de Marsay is largely expressed through her regret at not having his name. Feeling lost without a name which could sanitise her previous transgressions, she agrees to marry him despite loving someone else: 'J'étais réhabilité *[sic]* avec le monde! J'avais un nom!' (vol II, pp.140-1).

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(iii) Fragmented selves

Confessants who are separated from society are also often divided within themselves. At the start of the period, Anatole's heinous act is also representative of his divided selfhood, which both prompts the murder and which is exacerbated by it. His remorse leaves him unrecognisable to himself: catching himself in the mirror, he thinks he is seeing another person: 'Quel crime a donc commis ce malheureux […]

En vérité, il est encore plus à plaindre que moi' (vol I, p.97). It is as if his double has taken over, and now has a physical manifestation, for he now sees himself as other. This encounter with a mirror also serves as a metaphor for confession. Looking in a mirror, like confessing, is an encounter with the self; a mirror is the contemplation of the outer self whilst a confession is the contemplation of an inner self. The troublesome nature of Anatole's encounter with the mirror is later reflected in the enormous difficulty he finds in his act of confession.

Octave comments that during his period of debauchery, 'mon unique plaisir était de me dénaturer' (p.112). His debauchery is a performance: 'je mettais de l'orgueil à passer pour ce qu'au fond je n'étais pas du tout'. Yet, in a tragic irony, this performance of *libertinage,* whilst inauthentic, nonetheless takes over when he least wants it to. Octave's debauched persona only becomes genuine when it is no longer what he seeks: Brigitte sees 'sur ton visage cette affreuse gaieté, cet air de libertin railleur qui vient tout à coup se poster comme un masque de plâtre entre tes lèvres et les miennes' (p.210).[84] The false self has become the real self. If Brigitte is brought face to face with the *libertin* here, a little later Octave has to face it himself, in an echo of Anatole's mirror moment. Whilst Anatole cannot initially recognise his own traits, Octave can recognise his traits but not his soul:

> Mon propre visage, que j'apercevais dans la glace, me regardait avec étonnement. Qu'était-ce donc que cette créature qui m'apparaissait sous mes traits? Qu'était-ce que cet homme sans pitié qui blasphémait avec ma bouche et torturait avec mes mains? Était-ce lui que ma mère appelait Octave? (p.291)

[84] In this, Octave echoes a previous creation of Musset's, Lorenzo. Having played the role of a debauched man in order to gain Alexandre's confidence to facilitate his murder of him, Lorenzo discovers all too late that he has become his performance: 'Le vice a éte pour moi un vêtement; maintenant il est collé à ma peau'. (Musset, *Lorenzaccio,* in *Un Spectacle dans un fauteil,* 2 vols (Paris: Librarie de la revue des deux mondes, 1834) I, pp.1-278 (p.159).

He is now completely ‘dénaturé’, alien even to himself. He feels as if a double — 'cette créature [...] cet homme sans pitié' (p.291) — has taken over his body.[85] Again, the mirror serves as a metaphor for confession: the distancing effect of looking in the mirror is echoed in the distancing effect of the confession itself, as Octave, in the final chapter, moves into using the third person. Lucienne cannot write about herself in the first person at the start of her confession; Octave can no longer use the first person by the end of his. He has simply become a ‘jeune homme’ who is ‘seul’ — so bereft that he cannot even claim himself with a personal pronoun.

Other confessing characters articulate similar feelings of fragmentation to those experienced by Octave. In *Confessions d’un officier francais* (1846), the notion of a double is invoked: ‘Deux hommes vivaient en moi dans une désunion parfaite: un bon et un mauvais’ (p.51). Madeleine, in Dollfus's *La Confession de Madeleine* (1863), has her own metaphorical mirror moment; finding that there are moments in her life where 'je ne réussissais pas à me reconnaître moi-même'.[86] Zola's Claude writes, 'je vis doublement' (p.168).[87]

Some characters find that the intense divisions within themselves become manifested in madness. Janin's *La Confession* depicts both a seeming moment of madness that causes the transgression that prompts the need to confess, and the

[85] Zola's *La Confession de Claude* also contains a shattering encounter with a mirror, which leads to a brutal moment of revelation. For Claude, it is seeing Laurence in it, not himself, which prompts this realisation. As Claude watches Pâquerette help Laurence get ready for a ball, 'la glace me renvoyait leurs images; ces deux faces, malgré les rides de l'une et la fraîcheur relative de l'autre, me semblaient sœurs [...] Toutes deux étaient également vieilles de débauche' (p.98). Anatole and Octave are both forced to acknowledge what they have become: Claude is forced to face with whom he has become involved.
[86] Charles Dollfus, *La Confession de Madeleine,* (Paris: Hetzel, 1863), p.70.
[87] Also see Hugueny-Léger, p.129: 'nombreuses sont les occasions où Claude réalise qu'il est divisé en deux parties, avant même d'atteindre la lucidité qui lui permet de dire, "je vis doublement"'.

madness ocassioned by the act of confession. Octave, torn between two selves ('Etais-je bon ou étais-je méchant? Étais-je défiant ou étais-je fou?', p.201), is driven almost to the same point as Anatole — a point of distraction where he is prepared to consider murder: 'j'avais approché le couteau que je tenais de la poitrine de Brigitte. Je n'étais plus maître de moi, et je ne sais, dans mon délire, ce qui en serait arrivé' (p.300). For several characters, the war within leads instead to (attempted) suicide. The confessant of *Confessions d'un offcier français* (1846) despairs of the 'lutte' between his different selves. He tries to kill himself, though in a rather dark twist of humour, he only has stones not bullets and thus his attempt fails: he cannot even succeed in that. Louis Annibal in *Confessions d'un bohême* twice tries to commit suicide, and fails. Noël in *La Confession générale,* unable to live with the truth about his origins, decides to kill himself, and succeeds.

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(iv) Appropriated confessions

Like Jacques and Lucienne, so other characters are responding to the problems of identity they experience by the act of self-writing. In Soulié's *Confession générale* Noël's mother bequeaths Noël her story, whilst Noël's friends obsessively gather and write documents that attempt to build a self-narrative. For these fatherless children, these writings become both an identity-marker (a substitute for the name they can never have) and their progeny. Noël's friend Valvins abandons his actual child; his true issue is the written word. Alix, the protagonist of *Les Confessions d'une femme du siècle,* initially writes her story, not for a particular person to read (it is only by chance that it ends up being read by her friend Agathe), but rather for herself. It is an act of self-affirmation and construction, undertaken at a time when

she feels most alone and most lost. For many characters, confessing is an attempt to construct an identity (when one is lacking), or to take control of a narrative by putting oneself at the centre of something (where in life one feels powerless, or uninteresting — or both).

However, as for Jacques and Lucienne so for other confessants, the attempt to construct selfhood through confession is ultimately undermined. Rather than gaining ownership over their stories, the confessants tend to have their stories taken away from them, subsumed into a wider narrative, words changed, episodes cut, episodes added. The problem of ownership that Montépin emphasises by the *mise en abyme* of the narrator meeting the bohême, buying his confessions, and then translating the narrative into third person, is emblematic of the questions of appropriation that dominate the genre. In Émile Souvestre's *Confessions d'un ouvrier, publiées par Émile Souvestre* (1851),[88] the preface claims the text is based on a manuscript written by Pierre Henri and entitled 'tout ce que je me rappelle de ma vie',[89] which already contains the idea of an imperfect narrative. However, neither are all of Henri's original words printed, nor are all the words printed Henri's. As the 'editor' explains:

> Nous avons usé de la liberté entière [...] pour abréger plusieurs chapîtres, et pour rendre l'expression plus correcte. Parfois même nous avons achevé certaines esquisses, dont les lignes étaient restées trop confuses ou trop incomplètes; mais si ces additions et ces retranchements ont légèrement modifié la forme, ils ont toujours respecté l'esprit des Mémoires de Pierre Henri.[90]

[88] Souvestre's novel proved to be very popular, seeing re-editions in 1852, 1857, 1865, 1867, 1872 and 1873 (Stead, p.381).
[89] Souvestre, p.6.
[90] Souvestre, p.21.

This preface sets up a narrative where substantial 'editorial' work has been performed on the manuscript. The interventions have gone much further than simply abridging or correcting as the opening sentence suggests: there has been invention too. Through this combination of editing and creating, the 'je' of Pierre Henri becomes double, containing within it both his original text and the 'je' of the editor.

At the end of *La Confession d'un poète* (1859), the last words of Eugène, the 'poet', are followed by a letter, written by the 'comte de N.', a friend of Eugène's, which offers its own interpretation of Eugène's life and also announces his death. The inclusion of this document suddenly brings into play an invisible editor, who has drawn together Eugène's narrative with another text. What had seemed to be the unfiltered word of Eugène is suddenly called into question.[91] In Dollfus's *La Confession de Madeleine* (1863), a third person narrator again suddenly appears in the final twenty pages of what had previously been a first-person, epistolary narrative without any suggestion of an editor.

The opening of Zola's *La Confession de Claude,* by creating a narrative where Zola is the 'editor' of the letters, foregrounds the act of appropriation inherent in

[91] The presence of an editor/ narrator framing the first-person narrative was a trope more widely used. In Gœthe's *Les Passions du jeune Werther* — a novel that was immensely popular in France — Werther's first person narrative is preceded by an introductory note from an anonymous editor, whose voice then largely takes over the narrative once Werther's grasp of reality starts to slip (with odd letters of Werther's being included within the editor's narrative). Senancour's *Oberman* (1804) frames Senancour's role as that of editor, not author (its full title is *Oberman: Lettres publiées par M... Senancour, auteur de* Rêveries sur la nature de l'homme); the novel opens with the 'editor' describing the letters which follow. Constant's *Adolphe* (1816) is framed by the editor's comments on the text; Krüdener's *Valérie* opens with the preface which claims the authenticity of the letters and journal fragments which follow. In Duras's *Ourika* (1823), the frame narrator is the doctor in whom Ourika has confided, whilst in Fromentin's *Dominique* (1862), Dominique's story is again relayed by someone else — an individual who has visited Dominique in his home. (Also see Matlock, p.23).

publishing. In a slippery redefinition of Claude's intended audience, editor-Zola writes, 'il nous montre ses plaies [....] afin d'éviter à ses frères de pareilles souffrances' (p.47), but 'nous' and 'ses frères' are not one and the same. Claude *privately* writes to his friends ('ces lettres écrites *pour vous seuls',* p.172); editor-Zola appropriates this private act, redefining it for the benefit of a wider public. The preface initially makes grand utilitarian claims for the act of publishing: it is done 'au nom de la vérité et du bien de tous' (p.46). However, this moral high ground is then undermined, as the motive is corrupted to be about *pleasure:* 'en dehors de la foule, je songeais à vous [à Cézanne et Baille], il me plaisait de vous conter de nouveau la terrible histoire' (p.46). There is a voyeuristic pleasure in this act of revelation of the most intimate details of a life.

Other novels of confession show characters within the novel appropriating other characters' confessions — for their enjoyment, or for their emotional catharsis. In Champfleury's *Confessions de Sylvius,* Sylvius's sentimental experiences are misused by the friend with whom he shares them: Toby reads Sylvius's confession out to his friends for their amusement. In *La Confession d'Antonine*, Marie uses Antonine's confessions to communicate her own loss and suffering to her lover: for Marie, Antonine is a cipher through which she confesses herself. The novel of confession thus tends to depict characters confessing in order to seek ownership over their narratives, whilst simultaneously framing their acts of confessions in a way that highlight their very lack of ownership. The novels suggest that as soon as characters confess, they are opening themselves up to these acts of appropriation.

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(v) A deeply unoriginal quest for originality

A further problem for many confessing characters is that they are attempting to define their selfhood, specificity, and originality, in a form which regularly draws attention to its own lack of originality. The genre is highly self-referential. Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* regularly draws on the confessional autobiographies of St Augustine and Rousseau. Octave explicitly compares his suffering to that of Augustine, citing from Book II of Augustine's *Confessions*,[92] and calling St Augustine, 'l'homme le plus homme qui ait jamais été' (p.109).[93] At another moment, Octave's behaviour implicitly invokes the 'tolle, lege' moment in Book VIII of Augustine's *Confessions*: Octave opens the Bible at random, hoping that God will speak to him through the holy book (p.70).[94] A few pages later, Octave sees a drunken 'ouvrier' passing by (p.78), echoing the moment when St Augustine sees a drunken beggar (Book VI); the encounter leads Octave, like Augustine, to meditate on temporary, alcohol-induced happiness, compared with his own anxieties and search for joy.[95] Octave finds himself living a shadow of Augustine's life. His story also has echoes of Rousseau, with Octave's quasi-incestuous relationship with Brigitte not only an echo of Musset's and Sand's, but also a repeat of Rousseau's with

[92] See p.109 of Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle.* Also see Pierre Courcelle, *Les Confessions de Saint-Augustin dans la tradition littéraire* (Paris: Etudes augustiniennes, 1963), p.509.
[93] This is an echo of a comment Musset made to Sand, in which he called Augustine as 'l'homme le plus vrai qui ait existé' (Alfred de Musset, letter to George Sand, 10 May 1834, *Correspondance (1826-1839),* p.101).
[94] For Octave, this has radically different results: he falls upon a passage from Ecclesiastes, which tells of a world of injustice where 'l'innocent est traité comme le pecheur', leading Octave to turn away from God, 'Ainsi donc [….] et toi aussi, tu doutes, livre de l'espérance' (p.71).
[95] Claude Duchet, 'Preface', *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* (Paris: Garnier, Frères, 1968), pp. i-xxvii (p.vii) and Esther Pinon, *Le Mal du ciel: Musset et le sacré* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2015), p.26.

Mme de Warens.[96] Octave's secularised confession, directed more at a reader than God, is another echo of his real-life confessional predecessor. The imprint of Rousseau is indeed hard for Octave to escape: he even, at one point, goes to 'rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau' (p.265).[97]

Musset's *Confession,* which explicitly and implicitly references hypotexts, becomes a hypotext itself, most explicitly, as the title would suggest, in Mme de Saule's *Les Confessions d'une femme du siècle*. Alix's story follows the trajectory of Octave's: heartbreak stemming from a betrayal in first love, followed by a life which transgresses sexual propriety, and which (until the very final pages of du Saule's novel) prevents her from being able to live happily with her true soul mate — called Octave.[98] Soulié refers to the 'roman très célèbre' of *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle,* whilst describing one of his characters' relationships with an older woman (p.241). Eugène in *La Confession d'un poète* dreams of being a latter-day Musset, regularly quoting his poetry,[99] whilst also seeing himself through the lens of another confessant, concluding his confession with a reworking of Rousseau's opening: 'J'ai préféré [….] raconter avec bonne foi mes bons et mes mauvais sentiments, mes bonnes et mes mauvaises actions' (p.212).[100] Zola's Claude regularly linguistically echoes Octave's confession.[101] Characters in these novels of confession, hunting for their own individuality, cannot avoid reliving the lives of other characters or real-

[96] Pinon, p.134. Pinon is comparing the Rousseau/ Mme de Warens relationsip with Musset and Sand's, but the comment also stands for Octave's and Brigitte's.
[97] Pinon, p.136. Musset himself was often compared to Rousseau; see for instance 'B.Z.', '*La Confession d'un enfant du siècle', Revue de Paris,* 26 (1836), pp.53-61 (p.55).
[98] See Chapter III of this thesis, for a more detailed analysis of these similarities (pp.145-146).
[99] Indeed, the first part starts with a quote from Musset's *Namouna* (Séménow, p.10), and later, *La Coupe et les lèvres* (Séménow, p.30).
[100] See Rousseau, *Les Confessions*: 'Je me suis montré tel que je fus ; méprisable et vil quand je l'ai été, bon, généreux, sublime, quand je l'ai été' (pp.33-34).
[101] See pp.271-273 of this thesis.

life confessants, or echoing the words of others in their attempt to define their own experiences.

The frequent form of the titles further problematises this notion of originality; the formula of 'confession(s) d'un/une' (*un enfant du siècle, une femme du siècle, une jeune fille, un ouvrier, un poète, un bohême)* inevitably situates the individual as one of many. The titles absorb into a general type confessing characters who are desperate to be original.[102] Sometimes, these titles are not just generalising, they are also ironic: the confessants ultimately cannot live up to their own title. As has been seen, Frémy's Jacques is unable to espouse the bohemian lifestyle. Montépin's *Confessions d'un bohême* actually tells the story of the only time in Louis's life when he is *not* living like a bohemian; it is a time when he is trying to acquire a lifestyle which is quite the opposite of bohemia, revolving round material goods and social climbing. It is, in fact, Louis's attempt to escape from his vagrant life and live like an aristocrat which proves so destructive for him; if what brings Jacques's downfall is trying to pretend to be a bohemian, then what brings Louis's is trying to pretend he is not one. In another irony, a central theme of Murger's bohemian stories is that 'the artist's calling is a counterpart to modern commercial [...] identities';[103] in the financial exchange for his writing that Louis performs, selling away any control over his own story, Louis's behaviour is positively anti-bohemian — after monetary gain, not artistic merit.

[102] Also see Terdiman on this: 'the phrase *enfant du siecle* refers us to the realm of a generalised sociology that subverts the ordinary notion of a confession as a quintessentially *personal* and subjective text' (p.29).
[103] Gluck, p.16.

Similarly, in another novel of confession about Bohemia, *La Confession d'un étudiant: Estaminets, bouges et ruisseaux par un bohème,* Georges, the confessant, is neither a student (he is a drop-out), nor is he really a *bohème,* having found that the type of Bohemian life he fantasised about does not exist: upon arriving in the *quartier latin*, 'je tombai tout à fait pour le coup, du paradis de mes rêves, dans l'enfer de la réalité. Moi qui avait lu Mürger [...] jugez de la chute'.[104] In Séménow's *La Confession d'un poète*, the title again is a cruel joke. Eugène is hardly a poet: once he meets Inez — an encounter that occurs right at the novel's start — he finds himself unable to work or write anymore. Once Inez dies, he finds himself able to write again, but his clichéd, childish phrases hardly live up to his hero-worship of Musset:

> Depuis un an qu'elle est aux cieux
> Je suis fatigué de la vie;
> Si j'ai vécu des jours heureux
> Depuis un an, je les expie.
> […]
> Et je serai là-haut près d'elle,
> Là-haut près d'elle en paradis;
> Voici mon ange qui m'appelle;
> Nous nous reverrons, mes amis![105]

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(vi) Selfhood unresolved

The problems of selfhood experienced by Louis, Jacques and Lucienne thus persist over the whole period. They reflect certain trends — including the dominance of *mal du siècle* at the start of the period, a growing interest in madness during the period, and a vogue for Bohemia in the second half of the period. From the 1840s onwards, confessional tropes start to be popularised for the masses, as in Montépin's

[104] Anonymous, *La Confession d'un étudiant: Estaminets, bouges et ruisseaux par un bohème* (Paris: Lucien Marpon, 1860), p.19.
[105] Séménow, p.232.

Confessions d'un bohême, or parodied, as in *Confessions de Sylvius.* Across the different decades however, common tropes emerge: characters who are isolated, nameless, divided within themselves, and in search of an identity and originality that remain elusive.

A fictional confession is, as Charles Dollfus writes in his preface to *La Confession de Madeleine* (1863) 'une page de psychologie'.[106] Indeed, the novel of confession is central to shaping the novel of the early-to-mid-nineteenth century around narratives of introspection; the genre is furthermore crucial to the evolution of the novel as a form for exploring complex psychologies. [107] The characters of these novels are frequently unsure of their identity (literally or emotionally), and feel fragmented, or doubled, sometimes even mad or suicidal. Despite the fact that in the period in question self-writing was often seen as an attempt to know, unite and proclaim the self, and despite the fact that many of these novels present their characters as trying to do just that through their acts of confession, in these novels of confession any such attempt ultimately fails. In this respect, the confessants of these novels — who live in the shadows of their real-life confessional predecessors St Augustine and Rousseau — are unable to live up to them.

These novels are ultimately based on a series of paradoxes concerning the self. Characters seeking to be individuals can only do so through the words of others, or are classed by the title given to their stories as merely another type; characters seeking through the act of confession to articulate their own narrative often have

[106] Dollfus, p.iv.
[107] And away from a form exploring heroes. Ikayan discusses how, in the Restoration, certain schools of thought felt that the novel should represent heroes; from the 1830s onwards, characters tended to be more flawed (Ikayan, p.108).

that story appropriated by someone else — rendering problematic the notion of who is actually confessing after all. And the biggest paradox of all is that these novels, defined by their very titles as an attempt to articulate the self, suggest that it is actually impossible to do so. As will be seen in the next chapter, these novels, called confessions, continually and multifariously undermine the basis of both religious and secular acts of confession.

Chapter Three: The Confession(s)

At the end of Janin's *La Confession,* Anatole, after a *confession générale*, goes mad. At the end of Sand's *La Confession d'une jeune fille,* Lucienne's several hundred-page-long soul-searching confession is met with MacAllen's question 'qu'importe?' (vol II, p.315). Anatole's confession has been worse than futile. There is no mention of absolution accorded, and Anatole's guilt is only amplified by the confession: 'quand il vint à dire son crime [...] ce ne fut qu'une faute de plus dans sa vie, un péché presque vulgaire, tant il venait de se voir criminel!' (vol II, p.190). Lucienne's quest for self-knowledge through confession fails. The epistemological basis of confession is cast into doubt — the confessant remains unknowable, to herself and to her confessor, who dismisses her questions entirely. The period considered by this thesis starts with a priest who corrupts the role of confessor by forcing Anatole's confession; it ends with a character who subverts the role by not wanting to receive the confession at all. These two novels are indicative in their different ways of the novel of confession's problematic relationship towards the act by which it defines itself.

This chapter focuses on how three novels stage and interrogate the act of confession: Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* (1836), Soulié's *Confession générale* (1840-48), and Mme du Saule's *Les Confessions d'une femme du siècle* (1846). Formally, these novels are quite distinct. Musset's novel is one long first-person confession by Octave, which, in its final chapter, moves into third person. *Confession générale* starts as a third-person narrative which quickly becomes polyphonic, comprising a variety of documents telling various characters'

interlinking life stories. Du Saule's novel begins with a *mise en abyme* which starts in first person and changes suddenly into third, before shifting into a (different) first-person written confession for the majority of the novel. Within these different forms, each novel depicts not just one, but rather a multiplicity of acts of confession; the novels continually perform the act from which they take their name, whilst also constantly problematising it, both explicitly and implicitly.

The chapter starts by analysing the acts of confession in Musset's novel — both those which occur on the intradiegetic and extradiegetic level. It argues that Musset's novel repeatedly shows the acts of confession that occur on the intradiegetic level as sites of conflict or deceit. Furthermore, Octave's extradiegetic confession — and the way it subverts both a conversion narrative and Catholic confessional rules surrounding clarity, responsibility, and privacy, amongst others — constantly interrogates its form. In addition, the novel's exploration of moments where introspection fails or language breaks down further problematises the act of confession which depends upon both. The next part of the chapter argues that Soulié's commercially-oriented *Confession générale* follows Musset in portraying corrupted acts of confession occurring between the characters. The chapter then explores how the novel both playfully depicts the breakdown of confession as a narrative form, and challenges the Catholic structures of private confession by a narrative which stages mass acts of revelation. The third part of the chapter argues that *Les Confessions d'une femme du siècle* remoulds tropes of Musset's novel to create a female-driven re-imagining, which both explores the dangers of holding on to an inherited Catholic understanding of sin and confession and ultimately shows confession to be redundant. The final part of the chapter interrogates how the genre

as a whole, in its presentation of both Catholic and secular confessions, repeatedly and multifariously challenges the act of confession itself.

