

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the representation of conspiracy in the literature of the July Monarchy (1830–1848) and its engagement with conspiracy thinking, with particular reference to the work of Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850) and George Sand (1804–1876). In providing the first sustained scholarly exploration of conspiracy and cultural production in nineteenth-century France, it situates the novel within wider discourses on European political history in the years leading up to the upheaval of 1848. Through close readings of Balzac and Sand's common investment in conspiracist modes of explanation, this study makes the case for a new generic category, the novel of conspiracy, around which literary poetics, historical imagination and political fantasy come to coalesce.

Chapter one proposes a re-evaluation of the dialectic between models of surface and depth reading in Balzac's *Une ténébreuse affaire* (1841), arguing that the conspiratorial landscape of this proto-detective novel belies Balzac's fraught relationship to the severed referentiality of his narrative. As illustration of a Balzacian poetics of conspiracy, *Une ténébreuse affaire*, it is suggested, points forward in literary history towards the Flaubertian aesthetic of platitude. Chapter two looks to the political criticisms Jacques Rancière makes of Sand's patrician benevolence to inform its reading of *Le Compagnon du Tour de France* (1840), which depicts workers' secret societies and the underground networks of Restoration liberalism. Accusations of misguided idealism, this thesis shows, align Rancière's critique and the literary-critical narrative informing Sand's twentieth-century aesthetic devaluation with the reproach that she herself levels at the Carbonarist conspirators of her novel. Chapter three, finally, turns to the alternative origin myth of 1789 that Sand elaborates in *Consuelo—La Comtesse de Rudolstadt* (1842–44). Her engagement with the founding text of the conspiracist tradition of explanation, it argues, provides the cornerstone for the interrogation of the tensions of a pre-Revolutionary Europe torn between Enlightenment and Illuminism.

Framing the Balzacian and Sandian novel as emblematic of a wider discourse on the conspiratorial origins of 1789 has a two-fold advantage. On an immediate level, it nuances received critical ideas on these authors' relationships to history and literary genre (a realist Balzac incapable of looking back further than the Restoration whose demise he so lamented; an idealist Sand too caught up in a utopian future to envisage the historical past). In doing so, this study seeks to problematize the narrative of oppositionality behind the Balzac–Sand binary in terms of which the literary history of nineteenth-century France is habitually couched. Yet, more significantly, it also gestures towards the importance of the conspiratorial as a prism through which to approach the porosity of the very categories of 'literature' and 'history' in the nineteenth-century French context.