

**The University of Chicago**

Heed the Prophetic Warnings: Occultism and Conspiracy  
Theories as Linked Worldviews in *fin-de-siècle* France

By  
Ian Gregory

August 2021

A paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Master of Arts degree in the  
Master of Arts Program in the Social Sciences

Faculty Advisor: Darcy Heuring

Preceptor: John McCallum

**Abstract:** In France at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, both conspiracy theories and occult literature were widely read. A number of the most prominent occultists and conspiracy theorists also wrote extensively in the other genre. This paper examines both the occult and political writings of these authors in order to determine what connection exists between their conspiracy theories and occult writings. Both genres employed a kind of divination to reveal hidden truths about the world. They both analyzed these hidden truths in a logical framework that was all-encompassing and impossible to debunk. The purpose of this logical process was for the occultist or conspiracy theorist to explain the massive societal changes France had undergone in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They used this knowledge to create a historical understanding which laid the blame for any and every political or cultural setback on a specific enemy, one which they could overcome to create their desired social order. This paper reveals the fundamental logical connections between occultism and conspiracy theories and considers what this connection explains about each literary form.

## Introduction

France at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century often reads like the highlights of an odd novel: magicians dueling with swords at a park in Paris; Intelligence Officers dressing as women to fix the results of a military tribunal; a hoax about Satanism that bewildered even the Pope. Amidst the political and social upheaval brought by General Boulanger, the Dreyfus Affair, and the Panama Scandal, the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century also saw the rise in popularity of two peculiar genres of literature: conspiracy theories and the occult. Conspiracy theories, such as those that claimed the Illuminati caused the French Revolution, or that Jewish bankers were attempting to wipe France off the map, had become a mainstay in newspapers and books throughout the country, but particularly in Paris. Also in Paris, a new community of magicians and occultists were becoming famous for their occult novels and manuals, buoyed by their own corner of the press.

The most popular conspiracy theories in France were those around secret societies and Jews. These theories were propagated, with variations, across the political spectrum, but their most fervent supporters were among right-wing, Catholic-aligned writers and journalists. Occult literature is an even broader term, covering topics from tarot readings to angelic visitations, also from a wide range of political affiliations. When reading from these two literary genres, a strange trend emerges: a not-insignificant number of writers, all based in Paris and all active from the 1880s to around 1910, were engaged in writing both conspiracy theories and occult literature. The goal of this paper is to examine the works of these authors, both political and magical, to uncover not only why this overlap occurred, but what it might reveal about conspiracy theories and occultism.

This study concerns five different authors, though not all at equal levels of depth. Léo Taxil, an anti-clerical fraudster, fooled the press and the Catholic Church in a ten-year hoax claiming that Freemasons practiced magic and worshipped Satan. There was his rival, Edouard Drumont, best known as a career antisemite who achieved massive, mainstream popularity in France during the Panama Scandal and the Dreyfus Affair, and was also a palm reader, and contributed several articles regarding occultism to the paper *L'Echo de Merveilleux*. The founder and chief contributor of *L'Echo* was Gaston Méry, the editor-in-chief of Drumont's antisemitic daily paper *La Libre Parole*. Méry's occult interests were primarily seers and prophetesses. Another regular contributor to *L'Echo* was the master occultist Papus (real name Gerard Encausse), perhaps the most widely read magician in France. In 1903, Papus anonymously published a series of articles (later collected into a book) accusing a mysterious global Syndicate of attempting to sabotage French and Russian relations. Papus' spiritual master, and political inspiration, was Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, a spiritualist who claimed to have astral projected himself into the caverns beneath India and uncovered a secret kingdom, waiting to return to the surface and guide Europe into the future.

For these five authors, the connection between conspiracy theories and occult literature is more than coincidental. Nor were these authors published in both genres for purely commercial reasons, though all of the authors in this study made healthy careers out of their writing; all professed an ideological attachment to both their political and magical endeavors. For these writers, there existed a basic logic that underlined both their conspiracy and magical writing. By examining this shared logic, places where the arguments of conspiracy theories and occultism overlap, the motives behind both kinds of writing become much clearer.

Answering the question of why occultism and conspiracy theories overlapped requires a fairly novel approach. Rather than treat conspiracy theories as the byproduct of other political movements—as an outgrowth, say, of Boulangerism, antisemitism, or anti-clericalism—I will treat conspiracy theories as a distinct literary genre, just as occult writing is a genre. In this paper I will be analyzing the text of the conspiracy theories themselves, and the way that conspiracy theories, even across political lines, were part of a shared literary tradition. The point is not to uncover the political impact of these conspiracy theories, but to instead consider them on their literary and rhetorical merits. This does not mean divorcing conspiracy theories from the political context in which they were produced, or from the motivations of their authors, but rather attempting to understand conspiracy theories based on exactly what they said. A great deal of work has already gone into understanding what role these conspiracy theories played in the politics of the Third Republic. This project looks instead to understand the construction of conspiracy theories first before turning to wider political implications.