Part One: *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* by Alfred de Musset (1836)

(i) Intradiegetic confession: the manipulation and breakdown of confidences

The most substantial of the additions that Musset, the unfaithful translator, makes to his version of De Quincey, is Anna's story: in *L'Anglais mangeur d'opium*, Anna's voice takes over the narrative as she shares her experiences since last seeing the opium eater (pp.137-157). Musset thus edits De Quincey by incorporating another act of telling. Narrative within narrative is a theme that Musset goes on to develop in *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle:* Octave's first person confession is fragmented, shot through with other confessions.

Reid and Terdiman both highlight the significance of reported speech and conversation in Musset's text; Terdiman comments, 'it sometimes appears that all the characters in the *Confession* do is talk'.[1] However, it is not just that Musset's novel is built on conversation. It is, more specifically, structured around moments of avowal, indeed, of confession, that take place between Octave and the women in his life. These intradiegetic acts of telling are confessions in the sense that they are all intimate revelations, each an avowal of something private or secret, revolving either

[1] Terdiman, p.34; Martine Reid, 'La Confession selon Musset' *Littérature,* 67 (1987), pp.53-72 (p.56).

around the articulation of a specific transgression, or around the divulgence of emotions. First, is Octave's mistress's confession of her infidelity to Octave: 'elle se jeta à mon cou, me dit qu'elle avait été séduite' (p.42). Then is Octave's avowal of his heartbreak to his mistress's friend, and her revelation in response: 'elle me disait ses souffrances, je lui contais les miennes' (p.67). Next is Brigitte's confession to Octave of her past sexual experiences (p.212); and finally Brigitte's confession that she loves Octave and is ready to leave with him (p.279). However, all these confessions are problematic in some way, especially when read in terms of the paradigm of Catholic confession.

Octave's mistress's confession to him is completely performed — in the sense, not of being executed, but of being staged. She lies outright, pretending that 'mon rival l'avait enivrée dans ce fatal souper, mais qu'elle n'avait jamais été à lui' (p.42). She adds to the effect by performing the gestures of repentance: 'tout ce que le repentir sincère a de larmes [...] elle l'épuisa pour me consoler; pâle et égarée [...] ses cheveux épars sur ses épaules, à genoux au milieu de la chambre' (p.42). Octave half falls for it — being seduced if not entirely convinced: 'je frémissais d'horreur pendant que tous mes sens se soulevaient à ce spectacle' (p.42). Fifteen minutes later, returning to her, Octave finds her happily getting ready to go to a ball with his rival. The episode suggests the extent to which contrition — supposed, in a Catholic context, to be the ultimate proof of authenticity and desire for absolution — can be both sexualised and performed. Her confession indeed parodies traditional images of religious confession, where the display of repentance is ritualised and where 'le pénitent vient confesser ses péchés, prosterné aux pieds du prêtre, la tête

découverte, [...] élevant des mains suppliantes';[2] and where acknowledgement of guilt should be accompanied by 'larmes et gémissements'.[3] Such expressions and signifiers of guilt are usurped by Octave's mistress in an attempt to trick him.

Octave is soon disillusioned again. In his shared confession of suffering with his mistress's friend, Mme Levasseur — in these joint confidences of *intimité* — he feels a relief that assumes an almost religious value: 'je sentais s'élever je ne sais quelle douceur, je ne sais quelle voix consolante, comme un accord pur et céleste né du concert de deux voix gémissantes' (p.67). His sense of absolution is short lived; Mme Levasseur's confidences are all a seductive ploy: 'elle avait appuyé son pied assez haut sur le chambranle de la cheminée, en sorte que, sa robe ayant glissé, sa jambe se trouvait entièrement découverte' (pp.67-8). The intimacy of a shared confidence is exploited; confession is again a performance, part of a game of sex. Octave's mistress tries to seduce Octave with her distressed beauty in order to persuade him to believe her false confession; her friend uses a false confession in order to seduce him.

Brigitte's confession of her past is an attempt to reclaim Octave, pulling him back from his own horror of the past by making him understand her own: 'je n'ai pas fait du monde une expérience plus douce que la tienne' (p.211). It is a plea for him, in understanding her, to treat her better: 'si vous êtes malade, je le suis aussi; il faut avoir soin l'un de l'autre' (p.212). He becomes a confessor, from whom she requests

[2] The Catechism states that such gestures are not strictly necessary 'pour la validité [du sacrement de Pénitence], mais [...] [ils] en rendent plus sensible la dignité et l'excellence' (*Catéchisme du Concile de Trente,* p.499).
[3] Honoré de Cannes, *Manière très utile pour bien faire la confession générale: Nouvelle édition augmentée* (Paris: Pierre Debresche, 1678), Sig. A4i.

future kindness, rather than absolution for past crimes. Her confession initially seems to have the desired effect: 'je la soulevais dans mes bras: "O mon unique amie [...] ô ma maîtresse, ma mère et ma sœur"' (p.213). However, it very soon becomes clear that the confession has not changed him: seeing her praying to God, he asks her, 'demande aussi pour moi que je puisse t'aimer comme tu le mérites' (p.213). He fails to take responsibility for treating her well, instead deferring her plea for kindness to God. Octave effectively gives her confession back to her, placing the responsibility of his actions on a superior being in whom he is not even sure that he believes. As if to prove her confession's futility, by the very next page nothing has changed in their relationship, and Brigitte plans to leave him (p.214). If Octave does not respond to her confession as she hoped, then neither does God. Confession has failed Brigitte.

When Brigitte turns to the discourse of revelation again, it is to deny Octave's accusations that she loves Smith. Instead, she confesses her love to Octave: 'vous voulez savoir mon secret, mon secret, c'est que je vous aime' (p.279). The confession is, however, false; as her farewell letter to Smith reveals, she loves Smith instead: 'Ma destinée est liée à celle d'un homme à qui j'ai tout sacrifié [...] Je vous aime' (p.303). Brigitte too has used an avowal to conceal and mislead rather than reveal. Octave's story, which starts with one mistress 'pâle et égarée', trying to make him believe an untrue confession, finishes with another mistress, with 'tête pâle [...] pauvres joues maigres, pauvres yeux fatigués' (p.282), endeavouring to delude him. Confession again becomes a performance. Prior to her confession, Octave asks her 'quelle comédie horrible jouez-vous?' (p.271), but it is in the moment of avowal itself, above all, that she plays a role.

This false confession of love is the culmination of a communication breakdown between Octave and Brigitte. An ongoing motif of their relationship in Paris is her refusal to tell him what is wrong — 'elle garde le silence' (p.236); 'je n'ai pas un mot à vous dire' (p.240); 'elle restait muette' (p.271). Octave is reduced to speaking to himself, engaging in a debate between his mind and his conscience: 'Si je perdais Brigitte? disait l'esprit. — Elle part avec toi, disait la conscience'. (p.261). When he and Brigitte do speak, the conversation revolves almost solely around their lack of communication, and their relationship disintegrates into an argument of '"Vous parlerez, ou je renonce à tout." "Non! Non! Je ne parlerai pas." "Vous parlerez"'. (p.273). What Octave wants from her is a confession: 'que voulais-vous que je vous dise?' she asks, and he replies, 'ce que vous avez dans le cœur' (p.279). If all Musset's characters do is talk, then they are often talking about not talking. Because the spoken word fails Octave and Brigitte so monumentally, the major revelations come not through spoken confessions, but rather through accidental discoveries of documents, firstly in Brigitte's 'testament' — 'un récit fidèle, sans amertume et sans colère, de tout ce que Brigitte avait souffert par moi' (pp.227-228) — and secondly, in Brigitte's letter to Smith. The truth emerges by error, not design; it is confessed privately to paper, not deliberately to a person; it is written, not spoken.[4]

In *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle,* what is spoken is often lies, whilst the truth remains unsayable. Confession can easily be corrupted to manipulate, or, even when employed in good faith, it falls upon deaf ears. Comprising multiple intradiegetic

[4] The way that important secrets are discovered by written documents echoes *Adolphe,* where Ellénore discovers that Adolphe plans to break with her by reading a letter of his to the baron de T*** (pp.202-3) and where again in the discovery of Ellénore's papers Adolphe learns how much he was loved (pp.212-213) (see Véronique Dufief-Sanchez, p.124).

acts of confession, all of which mislead or founder, *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* is a novel which continually performs the failure of confessional discourse.

Philippe Lejeune, writing about the episode in Rousseau's *Les Confessions* where he deliberately misbehaves so as to be smacked because he desires masochistic pleasure and the episode where he lies about the ribbon, argues that behind the language of culpability, there is 'le langage de l'amour, de la demande de l'amour'. He suggests that Rousseau's *Confessions* are a form of substitution, where 'la "faute" […] ou le "manque" que l'aveu doit effacer *maintenant,* c'est l'absence d'aveu *alors,* et non la chose à avouer'. According to Lejeune, Rousseau's recounting of these scenes is actually a deferred confession of love. The substitution is three-fold. His confession of guilt in *Les Confessions* is a substitution for a confession of love; his confession now, in writing, is a substitution for the confession that he did not make before; the reader as the recipient of his confession is the substitute for the object of his desire.[5] The idea of confession as a substitution serves as a lens through which to analyse Octave's extradiegetic confession in Musset's text. What is unspoken between Brigitte and Octave becomes written, to the extent that Octave's narrative reads as a displaced confession — a confession to the reader because all confessions between him and Brigitte have failed.[6] Like Rousseau's, Octave's is a confession 'que

[5] Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975), p.53.
[6] In this, Octave also echoes both Amaury in Sainte-Beuve's *Volupté,* and Dominique in Fromentin's novel of the same name: both narratives are driven by a failure to speak about their feelings to the woman they love. The confession the reader reads is the side of the story the characters never tell the object of their desire. This idea of confession as a substitution is also parodied by Champfleury in *Confessions de Sylvius.* Sylvius makes explicit that he is writing his confession of love to his friend, Tony, because he has failed to say it to Clémence (and does not know how he will ever manage to articulate it to her), and because he has got bored of talking to his pillow: 'J'ai voulu lui écire; mais demain n'est-il pas bien plus simple de lui parler? Cependant il faut préparer ce qu'on appelle une déclaration. Impossible de trouver le premier mot [...] J'ai pris pour confident mon oreiller et je lui ai rendu les discours les plus extravagants. Enfin, j'ai allumé ma chandelle et je t'écris à háte ce mot' (p.16). His confession to his friend is third-best, after Clémence and the pillow.

se donn[e] à lire à tout le monde faute de pouvoir jamais trouver [son] vrai destinataire'.[7] However, as this chapter will analyse, Octave's extradiegetic confession, like the intradiegetic acts of confession, founders on several levels.

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(ii) Octave's extradiegetic confession and the problem of God

Octave's extradiegetic confession firstly is deeply problematic when considered through the lens of the Catholic paradigm which the word 'confession' inevitably brings into play. Octave's confession largely takes place in a framework where a Catholic belief system seems either to have been corrupted by the unscrupulous (the priest Mercanson is indiscreet, a gossip with his own agenda)[8] or to fail those who need it. When Octave tries to echo Augustine's 'tolle et lege',[9] opening the Bible at random, the passage he finds, rather than inspiring him, compounds his doubts: 'tout arrive également au juste et à l'injuste, au bon et au méchant' (p.70). The religious model offered by Augustine is inverted and subverted. Feeling deserted by God, Octave is frequently blasphemous, elevating his own suffering above Christ's: 'j'y bus un plus amer calice que celui que les anges apportèrent au Christ [...] dans le jardin des Oliviers' (p.85).[10] Blasphemy is indeed a medicine Octave consciously

[7] Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique,* p.54. In a different way, in Janin's *La Confession,* the major act of confession around which the novel centres is a displacement confession: Anatole is desperate to perform a religious confession to a priest because he has failed to perform a legal confession and pay the price for his crime.
[8] He spreads the rumour in the village of Octave's jealous questioning of him about Dalens and Dalens's feelings towards Brigitte (p.222).
[9] See Saint-Victor's translation of Augustine's *Confessions,* p.215-216.
[10] Also see: 'Ô Dieu! Moi qui te parle, et qui ne suis qu'un faible enfant, j'ai connu peut-être des maux que tu n'as pas soufferts' (p.30). Musset explores blasphemy elsewhere in his work. See, for instance:

> Ne riez pas, l'absinthe est bonne;
> L'Ecriture en parle beaucoup,
> Et quelque part, Dieu me pardonne!
> Notre Seigneur en but un coup.

consumes: 'il est malheureusement vrai qu'il y a dans le blasphème une grande déperdition de force qui soulage le cœur trop plein' (p.33).

Despite his doubts and blasphemies, Octave is unable to stop believing entirely. On rare occasions, he invokes God: when grieving his father, 'Dieu bénissait mes larmes' (p.140); when he falls in love with Brigitte — 'que Dieu soit loué!' (p.153). His relationship towards God lurches between extremes — from believing in him enough to praise him, to experiencing utter doubt in his existence, to believing that God is there but that he does not care: 'Qu'importe à Dieu [...] quelle livrée porte ma douleur' (p.298). He feels abandoned by a God in whom he is not even sure he believes; Musset depicts a world where 'la religion s'en va' (p.31).

Octave, on the point of murdering Brigitte, sees her crucifix and feels the presence of God: 'Seigneur mon dieu! vous étiez-là' (p.300). For a brief moment, the narrative creates a connection with God, whom Octave can finally address directly in the second person. It seems for a moment that Octave's story has become, like Augustine's, a conversion narrative: Octave writes, 'Que ceux qui ne croient pas au Christ lisent cette page; je n'y croyais pas non plus' (p.300). The prodigal *enfant du siècle* returns to echo the model of the confessing father, St Augustine.

However, Octave's apparent change of heart is more complex than initially appears. First, any faith that Octave finds is far from the structures of organised Catholicism. His 'conversion' is rather an acceptance of all spirituality: 'Qu'importe le nom, la

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(The poem was published posthumously as 'À *Ulric Guttinguer,* (in *Poésies complètes,* p.884)). Also see Paul Bénichou*, L'École du désenchantement: Saint- Beuve, Nodier, Musset, Nerval, Gautier* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), p.157.

forme, la croyance? Tout ce qui est bon n'est-il pas sacré?' (p.301). Secondly, in describing the moment when he sees the crucifix, Octave writes, 'J'étais ivre et insensé quand je vis le Christ sur le sein de Brigitte; mais, bien que n'y croyant pas moi-même, je reculai sachant qu'elle y croyait' (p.300). It is her belief in God, not Octave's belief and indeed not God himself, that saves Octave from murder. He believes in her belief — but that is far from conversion. God acts as a force that negates, rather than affirms: the sight of the crucifix stops Octave killing Brigitte, but that is about all. Addressing God, and talking about himself in the third person, Octave claims, 's'il avait cru, tu l'aurais consolé' (p.302). There is no real consolation for Octave, who did not believe and for whom it is now too late.[11] The words that Octave says to Brigitte as he leaves her sleeping peacefully — 'Dieu veille sur toi' (p.301) — strangely, leave Octave out of the equation.

Octave, saying farewell to Brigitte, reassures her, 'nous guérirons tous deux, vous avec le temps, et moi avec Dieu' (p.305). However, this very optimism is invalidated by the form of the novel — a confession addressed to a reader not to God. Indeed, the opening words of his confession frames his 'cure' in these secular terms: 'dans le cas où personne ne prendrait garde [à cette confession] j'aurai encore retiré ce fruit de mes paroles de m'être mieux guéri moi-même' (p.19). God, it seems, has not been part of the cure. This form further problematises the conversion narrative. Augustine, a convert, addresses his confession to God; Octave eschews this mode: he will 'couper cette portion de lui-même [...] et la faire circuler sur la place publique, afin que les gens du même âge palpent et jugent la maladie' (p.19). In this way,

[11] As Alain Heyvaert argues, 'la foi retrouvée […] n'est pas suffisamment forte pour le consoler', *La Transparence et l'indicible dans l'œuvre d'Alfred de Musset* (Paris; Klincksieck, 2000), p.65.

Musset is even more subversive than Rousseau, who, whilst writing for 'mes semblables' does at least also imagine himself with his *Confessions* before 'le souverain juge' (p.33); for Octave, the only judge is his peers.

The reader becomes a confessor, whom he addresses directly.[12] The reader's role is dual. On the one hand, Octave establishes the reader as a confessor who provides the moral framework and ultimate judgement. On the other, the reader becomes a fellow sinner, deriving pleasure from Octave's revelations. These two potential roles are encapsulated in the question Octave imagines a reader asking: 'mais, dira le lecteur, au milieu de tout cela quelles femmes aviez-vous?' (p.115). On one level, this suggests a confessor, who, as in Catholic confession, prompts the confessant with questions; on another, it implies a reader salaciously driving Octave to provide titillating information. The moral framework of Catholic confession is both secularised (he is confessing to a reader), and exploded (rather than administering moral judgement, the reader seeks pleasure). Indeed, when Octave postulates a possible reader, he imagines 'hommes du siècle, qui, à l'heure qu'il est, courez à vos plaisirs, au bal ou à l'Opéra, et qui ce soir, en vous couchant, lirez pour vous endormir quelque blasphème usé du vieux Voltaire' (p.85). The pleasure-seeking reader pictured here, far from being a surrogate priest, is a reader of Voltaire's blasphemies. Perverting the role of confessor, Octave casts the reader/confessor as a sinner and atheist himself.

The novel's title complicates matters yet further, given *siècle*'s double meaning of both 'century' and also 'l'état de la vie mondaine, en tant qu'il est opposé à l'état

[12] Speaking of his bullying of Brigitte, he comments, 'Lecteur, cela dura six mois' (p.225).

d'une vie chrétienne, de la vie religieuse'.[13] For Claude Duchet, '*siècle* devient à peu près synonyme d'absence de foi'.[14] Octave, as classified by the title, is unable to reach beyond the profane world, beyond his failure to believe. As he is too damaged by his experience of debauchery to build a relationship with Brigitte, so he is too damaged by his unbelief to build a relationship with God. The title unites a word of religion with a word of irreligion: it is the confession of someone who lies outside the religious structures that impose confession — who cannot, in the Catholic sense, confess. The religious act is reclaimed, appropriated to a profane context. Musset's text thus uses a form with religious origins, in order to undermine the very structures of salvation associated with that form.

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(iii) Octave's extradiegetic confession and the paradox of form

Octave's confession does not only transform Catholic confession by making it secular: its form as a written, published, narrative confession forces the *acte de parole* to undergo further fundamental transformations.

L'abbé Louis de Sambucy, in *Manuel du pénitent ou conduite pour la contrition et la confession,* states that, after a confession, 'on n'a plus à revenir sur le passé'.[15]As Richard Terdiman argues, according to the Catholic model, confession is 'designed to free the future from the past', which is recounted 'in the service not of memorialisation but of erasure'.[16] However, when a confession is literary, published,

[13]'Siècle', *Dictionnaire de l'Académie,* (1835), II, p.741-2.
[14] Duchet, p.x.
[15] Sambucy, p.151.
[16] Terdiman, p.26.

'its impermanence is transformed'.[17] Far from being erased, a written confession becomes a monument. Octave's almost-final words to Brigitte are 'ne parlons pas du passé' (p.306)[18] — and yet that is exactly what his confession does. Furthermore, this memorialisation takes place in a text where memory is shown to be destructive. Octave and Brigitte's love is decimated by the way that memory involuntarily resurfaces — both in terms of Octave's memory of his first mistress's betrayal and his ensuing debauchery, and also the collective memory of trauma detailed in Chapter Two.[19] Memory traps Brigitte too. Her past makes her particularly vulnerable to Octave's behaviour: 'je sais aussi ce que c'est le souvenir du passé. Il m'inspire aussi près de vous des moments de terreur cruelle' (p.212).

Octave's opening claims about wanting to cut off a part of his life through his act of confession (p.19) are undermined by both the events of the text (which suggest that this is impossible) and the nature of the text itself (which preserves that which Octave wants to amputate). Significantly, Sand explores a similar paradox at the end of *La Confession d'une jeune fille.* MacAllen's response to Lucienne's confession is 'efface ce songe, et que ce passé soit mort pour toi' (vol II, p.317). However, the very act of her writing to him has given the past a physical form that makes it hard to dismiss as a 'songe'; on a metatextual level, the act of publishing makes it impossible for it to be erased.

[17] Terdiman, p.27. Also see Terdiman's comment, 'by the end of his novel, Musset will reconceive the mnemonics of confession as a catastophe' (also p.27).
[18] Terdiman, p.26.
[19] Terdiman, pp.32-33 and pp.40-45.

Terdiman focuses on how the portrayal of memory intersects with themes of consciousness, neurosis and freedom in Musset's novel.[20] For this thesis's purposes, though, what is particularly significant is how this depiction of memory relates to the novel's confessional framework. Through presenting memory as destructive in a text which, by its nature, memorialises, *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* suggests that Octave's written confession is an intrinsically flawed exercise that cannot offer absolution. Octave remembers in order to try to erase the effect that memory has already had, but this confessional enterprise is doomed to failure: both because memory is the cause of, not the solution to, his problems, and because writing a confession down and publishing it only compounds the problems of memory. The tension inherent in the act of transformation of confession from a spoken to a written act — which memorialises when both Catholic confession, and Octave himself, seek to move on from the past — undoes Octave's confessional endeavour.

