French Divorce Fiction from the Revolution to the First World War

Nicholas White

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FOR NIKOLA

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This book has been roughly a decade in the making, and so the long list of friends and colleagues who have endured conversations with me on the subject of human discontent will have to go unenumerated. As one of them says, 'At least you don't work on commas in Proust,' and it is true that family life seems to be a topic on which we all have opinions to express. Indeed, the more our lives resemble those of characters in the novels I study in this book, the more expert on family life we apparently take ourselves to be.

With the irony demanded by my book's theme, I thank two nuclear families: the one I grew up in, with my brothers and parents; the other I now inhabit, with Nikola and our children, Greta and Jonathan. Elsewhere in Cambridge, I owe debts of an institutional kind to the School of Arts and Humanities, the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages, and the Master, Fellows and staff of Emmanuel College. From 2008 to 2011, when much of the work on this project came to fruition, I served as Chair of the Faculty, and so it is with a particular sense of camaraderie that I thank all its academics, administrators and support staff. As I write, I am reminded of the pertinence of the intellectual experience that the College has provided by recollecting the words of the recently deceased Carlos Fuentes in his lecture at his eightieth birthday celebrations in Emmanuel in 2008: 'Even in a matrimonial bed, there is a frontier.' I am very grateful to MML students, past and present, from the College and the Faculty, with whom it has been a delight to work; the undergraduates are now half my age, but still twice as quick-witted. Profound gratitude is offered to three who have shared their doctoral work with me: Andrew Counter, Claire White and Edmund Birch.

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Lethbridge. The latter's friendship and mentorship, dating back to the mid-1980s, have lasted longer than many of the marriages I describe in this book. I have co-edited the Society's journal, *Dix-Neuf*, since its very first number in 2003, and have gained immeasurably from such close engagement with the work of literally scores of colleagues in the field. Indeed, the NCFS and SDN communities have provided metaphorical homes and families much more happy and fulfilling than the fictional ones to be found in the chapters of this book.

N.J.W., Cambridge, July 2012

INTRODUCTION

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Sociology, Epistemology and Modern Marriage

Critical interest in the connection between narrative and desire is, of course, much older than Freud, and is still manifest in the work of numerous modern critics such as Peter Brooks and Catherine Belsey. More particularly, in recent decades critics have stressed how nineteenth-century European fiction exhibits a specific fascination with adultery.[1] In different permutations of narratological, ideological, feminist and psychoanalytical reading, these accounts stress the problematic nature of the adulterous wife, alongside male fears of uncertain paternity and fantasies of seduction. All stress the significance of the French fictional tradition too, and in particular Flaubert. Traditionally adultery had provided an outlet for discontent within the marriage structure; with the advent of the Loi Naquet in 1884, divorce provided a means of disposing of that very structure. It is the argument of this book that the divorce question offered French fiction a radically novel way of breaking the mould of the traditional family and recasting the limits of its narratives.

The aim of this book is to analyse the ways in which divorce informed the development of French fiction until the First World War. Except for one or two specific periods, such as the revolutionary years in France, divorces were extremely rare in Western society until the late nineteenth century. Indeed, I will argue that in France the divorce question was intimately related to the rhythm of revolution. The initial divorce law of 1792 provided a remarkably radical reflection of the ideal of *liberté*, only to be curtailed by the Napoleonic Code and quashed by the Restoration in 1816. This 'return to family values' received the intellectual support of social theorists such as Bonald, but in 1830, 1848 and 1871 the question of divorce was raised again and again, only to be lost in the maelstrom of the moment, not least because it was often proposed by feminist activists and associated with marginal interests in the minds of decision-makers and opinion-formers. During the 1860s the development of the modern feminist movement in France provided a political context in which the issue could be repositioned.

The Commune failed to realize many of its aspirations, but its residual radicalism was not forgotten by politicians of the Third Republic such as Alfred Naquet, Jewish deputy for Vaucluse. Though the divorce project was only one aspect of this remarkable polymath's career in science as well as politics, Naquet's reformist zeal was particularly energetic in this domain. He prepared the ground for his legislative proposals not only by making parliamentary addresses but also by touring the country. The written word was adopted, too, in newspaper articles and in book form. Of particular interest to this present book is the relation Naquet fostered

with the field of literary production. The debate leading to the new law had explicitly engaged creative writers on both sides: for example, Alexandre Dumas *fils* supporting the 'éléphant indien' of divorce whose shoulders were broad enough to bear the brunt of the social problems it addressed; Paul Féval, author of the popular *Le Bossu*, exclaiming in another title *Pas de divorce!* Only in 1884 did Naquet succeed in pushing through a compromise bill, reformed by fresh legislation in 1886 which, amongst other things, forbade press reporting of divorce cases. Indeed, one of the most provocative aspects of divorce was the way in which it threatened to expose to the public gaze the supposedly private matters of family life. Fiction, however, knew no such boundaries, and much of the literary response to the new laws reflected doubts on the part of progressives about the viability of Naquet's compromises as well as a conservative critique of divorce *per se*.

Social and legal historians have long displayed a fascination with the topic of divorce.[2] Given the commonplace that the novel has provided a vital space in which modern societies have analysed marriage and love, one would expect the debate surrounding the advent of divorce in the nineteenth century to have influenced the plot shapes of family fiction. Yet it is only in recent years that we have observed a mushrooming of critical interest in the literature of divorce in the English-speaking world.[3] But there is simply no book, in English or in French, on the considerable corpus of French divorce fiction which surrounds the Loi Naquet.

In the words of Phillips, 'One of the paradoxes of modern Western society is the simultaneous popularity of marriage and divorce,' and French culture still exerts an ambivalent fascination, as a country where both traditional Catholic family values and the sexual alternatives implicit in the values of the secular Republic have vied for supremacy.[4] Rarely was this more acute than in the French debate on divorce in the final decades of the nineteenth century, which acted as a prelude to the conflict between Church and State that boiled over at the turn of the century in the wake of the Dreyfus Affair. And nowhere was this tension articulated more precisely than in the literary life of the national culture.

It is my argument that the late nineteenth-century French divorce debates which led to the Loi Naquet of 1884 crystallize an epistemological tension in European thought between, on the one hand, an association of truth with origins and, on the other, the nascent sense that the truth of the self might be created rather than discovered. The important tension here lies in the fact that these quests for truth travel in contrary directions. The truth of origins takes us back to a past which can be excavated, back to where (in a double sense) truth lies. According to this model, it is not so much that 'the truth is out there' but rather that the truth lies underneath! The truth of self-creation, however, is concerned not with stripping away the palimpsestic layers of personal, urban or archaeological histories, but instead with the manufacture of a future truth, the self that one might become. Along this future-oriented road lie such wildly diverse twentieth-century phenomena as the philosophy of existentialism, gender's troubling of sex as chronicled by Judith Butler, and, most significantly for the question of divorce, two sociological concepts: first, Anthony Giddens's notion of life politics as a reflexive project of self-actualization, and second, Zygmunt Bauman's notion of liquid modernity. All of these dream

of a space for resistance to what New Historicism calls self-fashioning (in which identity and behaviour are constructed in accordance with the accepted standards of the social doxa). The utopian end of this second paradigm of self-reinvention might even dream of the 'a-paradigmatic' state of perpetual paradox. Such utopias seem distant, however, in the divorce fiction we shall study, where heterosexual desire not only needs but wants its own staging posts, *points de repère* and cartographical legibility. In other words, divorce not only undoes marriage but promises the possibility of further marriage. The temporal framework of this tension between paradigms which move backwards or forwards speaks eloquently to the temporality of the romance plot, which, in the divorce narratives I shall explore, permutes the traditional sense of where married love begins and ends.

It is hard to resist the notion that it is in the reordering of the family that the shapes of plots and the shapes of lives meet. Comedies of the Molière variety we expect to culminate in the consummation, or at least promise, of marriage. Novels of adultery unfold in the wake of a wedding, either in the plot's pre-history (Julien Sorel entering the Rênal family in media res) or in the early stages of the plot (Emma Bovary's wedding cake almost collapsing under the weight of its burdensome symbolism). In either event, the adultery plot interrogates the origins of such a marriage, and habitually associates wifely adultery with the curtailment of female choice in traditional society. Marriage may be arranged; happiness, it seems, cannot. The tragic path of such classic fiction often leads to that other archetypal ending, the death of the protagonist (wanton women such as Emma Bovary and Anna Karenina punished by narratives which critique the stuffiness of their marital context but refuse to indulge unambivalently their heroine's desire for air). In both the marriage and the death ending, the family is redefined in emotional and financial arenas.[5] The family (and its story) are defined by the very patterns of perpetuation and rupture which they determine.