Octave's confession breaks further crucial principles of the Catholic paradigm, by its very nature as a public text. The privacy of confession, since the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century, was paramount, the structure of a confessional the physical embodiment of this secrecy. Anyone waiting to confess must keep his or her distance from the confessional to ensure that no one's confession is overheard: 'Ne vous placez pas trop près du tribunal de la pénitence, de peur d'entendre, par votre faute, la confession des autres'.[21] Priests must treat anything said in a confession as 'le secret le plus inviolable';[22] tellingly, confessants must also keep their own confessions secret: 'la confession doit être secrète tant de la part du pénitent que de

[20] Terdiman, p.46.
[21] Sambucy, p.187.
[22] Sambucy, p.187.

la part du prêtre'.[23] Octave's act of confession inverts this model, both on a metatextual level, by its status as a published text, and within the text itself, as Octave is explicit about the public nature of this confession, aimed at 'la place publique' — it is hard to think of a location that contrasts more dramatically with a confessional. By appropriating the act of confession, associated with secrecy, to a public context, Musset's Octave echoes Rousseau: rejecting the model of private, auricular confession to a priest, and the secrecy and control that entailed.[24]

Central to the discourse of secrecy required by Catholic confession, is the confessant's silence on the sins of others. Indiscretion in this matter is a sin in itself: one of the sins listed by Louis de Sambucy is 'je m'accuse [...] d'avoir révélé les secrets qu'on m'avoit confiés'.[25] By airing his sins in the 'place publique', Octave is also sharing — in direct, not even reported, speech — Brigitte's confession of her past transgressions. Octave's break with the Catholic model is twofold, not only making the private public as regards his own life, but, in so much as he becomes a surrogate confessor for Brigitte, breaking the *sceau de la confession* as regards what

[23] *Catéchisme du councile de Trente,* p.507.
[24] Much of the nineteenth-century condemnation of Rousseau was targeted at what was often seen as a disgraceful decision to reveal his private life and that of others. This distaste for public revelation extends even to fictional works — George Sand was viciously attacked for the publication of *Elle et lui,* which was seen to be too closely based on her relationship with Musset. Taxile Delord criticised her for having followed in the tradition of Rousseau, and 'd'ouvrir [sa] vie privée au public […] on met ses amours dans les journaux et les revues; on publie son coeur par livraisons' (Taxile Delord writing in *Le Siècle,* 24 May 1859, quoted in Thierry Bodin, 'Le Dossier d'*Elle et lui', Présence de George Sand,* 29 (1987), 6-62 (p.20). Tellingly, Musset did not come under the same criticism for publishing *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* — ironically Barbey d'Aurevilly viciously attacks Sand for the way in which 'cette vie douloureuse [de Musset.] [...] est jetée comme un scandale au public' (writing in *Le Pays on* 15 June 1859, quoted in Bodin, p.27), completely ignoring the fact that Musset had himself written a fiction based on his private life years earlier. Sand herself saw the patriarchy at work in this selective memory; she wryly criticised the attitude according to which 'tout artiste qui retrace des scènes de sa propre vie, ou qui analyse des sentiments de son propre cœur, commet une indécence [....] Donc (si cet artiste est une femme surtout) toute populace a la droit de l'insulter et de la calomnier' (Sand, writing in the 'Avant-Propos' to the novel *Jean de la Roche,* published in the *Revue des deux mondes* on 15 October 1859, quoted in Bodin, p.42). A furious Paul de Musset responded to *Elle et lui* with his parody, *Lui et elle* (1859).
[25] Sambucy, p.216.

she has confided in him. Octave's confession becomes a direct subversion of Catholic practice.

Beyond its status as a written and public confession, there is one further fundamental way in which Octave's confession breaks with the Catholic mode: by being *narrative.* Indeed, the very concept of a narrative confession is an inversion of Catholic teaching on confessional discourse, according to which sins should be enumerated, not narrated. The Council of Trent makes clear, 'celui qui confesse ses péchés *ne doit pas en faire le récit [....] par manière d'histoire*, comme s'il s'agissait d'amuser les auditeurs oisifs';[26] Louis de Sambucy reminds confessants, 'point de ces longues narrations';[27] a 1820 edition of François de Sales's teaching on confession, specifies that: 'il faut que la confession, soit nette, sincère et courte, disant seulement l'espèce de péché, *sans conter des histoires*; car alors on s'excuse plutôt que de s'accuser'.[28] Narrating can very quickly lead to excusing, and, as the Catechism of the Council of Trent makes clear, 'la confession est une accusation [...] il faut [...] faire l'énumération de ses fautes avec l'intention de s'avouer coupable'.[29] Narrative confession involves creating the story and the framework around a confession that undermines the purpose of confession. Octave's confession — and indeed the 'novel of confession' more broadly — contains an unresolvable tension within it, between the narrative novelistic form and the Catholic origin from which it

[26] *Catéchisme du concile de Trente,* p.495, italics added.
[27] Sambucy, p.151.
[28] *Conduite pour la confession* (1820), p.4, italics added.
[29] *Catéchisme du concile de Trente,* pp.495-6.

takes its name.[30] Any narrative confession risks slipping into a discourse of self-justification, not self-accusation.

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(iv) Octave's extradiegetic confession and the problem of self-justification

It is not simply the case that Octave's confession, by being narrative, intrinsically and inevitably risks falling into an excusatory mode: rather, Octave's confession also seizes upon any opportunity to reduce the sense of his responsibility.

Excuse exists on a structural level. The title, by framing Octave as a product of his time, reduces his individual responsibility; the designation of Octave as an 'enfant', not only in this title but in much of the narrative, again works to diminish his agency and therein his culpability. Furthermore, Octave's depiction of the events of this period of his life are preceded by Chapter Two — which, by casting Octave's story in the context of the tragedy of his generation, tries to frame it as the result of cosmic forces beyond his control, rather than the product of his own decisions and wrongdoing.[31] Furthermore, once Octave starts the narrative of the events he is confessing, he begins, not with his own transgressions, but rather with the betrayal of his former mistress, meaning that the whole 'confession' is structured as a plea for understanding — where the reader is invited to see Octave's later behaviour as

[30] It is a tension that exists too in Rousseau: De Man, distinguishing between the confessional mode, which aims to relay the facts of what happens, and the excusatory mode, which involves accounts of intentions and thoughts, argues that Rousseau's text operates regularly in an excusatory rather than a confessional mode. De Man analyses the ribbon episode in particular, showing that much of the text is concerned with explaining how Rousseau acted, rather than relaying the events. (Paul De Man in *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp.179-281). Also see Taylor, p.94.

[31] Also see Terdiman on the way that Chapter Two (and, he also suggests, Chapter One) 'displaces and upsets the relation between the first-person speaker in the text and the personal responsibility for his own memory and his own past that the ritual of confession presupposes' (pp.27-28).

the result of the moment that he himself is betrayed. This is compounded by Octave's presentation of Desgenais as a kind of Mephistopheles: 'lancez-vous sans crainte dans le torrent du monde; ayez des courtisanes, des danseuses, des bourgeoises et des marquises' (p.61). Octave sets himself up as a victim from the start, betrayed then led astray.

Octave's refusals to accept responsibility occur on a micro, as well as a macro, level. At one moment, Octave simultaneously accepts the wrong that he is doing and suggests that his actions are beyond his control: 'Faire le mal! tel était donc le rôle que la Providence m'avait imposé' (p.290). At another, Octave explains, 'pendant six mois entiers, Brigitte [...] eut à essuyer de ma part tous les dédains et toutes les injures qu'un libertin colère et cruel peut prodiguer à la fille qu'il paye' (p.225). Whilst this sentence initially sounds like self-accusation, Octave's expression reduces the emphasis on his wrongdoing. First, the syntax puts the emphasis on Brigitte, not him: 'Brigitte eut à essuyer de ma part tous les dédains et toutes les injures', rather than 'je la dédaignai', je l'injuriai'. 'Eut à essuyer' indeed suggests there is something inevitable about it — again, it is apparently outside Octave's control. Furthermore, though it initially appears that Octave is calling himself a 'libertin colère et cruel', as one reads on it becomes apparent that he is rather expressing himself figuratively. The simile works to create distance between Octave and his guilt. The prevarication of Octave's language is far from a discourse of self-blame.

The tension between Octave's supposed confessional mode and the excusatory mode which operates in reality is encapsulated at the moment when two sides of

Octave – 'l'esprit' and 'la conscience' — are in conflict. His conscience tells his mind, 'Mets-toi à genou, confesse-toi; si tu crois au mal, tu l'as fait'. His mind replies, 'si je l'ai fait, était-ce ma faute? Pourquoi le bien m'a-t-il trahi?' (p.261). This moment — where an act of religious confession is directly suggested and rejected — offers a key to the way that excuses and justification operate more widely. If, on the one hand, one side of Octave's fragmented self is prompting a confession, another seeks constantly to reduce his responsibility, throwing the whole confessional attempt into doubt.

Octave's story thus structurally and linguistically functions as an excuse: again subverting the Catholic model of confession. Indeed, he breaks almost all the rules of the confessing manual, *Conduite pour la confession et la communion*:

> Donner [aux actions] un tour qui les diminue, ou qui ne fasse voir qu'une partie de leur malice; en rejeter [....] la principale faute sur quelqu'autre, sur Dieu même [....] sur la faiblesse de la nature, sur son temperament, sur l'occasion [...] ce n'est point les accuser, ce n'est donc pas les confesser.[32]

In another confessing manual, *Manuel du pénitent ou conduite pour la contrition et la confession* by Sambucy, is a long list of the possible sins that one might need to confess. Listed high amongst those are sins related to confession itself: in a circular manner, what one might need to confess is not having confessed properly: 'Je m'accuse de n'avoir pas accusé tous mes péchés. D'en avoir caché par honte [...] D'avoir manqué de sincérité dans la manière d'accuser mes péchés, en les déguisant, les diminuant'.[33] From a Catholic perspective, Octave's corrupted confession of his transgressions is yet another transgression to be added to his list.

[32] *Conduite pour la confession et la Communion* (Paris: Herissant, 1778), p.21.
[33] Sambucy, p.206.

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(v) Octave's extradiegetic confession and the problem of obfuscation

Octave's confession contains a further break with the Catholic model. Catholic doctrine demands that, in a confession, sins are confessed, clearly, openly and in their entirety.[34] Musset's *Confession,* by contrast, subverts such requirements — gesturing toward the many sins that are concealed. Octave manages to write about debauchery, without really writing about debauchery. He provides only fragmented images: ''Maintenant que je pense à ce temps de ma jeunesse, je crois voir [....] des formes flottantes se soulèvent ça et là et puis s'effaçent [...] un soupir plaintif déchire les airs' (p.115). He resorts to literary allusion — 'une rivière limpide coule ça et là auprès entre des saules ; Ophélia, couverte des fleurs y flotte doucement' (p.116) — and fantastical imagery, where, on his nights of debauchery, 'des monstres grimaçants volent en rond; ils pouffent de rire et s'engouffrent' (p.115). Image is piled upon image, whilst what is actually signified is lost in allusion. Octave describes his decadent lifestyle as 'un abîme' (p.109) — but the real abyss lies between the events of his life and his representation of them.

Revelation tends to be dominated by gaps: the quick reference to a courtesan who loved Octave (p.105) suggests a whole story never revealed. Octave even draws attention to his lack of revelation: 'mais, dira le lecteur, au milieu de tout cela, quelles femmes aviez-vous? Je ne vois pas là la débauche en personne' (p.115). His response to the imagined question again highlights how he is only offering partial information: 's'il faut parler des femmes, j'en citerai deux' (p.116). But in neither

[34] See p.110 of this thesis.

case does he depict debauchery: Octave's confession teases the reader, being silent where it might most be expected to be explicit. Describing Cendrillon, Octave reveals nothing more than, 'Elle savait un peu toucher du piano, un peu compter, un peu dessiner, même un peu d'histoire et de grammaire' (p.117). Octave describes his initial meeting with Marco in deeply sensuous terms, but the encounter ends in bathos, when, instead of consummating the relationship, Octave looks out of the window and Marco falls asleep (p.126). Octave's confession rejects the discourse of revelation of sins demanded by its form.

This chapter has thus far argued that the extradiegetic act of confession becomes problematic by dint of its relationship to its Catholic origins, both in terms of the way that a written, published, narrative confession is an inevitable inversion of Catholic confessional practice, and in terms of the multiple ways in which Octave's confession's structure and language further breaks the rules of Catholic confession. Musset — an anti-clerical and frequently blasphemous writer — both invokes the Catholic paradigm and simultaneously rejects it in a work that creates an ever-widening gulf between its form and the model on which it draws. Musset's novel however goes further than simply undermining the Catholic model: the text questions the very principles upon which confession — either Catholic or secular — depends.

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(vi) The failure of introspection

Catholic confession, by its dependence on an individual confessing not only sinful actions but also sinful thoughts, demands a focus on interiority in conjunction with

exteriority. As the abbé de Sambucy notes, 'Quiconque veut donc se réconcilier avec Dieu, doit rentrer sérieusement en lui-même, s'examiner avec soin'.[35] Catholic confession depends on the thesis first, that an individual can successfully self-analyse and, second, that he or she will then be able to communicate his or her discoveries in words to a confessor. These two elements are necessary indeed even if one removes the Catholic framework: an autobiographical confession like Rousseau's equally depends on the confessant's ability both to access his own interiority and to express that in language. As will be seen, *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* throws into doubt both these crucial principles.

At one moment, Octave attempts a secular *examen de conscience*:

> Je m'asseyais le soir sur mon lit, et je me disais: 'Voyons, pensons à cela.' Je mettais ma tête dans mes mains, puis je m'écriais: 'C'est impossible!' et je recommençais le jour suivant. (p.255)[36]

When Octave tries to 's'examiner avec soin', he finds it impossible. Instead, he is trapped in a cycle of failed introspection, doomed forever to recommence but never to find an answer, in a constantly elusive process. The novel enacts the failure of the self-contemplation that is absolutely essential for confession. The introspection that fails Octave intradiegetically also fails him extradiegetically. In *Allegories of Reading,* Paul de Man claims that, 'To confess is to overcome guilt and shame in the name of truth: it is an epistemological use of language'.[37] However, Octave's knowledge breaks down as he confesses. At one moment, he comments, 'Étais-je bon ou étais-je méchant? [...] Il ne faut pas y réfléchir'. (p.201). With hindsight, he is still no closer to self-knowledge than he was at the time of the events he describes. Octave's question

[35] Sambucy, p.132.
[36] Also see Terdiman, 'the insight Octave is able to achieve through self analysis proves impotent' (p.42).
[37] Paul De Man, *Allegories of Reading,* p.279.

further suggests the failure of a moral code: he cannot arrive at the judgement of himself upon which confession depends. Furthermore, Octave undermines his very process of confession, which, by nature, depends on reflection: 'il ne faut pas y réfléchir'.

Central to the process of introspection required by Catholic confession is the process by which the confessant identifies his reasons for sinning: 'Qui veut faire bien connaître son peché, doit expliquer le motif qu'il a eu, le but qu'il s'est proposé en le commettant'.[38] By contrast Octave, having just described his and Brigitte's happy union, writes, 'j'ai à raconter maintenant ce qui advint de mon amour et le changement qui se fit en moi. Quelle raison puis-je en donner? Aucune, sinon que je raconte, et que je puis dire: C'est la vérité' (p.181). Octave does not understand his own actions; like Anatole's murder of Anna,[39] Octave's behaviour is both beyond his control, and beyond his comprehension. Confession, rather than describing the motivation for transgression, serves to highlight the lack of it.

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(vii) The failure of language

Peter Brooks, in *Troubling Confessions,* writes that, 'Western culture, most strikingly since the Romantic era to our day, has made confessional speech a prime mark of authenticity, par excellence the kind of speech in which the individual authenticates his inner truth'.[40] Octave, however, finds that his 'inner truth' cannot be

[38] *Conduite pour la confession et pour la communion* (1778), p.25.
[39] The narrator in *La Confession*, describing Anatole's murder of his wife, claims 'je serai très simple et j'irai vite: à quoi bon s'appesantir sur un fait qu'on ne peut pas expliquer? Sans doute il existe une cause aux moindres mouvements de l'homme, mais cette cause qui peut la dire?' (vol I, p.61).
[40] Brooks, p.4.

authenticated by his act of confession, because he does not know what his inner truth is. Instead, he tries to make the act of telling its own mark of authenticity: 'quelle raison puis-je en donner? Aucune, sinon que je raconte'. He cannot offer a reason for his behaviour: the only reason is that he says it. He wants confession to *produce* the truth that it cannot reveal. Confession thereby becomes a *performance* of veracity. However, this performance is doomed to failure: how can one signify a missing signified? As Octave phrases it, 'comment donner un nom à une chose sans nom?' (p.201).[41] Octave's epistemological failure is therefore also a linguistic failure. Words fail Octave; far from language succeeding in producing the truth he desperately seeks, the signifier fails because the signified is unknown. When language is incapable of expressing what Octave wants to say, this produces far more than pure linguistic frustration: it strikes at the heart of the possibility of the act of confession itself, Catholic or secular.

Rather than language bringing Octave closer to self-validation, by the end of the novel, the linguistic structures of Octave's confession break down entirely. Octave-the-narrator can no longer identify with the Octave-the-narrated; the 'je' cannot encompass both Octaves; Octave-the-narrator has to resort to the third person to describe Octave-the-narrated. This linguistic fragmentation of selfhood is representative of the impossible strain that confession imposes upon the self. It divorces the present, writing self from the past, written self — cutting it off like a gangrenous limb.[42] The self bifurcates into the self that is confessing and the self that is confessed.

[41] In this exploration of the inexpressible, Octave echoes René's question, 'mais comment exprimer cette foule des sensations fugitives?' (Chateaubriand, *René,* p.175).
[42] In this intertwining imagery of dissection/ amputation is encapsulated both the act of confession, which is at once a sort of dissection and amputation of the past self, and the act of reading a

This division within the self is intrinsic to Catholic principles of confession: 'celui qui se confesse est en même temps l'accusateur et le coupable'.[43] The aim of this splitting of the self, in a religious context, is for the confessing self to free itself from the sins of the confessed self, in order to achieve absolution and healing.[44] As the Council of Trent claims, confession is a means by which 'ceux qui sont troublés des remords de leurs crimes [...] trouveront [...] des remèdes tout prêts pour guérir d'abord leur âme des maladies':[45] this language of curing tallies closely with Octave's expressed (albeit secularised) aims at the start of his confession. However, *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* suggests that the act of confession is not healing but destructive. Far from providing absolution, the confession rather fragments the self irrevocably; far from being freed from his past mistakes and able to continue with his life, Octave-the-narrator is instead nullified by the end of the novel, becoming invisible in the final chapter as the 'je' disappears. Confession becomes a sort of suicide — almost a displacement of Octave's plan of killing Brigitte then himself. His confession is a metaphorical killing of the self where the present self cuts itself off from the past self by turning it into object, not subject. Yet this act of confession backfires, alienating him from his past self and also destroying his present self in the process. The final word of the novel — 'malheureux' — furthermore suggests that Octave's aim of curing himself with his act of confession is

confession, which is driven by a perhaps slightly macabre desire to know — a metaphorical lifting of the sheet to see the body beneath.

[43] *Conduite pour la confession et pour la communion* (1778), p.21.

[44] 'Christian confession was supposed to heal the divided self through the linguistic articulation of its dividedness (constituted by sin) and to bring the self back in touch with itself' (Clej, p.13).

[45] M. Dassance, *Dictionnaire Apostolique à l'usage de ceux qui se destinent à la chaire,* 2 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque Ecclesiastique, 1836), I., p.12. Also see *Catéchisme du concile de Trente,* p.495.

far from successful. Indeed, as Larousse reflects in his entry on *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* in the *Grand Dictionnaire universel*, 'la guérison. Où est-elle?'[46]

The implications of this fragmentation of selfhood caused by confession are expressed on the most fundamental linguistic level in the final chapter. The speech act of confession that has been stalling over the course of the novel, ultimately breaks down: confession cannot occur in the third person. Musset's text thus revolves around a central paradox: the act of confession fragments the self to such a point that confession cannot take place.

Musset's novel, entitled a confession, consistently performs the breakdown of confession, on both the intradiegetic and extradiegetic level. Intradiegetically, it is the story of confessions that are corrupted or that do not happen — Octave's tragedy is in part one where communication has broken down. Confession is the site of Octave's obsessive distrust, both of his mistress and her friend (who offer false confessions), and of Brigitte (who either will not confess or again lies in confession). Octave may be confessing to make up for past failed confessions, but that means that the foundations of the novel are built on an act that the novel regularly proves to be fraught with issues.

Indeed, Octave's extradiegetic confession compounds, rather than resolves, his problematic relationship to confession. Firstly, the form of a public, written, narrative confession is a far cry from the Catholic sacrament. Of course, as Todorov

[46] Larousse, '*La Confession d'un enfant du siècle', Grand Dictionnaire universel,* IV, p.904.

has argued, genres do transform the *acte de parole* from which they emerge:[47] that the novel of confession should differ from the model of Catholic confession is not in itself surprising. However, what is significant is that, in Octave's confession — and indeed novelistic confession more broadly — these changes do not only transform, but fundamentally break the Catholic model, inverting its rules, practices, defining traits and even the very purpose of the Catholic act. The novel of confession changes the act almost beyond recognition, making the novelistic confession the very opposite of its origins. In some ways, this is an explicit rejection of the Catholic model (Octave will confess publically, not privately, to his peers, not to God). Yet on another level, the fractures created by this transformation of the confessional act make Octave's confession deeply unstable, fraught with paradox. It is a confession that makes permanent the sin, rather than erasing it; it is a confession which, by its refusal fully to embrace guilt, is another transgression in itself; it is a confession which, by gesturing towards omissions and silences, indicates its own lack of revelation. It is a confession which, essentially, fails to be a confession: Octave's act is a formal impossibility. Furthermore, by portraying both the failure of introspection and the breakdown of confessional discourse, Musset undermines the founding principles of any act of confession, Catholic or secular. As such, Octave's confession contains an epistemological and linguistic failure by which the text stages the disintegration of confession itself.

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[47] Todorov, *La Notion de littérature,* p.35, p.39.

Part Two: *Confession générale* by Frédéric Soulié (1840-48)

'Confession générale' is a Catholic term for an act of confession, in which a confessant confesses his or her whole life; it enables confessants to see 'l'énorme multitude de leurs péchés'.[48] Soulié's novel, like Musset's, multifariously creates a tension between its religious title and its content — as is highlighted by an early reviewer of the first volumes of *Confession générale,* who compares the work to Soulié's earlier novel *Les Mémoires du diable* (1837-8): 'Si pour cet ouvrage nouveau [Soulié] s'est défait de son infernal secrétaire, et s'il a habillé ses récits en confession, ce n'est pas qu'il ait fait pénitence'.[49] The lack of penitence (not just on the part of Soulié, whose dark world again rejoices in and thrives off hidden sins, but also on the part of the characters) is just one of the ways in which the text problematises the Catholic origins of its form.

Despite Soulié's scant success with posterity, he was a highly popular — and in some circles, celebrated — writer in the mid-nineteenth century. Janin, looking back in his *Histoire de la littérature dramatique,* writes that 'Frédéric Soulié a joué un très grand rôle dans la littérature de ce temps-ci'.[50] Janin, admittedly a friend, describes him as 'une imagination puissante, un écrivain d'un naturel exquis et d'une verve ingénieuse qui se répandait abondamment ça et là'[51] and dedicates over a hundred pages of his *Histoire de la littérature dramatique* to him. When, in 1840, Frédéric Soulié published the first two volumes of *Confession générale,* he was at the height of

[48] Joseph Pochard, *Méthode pour la direction des âmes dans le tribunal de la Pénitence et pour le bon gouvernement des paroisses,* 2 vols (Besançin: Gauthier, 1821), I, p.284, quoted by Corbin, *L'Harmonie des plaisirs,* p.331.
[49] 'A.B.', 'Critique littéraire: *Une fin de siècle. Le Bracelet. Confession générale', Revue de Paris,* 1st series, vol. 13 (1840), pp.277-284.
[50] Janin, *Histoire de la littérature dramatique,* V (1857), p.7.
[51] Janin *Histoire de la littérature dramatique,* V, p.10.

his fame. He had written his first novel, *Les Deux Cadavres* in 1832; it was to have over twenty-five editions or reprints across the century.[52] In the next four years, he wrote eight novels, three collections of short stories, and several plays, and worked as a journalist.[53] In 1837-1838 he published *Les Mémoires du diable*, first in *feuilleton* and then as a volume. It was devoured by readers and consolidated Soulié's place as one of the most successful popular writers of his day.