Divorce, of course, provides a third moment at which the family is redefined in affective and pecuniary contexts. Feelings and funds are redirected all at once. The Third Republic novels which we shall examine in greater detail in subsequent chapters argue for or against divorce in manifest fashions. Modest and sometimes immodest proposals for marriage reform infuse the novel of adultery more generally. This often entails a redefinition of how marriages should begin: namely, an interrogation of dowries and marriage contracts, and a critique of the father's right to impose on his daughter the groom of his choosing. In their more radical variants, such novels ask — if only by implication — the following question: how should marriages end? By death alone? Or also, in extremis, by divorce, before 'death do us part'?

Indeed, marriage has often been understood in terms of beginnings and endings. As a complement to the marital expression *faire une fin*, we might quote the opening lines of the finale (in other words, the beginning of the end) of *Middlemarch* (1871–72) by George Eliot:

> Every limit is a beginning as well as an ending. Who can quit young lives after being long in company with them, and not desire to know what befell them in their after-years? For the fragment of a life, however typical, is not

> the sample of an even web: promises may not be kept, and an ardent outset may be followed by declension; latent-powers may find their long-awaited opportunity; a past error may urge a grand retrieval. Marriage, which has been the bourne of so many narratives, is still a great beginning, as it was to Adam and Eve, who kept their honeymoon in Eden, but had their first little one among the thorns and thistles of the wilderness. It is still the beginning of the home epic — the gradual conquest or irremediable loss of that complete union which makes the advancing years a climax, and age the harvest of sweet memories in common.[6]

The very notions of divorce and pre-marital flirtation were seen to challenge the traditional life plot (particularly of women) which charted a linear path through stages of respectability — from innocent girlhood via pre-marital virginity to the dutiful imperatives of wifely and motherly love. Both divorce and pre-marital flirtation exposed the possibility not only of sexual transgression during marriage (as in the novel of adultery) but of sex before or after marriage. In a yet more radical way than the already problematic figure of the widow, the divorcee provided a new way of reshaping the feminine plot, as the possibility of remarriage legislated for a chain of feminine desires rather than a singular love.

Divorce provides a way of precipitating the logic of permutation which has always characterized love plots. Permutation's metaphors are many: from the deterministic force of chemical bonding in Goethe's *Elective Affinities* to the common figure of the dance (where, as in *La Princesse de Clèves*, partners conjoin, separate and swap). Divorce promises and threatens to impose a public outcome on such shenanigans. It points towards both the newly found stasis of remarriage and the potential for mobility in such a new marriage. The literary limitations of the divorce plot are felt most extremely by Briony in Ian McEwan's novel, *Atonement*:

> She vaguely knew that divorce was an affliction, but she did not regard it as a proper subject, and gave it no thought. It was a mundane unravelling that could not be reversed, and therefore offered no opportunities to the storyteller: it belonged in the realm of disorder. Marriage was the thing, or rather, a wedding was, with its formal neatness of virtue rewarded, the thrill of its pageantry and banqueting, and dizzy promise of lifelong union. A good wedding was an unacknowledged representation of the as yet unthinkable — sexual bliss. In the aisles of country churches and grand city cathedrals, her heroines and heroes reached their innocent climaxes and needed to go no further. If divorce had presented itself as the dastardly antithesis of all this, it could easily have been cast onto the other pan of the scales, along with betrayal, illness, thieving, assault and mendacity. Instead it showed an unglamorous face of dull complexity and incessant wrangling. Like re-armament and the Abyssinia Question and gardening, it was simply not a subject.[7]

Briony's is the romance plot, but what she does not understand is that divorce offers many opportunities for betrayal, illness, thieving, assault and mendacity. Indeed, divorce may represent a desire for the achievement of glamour and the relinquishment of gardening.

The association of divorce in nineteenth-century France with the politics of *laïcité* brought with it a wider order of philosophical contemplation which may seem

in turns broadly ethical or vaguely existential. These concerns meet the issue of fictional plotting in the arena of the 'life narrative'. What does it mean to imagine a life to be a singular thread whose two ends might be drawn together in the assertion of circular completeness? Is it possible to imagine how a life might begin again? This posed a particular problem for women within polite society. For a widow to remarry was one thing, but for a wife to divorce and remarry was quite another. Against the libertarian tradition of the Revolution which argued that marriage should be the site of individual fulfilment ran a conservative vision of gender order which demanded that women be the subject to the master narratives of men, passed as virginal brides from fathers to grooms. The thread of bourgeois women's sexual narrative was in theory supposed to begin with marriage, where the 'knot' at one end of the thread was first tied. Divorce and remarriage eroded the association of weddings with the idealizing imagery of the virgin. In the words of Onézime Seure's anti-reform poem 'Le Divorce' (1848):

> A qui l'a mérité nous renvoyons le blâme:
> Un mariage impie est un meurtre de l'âme.
> Mais le tombeau n'a point deux portes ici-bas,
> Et la virginité ne se répare pas.[8]

To the conservative mind the marriage vow (like virginity) could not be taken back. To unhappy spouses Seure dictates silent tears:

> Vous donc qui languissez dans des nœuds abhorrés,
> Vous les avez voulus: taisez-vous et pleurez.
> Ce qu'on donne une fois on ne peut le reprendre,
> On ne réclame pas une victime en cendre.
> On peut mentir à Dieu ; mais d'un vœu solennel
> Le seul regret permis, c'est un deuil éternel!

Divorce invited serial plots consonant with the serial lives it permits, as we shall see in the case of Camille Pert in Chapter 5. Alongside Marcel Prévost's notion of the sexually flirtatious adolescent girl which undermined the mythology of feminine purity before marriage, the stereotype of the divorcee eroded the 'once-and-forever' ideology of sexual partnership imposed upon women. Indeed, as we shall see in Chapter 3, the moral debate over the concept of retrospective jealousy was evoked, inter alia, in the fiction of Anatole France and Marie-Anne de Bovet, as well as in the novels of Paul Bourget and Marcelle Tinayre, all of whom considered whether a 'new man' — in both senses — could ever fully accept the sexual past of a divorcee. Hence such fiction explored the narrative possibilities of a law which, for all of its compromises and hypocrisy, promised to offer women a second chance, as we shall see in the cases of André Léo and Claire Vautier in Chapter 2.

Divorce emerges as a potential means of escaping the received plots of social history and classic fiction. The reader is led to inquire whether, by serializing one's desires (serializing in what we might call a bio-narratological sense), by moving from one passion to another, one can avoid duplicity. Or, as Édouard Rod asks in his Michel Teissier novels, is a life led by the passions (in Teissier's case both amorous and political) ultimately misguided, not least in the case of couples with children (as in Rod's fiction and Alphonse Daudet's *Rose et Ninette*)? To both of these novelists

I shall turn in Chapter 4. To divorce and remarry is to double doubleness, or in some sense to give up the idea of uniqueness in the very search for the unique elsewhere. As such, the new legal possibility of divorce after 1884 raised a number of ethical and philosophical questions. Most fundamentally, is it possible to start again? This problem of beginning again ensues from the difficulty in stumbling across an ending in the middle of the thing. Furthermore, can one redeem the fault of a repudiated marriage by forging a coherent second life, by committing oneself to second marriage? Rather than seeing in what has been called 'the culture of divorce' a cynical take on marriage, one could see in divorce a kind of romantic idealism, a hope that marital bliss may be locatable elsewhere, given that divorce (unlike separation) permits remarriage.

Much hangs on whether we would choose individually to put scare-quotes around that notion of divorce as failure. However resistant to judgement modern liberal sentiment may make us, even those brave, desperate or radical enough to use the new divorce law at the end of the nineteenth century would almost certainly have felt that their life had in some sense failed. The question was what to do with that conjugal failure — to bear it, to flee it, to repair it, to risk it again?[9] In truth, nineteenth-century divorcees would rarely have shared a euphoric philosophy of mistakes celebrated and narratives rewritten and relived. Few were the genuine radicals of intimacy who would in all honesty merely chalk such disappointments down to experience in authentically phlegmatic fashion. Divorcees were, in general though, set at odds with the notion that to have failed once was to have failed for good.[10] To rigid moralists, divorce was little short of bigamy. However nineteenth-century progressives cut the cake, such a re-scripting of the life narrative (this second existence) would be associated with a dual life, or in ethical terms with a life of duplicity.