On the basis of this success, Soulié wrote *Confession générale* — a work which contributed further to his popularity. Larousse's *Grand Dictionnaire universel* specifically praises the novel: 'Le style [...] est vif, animé, coloré [...] à la vigueur de la touche, il est impossible de ne pas reconnaître le pinceau du maître'.[54] Even Soulié's enemies grudgingly paid tribute to his talent: Charles Menche de Loisne in *Influence de la littérature française de 1830 à 1850 sur l'esprit public et les mœurs* (1852), criticises Soulié for immorality, [55] whilst describing him as 'un des écrivains les plus originaux et les plus féconds de cette époque'.[56] Significantly, Menche de Loisne listed *Confession générale* as one of the texts 'qui ont assuré à M. Frédéric Soulié la position qu'il occupe parmi nos littératures modernes'.[57]

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[52] Harold March, *Frédéric Soulié: Novelist and Dramatist of the Romantic Period* (New Haven: Yale University, 1931), p.1.
[53] March, p.106.
[54] Larousse, '*Confession générale', Grand Dictionnaire universel,* IV, p.905.
[55] Charles Menche de Loisne, *Influence de la littérature française de 1830 à 1850 sur l'esprit public et les mœurs* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1852), pp.322-346.
[56] Menche de Loisne, p.320.
[57] Menche de Loisne, p.321.

(i) A narrative of sin, cynicism and lost identities

The plot of Soulié's novel is long and complex — only such details will be given here as are essential to the analysis which follows. The novel opens during the Terror, when a young aristocrat, Angélique, is threatened with death. Her life is spared, due to the intervention of four men — Varneuil, Gabarrou, Ambret, and the cleric Arvilliers — who, it is implied, each offer her safety in exchange for sex. In his depiction of the corrupt priest Arvilliers, the anticlerical Soulié continues one of his common tropes. Many of his novels contain immoral clerics[58] — a point with which Menche de Loisne particularly takes umbrage:

> Jamais M. Soulié n'a parlé des prêtres catholiques sans leur donner une physionomie particulière. Il les représente presque toujours comme des fanatiques impitoyables et toujours comme des êtres égoïstes [...] marchant à leur but avec [...] une hypocrisie et une cruauté extrêmes.[59]

Menche de Loisne cites one specific danger of Soulié's apparent sullying of the character of priests: 'dans une religion qui ordonne [...] la confession, ce n'est pas impunément qu'on souille ainsi le caractère sacerdotal'.[60]

The rejection of Catholic confession that Menche de Loisne fears will occur in the real world, is already depicted by Soulié in the fictional world of *Confession générale.* Angélique, on her death bed, eschews Catholic confession; instead, she bequeaths her son, Noël, a written document. In this world where priests are rapists, the Catholic act of confession is replaced by a secular one. As well as the document,

[58] Amongst others, Bishop Juxon, in *Les Deux Cadavres* (1832); Saint Dominic in *Le Vicomte de Béziers* (1834) and Norton in *Marguérite* (1842).
[59] Menche de Loisne, p.322 . Significantly, Menche de Loisne also included Sand and Musset in his study of immoral texts, criticising these authors too for their sacrilegious attitudes — a fact that highlights how many of the major novels of confession were written by those considered to have anti-Catholic tendencies.
[60] Menche de Loisne, p.323.

Angélique leaves her son a task. He must visit Varneuil, Gabarrou, Ambret, and Arvilliers with a letter for each. If any welcomes him with kindness, he must treat that man as a father and do nothing more. If he is cast aside by all, he must summon them together and read aloud to them the manuscript.

Whilst following her orders, Noël meets two women, Carmélite and Victorine, and three young men: Valvins, Fabien and Lucien. These latter three then read to Noël, and give Noël to read, a series of documents telling their own life stories, and those of Carmélite and Victorine. Their stories are, like those of many confessing characters, narratives of illegitimacy, identity crises and disillusionment. Carmélite has a relationship with Fabien's half-brother, Poyer, with Fabien himself, and with Fabien's other half-brother (on the other side) Melchior de Lesley. The story ends in tragedy as Poyer steps in to stop Melchior and Fabien killing each other over her and is killed himself. Elsewhere, revelations emerge about Carmélite's — and Lucien's — origins: one is the illegitimate child of the comtesse de Chastenux and the other of the peasant Louise Firon. The comtesse gives her baby away to Louise and Louise tries to drown herself and both babies, but they are all saved just in time. In another story, Valvins's mother (who had him illegitimately) and Valvins's lover (Léonie) conspire to poison Valvins's father, Gregorio Massoni, as they realise he has enough information to ruin them both. A further story tells how, Victorine, a married woman, uses the affection felt towards her by a young man, Eugène, to divert her husband's suspicions from the actual affair she is having with the fiancé of her step daughter, Amélie. Victorine then frames her step-daughter as the one having the relationship with Eugène; Eugène and Amélie marry, Amélie to protect her father and Eugène to protect Amélie's reputation. Much later in the novel,

Amélie's story is continued: unhappy in her marriage to Eugène, she is in love with none other than Melchior de Lesley.

After reading such stories, Noël's zest for life is significantly impaired. His three friends invite him to form part of their 'association' (p.591), dedicated to exposing the crimes of their mothers. He refuses and decides to summon Varneuil, Gabarrou, Ambret, and Arvilliers to hear his mother's manuscript read. After reading it, Noël commits suicide. Lucien, Fabien and Valvins emigrate to America, taking with them the manuscripts they have written, and, in Valvins's case, leaving behind his child, thus perpetuating the act of parental rejection of which he himself has been the victim. After the three men's deaths, their friend, a doctor, decides to publish the manuscripts.

In Menche de Loisne' s writings on Soulié, he reveals a significant fact: Soulié had a different readership to some of the other writers considered here. Comparing Soulié's popular appeal with Sand's, Menche de Loisne writes: 'Mme Sand n'est guère lue que par les hommes éclairés et intelligents, tandis que [...] M. Frédéric Soulié [est] surtout lu par le peuple, par les gens désœuvrés et par les femmes'.[61] Soulié's *Confession générale* popularises the novel of confession, turning it into a form that could reach a mass public — something that Montépin would later capitalise on in *Confessions d'un bohême.* The exportation of confessional tropes to a more popular context is indicated by the complicated publication history of *Confession générale.* Two sections of the novel were published in *feuilleton form,* in 1838 and 1839: *Un premier amour* (published in the *Journal des Débats,* 30 July - 27

[61] Menche de Loisne, pp.274-5.

August 1838), telling the story of Eugène's fateful love for Victorine; and *Le Serpent* (published in *Le Siècle*, 31 May - 2 July, 1839), which recounts Valvins's origins and love affair with Léonie. These sections were incorporated then into *Confession générale,* the first two volumes of which were published by Souverain at the start of 1840, with two further volumes published later that year. Another fragment entitled *Il était temps, ou à quelque chose malheur est bon*, telling the story of Amélie and Melchior's relationship, was published in *feuilleton* in *Le Siècle,* 5 - 16 August 1845,[62] but the full novel did not appear in book form until 1848.[63] Further editions of the novel then appeared, in 1856, 1857, 1858 and 1865-7.[64] In another indication of its commercial success, in 1849, the novel provided material for a play: *Mauvais Cœur* by Paul Féval. The prologue (entitled *La Femme du Corsaire*) is a prequel to the events of *Confession générale,* set during the Chouan uprising and telling the story of the love triangle between Poyer *père,* Madame Poyer and the Marquis de Lesley. The rest is an adaptation of the events which start with Poyer *fils* falling in love with Carmélite and end with Poyer being killed.[65]

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(ii) Corrupted confessions on the metadiegetic level (and below)

Like *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle, Confession générale* revolves around multiple acts of telling which are often central to the plot: the novel is in part *about* confession and revelation, as well as their converse — silence and concealment. Soulié's text exists on multiple levels. On the extradiegetic level is the voice of the

[62] March, p.206.
[63] See *Catalogue générale Catalogue général des livres imprimés de la Bibliothèque nationale,* CLXXV, p.836 and March, p.206.
[64] Also see on this Stead, p.381.
[65] Paul Féval, *Mauvais cœur … précédé de la Femme du corsaire, prologue tiré des Confessions générales de Frédéric Soulié* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1849); first performed 15 February 1849 at the Théâtre de l'Ambigu-Comique.

third person narrator. On the intradiegetic level are the events this narrative depicts, including what happens to Angélique during the Revolution; her death; Noël's summoning of his four potential fathers to listen to his mother's confession; Noël being found dead; the journey of Valvins, Lucien and Fabien to America; as well as — significantly — the handing over and reading of the manuscripts that Valvins and Lucien give to Noël. On the metadiegetic level — and further narrative levels beneath as the narrative layers multiple levels even within the documents read by Noël — are the events depicted in Valvins's and Lucien's stories. These events include many secular acts of confession, in different forms: avowals in which transgressive feelings or behaviour are revealed to another character. These acts of confession on the metadiegetic level (and below) are often suggested to be treacherous — at times for the person confessing, but, more often, for the recipient of the confession.

La Confession d'un enfant du siècle shows confession used to deceive; so it can be in Soulié's world. Confession becomes a tool for convincing others of what is *not* true — particularly in terms of confessions of love. The language of *intimité* is usurped to mislead. Mme de Cantel writes a 'private' and false confession of love for Eugène, knowing that he will see it, read it and be tricked into inadvertently following her plans. Amélie writes a false confession of love to Eugène (p.140-41) that she asks him to show her father, in order to conceal the truth of her stepmother's infidelity. Later in the novel, amorous confession is not just faked, it is forged. Mme de Cantel, maliciously trying to ruin Amélie's reputation, writes a forged confession of love from Melchior de Lesley to her, which starts, presumptuously, 'Amélie, je vous aime et vous l'avez deviné' (p.647). Whilst Amélie previously faked her own confession of

a love she did not feel, now her stepmother forges a confession from the man she *does* love to her of a love that he *does* feel, but which he would not dare to express in such a way.

The novel also contains confessions of guilt which supposedly tell the truth but actually manipulate it. At one point in the novel, Fabien is forced to confess, in front of his brother Poyer, his mother and Valvins, how he started an affair with Poyer's mistress. Fabien first claims that language fails him: 'je ne sais comment vous dire ce qui a amené sa colère [de Poyer] contre moi' (p.520). What on one level is an admission of the difficulty of putting a confession into words, is on another an implication that Poyer's anger is, in some way, incomprehensible, misplaced or excessive. Fabien proceeds by self-justification: 'Quand je la rencontrai [...] je ne savais pas même qu'elle connût Poyer' (p.521). Like Octave's mistress, he offers a performance of guilt: 'les yeux baissés', 'une voix larmoyante' (p.521) and ultimately even 'tombant à genoux devant sa mère' (p.522). His final words offer a last stroke of manipulation: 'Si quelqu'un a oublié le premier ce qu'il devait à Poyer, je vous le jure, ma mère, ce n'est pas moi, c'est cette malheureuse; car, après avoir trahi Poyer pour moi, elle m'a trompé pour un autre' (p.522). Valvins, the narrator at this point, comments:

> C'était là le comble de la duplicité. D'après ce récit Poyer était ridicule d'avoir été trompé par un enfant, ridicule de montrer une si violente colère et une si vive douleur pour une pareille créature. Fabien était coupable [...] mais d'une de ces fautes légères que l'entraînement de son âge devait excuser [...] Et cependant il n'y avait pas un mot qui ne fût vrai dans ce récit. (p.522)

Valvins's description draws attention to Fabien's manipulation: this is a confession that exonerates Fabien himself and pins the responsibility on his brother, where Fabien appears *less* guilty at the end of the confession than at the start. By the end of

the confession, Poyer claims Fabien's fault as his own: 'c'est moi qui ai tort, tort d'avoir aimé avec excès une indigne créature, tort d'en vouloir à Fabien' (p.522). Confession can tell the truth and yet be utterly manipulative; it is a highly dangerous tool in the hands of the cunning. Soulié's text is, like Musset's, in part about how a discourse of revelation may be misused to mislead.

Confession générale is not just about corrupted acts of confession; it is also about prevented acts of confession. Each of the documents that makes up the text revolves around secrecy and revelation. Lucien and Valvins's *raison d'être* is to find out the truth about their births — the *raison d'être* of their mothers is to conceal that truth; Eugène is desperate to find out the truth of Victorine de Cantel's feelings — Victorine is desperate to conceal them. *Confession générale* explores confession as *information* — and information is a powerful currency. In this world of secrets, the stakes of confession are raised. One person's truth tends to be another person's secret, and so any act of revelation is dual and therefore dangerous. At one moment, the comtesse de Chastenux, terrified that Louise Firon will confess on her deathbed to the crimes to which the comtesse tried to enlist her, ensures that Louise is unable to find a priest. As Louise summarises it: 'elle m'a fait faire le mal et elle me vole le pardon' (p.501). At another moment, in a perfect narrative union of the danger of revelation, Gregorio Massoni is murdered by the princesse de Kadicoff and Léonie as he tells them his life story, which is also his confession of his relationship with the princesse. Led on by the two women to share his story and to drink simultaneously, he is told 'contez-nous donc votre histoire', whilst his act of telling is regularly interrupted by the interjections of 'buvez donc' (p.404). The more he says, the more he drinks, until he dies mid-speech, leaving his confession unfinished.

The plot often turns upon moments of manipulated, corrupted or suppressed confession or acts of revelation on metadiegetic level. The novel explores confessions — occurring in a secular context — which are false or forged; it also explores confessions which are prevented, including through the murder of the confessant. Confession is such a powerful tool that it is easily exploited; it is also such a powerful tool that people will do anything to shut it down. Confession is the site of conflict, danger and deceit.

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(iii) The failure of confession as a narrative form

The novel stages these mini acts of confession on the metadiegetic level, whilst also using confession as a narrative tool. By framing itself as a 'confession générale', the text invites readers to read the documents with which Noël is presented — these narratives written by, largely, Lucien and Valvins — at least on some level as forms of 'confession'. This discourse of confession (and Catholicism) present in the title is reinforced by the characters themselves, with Fabien describing Lucien, Valvins and himself as seeking, by the documents they have written, to 'tenir [...] le serment de *la Confession générale'.*

The narrative is thus fragmented between multiple documents of confession. The novel that starts off as a third person narrative very quickly becomes a polyphonic text — 'cet assemblage de récits' (p.409), as they are somewhat disparagingly termed on the extradiegetic level. Each document Noël reads provides a sort of 'confession générale' that each character has written about his own life, and, in

some cases, about someone else's life. These acts of telling are continually foregrounded and commented upon. The chapter headings draw attention to the proliferation of narratives: 'une histoire' (p.270), 'encore une histoire' (p.273), 'épisode' (p.361), 'récit' (p.490). The stories seem endless — at one point a chapter called 'Dénoûment *[sic]'* ends with the following phrase, 'le manuscrit qu'il [Nöel] tenait *n'était point achevé'* (p.409, italics added), and the chapter which follows it is entitled 'un nouveau personnage' (p.409). The narratives proliferate. The text draws further attention to its form by wryly depicting Noël as 'fatigué de ces confidences incessantes' (p.590).

Narrative follows narrative; narratives also exist within other narratives: the novel is like a series of Russian dolls of storytelling. At one point, Léonie shares with Valvins the memories she has of their past relationship. Her act of telling is reported within Valvins's story of his past, which has in turn interrupted the story that the Princesse de Kadicoff was telling Léonie about her own past, all of which form part of the wider manuscript that Valvins has given to Noël, which has interrupted Valvins's other story about Carmélite and Fabien, all of which is a digression from Noël finding out about his own past. Narratives are constantly interrupting each other, [66] forming not just a polyphony but a cacophony of acts of telling.

Of course, the proliferation of narratives is a widespread technique in novels — present notably in Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste* (1796), and subsequently, in Nodier's *Histoire du roi de Bohême* (1830). Soulié uses this technique of intertwining

[66] Sometimes the narratives are also interrupted by the characters themselves. Fabien intervenes in Valvins's narrative of Carmélite to complain about the language he is using to describe her (p.149). At another moment, dinner interrupts the act of reading (p.490).

narratives elsewhere in his work too, including in *Les Mémoires du diable*.[67] Yet when these stories-within-stories are found in a novel which is entitled 'confession', the use of this technique of proliferating and interrupted narratives has an added weight. In a confessional context, the multiple acts of telling imply a never-ending cycle of confessional discourse. Confession breeds confession. The proliferation suggests failure: the acts of narrative and of confession are both thrown into doubt; they never are, and can never be, complete. Given that sections of *Confession générale* were, like *Les Mémoires du diable ,* first published in *feuilleton form*, the recurring cycle of storytelling in Souliés hands also appears as a reflection of (indeed, perhaps a metatextual joke by Soulié on) the commercialised context for which Soulié was writing, where the novelist is incentivised to keep spinning more stories: it is *le marché de la confession* in a different form.

Set against this seemingly uncontrollable proliferation of narrative is one, very significant, blank. Having revealed a whole host of secrets the reader did not expect, the novel remains silent on the one truth that was anticipated: Noël's mother's confession is conveyed purely through ellipses, and the chapter title 'Horrible mystère'.[68] What Noël's mother has written is her own *confession générale* — her life story, explaining to Noël his questionable paternity — yet the reader is denied the confession that the characters in the novel receive. As in Janin's *La Confession,* where Anatole's confession is denied to the reader, so here, in Soulié's novel, is a gap at the centre of the narrative: the final Russian doll does not exist. In the novel, confession

[67] Charles Menche de Loisne describes Soulié's technique of intertwining narratives: 'des histoires s'enchevêtrant les unes dans les autres et toujours interrompues au moment le plus intéressant' (Menche de Loisne, p.320).
[68] In this, the novel echoes *La Confession,* where again the major confession (Anatole's) is not reported to the reader.

thus defies all expectations of finality: both because it proliferates beyond all control and because it is ultimately silenced. *Confession générale* playfully pushes at the boundaries of the possibility of confession as a narrative form.

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(iv) The subversion of Catholic confession

The refusal of confessional finality staged by the novel is the opposite of the completion, resolution and redemption supposedly offered by Catholic confession. This is just one of the ways in which Soulié enters into an irreverent dialogue with the Catholic act of 'confession générale'. Indeed, the acts of telling on the intradiegetic level undermine the model of Catholic confession in almost every possible way.

Valvins and Lucien both write their stories in the third person. At one moment, Noël confronts Valvins about the oddness of this: 'C'est toi dont il s'agit?' (p.162). Thrown by the use of the third person, Noël has to clarify the identification of narrator-Valvins with narrated-Valvins. Later in the novel, Valvins reads Lucien's manuscript, also written in the third person. After dinner has interrupted Valvins's reading, Lucien continues to tell his story, now 'de vive voix', and finally in the first person, but only a tiny percentage of his story remains. The switch into first person only heightens the sense of disconnection between Lucien and the confession he has given Valvins to read: it breaks his narrative, posing the question, why has Lucien chosen at all to *write* his life story in the third person, rather than speak it in the first person?

Valvins's and Lucien's confessions are driven by a distancing effect. The writing of their stories is part of that process — an oddity which, again, Noël highlights: 'si ce récit m'était fait de vive voix [...] cela serait beaucoup plus naturel' (p.162). In these written, third-person narratives, the teller fails to own his story: these life stories are confessions which are not confessions. They are narratives where, like Octave at the end of his confession, or like Lucienne at the start of hers, a fragmentation appears between the speaker and his or her past self. In part, *Confession générale* is about the failure to tell one's own story.

The confessants do not own their experiences in more ways than one. Their failure to use *je* represents a deeper failure to claim responsibility. Valvins may criticise Fabien for confessing without accepting responsibility, but this is exactly what Valvins's and Deville's long, narrative confessions do on a macro-scale. Lucien, talking about the infidelity which caused his wife's suicide, eschews blame:

> Ce fut cet enfant naïf [Lucien] que madame de Favrières condamna à servir ses projets. Il est inutile de dire par quels moyens elle avait amené Lucien à cette passion désordonnée, qui le rendait ingrat et cruel envers celle qui l'avait sauvé. (p.464)

The use of the word 'enfant' echoes Octave's technique of diminishing responsibility. Like Octave too, Lucien manages seemingly to admit to his faults (he is 'ingrat and cruel'), whilst actually diminishing them: the structure puts all the blame on madame de Favrières. Valvins himself is far from blameless; he is the father of an illegitimate son, whom he then abandons, thus committing the same act for which he refuses to forgive his mother. Lucien and Valvins, so driven by the desire to reveal the sins of others, are hardly innocent themselves, yet their acts of confession fail to embrace guilt. Indeed, early on, Noël draws attention to this failure to self-criticise,

confronting his friends about the way they present themselves: 'je m'étonne de ces récits ou votre vie est racontée avec une singulière naïvété de bonne opinion pour vous-mêmes' (p.162). Later, when Noël suggests that the friends should take some responsibility, Fabien dismisses him, casting himself again as a victim: 'Aucun de nous trois [...] est-il coupable de sa naissance' (p.687).

Indeed, in a subversion of Catholic doctrine, rather than blaming themselves, the writers of these texts of revelation are writing to accuse others. The burden of guilt is inverted from the Catholic model, according to which 'surtout on doit se bien garder de donner à connoître, et de nommer la personne qui pourroit avoir quelque part dans notre péché'.[69] One should accuse oneself, not others: indeed, one should not even implicate others. Of course, narrative confession — be it autobiographical like Rousseau's, or fictional — invariably names and implicates others; this was one of the major nineteenth-century criticisms of Rousseau. However, Soulié's text is particularly subversive in this respect. Rather than the implication of others being a by-product of Valvins's or Deville's narratives, it is their own life stories that seem the by-product, and the revelation of other people's secrets their *raison d'être.* They have taken it upon themselves to confess on behalf of others. Far from the purpose of their revelation being to seek absolution for their own wrongdoing, it is to seek revenge for that of others: Lucien asks Noël, 'tu penses donc que nous avons raison de nous venger?' (p.687). Their plan for vengeance is to make public their revelations — thus subverting another aspect of Catholic confessional doctrine. This is why these stories have been written not spoken: by their act of writing, they make permanent their accusations.

[69] *Conduite pour la confession et pour la communion* (1820), p.4.

Thus the 'association' of friends breaks utterly with the confessional framework. Writing about themselves in third person, failing to acknowledge their own guilt, accusing others, planning vengeance through publication — in almost every possible way, these texts, grouped together under the title *Confession générale*, fail to meet the definition of Catholic confession. Fabien simultaneously invokes and corrupts Catholic doctrine by describing the aims of the association as being to 'tenir [...] le serment de *la Confession générale* et de révéler au monde les turpitudes des hypocrites qui le trompent' (p.687). Appropriating the language of Catholicism, the friends invert an act that is about self-accusation in private to one that is about the accusation of others in public. In this, they plan to relinquish the hold that individuals — especially those who are rich and powerful — have over their own secrets.

As argued above,[70] Octave's explicit aim of making his confession public is a reappropriation of the Catholic hold over private confession. Valvins, Fabien and Lucien seek to go one step further. They take it upon themselves to cast into the light the secrets of a whole society; thus undermining the structures of secrecy brought about by a society founded on confession. It is a complete subversion not just of the individual act of confession, but of the entire confessional structure where secrets are kept. Confession, which has been the means of concealment in society, instead becomes the means of revelation.

[70] See p.211 of this thesis.