But back to origins... Two key critical voices that have in recent decades explored the first of these cognitive paradigms are Carlo Ginzburg and Malcolm Bowie.[11] Ginzburg uncovers 'the silent emergence of an epistemological model (a paradigm, if you prefer) towards the end of the nineteenth century, in the humanities' (96), to which he connects the art historian, Giovanni Morelli, the fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes, and the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud. This is known as the conjectural or evidential paradigm. Morelli argues that in order to distinguish original art works from copies, it is vital to focus not 'on the most conspicuous characteristics of a painting, which are the easiest to imitate' but on 'the most trivial details that would have been influenced least by the mannerisms of the artist's school' (96–97). Conan Doyle's hero detects the identity of the criminal 'on the basis of evidence that is imperceptible to most people', clues such as footprints, cigarette ashes, and the like (98). Freud himself identified Morelli's influence on psychoanalytical technique in his 1914 essay 'The Moses of Michelangelo'. Ginzburg glosses that influence thus:

> It was the idea of a method of interpretation based on discarded information, on marginal data, considered in some way significant. By this method, details usually considered of little importance, even trivial or 'minor,' provided the key for approaching higher aspects of the human spirit. [...] In each case, infinitesimal

> traces permit the comprehension of a deeper, otherwise unattainable reality: traces — more precisely, symptoms (in the case of Freud), clues (in the case of Sherlock Holmes), pictorial marks (in the case of Morelli). (101)

Malcolm Bowie explores the question of Freud's fascination with archaeology ('this predilection for "deep" and "buried" meaning', 24) in the second sub-section of Chapter 1 ('Freud's dreams of knowledge') of *Freud, Proust and Lacan*. In Bowie's words:

> Psychoanalysis, like archaeology, is the quest for, and the systematic study of, anterior states: for Freud *that which came before*, whether in the life of a civilisation or in the life of the mind, has a peculiar and unparalleled capacity to organise our perception of *that which is*. 'Le thème de l'antérieur,' Paul Ricoeur has said of the Freudian theoretical corpus, 'est sa propre hantise'. (18)

To archaeology, Bowie appends Freud's interest in geology and palaeontology. Bowie reads Freud's archaeological passion as 'a dream of unitary and unidirectional knowledge' (25), 'the dream of an alternative logic to the threatening and insidious logic of dreams' (26), in other words, as a kind of anti-oneiric dream. These disciplinary references open a route to Ginzburg's analysis. As well as identifying the ancient origins of the conjectural paradigm (not least in the semiotics of hunting), Ginzburg identifies the constellation of modern disciplines in which it emerges. He cites the French naturalist and zoologist Georges Cuvier (1769–1832) in order to highlight the connection between the detective story and palaeontology.

This constellation takes on a yet richer pattern in Ginzburg's reference to the English evolutionary biologist Thomas Huxley (1825–95) and his methodological reliance on Voltaire's *Zadig* (1747):

> The name 'Zadig' had taken on such symbolic value that in 1880 Thomas Huxley, on a lecture tour to publicize Darwin's discoveries, defined as 'Zadig's method' that procedure which combined history, archaeology, geology, physical astronomy, and palaeontology: namely, the ability to forecast retrospectively. Disciplines such as these, profoundly diachronic, could not avoid turning to the conjectural or divinatory paradigm [...]. When causes cannot be reproduced, there is nothing to do but to deduce them from their effects. (117)

In Chapter 3 of *Zadig*, 'Le Chien et le Cheval', Voltaire's hero manages to describe minutely these two animals which have gone missing, and he does so by deciphering their tracks on the ground. But how could he possibly know them so well if they were not already in his possession? When he is accused of stealing them, he defends himself by inventorying the mental processes which allowed him to sketch the portrait of two animals he had never seen.

For our purposes, it is worth recalling that the key chapter in Voltaire's tale begins with the collapse of Zadig's short-lived marriage. The opening chapter of the tale shows how his plan to marry the lovely Sémire, to whom he seems so well suited socially and amorously, is thwarted when he defends her against the brigands of his jealous rival, Orcan. When Zadig recovers from the wound to his left eye, he learns that 'celle [...] pour qui seule il voulait avoir des yeux' has in fact married Orcan, of all people, citing her insurmountable aversion for one-eyed men as the cause of her change in inclination — hence the reference to 'le borgne' in the title

of this opening chapter.[12] In fact, the abscess over his eye clears and sight from his left eye returns, in spite of the public prediction of his incompetent but much fêted physician, le grand Hermès, that unlike an affliction of the right eye, such an affliction of the left eye could not be healed. In a brilliant satire on the incorrect use of conjectural method, and what Ginzburg calls its retrospective forecast, Hermès writes the most useless of books 'où il lui prouva qu'il n'avait pas dû guérir. Zadig ne le lut point.' Reacting against the courtly intrigue of Orcan and Sémire, he marries 'une citoyenne' (to be understood in mid-eighteenth-century terms as a *bourgeoise*). Although Azora appears to be 'la plus sage et la mieux née de la ville' and their first month of wedlock offers 'les douceurs de l'union la plus tendre' (5), he notices her eye for 'les jeunes gens les mieux faits'.