Noël, as the recipient of the manuscripts, performs the role of a surrogate confessor. Significantly, and specifically using religious discourse, he refuses to offer Fabien, Valvins and Lucien absolution: 'je ne veux juger la conduite d'aucun de vous, je ne veux ni la condamner [...] ni l'absoudre' (p.687). Noël simultaneously refuses them absolution for their behaviour within their stories (he comments, 'c'est vous qui avez été le plus souvent, la cause première de tous vos malheurs', p.687), and for their behaviour in writing those stories down and planning their publication. Far from confession leading to absolution, Noël suggests that it might be for the act of 'confession' itself — so corrupted by them — that they need the absolution, and he refuses to offer it. Indeed, Noël goes further: he rejects the whole framework of revelation: 'ne comptez pas sur moi pour vous aider dans de pareiles révélations. [....] Non, je ne m'associerai jamais à un tel crime' (p.689). The crime — the transgression — becomes the confession itself.

Noël not only refuses his friends' revelations; he also eschews that of his mother. After reading her manuscript, Noël kills himself. His final act before killing himself is to try to burn the manuscript of revelation. By trying to destroy both his mother's confession and himself — who is both the recipient of that confession and the living proof of its contents — he attempts to reverse the revelation. Catholic confession depends upon the principle that revelation heals; it is through revelation that an individual achieves absolution; it is through speaking a sin that it can finally be erased. In *Confession générale,* however, the poetics of revelation are reversed; revelation becomes a destructive force. Noël's mother's *confession générale* does no good to her — she is already dead — and it kills her son.

And yet, in a final twist of irony, whilst this confession destroys, the attempt at its destruction fails. The novel may deny the reader access to Angélique's confession through its ellipsis, but it leaves the reader in little doubt as to its content. The novel's opening sets up the probable conclusion of Angélique's time during the Terror; the closing words of the novel divulge through insinuation, as Valvins asks the doctor who will become the editor of the manuscripts,

> Croyez-vous qu'il y ait quatre hommes capables d'avoir dit à une femme: "ta tête est proscrite [...] Veux-tu que je te sauve? [...] donne-moi le prix de mon silence". Pensez-vous qu'une pauvre fille tremblante [...] ait pu succomber devant une pareille menace?

The doctor replies with 'Non, je ne puis croire à de pareils crimes et à de si bizarres événements'; to which Valvins replies, 'si cela n'est pas ainsi, personne au monde ne pourra écrire le véritable dénouement de cette histoire' (p.699). What starts as an interrogative, and progresses through a negative, is really an affirmation of what happened. The secret Noël dies to conceal is half-revealed, appropriated by the editor, and published. Noël's mother's own voice is erased, her ownership over her story diminished; her own confession suppressed, her secret is nonetheless revealed by others. Like all the other mothers in this text, she has her story written by someone else. Furthermore, the confessions of Valvins and Deville, that are an outrage against confession itself — that unearth other people's secrets, that accuse others whilst excusing themselves, that seek vengeance rather than absolution — are published too.

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(v) A *confession générale* which is not one

In Soulié's novel, like Musset's, confession is the subject matter as well as the form. Here is another novel of confession that constantly performs the act by which it defines itself. At every turn in the novel, confession is dangerous or corrupted. On the metadiegetic level, confession is manipulated, faked, forged, and used to reduce guilt. On the intradiegetic level, it is an act of appropriation and vengeance that destroys rather than absolves or heals. And on the extradiegetic level, all these heinous acts of revelation are finally made public.

Confession générale presents different options for what the 'confession générale' might be. In one model, it is Noël's mother's life story. According to this interpretation, *Confession générale* is a text in which we never hear the 'confession générale': it is a confession concealed from the reader, conveyed only through the words of others, simultaneously denied and appropriated. On another level, the 'confession générale' is the act of writing that Lucien and Valvins undertake in producing the documents about their lives — and yet these documents thoroughly undermine their Catholic model. On a third level, the 'confession générale' is the act of revelation produced by these documents that Lucien, Valvins and Fabien plan to publish (and that the novel does publish); it is the 'confession générale' of a society.[71] This was indeed how the novel was read in the review in the *Revue de*

[71] Soulié is not the only novelist to reappropriate the term 'confession générale' to mean the confession of a group of people, rather than the lifelong confession of an individual. In *La Confession d'un étudiant* (1860), the confessing character Georges comments, 'je tenais à vous faire cette confession générale sur vos amis — sur les miens — sur vous — sur moi — sur nous tous enfin' (Anonymous, *La Confession d'un étudiant: Estaminets, bouges et ruisseaux par un bohème* (Paris: Lucien Marpon, 1860), p.23). Far from confession being a deeply personal, individual act, one man's confession has become representative of that of a whole group.

Paris of the first volumes: 'achevez donc, M. Soulié, achevez notre confession générale'.[72] Yet this other 'confession générale' can itself barely be termed that. Far from being a confession, these documents are rather its opposite, above all in planning to use 'confession' to undermine the structures of secrecy which traditionally confession itself imposes upon society. In the ultimate appearance of an editor figure who has published the documents of Noël's friends, the novel upholds the act of revelation of Fabien, Lucien and Valvins, thus creating a narrative world in which, not just individual confessions, but rather the whole social structure of confession has been inverted and indeed subverted.

Part Three: *Les Confessions d'une femme du siècle* by Madame la baronne M.-R. du Saule (1846)

(i) Palimpsestic confession

After publishing her previous novels, *Daria* (1836) and *Éliane au lac de Côme* (1842), and ten years after Musset published his *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle,* Madame la baronne M.-R. du Saule wrote the most strongly hypertextual of any of the novels of confession considered here: *Les Confessions d'une femme du siècle.* Mme du Saule's novel layers confessions upon confessions, in a narrative which, like the other two texts considered in this chapter, stages multiple acts of confession, whilst simultaneously engaging in a complex and continuous dialogue with Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle.*

[72] 'A.B.', 'Critique littéraire: *Une fin de siècle. Le Bracelet. Confession générale', Revue de Paris,* 1st series, vol. 13 (1840), pp.277-284 (p.284).

The novel opens as a first-person account, written by Agathe, who, upon returning to her childhood village, encounters her friend Alix, whom she has not seen for many years. When she asks Alix about her life in the intervening time, Alix responds by handing her a long, written confession, which takes over the narrative. Like many confessions, it is the story of an outsider. Alix's social status is complicated: growing up as a servant in an aristocratic household, she is befriended by wealthy children, and, as a teenager, becomes the lover of Emmanuel, the son of the household. He leaves her to go to Paris; she follows him, only to discover he has another mistress. Alix enters into an arrangement with the duc *** as both his mistress and his mother's carer. On her deathbed, the duc's mother confesses to Alix her life story. The duc dies too and Alix falls in love with a young man called Octave. Though he loves her in return, she flees him because of guilt concerning her past actions. Finding Emmanuel by chance again, she marries him, thus attempting to regain her honour: like other characters (Noël, Lucien and Valvins in *Confession générale;* Lucienne in *La Confession d'une jeune fille*), she is obsessed with the question of her name. However, Alix soon realises that gaining that name does not solve her identity crisis — she is still isolated: 'Que fait un nom, s'il n'y a pas dans quelque âme chérie un écho qui le répète?' (vol II, p.161). When Alix meets Octave again, she discovers that he sees her marriage as compounding her previous transgression, not erasing it:

> Peut-être [...] aurai-je regretté de ne pas avoir été le premier homme jeté sur votre passage, mais du moins, je n'aurais pu être assez injuste pour vous accuser; aujourd'hui je vous accuse, car vous m'avez sacrifié à des chimères. (vol II, p.189)

Inverting Catholic doctrines of morality, by suggesting that the wrong is in *marrying* her first love, not in sleeping with him, Octave, and the novel, suggest an alternative moral code. Emmanuel dies, but Alix thinks that she has nonetheless lost Octave forever. There Alix's confession ends. After reading her confession, Agathe helps Alix and Octave to be united after all.

Du Saule's novel positions itself as the somewhat salacious sister to Musset's: the preface opens with the words 'arrête-toi ici, jeune fille pudibonde, mon livre n'est pas pour toi; j'aime ton innocence' (vol I, p.1). This line seems to evoke the practice of confessional erotica, growing from Duclos's *Confessions du Comte de **** (1742),[73] which spawned a host of novels representing liberal female sexual behaviour[74] — often depicted by men for men. Whilst du Saule's text alludes to this tradition, in reality it is very different from the previous century's and the Restoration's erotica. Far from revolving around titillating amorous encounters, it is largely structured around a constantly delayed act of consummation which — when it finally occurs — is not depicted. Language stops where the act begins.

The real inspiration of the novel is not erotica, but rather Musset's novel. Du Saule transforms Musset's hypotext into a female-orientated retelling. Du Saule's choice of title brings her novel explicitly into dialogue with Musset's; the presence of a protagonist called Octave only invites further comparison. The similarities go far beyond titles and names. As Brigitte has done in her very first relationship, Alix has given herself, in love and naivety, to a man who leaves her. Like Musset's Brigitte

[73] Charles Duclos, *Confessions du Comte de **** (Amsterdam, 1742).
[74] See p.48 of this thesis.

and Octave, du Saule's Alix and Octave find themselves trying to build a relationship on the detritus of previous relationships. Like *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle, Les Confessions d'une femme du siècle* is the story of how the past can damage (or, fortunately for Alix and Octave, only almost damage) a relationship. At one moment, Alix asks herself, 'pouquoi ne puis-je faire disparaître le passé?' (vol II, p.45) — a question that could equally be asked by Musset's Octave. It is not Alix's past per se that is the problem; for Alix, as for Octave, the real problem is her inability to forget it: a mistake she makes not once, but twice, firstly by confessing it to Octave, and secondly by marrying Emmnauel to try to rectify it. Alix engages in a similar paradox to Octave: wanting to escape the past, she nonetheless immortalises it by writing it. Furthermore, *Les Confessions d'une femme du siècle* is the story of lost potential — of a young man ruined by debauched Paris. In this, whilst du Saule's Octave might share a name with Musset's character, it is really Emmanuel who is his true heir, ruining a relationship with a woman who loves him because he is too debauched to value her. Du Saule's Octave becomes instead a reincarnation of Musset's Smith — a decent man prepared to look beyond the past of the woman he loves. Like Brigitte, Alix ultimately achieves union with this man; like Musset's Octave, Emmanuel ends up ruining himself (and, in du Saule's version, dying). Du Saule thus filters Musset's themes, retelling a similar story from a different perspective. The use of Musset's novel as hypotext is an indication of Musset's enduring influence and of the strongly self-referential nature of this genre.

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(ii) The form(s) of confession

As in *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle, Confession générale* and most other novels of confession, confession in du Saule's novel has been transformed from a religious to a secular act. This text, like other texts of confession, explicitly rejects religious confession in favour of secular confession. As the duc's mother prepares to die, she tells Alix, 'aussi, ne sera-ce point les prêtres qui entoureront mon lit de mort' (vol I, p.237). Instead, she offers up her deathbed *confession générale,* which starts with her birth, to Alix. Similarly, Alix's own confession takes place within a secular framework: the possibility of confessing to a priest does not even occur to her. If Anatole desperately searches for a priest to whom he can confess, his confessional descendants seem to have already decided such a quest is futile. Indeed, Alix's only encounter with priests is negative, where a priest tries to ban her from the duc's deathbed (vol II, p.74).

Through Alix's confession, Du Saule's text emphasises the translation of the oral, Catholic sacrament to the written, secular one. This translation of course exists on a meta-textual level in all novels of confession by their very nature; du Saule specifically highlights the written nature of the confession within the narrative. Alix refuses to *tell* her life story to Agathe, choosing instead to give her life story to read: '"Tu m'as promis l'histoire de ta vie", dit Agathe [...] "je n'ai point oublié", dit madame de Marsay, "je vais t'en remettre la copie"' (vol I, p.61). The refusal to speak is translated into an offer to write, to be *read.* Significantly, Alix has already written her life story before meeting Agathe, or knowing that she would ever meet her again

to share it: Alix is first and foremost writing for herself. Here is another step away from the religious act of confession. Alix has written with no recipient in mind; thus doing away with the confessor figure entirely, and empowering herself with the ownership of her own narrative.

Alix's is the major act of confession in the novel, but confession also operates on several other levels. The opening of the novel in the first person initially leads a reader to assume that it is Agathe who is the *femme du siècle.* However, the narrative then suddenly and inexplicably changes into the third person:

> '"Laisse-moi au moins aller changer de toilette," répondis-je.
> "Non," dit Alix. "Nous serons seules dans ma voiture, et ceux que nous trouverons à la campagne où je veux te mener n'ont point d'yeux pour les vanités de ce monde".
> Après quoi les deux amies prirent place dans la voiture. (vol I, p.51)

The narrative briefly swaps back to Agathe's first person, and then reverts to the third; this switching is another echo (or even parody) of Musset. In Du Saule's novel, its effect is simultaneously to create a sense of perspective, where the events of the novel could be told from many different points of view, and to create a sense of appropriation: the narrative fragmentation creates the impression of an editor, who has pieced together different voices.

Like Soulié's *Confession générale,* Du Saule adds a further level of narrative. Within Alix's confession is another confession: that of the duc's mother. After Alix's confession, the text reverts to the third person, but just before the novel's end, Octave writes Alix his own confession of his time without her: the first-person narrative takes over again with another confession on the intradiegetic level. Du Saule's novel is thus polyphonic, with the narrative voice moving between third

person and four different first-person narratives; like others before it, the novel foregrounds the act from which it takes its name, constantly performing confession, and confessions within confessions. The answer to the question asked in the previous chapter — 'who is confessing?' is plural; *Les Confessions d'une femme du siècle* are also the confessions of other characters.

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(iii) Confession as a trap

As in Musset and Soulié, the acts of confession in *Les Confessions d'une femme du siècle* are not purely a narrative form. Alix's relationship with Octave is structured around moments of confession and missed confession: part of the reason it takes them so long to unite is that acts of confession continually fail them. Their (non) confessions revolve both around confession of their feelings and of past transgressions. The first major moment is Octave's revelation of love. Having told Alix that he will share with her what he thinks of her, he then backs out: 'cela sera pourtant difficile [...] quand le sentiment combat la pensée, on est peu éloquent, et toujours en contradiction avec soi-même' (vol II, pp.41-42). Emotion inhibits thinking, making language difficult and putting the self at odds with itself. Octave's remark expresses the difficulty of putting into words any high-stakes issue or experience: in other words, the difficulty of any act of confession. Octave abandons his attempt at confessing his love in person; like so many characters in these novels, he resorts to writing. Even in writing, he finds himself at odds with his mind: 'Vous m'avez ordonné de dire qui vous étiez, Alix, ce que je pensais de vous, hélas! Le sais-je moi-même?' (vol II, p.52). As Frumence writes in *La Confession d'une jeune fille,* 'que sais-je de moi?', Octave could respond with a similar question: what does he

know about what he thinks? Reflection has not helped, as it is fraught with contradiction: 'quand il m'arrive d'y réfléchir, eh bien! je suis tenté de vous croire d'une nature supérieure, et privilégiée de Dieu! [...] Seriez-vous l'envoyée de Satan? Mais non' (vol II, p.52). Octave's attempt to share his feelings is the site of a conflict that is at once emotional, epistemological and linguistic.

Alix also finds herself caught in a confessional bind, and one that is even harder to resolve than Octave's:

> Pourquoi ne puis-je lui dire surtout que je l'aime?... il y aurait tant de bonheur dans cet aveu! Mais il faudrait lui confesser mes égarements, ou bien le tromper. (vol II, p.45)

Rather than her feelings and thoughts being in conflict, as they are for Octave, she is the victim of two competing confessions: one the 'aveu' that she longs to make, the other the 'confession' that she dreads. The two possible confessions, one of which would be demanded by the other, create a stalemate. So frightened is she of one confession that for a long time she suppresses the other, saying nothing at all. Like Musset's Octave, unable to speak to the person she loves, she enters into a dialogue with herself — one that is fuelled by questions: 'descendrai-je avec lui dans les détours de ma conscience! Lui monterai-je mon passé?' (vol II, p.58). She is obsessed by the question of confessing: at times not wanting to confess, but feeling she must; at others, longing to confess, but not daring to: 'je fus tentée de me confesser à Octave... de lui révéler mes erreurs passées... mais un sentiment de vanité me retint encore' (vol II, p.11).

Alix fears the truth, but feels she should reveal her past; by contrast, Octave instead dismisses confession of past transgressions entirely: 'si tu as quelque chose à te

reprocher, va, ce n'est point toi qu'il faut en accuser, mais seulement le sort'' (vol II, pp.69-70). In this, he undermines the whole imposed structures of Catholic confession with a single two-letter word — 'va'. The Catholic language of self-accusation is rejected, making Alix the victim of events, not responsible for her actions. He asks her to decide about her feelings for him 'sans consulter [son] passé'. He offers her absolution without even knowing for what: she replies, 'merci, merci [...] de vouloir m'ainsi absoudre' (p.70). In this novel of confession, du Saule's Octave suggests that confession of transgression does not matter at all. Indeed, Octave rejects the framework of revelation in favour of ignorance: he simply does not want to know Alix's past. Ultimately, in this complete dismissal of the act of telling, Octave foreshadows MacAllen's attitude towards Lucienne's confession, who dismisses his suffering at her confession with the tiny phrase, 'qu'importe' (vol II, p.315).

If Octave dismisses confession in respect of Alix's past, he longs for it as regards her present feelings, yet their relationship continues to be dominated by a complete failure to communicate. Octave and Alix's conversations start, like those of Brigitte and Octave, to revolve around what is not said. Alix defers revelation: 'Ce n'est pas le moment d'une explication' (vol II, p.66); 'un jour je pourrai tout vous dire' (vol II, p.69), and later, 'demain [...] vous saurez tout [...] je vous écrirai' (vol II, p.97). Octave repeatedly seeks the truth from her: 'ne vous expliquerez-vous donc jamais franchement?' (vol II, p.96); 'Quelle peine n'osez-vous me confier?' (vol II, p.109). Alix explicitly rejects a model of auricular confession: 'il est des aveux qui coûteraient trop à faire en face' (vol II, p.69), suggesting that she, like Octave, will resort to writing not speaking. Ultimately, she does write, confessing in a few brief sentences her previous life and breaking off their relationship: 'Il fallait donc vous

fuir; car je n'aurais pu soutenir votre regard, après les aveux que je vais vous faire' (vol II, p.114). Ironically, given that sacramentally confession is meant to be the point of redemption, Alix feels that instead confession tars her with her past sins. It is the point of no return. It is through this confession that she loses Octave — not because he actually rejects her, but because she expects to lose him after it and so puts hundreds of miles (and a marriage to someone else) between them.

Alix is trapped by confession and by her attitudes towards it. Though less explicitly, the novel explores a similar theme to *La Confession*: how an inherited Catholic understanding of a model of confession or guilt can dominate a new generation, even when the belief systems that underpin that model no longer exist. Though secularised, Alix is still operating within an inherited model of Catholic confession; even though the man she loves tells her that he does not want to know, she feels compelled to confess. Though not a believer, she is still trapped by the confessional framework — a framework that is deeply destructive for her.

Alix's response to her disastrous obsession with confessing and the past is to confess again. This time, she does so in the long 'histoire de [s]a vie' (vol II, p.61) which she writes alone and ultimately gives to Agathe to read. This act of self-definition, read in the context of her previous painful encounters with confession, takes on a new light. Confession becomes a self-generating process, where, far from absolution, the result of confession is the need to confess more. Instead of confession creating closure from the past, one act of confession creates another, meaning that the past — the remembrance of which is shown to be destructive — is constantly relived.

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(iv) Confession as substitution

On another level, Alix's confession is an attempt to get close to Octave again, albeit it only in imagination and memory. The long narrative confession becomes one of substitution: the few short sentences with which Alix explains her past life to Octave are replaced with hundreds of pages of detailed self-analysis, written for herself. For Alix, confession is the child of loss and of desire. Alix is writing to make up for her unconsummated relationship. In this, Alix, resembles other confessing women — including the duc's mother and Antonine in *La Confession d'Antonine* (1864) — who are also confessing their unrealised desire.

At the end of *Les Confessions d'une femme du siècle*, Octave finally discovers that Alix does love him, but she makes him await the next day for consummation. He spends the night writing her a long letter, which details his experience of their time apart, and which is also the expression of his longing for her. Octave's confession too is a substitution for sex: 'Alix, pourquoi ne l'as tu pas dit, Alix, reste avec moi [...] pourquoi en suis-je encore réduit à t'écrire' (vol II, p.296). Octave uses writing to fill up the time before that union: 'en attendant le jour, je vais te faire la narration du temps que j'ai passé sans toi' (vol II, p.296). The confession itself is reduced to nothing — purely a way to pass the time and manage his own desire. As he makes clear, even though she will receive the letter, they are beyond confession now: 'dans quelque instants on te remettra cette lettre, mais je n'attendrai pas sa réponse' (vol II, p.334). The letter ceases to matter for her upon receiving it — she reads some, but puts it aside in order to put on 'un de [s]es plus jolis négligés' (vol II, p.336). She

briefly then picks it up again whilst she is waiting for him, but it is never clear if she finishes it; she is too full of impatient desire for it to matter. Confession becomes redundant. When Octave finally arrives, 'tous deux restèrent sans parole et sans voix [...] dans cette étreinte de l'amour dont l'âme double la volupté' (vol II, p.341). The novel ends with a celebration of sexuality, which simultaneously appropriates the language of religion to describe sex, whilst elevating the union above words: 'Nous ne parlerons pas des premiers jours de leur union, et ne redirons ni leurs transports, ni leurs saintes extases. Voluptés mélangées du ciel et de la terre!' (vol II, p.344). Religious discourse exists to describe sex, not God; confession exists as a (poor) substitute for consummation.

Les Confessions d'une femme du siècle thus echoes previous novels of confession in constantly performing acts of confession. On one level, the novel portrays the dark side of confession: it conveys the potentially destructive consequences of continuing to abide by a framework of transgression and revelation inherited from Catholicism within a secular context. On another level, it offers another model of confession, not orientated towards an ethical code of right and wrong but rather an act of telling that is driven by the need to make up for a loss or for a lack of consummation. In this, *Les Confessions d'une femme du siècle* is not so much about the failure of confession, as about its ultimate redundancy. The moment where Alix puts down Octave's letter of confession in favour of a *négligé* encapsulates the point. When union is about to happen, confession is no longer necessary. The act makes the word futile.

Part Four: Narratives of confession, narratives of confessional failure

(i) Anti-sacramental acts: the novel of confession and Catholic confession

All three novels examined in this chapter contain moments where priests are presented in a negative light, or where Catholic confession is explicitly rejected by characters. The novel of confession grows out of a highly anti-clerical and anti-confession novel: Janin's *La Confession.* Significantly, most writers examined in this thesis write from an anti-Catholic viewpoint, including Musset, Soulié and Zola (who all, in their wider work, are critical of Catholicism),[75] and Sand, who regularly criticises Catholic confession.[76] When novels of confession do depict Catholic confession, they present and emphasise the problems inherent in the Catholic act.

Anatole's Catholic confession in *La Confession* is disastrous, sending him mad. The act of confession is presented as a rape of the mind, where Anatole is (physically and psychologically) subjugated to a priest who forces him to perform a confession he no longer wants to give. The novel suggests, however, that it is not just the brutality

[75] For Musset and blasphemy see p.204, footnote 10 of this thesis; on Soulié and priests see p.226 of this thesis. Zola was not an atheist, but, through a combined influence of Musset and Michelet, he was strongly anticlerical, rejecting the Church and priests, and echoing the arguments of Republicans for whom the Roman Catholic Church was a major enemy in its support of the Bonapartist regime (See Becker, *Les Apprentissages de Zola: du poète romantique au romancier naturaliste, 1840-1867* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1993), p.55). Zola wrote to Baille in 1860, 'ce qui tue la foi, ce sont les prêtres' (Émile Zola, Letter to Jean-Baptiste Baille, 10th August 1860, *Correspondance,* ed. by Bard H. Bakker, Colette Becker and Henri Mitterand, 10 vols (Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal et Éditions de SNRS, 1978-1995) I, p.226). In working for Hachette, as he did in the early 1860s, he was in an anticlerical environment; he read the Republican, anticlerical newspaper *Le Siècle* daily (Pierre Ouvrard, *Zola et le prêtre* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1986), p.144; Becker, 'Introduction Biographique' to the *Correspondance,* I, (pp.29-59), p.45).
[76] See this thesis, pp.160-1.

of the confession that Anatole undergoes that is at fault, but rather the whole enterprise. Early in the novel, Anatole finds that, 'plus il étudiait son âme, et plus il se perdait dans ce triste dédale' (vol I, p.93). This sentence contains within it the kernel of his disastrous confession later: the soul is, like the Piranesi-esque staircase Anatole later encounters,[77] a labyrinth in which one can get lost. Attempting to articulate it is doomed to failure. For Anatole, as for Octave, rather than create wholeness, confession emphasises — even concretises — the divided self. No wonder Anatole loses his mind in the maze of his own mind.

Édouard Ourliac's humorous *La Confession de Nazarille* (1840),[78] described by Balzac as a 'pastiche d'après Scarron',[79] approaches Catholic confession from an entirely different perspective, delighting in showing it going awry. The joke is at the expense of the priest. Nazarille, pirate captain of the Zapatar, is arrested and sentenced to death on the island of Bajador; Don Lopez, the priest who comes to receive his final confession, is also the island's 'grand inquisiteur'.[80] Don Lopez is determined to use Nazarille's confession to find out as much as possible about Nazarille's criminal activities, so as to 'tenir les mystères du Zapatar'[81] — an undermining of one of the central tenets of confession by which a priest cannot act on what he hears. The clever Nazarille outwits him, performing the role of repentant sinner — 'Nazarille prit un air de componction'[82] — whilst faking his confession. Far from revealing his own sins, he bases his confession around what he knows of Don

[77] See Clej, p.108 on De Quincey and Piranesi; on the theme more widely, see Lucius Keller, *Piranèse et les romantiques français* (Paris: J. Corti, 1966).
[78] The text was republished by Michel Lévy in 1865.
[79] Balzac 'Lettres sur la littérature, le théâtre et les arts', *Revue Parisienne,* 24 September 1840, pp.343-366 (p.351).
[80] Édouard Ourliac, *La Confession de Nazarille* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1865), p.11.
[81] Ourliac, p.11.
[82] Ourliac, p.13.

Lopez's own chequered past, ultimately succeeding in making Don Lopez believe that Nazarille is his long-lost son. Nazarille's confession ends with confessor becoming confessant: Don Lopez declares, 'C'est à moi, misérable pécheur, c'est à moi de vous faire ma confession; c'est moi qui suis le coupable et c'est vous que êtes le juste'.[83] Ourliac's work shows Catholic confession both being exploited (by the confessor) and inverted (by the clever confessant), making the Catholic priest appear both corrupt and gullible — and a hypocrite. In this way, Ourliac forms part of the anti-clerical discourse surrounding much writing on confession, exploiting these tropes for comic potential.

The anonymous *Confessions d'un officier français* (1846) portrays confession making the protagonist *less,* rather than more, virtuous. He becomes arrogant and self-satisfied with his virtues:

> J'allais donc à la messe, à confesse, pensant que ces pratiques extérieurs auraient peut-être la vertu de me sanctifier [...] Ce n'était qu'une fausse sécurité qui naissait de mon orgeuil [...] Je devenais un bigot consommé.[84]

Ultimately, it is only through a Protestant priest that he finds grace and morality. In an attack on confession, amongst other Catholic practices, the protagonist concludes that,

> l'Église romaine s'était depuis fort longtemps écartée de la véritable route que Christ lui avait tracée, pour aller se perdre dans un labyrinthe d'observances, qui ne sont d'aucune utilité pour le salut des âmes.[85]

The novel stages a conflict between its form and its message, using the Catholic form of confession to create a narrative that is about the very dangers of that practice.

[83] Ourliac, p.99.
[84] *Confessions d'un officier français,* p.79.
[85] *Confessions d'un officier français,* p.104.

La Confession d'un poète (1859) makes a mockery of the religious act of confession; the serially unfaithful, materialistic Inez — a woman who rejoices in the murder of her former lover and who has not been shown to repent at all — confesses on her deathbed to a priest who describes her as 'une sainte; jamais un cœur plus pur n'a offert en sacrifice à Dieu une résignation aussi sincère' (p.190). The laughable inaccuracy of this description implies that either the priest is a gullible fool (to whom Inez made a far from complete confession), or a man who has been inclined to lenience by her physical, rather than religious, attributes. Confession becomes an absurd rite of passage, devoid of any value.

Those texts that do engage with Catholic confession — in vastly different contexts — all imply that it is not fit for purpose: it corrupts or ruins the confessant, and priests, corrupted already, are not suitable confessors. Indeed, priests generally come out of narratives of confession looking incompetent, negligent, or corrupt. When it does portray Catholic confession, the novel of confession works against it.

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(ii) The sacrament transmogrified: the novel of confession and secular confessions

Other novels of confession follow Musset in secularising confession: in *Confessions d'un bohémien, La Confession de Madeleine, La Confession d'une jeune fille, La Confession de Claude* to name but a few, the confessional framework is secular. Characters are either confessing to the reader, or to other characters in the novel, or to themselves. They too are 'enfants du siècle' and, indeed, 'enfants d'Octave', for whom confession no longer is possible in a religious context. The secularisation

inherent in many novels of confession is encapsulated by the opening lines of Paul Viator's parodic *Confessions d'un commis-voyageur* (1846), which playfully appropriates religious ritual to this non-religious context: 'Meâ culpâ, je commence mes confessions; et j'espère que mes lecteurs daigneront m'accorder la faveur d'une absolution'.[86]

As has been seen in Musset's novel, the lack of religious confession does not necessarily mean religion itself is absent from these novels. Confessants regularly find themselves still operating within a religious framework, but unable to inhabit its practices fully. Séménow's Eugène in *La Confession d'un poète* at various points in his story prays to God to help him; yet, like Octave's, his ultimate confession is secular, not religious. It is to the reader, not God, that he hands over the moral judgement: 'ai-je eu tort ou raison? Le lecteur en jugera' (p.212). Furthermore, the 'Comte de N.' whose letter, describing Eugène's death, finishes the confession, concludes by offering an interpretation of Eugène's story through a quotation from Musset's *La Nuit d'octobre:* 'Sans doute alors la colère des Dieux/ Avait besoin d'une victime'.[87] Bringing Eugène's story into dialogue with the anti-Catholic views of his famous real-life confession-writing predecessor, this quotation rejects a Catholic God altogether by referring to a plural, not singular, deity and by suggesting this force is vengeful, not supportive. In *Confessions d'un bohémien,* Frémy's Jacques's attempt to trust in God — 'je me dis que Dieu et bon et juste, et qu'il ne peut manquer de veiller sur nous' (p.144) — sits unhappily with his regular counter-assertions of being a 'pauvre abandonné' (p.34). His decision to confess in 'ces pages

[86] Paul Viator, *Confessions d'un commis-voyageur* (Paris: Lacrampe, 1846), p.37.
[87] Séménow, p.235.

que j'écris pour moi, rien que pour moi' (p.93) becomes a symptom of his inability to find salvation within a religious framework.

For Zola's Claude, God is an even more distant figure than for Eugène or Jacques. Claude cannot even pray — yet he still finds himself longing for a God he cannot access: 'moi, j'aurais voulu prier. [...] Mais ma bouche ignorait la prière, je tendais les bras avec désespoir, dans le vide, vers le ciel muet' (p.219).[88] Claude lives within the discourse of falling and repentance, [89] and yet he finds himself unable to practise Catholicism. Like his confessional predecessors Anatole and Octave, he has inherited a series of beliefs that he cannot fully espouse. Claude's secular confession is the confession of someone who can neither escape nor inhabit a religious framework. Confession, like Catholicism, is an empty shell; the detritus of a past belief system which characters have had passed down to them but which they can no longer embrace. These characters are doomed to express their unbelief in a framework which used to be one of the ultimate expressions of belief.

Furthermore, as in Musset's, Soulié's and du Saule's novels, the genre more widely depicts acts of confession — on both the intradiegetic and extradiegetic level — that transmogrify the Catholic act, questioning its very principles. Firstly, Catholic

[88] At the very end of the novel, Claude, looking at the dawn, sees God within it: 'tout le ciel s'est enflammé peu à peu [...] il s'est creusé dans la lumière pâle, laissant voir Dieu à cette heure matinale' (p.238). If, on one level, this ending suggests redemption, it is far from a conversion narrative. God exists outside the framework of organised religion, seemingly only visible in nature; in a similar way, Claude imagines Marie's 'être [...] dans la grande nature' (p.234).

[89] Also see Sophie Guermès: 'Le champ lexical de la religion est omniprésent, soit qu'il nourrisse des métaphores ou des clichés […] soit qu'il traduise le projet même de l'auteur, qui est d'exposer "la morale haute et pure de la chute et de la redemption"': *La Religion de Zola: naturalisme et déchrisitanisation* (Paris: Editions Champion, 2003), p.63. ('La morale haute et pure de la chute et de la redemption' is a quotation from 'editor' Zola's 'preface' (p.41)). Also see Becker, 'Zola utilise pour la première fois le mythe du péché originel et de la chute, central dans son œuvre' (*Les Apprentissages de Zola,* p.190).

confession depends upon oral avowal, but in these novels, the model of auricular confession fails. Oral confession, when attempted or demanded, falls apart. In a close echo of the relationship between Octave and Brigitte, *La Confession de Claude* stages the breakdown of communication, centred around a refused confession. Claude desperately desires a confession from his mistress Laurence and his friend Jacques, concerning the affair that he suspects they are having. However, when Claude confronts Laurence about where she has been one night, all she offers is a ridiculous excuse about having coffee with a (female) fruit-seller. After physically attacking her, Claude is consumed by guilt and substitutes her lack of confession for a confession of his own, offering her an outpouring of his soul: 'j'ai fait l'histoire de mon cœur, j'ai fouillé jusqu'au plus profond de mon être pour ne rien cacher' (p.188). But this fails to produce any effect whatsoever: 'Ma voix ne semblait pas arriver jusqu'à elle [...] Sa bouche froide et crispée annonçaient la résolution implacable de ne pas écouter, de ne pas répondre' (p.188). Claude thus moves between confessor and confessant; his attempts at playing either role are met with ridicule or resistance. Later, their communication has broken down to the extent that he longs for words of any kind from her — even if they are a performance rather than the truth: 'Oh Laurence! par pitié, parle-moi [....] dis-moi que tu veux bien me suivre' (p.203). In seeking the truth from Jacques, Claude again shifts between the roles of confessor and confessant: he wants to see Jacques in order to 'l'interroger [...] c'était [...] un honnête homme qui répondrait avec franchise à mes questions' (p.195), thus placing himself in the role of confessor. Yet, when he arrives, Claude rather becomes the confessant, begging Jacques, 'rends-moi le service de fouiller mon être, de l'étaler saignant devant mes yeux' (p.197). Neither does Claude achieve the absolution he seeks for himself, nor does he discover

anything about Jacques's behaviour. Jacques remains as inscrutable as Laurence, confessing nothing. The spoken word does not lead to revelation.

Auricular confession fails the characters of these novels as it seems impossible to speak important words out loud; characters often resort to writing instead of speaking. As Alix gives Agathe her life story to read rather than telling it to her, so Jacques in *Confessons d'un bohémien* writes his diary rather than confessing to his sister.[90] Lucienne tells MacAllen, rejecting auricular confession in favour of written confession: 'J'ai refusé de vous répondre [...] Je vous ai demandé le temps de [....] résumer ma vie presque jour par jour, mot pour mot, heure par heure. *J'ai tout [...] écrit'* (vol II, p.314; italics added).[91] Claude, unable to communicate with Laurence or Jacques in person, writes to his friends instead.

Yet even written confessions are not problem-free: firsly because they make the past (often a source of extreme anxiety) permanent, and secondly because introspection fails on a written level as well as on an oral one. Frémy's Jacques has a less clear understanding of himself when he is alone writing his diary; Sand's Lucienne asks MacAllen to make the moral judgement of her life that she finds herself incapable of making. Eugène in *La Confession d'un poète* finds himself lost when trying to understand himself: at the end of his confession, he still has to ask 'ai-je eu tort ou raison?'.[92] In *La Confession de Claude,* Claude's confession frequently reinforces the fact that he does not know himself: 'j'ignore si j'ai tout au fond de moi quelque

[90] See pp.151-2 of this thesis.
[91] This relationship between written and spoken confession appears in another guise in Rousseau's *Confessions.* In his final pages, Rousseau translates his written act back to a spoken one as he suddenly grounds his confessions in the context of his reading an extract of them out to a select audience (p.774)**.** Also see Jefferson, *Biography and the Question of Literature in France,* p.55.
[92] Séménow, p.212.

sentiment honteux' (p.101), he admits, and later, 'je ne me connais plus moi-même' (p.197). The process of self-scrutiny demanded by the act of confession, far from making the self whole, fragments it further. As he describes his endeavour, Claude linguistically fragments, his pronouns moving from first to third person:

> Je veux ouvrir mon cœur et y lire la vérité, je veux pénétrer jusque dans les dernières profondeurs de mon être pour l'interroger et lui demander compte de lui-même' (p.138).

In an echo of Octave, who ends up writing about himself in the third person, Claude's grammatical structure in this utterance, by its slip into the third person, implies that the more he interrogates himself, the more alien he becomes.

Transforming the act of confession to something written, not spoken, these novels also transform it to something public, not private. Octave's vision of the 'place publique' is echoed in the way that many novels which follow foreground the act of making public within the narrative itself — or, in one case, even within the title as in the anonymous *Les Confessions d'une jolie fille, mises en lumière par un clerc d'avoué* (1845).[93] In Champfleury's *Confessions de Sylvius*, Sylvius's confessions of love become increasingly public, the parodic nature of this text thereby spotlighting a common theme in the genre. First, Sylvius's friend Toby, to whom he has addressed his letter of confession, gives it to his wife to read.[94] Second, Toby reads Sylvius's next confessional letter out loud to friends at a party. Finally, the voice of the narrator himself — which had previously seemed a neutral third person narrator — suddenly gains a specific identity. The narrator is another friend of Sylvius's, who is sharing his story: 'Pardon, Sylvius, si je *trahis l'amitié* en racontant les douces

[93] Paris, Baudouin, 1845.
[94] Champfleury, p.14.

journées que tu passas rue de Vaugirard'.[95] Toby's act of reading Sylvius's confession out loud to a group of friends becomes amplified by this friend/narrator who is publishing Sylvius's confessions for anyone whosoever to read. The sharing of something that was private and secret occurs both on the intradiegetic and the extradiegetic level; Champfleury's text thus performs the act of making public within its own narrative and also draws attention to its own identity as a *published* text.

Louis in Montépin's *Confessions d'un bohême* sees the public nature of confession as a commercial opportunity, selling his own life story. On other occasions, as in *Confessions d'un ouvrier* by Souvestre or *Confessions d'un bohémien* by Frémy, it is an editor figure, not the confessant himself, who chooses to make the story public. In particular, Editor-Zola highlights the exposing (and morally ambiguous) nature of this act of publishing, framing his act as the breaking of private confessional practice:

> Je doutais du droit que je pouvais avoir de montrer un corps et un cœur dans leur nudité; je m'interrogeais, me demandant s'il m'était permis de divulger le secret d'une confession. (p.45)[96]

In other texts, rather than the 'editor' introducing the work, editor figures appear quite unexpectedly towards the end of the novel (Dollfus, Séménow). In Garcia's novel, the epistolary form constantly highlights the transmission of this private confession to someone else. Thus, in prefaces or postscripts, sudden intrusions of the editor's voice within the body of the text, or in their very form, these novels stage within their narratives the process of making public that they themselves

[95] Champfleury, p.46.
[96] This comment is redolent of Musset's translation of De Quincey, where to confess is to 'm'exposer nu aux yeux de tout le monde' (*L'Anglais mangeur d'opium,* pp.vii-viii).

enact by their status as public text. In this, they highlight a paradox that lies at the heart of the genre. The term 'novel of confession' is indeed almost an oxymoron — firstly, because a novel is by definition narrative, whilst Catholic confession demands a rejection of narrative; secondly because confession is defined by Catholic doctrine as a private act, whilst the novel, by its very nature, is public. The novel of confession flourishes particularly at a time when, more widely, the private nature of Catholic confession was being contested by anticlerical writers.[97] In this way, the novel of confession is a revolt against the secret discourse of Catholic confession, breaking open the confessional and bringing a discourse of transgression and *intimité* into the *place publique.*

However, whilst subverting secret confession, these novels often also deny the possibility of full revelation. Confessional discourse runs away with itself, with confessions proliferating within individual novels, yet, at the same time, novels are often silent where they might most be expected to reveal. A playfulness similar to Soulié's in *Confession générale* is at work in *La Confession de Nazarille,* published the same year as the first volumes of Soulié's work. Each day Nazarille invents more twists and turns to his story: at one point, even the gullible Don Lopez realises, 'c'est une autre histoire que vous entamez'.[98] However, neither the reader, not the confessor, receives the *one* confession which might be expected: nothing is said about Nazarille's crimes as a pirate; his (totally fabricated) stories are those of him as a young — and unsuccessful — lover. A comparable frustration is present in the anonymous *La Confession d'un étudiant* (1860), where Georges undermines his

[97] See p.62 of this thesis.
[98] Ourliac, p.93.

friends' — and the novel's readers' — expectations of revelation. He mentions what sounds like an eventful story — that of 'ce premier amour extravagant et insensé, flambant comme un feu de paille'[99] — only to refuse to speak about it, thus teasing both his listeners and his readers with the unsaid:

> il est, mes amis, de belles pécheresses qui ne se confessent qu'à moitié: permettez-moi d'user aussi de cette discrétion. — Le passé a des fantômes dont il faut couvrir la face d'un voile noir pour qu'on ne les voie plus ricaner quand ils se promènent dans son cimetière.[100]

Specifically invoking the Catholic sacrament of penance through his discourse ('pécheresse', 'confession'), Georges simultaneously misrepresents it by his claim that confession is often partial, and some things are better unsaid.

There is thus a further tension at work in the novel of confession. On the one hand, the genre revels in its act of making public the intimate, rejecting private confession and instead making these confessions as public as they possibly could be. On the other hand, where the reader, who has become a surrogate confessor, might most expect certainty, the discourse of revelation disintegrates: the narrative omits the most central revelation through ellipses (Angélique's confession in *Confession générale* or Antonine's confession of her encounter with Georges in *La Confession d'Antonine*); or because a character simply chooses not to speak on a subject (Georges's love affair in *La Confession d'un étudiant;* Nazarille's criminal career in *La Confession de Nazarille*); or only talks vaguely, using language to conceal rather than reveal (Octave on his debauchery); or because the character finds him/herself and his/her own past impervious to analysis (as Lucienne does both on the subject of her abduction and her past feelings); or because communication itself completely

[99] *La Confession d'un étudiant,* p.77.
[100] *La Confession d'un étudiant,* p.77.

breaks down (Jacques as he descends into madness in *Confessions d'un bohémien*). These novels thus both simultaneously engage in an act of mass revelation and publication and yet, paradoxically, remain in some respects impenetrable, denying, on some level, the act of revelation on which they depend.

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(iii) The breaking of the *acte de parole*

The first two chapters of this thesis argued that this genre of novel uses confession as a medium not solely for exploring transgression, but also for exploring selfhood. This chapter has argued that, above all, the focus of these novels is on the act of confession itself; the chapter is entitled 'The Confession(s)', because the novels explored by this thesis are about plural, rather than singular, confessions. Novels of confession continually perform the act of confession.

The novel of confession appropriates and transforms the Catholic act of confession: making it secular, rather than religious, narrative rather than merely a list of sins, public rather than private, written rather than spoken, memorialised rather than erased. Of course, this translation of medium is intrinsic to the form of the novel of confession, but these novels go further, continually highlighting, even flaunting, the nature of this shift — be that by drawing attention to the repeated use of the written word instead of the spoken word, by creating narratives riddled with excuses, by drawing attention to the public nature of the act of publication. As such, these novels are in an irreverent dialogue with the Catholic act on which they draw, both invoking it and subverting it.

By the way in which they problematise the acts of confession they depict, these novels — some more explicitly and more anticlerically than others — become one of the sites of the century's deep concerns with Catholic confession and its failings. For confession to 'succeed' according to a Catholic model, a number of things need to happen. The confessant needs a confessor. The confessant must be able to analyse where he or she has sinned, and he or she must be able then to express that verbally (and orally). The confession must be complete and the sins must be clearly articulated. The confessant must confess in good faith, not making excuses or blaming someone else. And the confessant must achieve absolution at the end, thus being able to move on from his or her sin and be reconciled to himself or herself and to God. By contrast, the novel of confession shows confessions which fail to fulfil every one of these requirements — sometimes all at once, sometimes one at a time. The model of confession required by Catholicism simply does not work — most fundamentally of all, because, even if there is good faith, the demands of confession (particularly those of self-analysis and self-articulation) seem beyond the reach of confessants.

As this chapter has shown, these novels thus tend to enact confession in order to interrogate it, problematise it, subvert it, undermine it, or dismiss it. Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* suggests the multiple failures of confession. When introspection breaks down, there is no hope of an individual being able to put feelings into words; indeed, the process of confession, far from healing the self, fragments it. In Soulié's novel, it is the whole structure of a society of confession that is challenged: confession is appropriated to do everything it should not do, in order to undermine a social structure founded upon the power of secrecy. In du Saule's

novel, confession is initially presented as a dangerous force which traps an individual through unhealthy — and outdated — obsession with guilt; by the end, it is completely rejected — seen as utterly redundant.

In the genre more widely, almost uniformly, the acts of confession in these novels (be they intradiegetic or extradiegetic) fail to achieve what the confessant wanted them to achieve: Anatole finds no absolution; Jacques feels distanced from his past self and ends up going mad in the process of writing; Antonine's confession affords her no solace from her suffering (she still dies of a broken heart); Lucienne's, Eugène's and Claude's do not help them understand themselves. As characters confess, self-knowledge and language both break down.

By showing both intradiegetic and extradiegetic acts of confession that fail in multiple ways, these novels suggest that confession itself in any form is intrinsically — linguistically, ethically, epistemologically — flawed. This is turn has implications for non-religious confession: these fictional descendants of Rousseau find themselves unable to examine their lives or express themselves with the clarity of their predecessors. It is not only religious confession which is no longer possible for these *enfants du dix-neuvième siècle* — it is any act of confession at all.