In Chapter 2 Zadig tests her loyalty by pretending to have died and have one of his friends, Cador (one of those young men in whom Azora finds such 'mérite'), offer her a shoulder to cry on. When Cador claims to have inherited Zadig's wealth and offers to share it with Azore, she is all ears — and this only one day after Zadig's apparent demise. But Cador, it seems, suffers from a spleen problem, which can only be treated, he claims, by the application of a nose removed from a fresh corpse. When Azora approaches Zadig's 'corpse', blade in hand, he suddenly rises from 'le tombeau de ses pères', at the bottom of the garden! This episode emblematizes in a forceful manner the homosocial policing of heterosexual love. Key to this test is that it cannot be defined, strictly speaking, as a test of adultery, if one accepts that marriage ends with the death of one spouse (and that a widow is free to start a second life). The problem seems more to lie in the lack of a respectable period of mourning, and what matters most here is not so much the existence of serial love as the negotiation and transmission between the episodes of a serial life. In this sense, a widow's mourning (which will come to loom so large in the collective nineteenth-century vision of the roles of the *bourgeoise*) provides society with a way of negotiating the transmission of women, not between father and husband (as patriarchy initially prescribes), but between husband and husband. And structurally (and thus cynically rather than sympathetically) widowhood can, of course, be seen as a way of having two husbands (one after the other, unlike bigamy), without being divorced. And so Chapter 3 opens with Zadig, not once but twice the victim of disappointed love, turning from marriage to nature. In reference to the writings on marriage offered by Zoroastrianism (in which he sought a rational form of Deism), Voltaire begins:

> Zadig éprouva que le premier mois du mariage, comme il est écrit dans le livre de *Zend*, est la lune du miel, et que le second est la lune de l'absinthe. Il fut quelque temps après obligé de répudier Azora, qui était devenue trop difficile à vivre, et il chercha son bonheur dans l'étude de la nature. (6–7)

Ginzburg locates this Enlightenment form of the *venatic* model of conjecture (literally hunting for clues) within a longer tradition. It points forward by direct influence to Poe, Gaboriau, and 'the mystery novel'.[13] Its distant origins in the hunter's reading of clues is transmitted via the oriental folkloric tale, circulated among Kirghiz, Tartars, Jews, Turks and others, of three brothers who are accused of stealing a camel (or in some versions, a horse) which they describe with immediate

and brilliant clarity: it is white, blinded in one eye, and carries two goat-skins on its back, one full of wine, the other of oil. In the face of an accusation of theft, they triumph by showing how myriad small clues have helped them to reconstruct the appearance of an animal they have never actually seen (in other words, 'the ability to construct from apparently insignificant experimental data a complex reality that could not be experienced directly' (103)). Ginzburg can thus even suggest that 'the actual idea of narration (as distinct from charms, exorcisms, or invocation) may have originated in a hunting society, relating the experience of deciphering tracks.'

The venatic tale was first collected in the West by one of Boccaccio's imitators, Giovanni Sercambi of Lucca (1348–1424). It reappeared as the centrepiece of a mid-sixteenth-century Venetian anthology, presented as translations from Persian into Italian by one Cristoforo the Armenian. *Peregrinaggio di tre giovani figliuoli del re Serendippo* was translated into different languages, in particular during the eighteenth-century fascination with things oriental. It is in this context that Horace Walpole coined the neologism *serendipity*, the way in which one accidentally discovers something fortunate, especially while looking for something else entirely. One might well argue, though, that the brothers' achievements are not merely what the French would call *heureux hasard*. In fact, Walpole's letter of 28 January 1754 to Horace Mann offers the following gloss on the story: 'as their highnesses travelled, they were always making discoveries, by accidents and sagacity, of things which they were not in quest of'. Though the term *serendipity* stresses the accidents (in Walpole's emphasis, '*no* discovery of a thing you *are* looking for, comes under this description'), the conjectural paradigm stresses the other means, namely sagacity, though this too means foreseeing that which cannot be seen. In the scopophilic culture of late-nineteenth-century Europe, both the accidents of serendipity and the sagacity of conjecture represent what we might call paradoxes of the gaze, as we ultimately see what we cannot see in front of us, or were not even looking for.