Conclusion

(i) 1865: A pivotal year

In 1865, some thirty years after Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle,* George Sand published one of her last novels, *La Confession d'une jeune fille,* and Zola his first, *La Confession de Claude.* 1865 is a year which looks both backwards and forwards — backwards in Sand's text, which in some ways offers a culmination of the novel of confession, with its intense psychological depth, ongoing quest for a literal and emotional identity, and ultimate questioning of the discourse and act of confession. Backwards too in Zola's exploitation of the generic traits of confession in his own novel, and especially in terms of his relationship to Musset, whom he repeatedly echoes in the narrative and discourse of his novel. Yet at the same time, forwards too, as *La Confession de Claude* contains the germs of the literary style Zola would go on to develop. Two years later, he would publish *Thérèse Raquin* (1867).[1]

1865 is the year when two of the ultimately most influential writers of the nineteenth century (one towards the end of her career, one at the very start of his) both turned to confession. Sand, who had inspired Musset's novel of confession, now wrote her own; Zola, so inspired by Musset's poetry,[2] now turned in his first novel to the genre of Musset's own first novel. Yet this year which might seem the pinnacle of

[1] François-Marie Mourad, 'Introduction', to Émile Zola, *La Confession de Claude,* ed. by Mourad (Paris: Les Livres de poche, 2013), pp.7-42 (p.41).
[2] In one letter to Paul Cézanne, 25 June 1860, Zola writes of his attempts at poetry, 'on me dira peut-être que j'imite Musset. À cela je répondrais que ce poète est mon poète favori, que je lis chaque jour quelques pages de ses œuvres, et qu'il n'est pas étonnant alors si, même sans le vouloir, je prends sa forme et quelques-unes de ses idées' (*Correspondance,* ed. by Bard H. Bakker, Colette Becker and Henri Mitterand, 10 vols (Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal et Éditions de SNRS, 1978-1995), I (1978), p.194).

the novel of confession, simultaneously represents the start of its demise: Zola's novel is an impossible hybrid, which sits uneasily within its own genre.

This conclusion will start by exploring how Zola's novel, examined elsewhere in the thesis for the ways in which it is emblematic of the genre of confession, is also indicative of a new focus, style and discourse, which Zola would go on to make enormously successful in his later work. It will argue that *La Confession de Claude* is symptomatic of the novel of confession reaching a turning point in its life cycle, after which Zola's work would move away from the tropes associated with confession, whilst the novel of confession itself would develop in a different direction. As the next section of the conclusion will show, the novel of confession in the later years of the century tended to operate in a more commercial and popular context. Finally, this chapter — and thesis — will close with a consideration of the defining traits, scope, development and significance of the novel of confession in the early-to-mid-nineteenth century.

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(ii) Zola's uneasy hybrid

In *La Confession de Claude*'s depiction of distressed and fragmented selfhood; in its staging of the breakdown of the discourse of revelation; in its portrayal of a failure that is at once sexual, epistemological and, indeed, confessional, the novel embodies many of the central generic traits discussed in this thesis. The thematic links to Musset, in particular, are potent. Claude, like Musset's Octave, falls prey to a tempter: in Zola's text, Musset's Mephistophelian Desgenais gives way to Pâquerette, 'une horrible vieille' (p.61), who, like her male predecessor, leads a

naïve protagonist into sexual misdemeanours. Claude, like Octave, laments the loss of his sexual innocence. Like Octave and Brigitte, Claude and Laurence are sucked into a relationship haunted by what is unsaid, where a male character demands a confession and a female character refuses it. Whilst Octave, despairing at the silence between them, almost kills a sleeping Brigitte, Claude almost strangles Laurence in bed because she will not tell him the truth: 'J'ai pris le cou entre mes doigts crispés [...] J'ai secoué violemment Laurence, serrant de toutes mes forces' (p.187). This moment is of course also strongly reminiscent of the moment when Anatole does strangle a sleeping Anna: 'ses deux mains robustes entouraient le cou de la malheureuse fille, avec la fureur d'un homme qui se noie et qui s'attache à un roseau' (*La Confession,* vol I, p.78). The novel of confession has come full circle. As Octave so frequently does to Brigitte, Claude even suggests to Laurence that they should leave together — 'Écoute, nous partirons demain pour la Provence' (p.203) — but they do not. Like Octave, Claude finds out that his mistress is unfaithful to him with a childhood friend of his. Like Octave, he ends up alone. The order of events is different to Musset's novel, but the major plot points are there, reconfigured into this different framework.

The echoes of Musset are present linguistically as well as thematically.[3] Throughout, Claude is compared to an 'enfant', by himself and by others. Zola frames him as such in the opening sentence of the preface, describing him as a 'misérable enfant' (p.45); Claude writes in a letter to his friends, 'nous sommes de grands enfants' (p.92); later, Claude comments, 'je ne sais quel triste enfant je suis' (p.168); Jacques

[3] As well as referencing *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle,* Zola also directly references Musset's poetry: 'Lorsque, dans *les nuits de mai*, j'évoquerai la fiancée, je verrai se lever une fille nue et cynique' (p.67, italics added).

describes him as 'l'enfant, le pauvre enfant' (p.197), and a 'pauvre grand enfant' (p.199); Claude says of himself 'je ne suis qu'un enfant qui a souffert' (p.234) and 'je n'étais qu'un enfant faible et nu' (p.237). Like Octave, who in the very first chapter writes of himself as 'malade' and needing to '[se] guéri[r]' (p.19), Claude says to Jacques, 'je suis malade et je viens me guérir' (p.196). Zola's work also echoes Musset's in an image of dissection. Octave likens himself to a gangrene victim being cut up in an amphitheatre, covered with a white cloth; Claude imagines Laurence in not so different a situation:

> Elle mourrait une nuit, sur le trottoir, soûle et éreintée [...] le corps irait à l'amphithéâtre, et là [...] on le couperait en quatre pour savoir ce qu'il contenait d'amer et de nauséabond [....] je voyais Laurence [...] étendue toute raide sur la pierre blanche. (p.193)

At the same time, Zola's novel differs significantly in tone from the novels of confession which precede it. As much as it is a novel about selfhood, sex, and silenced communication, it is also a text which is driven by its portrayal of contemporary social structures, of Parisian poverty, of sexual hypocrisy. In an eviscerating review, Barbey d'Aurevilly remarks on how Zola's novel includes 'les détails les plus dégoûtants qu'une plume réaliste ait écrits encore'.[4] The novel of confession, which had thus far been associated primarily with *intimité* and sentiment, is now the vehicle of 'une plume réaliste'.

Alongside Musset's influence on *La Confession de Claude* sits another, more recent, inspiration: *Germinie Lacerteux,* published by the Goncourt brothers the previous year, in 1864. In the preface, the Goncourts advocate a style of literature which

[4] Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly, 'À Monsieur Grégory Ganesco, directeur du *Nain jaune', Nain jaune,* 30 December 1865, article reprinted in Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Polémiques d'hier* (Paris: Albert Savine, 1889), pp.23-36 (p.31).

imposes on itself 'les devoirs de la science', which seeks to 'contrarier [les] habitudes [du public] et nuire à son hygiène'[5] and to reveal the struggles of 'les basses classes'.[6] It is not that the study of human psychology becomes unimportant — indeed, it is central to the Goncourts' mission — but rather that the analysis of human thought and behaviour is linked inextricably to Goncourt's view of the novel as a form of 'enquête sociale', of 'Histoire morale contemporaine'.[7] 'La recherche psychologique' of the Goncourts is far from the distressed selfhood of an Octave.

Zola, an admirer of the Goncourts, was one of the few critics to praise *Germinie Lacerteux.*[8] Zola had already started *La Confession de Claude* when he read and reviewed *Germinie Lacerteux,* but his own novel was lying in a drawer incomplete.[9] It would be speculation to try to identify to what extent he saw validation of his own work in that of the Goncourt brothers, and to what extent their work shaped and shifted his new draft of the novel: it is probably a mixture of both. What is certainly quantifiable, however, is that there are significant shared themes and approaches between the aspects of *Germinie Lacerteux* that Zola commends in his review, and his own work in *La Confession de Claude.* Zola's review particularly highlights the way in which *Germinie Lacerteux* portrays the impact of an environment on an individual,[10] whilst defending the Goncourt's choice to depict the love affairs of the

[5] Jules and Edmond de Goncourt, 'Preface', *Germinie Lacerteux,* p.55.
[6]Jules and Edmond de Goncourt, 'Preface', *Germinie Lacerteux,* p.55.
[7] Jules and Edmond de Goncourt, 'Preface', *Germinie Lacerteux,* p.56.
[8] Zola, '*Germinie Lacerteux* de MM. Edmond et Jules Goncourt'*, Le Salut Public: Journal de Lyon,* 24 February 1865, p.3.
[9] He had first conceived *La Confession de Claude* at the start of 1861, and had largely written it in 1862-1863, before abandoning it to 'dormi[r] tranquillement au fond d'un tiroir'; then taking it up again, finishing it and publishing it in 1865. (See letter to Antony Valabrègue, 6 February 1865, *Correspondance*, I, p.405).
[10] 'Imaginez une créature faite de passion et de tendresse [..] Placez cette femme frémissante et forte dans un milieu grossier qui blessera toutes ses délicatesses [...] et qui, peu à peu, tuera son âme en

poor, accusing society of hypocrisy for being more comfortable with stories of bourgeois love affairs than of those of the 'ruisseau'.[11] Indeed, Zola's review stakes his claim to the value of 'réalisme' — the same 'réalisme' which Barbey d'Aurevilly would attack so vociferously in Zola's own novel. As Zola writes:

> Ce que l'on se plaît encore à appeler réalisme, l'étude patiente de la réalité, l'ensemble obtenu par l'observation des détails, a produit des œuvres si remarquables dans ces derniers temps [...] L'artiste a le droit de fouiller en pleine nature humaine, de ne rien voiler du cadavre humain.[12]

Furthermore, the language that Zola uses in his review of the Goncourt brothers' novel is shared with the preface he writes to *La Confession de Claude.* In his review, Zola describes *Germinie Lacerteux* as containing 'des pages d'une vérité effrayante[...] [des] crudités', which his review will reveal in all their 'nudité'; [13] his own novel is 'nue et vraie jusqu'à la crudité' (p.46).[14] In his review, Zola writes of the 'plaies saignantes que [l'œuvre] découvre hardiment';[15] in his preface, he writes that Claude 'nous montre ses plaies' (p.47) and calls Claude's letters 'l'œuvre de sang [...] d'un pauvre âme' (p.45). In his review, Zola writes of the Goncourt brothers' treatment of Germinie that 'ils ont tout à la fois étudié la maladie de son corps et celle de son cœur'; in his preface, he says that Claude's letters 'montrent un corps et un cœur dans leur nudité' (p.45). Zola writes in his review of *Germinie Lacerteux* that, 'le drame est terrible[...] il a l'intérêt puissant d'un problème

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l'étouffant sous les ardeurs du corps et l'exaltation des sens'(Émile Zola, '*Germinie Lacerteux* de MM. Edmond et Jules Goncourt', *Le Salut Public: Journal de Lyon,* 24 February 1865, p.3).

[11] 'Les timides vont opposer madame Bovary à Germinie Lacerteux. Une femme mariée, une femme de médecin, passe encore ; mais une domestique, une vieille fille de quarante ans, cela ne se peut souffrir. Puis les amours des héros de M. Flaubert sont encore des amours élégantes et raffinées, tandis que celles des personnages de MM. de Goncourt se traînent dans le ruisseau. Selon nos temps hypocrites, on peut peindre l'un, on ne saurait s'occuper de l'autre' (Zola, '*Germinie Lacerteux* de MM. Edmond et Jules de Goncourt', p.3).

[12] Zola, '*Germinie Lacerteux* de MM. Edmond et Jules Goncourt', p.3.

[13] Zola, '*Germinie Lacerteux* de MM. Edmond et Jules Goncourt', p.3.

[14] Zola is also echoing the language of the Goncourt brothers themselves in their preface, where they declare 'ceci est un roman vrai' (Paris: Flammarion, 1990), p.55.

[15] Zola, '*Germinie Lacerteux* de MM. Edmond et Jules Goncourt', p.3.

physiologique et psychologique'; in the *Prière d'insérer* which he wrote for *La Confession de Claude,* Zola describes his own novel, too, as 'une étude psychologique et physiologique [....] le livre est [un] terrible récit'.[16] Such examples illustrate that Zola describes — and markets — his own novel in the same terms that he used for the Goncourts'. They suggest not just the fact that Zola saw a continuity between the brothers' work and his own, but also that he frames it similarly for the public.

Zola's novel looks outwards as much as it looks inwards. From the very opening pages, it, like *Germinie Lacerteux,* considers the impact of a physical environment on the individual. In his first letter, Claude describes his living arrangements in the bleakest terms: 'Mon grenier [est] tout au haut d'un escalier humide, [...] les murs [...] font de la chambre une sorte de corridor qui s'allonge en forme de bière' (p.49). Claude closes his first letter with the sense that his environment dooms him from the start: 'cette fenêtre me refuse le soleil, ce plancher est humide, cette mansarde est déserte. Je ne puis aimer, je ne puis travailler ici' (p.53). *Mansarde, grenier* — we are in an impoverished *milieu,* and a very different Paris from Octave's world of debauched dinners and glittering parties. The majority of other confessing characters are living in well-off circumstances: Anatole, Octave, Noël, Alix, Antonine, Lucienne — either through family or marriage they are all provided for. They may be outcasts, socially, but they are not financially. Their needs are emotional and psychological, not material. The main exceptions to this are the other novels which relate to bohemian experiences (*Confessions d'un bohême, Confessions d'un bohémien, La Confession d'un étudiant*), but there are central differences to Claude's

[16] Zola, 'Prière d'insérer de *La Confession de Claude',* reproduced in Mourad's edition, pp.268-269 (p.268).

situation: Jacques, in Frémy's novel, is professionally established but chooses to give it up for a bohemian life; Louis, in Montépin's novel, lives a wealthy life for the duration of the novel, paid for by the Baron; Georges, in *La Confession d'un étudiant,* is hardly on the poverty line, still merrily drinking and smoking with his friends. These characters hardly wrestle with the poverty that Claude is fighting or encounter the brutal world of child prostitution and starvation that Claude sees through the experiences of Marie and Laurence: 'la bohème vraie'[17] indeed.

The discourse of Zola's novel is radically different from the linguistic fields of his confessional predecessors: his language is explicit, anatomical. Indeed, the *Procureur général* highlighted in particular how, in the novel, 'la chasteté du langage souvent [est] offensée par la crudité des images et le cynicisme du détail'.[18] The first time Claude meets Laurence, she has '[la] poitrine brutalement découverte' (p.65); the last time he sees her, she is 'à moitié vêtu[e]' (p.227), interrupted in the middle of her encounter with Jacques. Indeed, in the novel, references to nudity (both literal and metaphorical) abound. It is a novel of 'chair' (p.172), of bodily fluids — sexual fluids, 'sang et larmes' (p.45) — and of the air that comes from Marie's dying lungs, as Claude painstakingly describes her final breaths.

In *La Confession de Claude,* the portrayal of the emotional life of its protagonist exists alongside the brutal depiction of impoverished urban living. One moment in particular clearly indicates the co-existence of the interior and exterior worlds. Claude's interior monologue in which he obsesses over trying to understand both

[17] Zola, letter to Édouard Fournier, 20 November 1865, *Correspondance,* I, pp.422-423 (p.422).
[18] 'Rapport du procureur général sur *La Confession de Claude',* reproduced in Mourad's edition of the novel, pp.273-275.

Laurence and himself is punctuated by the sound of Marie dying. The sounds of Laurence's heart are both an emotional and anatomical presence; Laurence's signs of life are brutally contrasted with Marie's sounds of death. Claude is not allowed by his author to descend solely into the psychological space of the earlier novel of confession; reality interrupts.

> Marie râlait, le cœur de Laurence battait presque dans ma tête. À ce double bruit, qui parfois se confondait en un seul, j'ai songé à la vie [...] J'entendais le râle de Marie, plus saccadé. J'écoutais le cœur de Laurence et je ne savais pas en comprendre le langage [...] Je suis resté sur le sein de Laurence, me croyant au fond d'un grand trou noir, humide et désert. Marie râlait. (p.194)

The 'double bruit' is indicative of the dual outlook of the novel: its studies of the human heart do not exist in a vacuum but rather are penetrated by the grim realities which indeed shape that emotional world. Subjectivity does not exist alone, but is rather formed — and, in some cases, ruined — by objective realities.

La Confession de Claude is an uneasy hybrid, demonstrating certain impossibilities for Zola and for the genre. The confessional form was not one which married well with the 'enquête sociale'[19] that Zola, following the Goncourts, was seeking thematically. For Musset, the novel is about writing about the self rather than treating external actions; *La Confession de Claude* suggests almost the opposite development three decades later: a need for the novel to become more outward-facing again. *La Confession de Claude* is a sort of leave-taking by Zola of the confessional discourse; he would never write fiction in the first-person again. Zola's novel thus stands Janus-faced, looking back to the novel of confession and forwards to a newly-oriented, more socially-minded field of literature that he would make popular in the coming years. It is both an end and a beginning, published at a time of

[19] Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, 'Preface', *Germinie Lacerteux,* p.56.

change in the 1860s, when literary tastes were shifting and where the focus of sentiment and selfhood which had triumphed in the previous three decades was losing some of its dominance. [20]

Indeed, *La Confession de Claude* was not a commercial success;[21] nor was it a critical one.[22] Many of the criticisms were directed at the novel's immorality, but in this commercial and critical failure, it is possible perhaps also to see the reflection of the implicitly problematic task that Zola had set himself, in trying to create a compound from two such different elements. *La Confession de Claude* is a novel of confession which gestures beyond and outside confession; it a novel which pulls away from its genre; it is a novel which attempts an impossible translation of the novel of confession, and which, by this very impossibility, suggests the ending of a chapter in the story of the novel of confession.

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(iii) Novels of confession after 1865

Of course, any ending is a false ending. As Genette says, 'il est facile d'observer la naissance d'un genre ; plus risqué [...] d'en diagnostiquer la mort'.[23] Indeed, texts which explore or exploit confession continue to flourish in different forms for the

[20] See Becker, *Les Apprentissages de Zola,* p.129: 'Les années 60 furent, sur tous les plans, politique, économique, religieux, artistique, une période de recherché et de mutation. Sur le plan esthétique [...] on aspire à plus de réalisme'. It is noteworthy, also, that Fromentin's *Dominique,* the last of the novels now commonly grouped by scholarship as 'romans personnels' was published in 1862.
[21] The year after its publication, Zola received a letter from his editor, stating, 'la vente de votre dernier volume n'atteint pas encore 600 exemplaires'. Letter from Lacroix and Verboeckhoven, 3 May 1866, quoted in *Correspondance*, I, p.436, n.3. *La Confession de Claude* was republished in 1880, and again in 1886 (Mourad, p.281).
[22] In a letter to Valabrègue, Zola commented, 'Il a été aussi mal accueilli que mes *Contes* avaient été bien reçus [...] J'ai récolté des coups de férule à droite et à gauche, et me voilà perdu dans l'esprit des gens de bien' (Émile Zola, letter to Antony Valabrègue, 8 January 1866, *Correspondance,* I, p.434).
[23] Genette*, Palimpsestes,* p.190.

rest of the nineteenth century, into the twentieth century, and indeed are still being published in the twenty-first.[24] In the late nineteenth century, confession continued to be explored in other forms beside the novel: Arsène Houssaye published his autobiographical *Les Confessions, souvenirs d'un demi-siècle*, *1830-1880* (1885-1891), whilst confession furnished inspiration for five Maupassant short stories (1882-4),[25] and one short story by a young Marcel Proust (1896).[26]

As regards the novel of confession specifically, the *marché de la confession* does not go away; indeed, writers continue to exploit it with financial success. However, at a time when the divide between the 'serious' and 'popular' novel was widening,[27] and in the decades when Zola was enormously influential in redefining the scope of his own writing and of the 'roman experimental' to that of a 'littérature déterminée par

[24] See for instance, Mélanie Baranger's *La Confession d'une ronde* (Montluçon: Rebelle, 2018).
[25] 'Confessions d'une femme' in 1882, 'La Confession de Théodule Sabot' in 1883, and then three further stories just entitled 'La Confession' between 1883 and 1884. The stories explore confession in different situations (religious, secular, on a death-bed, from an unnamed woman writing to an unnamed friend). Amongst these stories are instances of 'bad' or 'failed' confessions. In 'La Confession de Théodule Sabot', confession becomes a transaction and part of powerplay, where a priest makes a carpenter confess to him before giving him work on the church ('La Confession de Théodule Sabot', *Le Gil Blas,* 9 October 1883, pp.1-2); in 'La Confession' (August 1884), a husband confesses an infidelity to his wife, seeking absolution, only to find that her response is to laugh at him in a 'délire de gaieté' which suggests, though does she not confess, her own infidelity ('La Confession', *Le Gil Blas,* 12 August 1884, p.1).
[26] Marcel Proust's 'La Confession d'une jeune fille' was published in *Les Plaisirs et Les Jours* (1896). In it, a young woman, mortally injured from a suicide attempt, recounts how her amorous transgressions inadvertently led to her mother's death. Here again, the confessant is isolated, suicidal — indeed, she has only up to a week to live before she dies from her injuries. The story draws on other common confessional themes: an encounter with the self in a mirror has been horrifying and fragmented her sense of self. Catching sight of her face in the mirror as she is engaged with an amorous embrace with a man who is not her fiancé just before her wedding, she sees that 'toute cette vague angoisse de mon âme n'était pas peinte sur ma figure, mais toute elle respirait, des yeux brillants aux joues enflammées et à la bouche offerte, une joie sensuelle, stupide et brutale' (Marcel Proust, 'La Confession d'une jeune fille', *Les Plaisirs et Les Jours* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1896), pp.142-157 (p.156)). Her inner anguish at her guilt is not visible on her face; she cannot recognise emotions she thinks she is feeling in the face she sees.
[27] See David Coward, 'By 1870, the gap between serious fiction and popular novels (available in increasingly cheap forms) had widened dramatically' ('Popular Fiction in the nineteenth century', *The Cambridge Companion to the French novel,* ed. by Tim Unwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) pp.73-93 (p.84)).

la science',[28] the novel of confession tends instead to enter a mass-market, sensationalist sphere. The genre's commercial potential, previously exploited by the likes of Montépin and Soulié, comes to dominate; these later novels of confession are certainly, as Menche de Loisne snobbishly observed about Soulié's fiction, 'lu par le peuple'.[29] Eugène Moret wrote no fewer than four historical confessional novels between the years 1873 and 1874, based on the stories of famous courtesans or mistresses: *Confessions* of Ninon de Lenclos, Mme de Pompadour, the Comtesse du Barry and Mlle de la Vallière.[30] Novels of confession spoke to a mass market: another Moret novel, *Confession d'une jolie femme* (1867), had five editions within two years;[31] Marcel Prévost's *La Confession d'un amant* (1891), had ten editions within one year; Marie Anne de Bovet's *Confessions d'une fille de trente ans* (1895) had five editions in one year.[32] As the novel of confession had an increasingly broad readership, in many cases, confession became a tool for relaying salacious stories; problems with selfhood became the material for melodrama rather than for existential questioning. This section will briefly consider how the novel of confession in the later part of the century exploited the tropes of previous novels of confession, before examining this titillating shift in mode.

De Quincey remains popular in the period; Musset's *L'Anglais Mangeur d'opium* was republished in 1878; the first full translation of De Quincey, by Descreux, was published in 1890, and republished in 1903. De Quincey's effect endures into the

[28] Émile Zola, *Le Roman experimental,* 5th edn (Paris: Charpentier, 1881), p.1.
[29] Menche de Loisne, pp.275.
[30] Also see Stead, p.382.
[31] Stead, p.382.
[32] Stead, p.384.

twentieth century, influencing Tita Legrand's *Confessions d'une Opiomane* (1925).[33] Significantly, the French-English crossover seen with De Quincey continued in another work: *Confessions of a Young Man* by George Moore, was popular in France, translated and published first in *La Revue Indépendante* in 1888, and then in book form in 1889.[34]

The model of Rousseau continues to have a strong presence in the novels of confession of the later part of the century. Tullia in Montépin's *Les Confessions de Tullia* (1873) comments, 'Rousseau, jadis, écrivait ses *Confessions* — Pourquoi n'écrirais-je pas les miennes?'.[35] The anonymous author of *Confessions d'une repentie* (1887) ironically reworks Rousseau in the novel's opening, 'J'entreprends une tâche sans précédents dans l'histoire des lettres'.[36] In Amédée Pigeon's *La Confession de Madame de Weyre* (1886), the eponymous confessant opens her confesson with 'J'ai lu Rousseau et Montaigne [...] Je serai aussi franche qu'eux'.[37]

Above all, Musset and the *enfant du siècle* continue to dominate the genre, more or less explicitly. Michel Corday's *La Confession d'un enfant du siège* (1897) parodies Musset in more than just its title: the confessant spends the opening of his confession declaring that he is one of a generation who has been irrevocably marked by the era in which he was born — in his case, the 'catastrophe' of the 1870 Siege of Paris.[38] That same year, Henry Kistemaeckers published his *La Confession d'un autre enfant du siècle, roman sardonique.* Other echoes are subtler. Mme de Weyre finds

[33] Stead, p.369.
[34] Stead, p.373-4.
[35] Xavier de Montépin, *Les Confessions de Tullia* (Paris: Sartorius, 1875), p.2.
[36] *Confessions d'une repentie, écrites par elle-même* (Paris, 1887), p.ii.
[37] Amédée Pigeon, *La Confession de Madame de Weyre* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1886), p.1.
[38] Michel Corday, *Confession d'un enfant du siège* (Paris: Flammarion, 1897), p.4.

herself with a lover who ressembles Musset's Octave: who is 'très jeune mais si vieux d'esprit',[39] having a 'véritable maladie' in the form of his 'désespérance'[40] (this character is also redolent of Musset himself: he is an 'enfant et [...] poète').[41] In a moment that echoes both St Augustine and Octave, Mme de Weyre attempts to find guidance by opening a page of her prayer book at random.[42] In Prévost's *La Confession d'un amant,* there is both an echo and inversion of Musset's story: like Octave, a disastrous first relationship (this time with older woman, Marie-Thérèse) haunts the confessant and dashes his hopes for a relationship with a woman (his own age) whom he admires and who is a kindred spirit (Valentine); like Octave, he regularly describes himself as an 'enfant'.[43]

Novels continue to be suspicious of priests and of religious confessions where they appear. The anonymous, highly anti-Catholic, *Les Confessions d'un prêtre par lui-même* (1870) is a text which centres on one of the chief themes of the anticlerical camp — namely that priests have carnal desires too, and that leaving them alone with women in confession is irresponsible: the priest thinks with fear,

> Je serai forcément en contact avec des femmes jeunes, séduisantes, passionnées peut-être [...] je [...] les verrai [...] à face, dans l'intimité du confessionnal. Comment résister alors à l'attraction d'un sexe vers l'autre?[44]

Ultimately, he does succeed in resisting, but his near-final words are damning: 'je suis resté honnête homme, même étant prêtre'.[45] Louis Ulbach, in *La Confession d'un*

[39] Pigeon, p.9.
[40] Pigeon, p.10.
[41] Pigeon, p.23.
[42] Pigeon, p.20.
[43] Marcel Prévost, *La Confession d'un amant* (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1891), p.97, p.217.
[44] Anonymous, *Les Confessions d'un prêtre par lui-même,* 2nd edn (Paris: Maresco, 1870), p.103.
[45] *Les Confessions d'un prêtre par lui-même*, p.245.

abbé (1882),[46] another successful novel which had four editions over the next ten years, explores a similar temptation, telling the story of a priest who fathers a child, having been re-introduced into the house of his childhood sweetheart after her husband has met him in a church. In this novel where priests commit cardinal sins, the world turns topsy-turvey: the priest's lover makes her confession to a doctor, the priest himself confesses to a policeman.

Elsewhere, the central tropes of outsider figures and of failures (both sexual and emotional) continue to be present. Two examples — Eugène Moret's *Confession d'une jolie femme* (1867) and Marcel Prévost's *La Confession d'un amant* (1891) illustrate the point. Eugène Moret's *Confession d'une jolie femme* (1867) is the story of a confessant who is an outsider, orphaned and friendless, unaware of who her family is and thus without a name, who ends up dying of heart-break. For her too, there is no hope in religious confession: it is a doctor, not a priest, who offers her absolution on her deathbed.[47] Like Noël's mother, she has written her life story, which she shares as she dies. The novel's narrative emerges through a combination of third-person narration and extracts from her first-person written confession; like many confessants, her voice is appropriated, only quoted occasionally, absorbed into a wider whole. In *La Confession d'un amant* (1891) Frédéric attempts to write the 'histoire de [son] âme'.[48] He is a young man who is orphaned as an infant and then loses his remaining family in his adolescence. He is isolated and unhappy, experiencing a 'maladie secrète de son âme',[49] a 'maladie sentimentale',[50] and 'un

[46] Louis Ulbach, *La Confession d'un abbé,* 3rd edn (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1883).
[47] Eugène Moret, *Confession d'une jolie femme* (Paris: Achille Faure, 1867), p.19.
[48] Prévost, p.85.
[49] Prévost, p.75.
[50] Prévost, p.154.

ennui intime'.[51] Like many male confessants in these novels of confession, he feels emasculated in his sexual relationships, commenting after his first sexual encounter with his first lover, 'J'ai été la femme de cet accouplement'.[52] He fails to live up to the novel's title. The description of him as an 'amant' is deeply ironic: he describes himself as 'un médiocre amant' in relation to his first lover, experiences 'une mortelle écume de dégoût' in response to sex,[53] and fails to consummate his relationship with his second 'lover'.

However, despite the persistence of certain tropes in these later novels of confession, it is possible to observe a general shift. Many of the novels are strongly driven by the twists and turns of plot, rather than by the nuances of psychology and feeling. In Moret's *Confession d'une jolie femme,* the narrative of lost identity is mixed with a framework that verges on the gothic and the melodramatic throughout. As a small child, the confessant is attacked by would-be murderers sent from her evil stepmother and has to swim to safety. Later in life, the beautiful confessant is abducted to a distant castle, where an evil aristocrat seeks to rape her. The re-emergence of gothic themes was to become one of the features of novels of confession later in the century. In the anonymous *Confession de la dame masqué par elle-même* (1868), the confessant has to cover her face to conceal the hideous effects of a corrosive liquid thrown over her face by a bitter enemy of hers, in a brutal attack that takes place in the luxurious house of the Russian aristocrat of whom she is the mistress. *Les Confessions de Tullia* (1873), another confession by Montépin, is the narrative of an actress who runs away from home; joins a circus troupe, only for

[51] Prévost, p.162.
[52] Prévost, p.147.
[53] Prévost, p.148.

her boss to be eaten by a panther; falls in love with her colleague William, only to discover that William is a woman; and then is stabbed by her boss. Stories of the macabre, tales of adventure and mystery, dominate.

Salacious confessions also come to the fore. Charles Duclos's *Les Confessions du comte de ***,* associated with the eighteenth-century vogue for amorous confessions, had not seen an edition since the late eighteenth century (1783): it had a new edition in 1889, published by the *Librarie des bibliophiles*.[54] The anonymous *Confessions d'une repentie, écrites par elle-même* (1887) contains various titillating details, including the confessant spying on her mother having an affair and then being sexually initiated in her convent school, and the (failed) sexual encounter she has with a rich banker to attempt to pay off her husband's debts. It is the story of how the *repentie* has been 'si longtemps regardée [...] comme une *machine à plaisir'*.[55] The *intime* becomes associated with the sexually intimate, rather than with inner emotional life: recounting her wedding night in detail, the *repentie* then comments,

> Toutes ces choses sont des plus naturelles et des plus vulgaires [...] Je ne sais rien au monde de plus saisissant et de plus poignant [...] C'est là ma seule excuse pour avoir eu l'idée de relater tant de détails un peu bien intimes.[56]

Elsewhere she describes her confession as recollecting 'dans leurs détails les plus infimes et les plus intimes, toutes les aventures qui me sont arrivées'.[57] Marie-Anne de Bovet's highly successful *Confessions d'une fille de trente ans* (1895), tells the story of an unmarried woman who chooses to have sexual relationships without

[54] See *Catalogue général des livres imprimés de la Bibliothèque nationale,* XLII, p.260.
[55] Anonymous, *Confessions d'une repentie, écrites par elle-même* (Paris, 1887), p.253.
[56] *Confessions d'une repentie, écrites par elle-même* p.130-1.
[57] *Confessions d'une repentie, écrites par elle-même*, p.231.

really caring what people think.[58] The next year, Bovet returned to her confessional theme with *Confessions conjugales* (1896).

In the later decades of the century, the novel of confession thus largely shifts the focus to mystery and seduction, moving away from the rigorous interrogations of selfhood or of acts of telling which pervade the earlier manifestations of the genre.

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(iv) Last Judgements: Narratives of confession from 1828-1865

The novel of confession in the 1830s, 40s, 50s, and 60s grows from a complex cultural context including the model of Catholic confession, the confessions of St Augustine and Rousseau, and Musset's rendering of De Quincey, with its fragmented narrative of subjectivity, driven by an ambivalent attitude towards the concept of transgression. Janin's widely read *La Confession,* with its narrative of anticlericalism and the failure (and destructiveness of confession) and Musset's enormously successful and repeatedly imitated *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* act as catalysts for a genre which then snowballs in the 1840s, 50s and 60s.

Janin's *La Confession* has strong gothic elements; more broadly, the genre moves from a portrayal of macabre crimes to amorous, or social, transgressions. During most of the period, the genre draws on an evolving literary context of focus on sentiment, psychology and emotion.[59] It is a major mode for the exploration of *mal*

[58] M. Leonard Marshall, 'Current French Literature', *Womanhood*, V (1901), p. 52-3.
[59] This was the new focus of literature which George Sand heralded in her review of Oberman 1833 ('Oberman', reprinted in *Questions d'art et de littérature,* p.66) — a literature which would represent 'le cœur avec ses extases et ses tortures pour sujet permanent de ses études' (George Sand, '*Lélia* et *Valentine*', *Revue des deux mondes*, 3rd series, vol. 2, (1834), pp. 110-116 (p.115), reprinted in George Sand, *Questions d'art et de littérature*, pp.69-78 (p.76)).

du siècle, especially in the 1830s. Psychological suffering remains central to the novel in later years, with novels often expressing a confessant's *ennui.* Ultimately, in *La Confession de Claude,* the novel of confession also becomes outward looking — as much about a broken society as it is about a broken self. The novel of confession thus develops over the period from Janin's work, redolent of the world of E.T.A. Hoffmann, to Zola's, which offers echoes of *Germinie Lacerteux.* With novels of confession often published by eminent publishers, including Michel Lévy who published *Confessions d'un ouvrier, La Confession d'Antonine* and *La Confession d'une jeune fille***,** and the Bibliothèque Charpentier, who published the new edition of *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* in 1840, the genre had a certain literary currency.

Yet different elements of the genre spoke to different readerships. Whilst George Sand's readers were described, by Menche de Loisne, as 'éclairés et intelligents',[60] and whilst the price of Marie Garcia's *La Confession d'Antonine* limited its readership to the wealthy, the presence of the popularly-minded Soulié and Montépin, and the publications of certain novels in *feuilletons,*[61] widened the genre's reach beyond an educated elite. The theatrical adaptation of both *Confession générale* and *Confessions d'un bohême* into melodramas[62] provides further indication of their popular appeal. The huge growth in female literacy across the course of the century;[63] the presence of female writers amongst this corpus of confession; the references in certain

[60] Menche de Loisne, pp.274-5.
[61] Including Frémy's *Confessions d'un bohémien* as well as section of Soulié's *Confessions générales.*
[62] In Paul Féval, *Mauvais cœur… précédé de la Femme du corsaire, prologue tiré des Confessions générales de Frédéric Soulié* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1849); Xavier de Montépin and Eugène Grangé, *Le Vol à la duchesse* (Paris: 1851, D. Giraud and D. Dagneau).
[63] From 27% at the time of the 1789 Revolution to 66% in 1871-75 in urban contexts — Anne Sauvy, 'Une littérature pour les femmes' in *Histoire de l'édition française,* pp.444-453 (p.445).

prefaces to a female readership;[64] and the 'long-standing associations between sensibility, women and the conventionally "feminised" characteristics of [...] emotional susceptibility'[65] all suggest that the genre held traction amongst female readers. However, it would be misguided to interpret the novel of confession as a predominantly female genre: the majority of novelists are men, and it is largely a genre which interrogates fragile masculinity and the impenetrability of women. Tellingly, a divide can be observed in the presentation of transgression between works with male confessants and those with female, which is, unsurprisingly, reflective of sexual mores: the male characters find themselves emasculated, or haunted by fears of sexual failure, whilst the female confessants are simultaneously troubled by the possibility that they have transgressed society's sexual rules — and experience a desire to do so again. Confessing men often find their confessions appropriated by an editor figure; by contrast, confessing women — often confessing to the object of their desire — find their confessions *rejected* by the men (MacAllen/ Octave) to whom they are writing, who would prefer to have their bodies than their attempts at self-articulation.

Novels of confession often seem to invite a private, 'intimate reading',[66] where the process of reading is a sentimental experience.[67] Yet there was also another — opposite — face to the genre, present from the 1840s: Montépin and Soulié in particular exploited the genre's association with questions of transgression and

[64] Gozlan's preface to *La Confession d'Antonine* presupposes a female readership, separating readers into 'celles qui n'ont pas encore aimé' and 'celles qui ont aimé' (p.xx) whilst Mme du Saule opens her novel with 'arrête toi, ici, jeune fille pudibonde, ce livre n'est pas pour toi' (vol I, p.1), a comment which, by stating that her novel is *not* intended for young girls, simultaneously implies that they might be (or at least be assumed to be) the obvious readership. By contrast, however, Sand's readership is, according to Menche de Loisne, mostly male (pp.274-5).
[65] Lewis, p.40.
[66] Lewis, p.39.
[67] See p.xx of Gozlan's preface to *La Confession d'Antonine,* for example.

characters who are unsure of their identities to create sensationalist narratives driven by crime, sex and mystery; the focus is less on interrogating the soul and more on illicit revelation. The genre further enters different modes, as in the parody of amorous confession exemplified by Champfleury's *Confessions de Sylvius,* or the comically anticlerical novel, Ourliac's *La Confession de Nazarille*. The genre's traits, remoulded, can often be read most explicitly in these commercialised, parodic or comedic confessions, whilst the very existence of such works indicates the significance of the genre, which had traits recognisable enough to be exploited for these different contexts.

Over a period of great change in both the literary and political sphere, the novel of confession can be seen to be responding to these shifts — drawing on the disillusionment around the July Monarchy, adapting to the censorship of the Second Empire, exploiting the increased commercial opportunity offered by newspaper serialisation and advances in printing, reflecting shifting literary interests in the gothic, the sentimental and the social. However, at the same time, the genre is highly self-referential, with Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* continuing to be a source on which novels draw, and with many of the generic traits identified by this thesis remaining remarkably constant across the period.

Portraying transgression, these novels often undermine a Catholic framework of sin. They depict wrongdoing as outside the control of their protagonists, who often fail to take responsibility for their actions, present themselves as victims, or seek to exonerate themselves. The confessant is thus transformed from wrong-doer to sufferer in these narratives that often explore themes of outsiders, problematic

identity, psychological anguish, fragmented selfhood, and failed or frustrated desire. For these characters who are at odds with their era, their society, those closest to them, and, above all, themselves, the act of self-articulation does not help. For those in search of self-knowledge, confession tends to reveal how little they can ever know about themselves. Those in search of cohesion find themselves yet more fragmented. For those in search of originality, their confessions (or the way they are framed by the 'editors') often establish them as mere imitators. Those in search of control over their own narrative have their words appropriated. Indeed, in the way that the novels frame characters' confessions, the attempt to write about the self can seem just one further loss of agency or individual voice. Confessions appear in contexts where they are mocked (as Sylvius's are by Tony), edited (Pierre Henri's in *Confessions d'un ouvrier,* for instance), dismissed (as Lucienne's are); or even erased (as Louis's are, with his voice taken out of the narrative). Some confessions are even, paradoxically, written (or part written) in the third person — a formal impossibility which encapsulates the foundering of the act of confession. On every level on which confession operates — be it extradiegetic, intradiegetic or metadiegetic — and in every form of confession — be it Catholic, or secular, a confession of a specific sin, a *confession générale* or a communication of *intimité* — the act of confession fails the characters who resort to it. This group of novels of confession thus variously perform confession in order to perform the disintegration of confession. These are novels of confession that unmake their own form.

The genre grows in part from the explicitly anticlerical *La Confession;* it emerges during a period of the nineteenth century when Catholic confession is constantly attacked by writers; many of the writers of novels of confession are explicitly

anticlerical or critical of confession elsewhere in their work. Questioning Catholic confession almost whenever it appears within the narratives, these novels also simultaneously appropriate the Catholic *acte de parole* in order to transform it beyond recognition — indeed, to its very opposite: a narrative, public, written act. The genre as a whole thus engages in a subversive dialogue with the Catholic act from which it grows. Whilst some novels actively participate in the contemporary hostility towards Catholic confession — by staging moments of Catholic confession as a catastrophe (as in *La Confession)* or by explicitly rejecting its model (with characters refusing to confess to priests or to God) — others operate more implicitly, by performing acts of secular confession which themselves break down.

At the same time, this genre engages in a dialogue with the model of life-narrative inhabited by St Augustine or Rousseau. Octave's experience of echoing St Augustine by opening the Bible at random and finding himself distinctly disappointed by the results is emblematic of the way in which these confessants tend to find themselves unable to live up to their real-life confessional predecessors. The novel of confession is a genre that questions the possibilities of self-knowledge and self-narrative; at a time when self-writing was in vogue, the novel of confession remains deeply ambivalent about whether the self can ever, really, be put into words. Whilst Rousseau expresses his confidence that he cannot doubt what he has felt ('je ne puis me tromper sur ce que j'ai senti'),[68] confidence and certainty is often precisely what the confessants in novels of confession lack: they find themselves both unable to understand or indeed to communicate their past selves. These confessants fail where their confessional predecessors felt most sure. This is a genre of disillusion —

[68] Rousseau, *Les Confessions,* p.348.

where the biggest disillusion of all is confession itself. The genre seems to say, to rewrite Janin, 'Heureux non-seulement celui qui trouve *St Augustin* ou *Rousseau*, mais encore qui trouve un monde où le produire!'[69]

The dominance of the novel of confession coincides with the period in which the novel itself, a comparatively new literary form, was growing immensely in popularity in France. The novel of confession, this thesis contends, was indeed a central factor in the way that the novel developed in these years. This was a period in which the novel consolidated its hold as a form for exploring interiority, private life, emotions and psychology, and for examining flawed characters; the novel of confession was one of the most significant means by which such concerns were expressed, becoming pivotal in the development of a mindset in which subjectivity and intimacy were prominent. At the same time, the novel of confession was a fundamentally disruptive genre — one where the self that the novel seeks to depict remains, at least partially, unknowable, and where language itself breaks down, is equivocal, resorts to ellipses, or stops altogether. In this, the novel of confession stages not just the failure of the act of confession, but also the very limits of the novel itself.

[69] Janin writes, 'Heureux non-seulement celui qui trouve Don Juan ou *Réne* mais encore qui trouve un monde où le produire', see *La Confession,* I, p.xxxv.

Appendix: Texts entitled 'confession', published in France in the nineteenth century[70]

Works up to 1865:

(Novels which are regularly mentioned within this thesis are in bold)

1817 (Anonymous) *Les Confessions de Clémentine, écrites par elle-même*

1817 (Anonymous) *Confession de Madame ***: Principes de morale pour se conduire au monde*

1820 (Anonymous) *Les Confessions délicates des véritables nymphes du Palais-Royal , écrites par elles-mêmes*

1824 L.-B. Picard, *Le Gilblas de la Révolution, ou Les Confessions de Laurent Giffard*

1824 (Anonymous) *Léonce et Clémence ou La Confession du crime*

1828 Alfred de Musset, *L'Anglais mangeur d'opium, traduit de l'anglais par A.D.M*

1828-35 J.-S. Quesné*, Confessions de J.-S. Quesné* (3 vols)

1830 (Anonymous) *Confessions d'un homme de cour contemporain de Louis XV*

1831 (Anonymous) *La Confession d'un soldat par un jésuite qui s'est grisé*

1830 Jules Janin, *La Confession, par l'auteur de* L'Âne mort et la femme guillotinée

1834 Gustave Drouineau, *Confessions poétiques* (verse)

1836 Alfred de Musset, *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle*

1837 *Confession de J.A. Balbaith, israélite allemand en forme d'une lettre addressée à ses frères*

1839 H.-E. Guilliez, *Confession d'un huissier*

1839 J.-E. Paccard, *Mémoires et confessions d'un comédien*

[70] Full bibliographical details for all significant texts are provided in the bibliography. The texts listed here include not only novels, but all texts published within the period entitled 'confession'. Musset's and Baudelaire's translations of De Quincey are also included, for reference. This list, which aims to be as complete as possible, is drawn from searches of the *Gallica* database, analysis of the *Bibliographie de la France* archives, and use of Stead's article ('Confessions sur un siècle, confessions fin-de-siècle', in *Autobiographie et fiction romanesque: Autour des Confessions de Jean-Jacques Rousseau : actes du colloque international,* ed. by Jacques Domenech (Nice: Publications de la faculté des lettres, arts et sciences humaines de Nice, 1996), pp.351-386) which also contains an appendix on pp.381-386.

1840 Marguerite Gardiner Blessington, *Confessions d'une Anglaise de qualité* (translated by Lewis Delaporte from the English, *The Confessions of an Elderly Lady*)

1840 Édouard Ourliac, *La Confession de Nazarille*

1840-48 Frédéric Soulié, *Confession générale*

1843 (Anonymous) *Confession d'un Criminel*

1843 (Anonymous) *La Confession d'une Plume de fer, par J.-A.H*

1846 Joanny, *Ma Confession* (verse)

1846 (Anonymous) *Combats et victoire, ou Confessions d'un officier français*

1846 (Anonymous) *Les Confessions d'une jolie fille, mises en lumière par un clerc d'avoué*

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