As we have seen, Freud is one of Ginzburg's high priests of conjecture. Bowie, of course, connects Freud to Proust, and at various moments the latter novelist will haunt our close readings of fiction which in many cases shares a similar social context for cultural production (broadly, the *mondain* salon society of *fin de siècle* and *belle époque* Paris), and even some of the thematic concerns which Proust will alchemically transmute (hence our chapter on retrospective jealousy in Anatole France's *Le Lys rouge*), but remains in its aesthetic vision resolutely pre-Proustian and pre-Modernist (in spite of its philosophical anticipations of the life politics of liquid modernity). It is the section on 'Plots and paranoia' in the final chapter of Christopher Prendergast's *The Order of Mimesis* which connects Ginzburg's conjectural paradigm to the classic French novel.[14] Prendergast explains how

> [the paradigm] can, at certain moments, penetrate into the established intellectual and institutional culture, where it is appropriated and refined as a means of social monitoring and control. Such is the case, argues Ginzburg, in the late nineteenth century, especially in connection with the growth of those human sciences — such as medicine and criminology — that are institutionally harnessed to the *policing* of an increasingly complex and mobile urban population.

Critically, Prendergast connects this paradigm to a chain of associations which lie at the heart of the narrative project: Aristotelian *anagnorisis*; Freud's theory of the Family Romance and the 'implicit knowledge that the *pater semper incertus est*'; Barthes' connection between narrative order and the law of the father; and Tony Tanner's analysis of the classic novel of adultery and 'the loss of social cohesion when the juridical rights of the institution of the *pater familias* are infringed by the transgressing adulterous woman'. Narratives of disorder, motivated in no small part by a desire for the order which the conjectural paradigm promises and pursues, take class-and-gender-specific forms, as Prendergast explains:

> Adultery and crime are recurring themes of nineteenth-century fiction. If one of the main concerns of the serious 'bourgeois' novel is with the disorder caused by female adultery, the major preoccupation of the 'popular' novel is with avenging disorder caused by the criminal transgressor.

To this comparison between adultery and crime in fiction, one might add Michael Riffaterre's Proudhonian basis for the interpretation of *Madame Bovary*:

> I will apply this moral pronouncement of Proudhon (entered under *adultère* in the first volume of Larousse, published in 1866, nine years after the novel): *L'adultère est un crime qui contient en soi tous les autres* [...]. No phrasing could be apter for generating the descriptive system in question here; the whole novel can be shown to derive from that system.[15]

The divorce fiction which we shall study belongs, in one way or another, to this same bourgeois tradition. And if the novel of wifely adultery takes us back to an original disorder which traumatizes patriarchy (namely, the uncertainty of paternal origins), the novel of divorce compels us forward to a latter-day disorder (namely, the failure of conjugal desire to adhere to the name of the father). Not only do we not know where we come from; it seems that we do not where we are going either. Like the novel of wifely adultery, the novel of divorce unseats the rights and privileges of the first man. It is also significant that the arch-criminal of classic French fiction is Balzac's Vautrin, because in his capacity for self-refashioning we see the seeds of self-manufacture which will be glossed positively in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries' model of self-reinvention. For all the avowed conservatism in Balzac's critique of modernity, we can nevertheless see in the sheer glee and energy of Vautrin's own particular 'comédie' an anticipation of this positive gloss. And Vautrin's plot, like the divorce plots at the end of the century, explores the vulnerability of the *état civil* to changes of name.

Rather than turning without reflection to recent French sociology for conceptual models, I would suggest that Anthony Giddens and Zygmunt Bauman provide us with a model of contemporary identity which speaks most persuasively to our question of divorce. Of particular relevance are their accounts of self-reinvention in the 'liquid modern' or 'late modern' age. Few sociologists can claim to have been more prolific than Giddens in their production not only of books but also of paradigms, and we shall make use of his work in the early 1990s on the reflexivity of modern identity and sexuality.[16]

In the introduction to *Modernity and Self-Identity* Giddens applies the notion of