There are three key characteristics to both the conspiracy theories and occult literature of these authors. First was their shared tendency towards divination. Both the occultist writings and conspiracy theories revealed hidden truths about the world and made predictions of the future. The second characteristic is that they both constructed a perfect world, that is, a world in which everything is explicable through proper interpretation and analysis, and nothing occurs by chance. Finally, conspiracy theories and occultism both provided ways to reclaim power these authors felt they (and, by extension, their country and religion) had lost. This paper describes the logical process of these genres: first, information gathering via divination, then combination of those facts into a perfectly logical world, and finally, the reclamation of power through that analysis. As a result, the first half of this paper deals heavily in matters of divination, describing

our authors and the information they collected via divination, and is therefore the longest portion of the paper. Once that data is in place, I move on to describing their analytical process and the desired change they sought to bring about. This logical process reveals that conspiracy theory and occultism were both defense mechanisms, ways for its authors to make sense of the world and impose a form of order. They allowed authors to understand how the world had turned against them, and what must be done to combat these changes.

## Historiography

Conspiracy theories have attracted significant scholarly attention, though primarily more in the domains of psychology and political science than history. Fundamental to almost all these studies are the works of Karl Popper and Richard Hofstadter. Popper's works, particularly 1945's *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, first advanced "the conspiracy theory of society" as a distinct social phenomenon whose practitioners believe in a theory of reality in which all social events are the result of "direct design by some powerful individuals and groups."<sup>1</sup> Hofstadter's essay "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," published in *Harper's Magazine* in 1964, refined the image of a conspiracy theorist. According to Hofstadter, "paranoids" saw the world in apocalyptic terms and sought to defend civilization and expose their enemies as evil.<sup>2</sup>

Conspiracy theory theory has evolved much in the decades since Popper and Hofstadter first breached the topic, though their fundamental observations remain relevant. The conspiracy theorist, or paranoid, sees the events of history and society as being part of an "absolutistic"

---

<sup>1</sup> Karl Popper and E.H. Gombrich, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 306.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," *Harper's Magazine*, November 1, 1964.

framework, one which explains everything as being the result of direct action.<sup>3</sup> Subsequent studies of conspiracy theories have elaborated further on the definition (and meanings) of conspiracy theories.

Much of the academic literature has focused on the development of conspiracy theories in post-war America. *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America* by Timothy Melley focuses primarily on anti-communist conspiracy theories in the United States and interprets them as resulting from anxiety over personal agency.<sup>4</sup> With the exception of Melley, most of these works focus not on the textual details of conspiracy theories, but on belief in conspiracy theory. Political scientist Joseph Uscinski's *Conspiracy Theories: A Primer* purports to study the phenomenon at large but focuses primarily on American conspiracy theories after the John F. Kennedy assassination. In *Enchanted America: How Intuition and Reason Divide Our Politics*, authors Eric Oliver and Thomas Wood conduct extensive studies to determine causes of conspiracy belief, and their prevalence in modern American culture. Cass R. Sunstein's *Conspiracy Theories and Other Dangerous Ideas* develops a nuanced model of conspiracy theory reception and dissemination, primarily using American conspiracy theories (and conspiracy theories about America) as its base. Even historian Daniel Pipes, in *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where it Comes From*, cannot resist several chapters of diversion into contemporary American politics.<sup>5</sup> The approach of these works towards conspiracy theories is fundamentally different than mine. They primarily attempt to explain the

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Timothy Melley, *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Pipes spends a significant portion of the book passing judgment on contemporary conspiracy theories, with a special focus on black Americans, a group he claims to be the most likely to engage in conspiracy theories, particularly antisemitic conspiracy theories. Beyond the countless outstanding criticisms of Pipes' other work, his approach to contemporary conspiracy theory in this book was also criticized in Jovan Byford's *Conspiracy Theories: A Critical Introduction*. In addition, Pipes' critical perspective on conspiracy theories is slightly undermined by his later belief that former president Barack Obama is a secret Muslim.

cultural popularity of conspiracy theories, and what influence they have had on American politics. They do not, however, conduct a textual analysis of the conspiracies themselves, dealing only with their broad concepts (“John F. Kennedy was assassinated by the CIA”) rather than their specific details (“Who was involved? How was it done? For what reason? How has this argument changed over time?”).

Besides contemporary American conspiracy theories, the next largest genre of academic literature centers around *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The *Protocols* first appeared in Russia in 1903 (a with authorship unclear, even today) and quickly became the most popular and influential conspiracy theory in the world, and was even used by the Nazis as a classroom textbook. Much has developed in the study of the *Protocols* since Hannah Arendt bemoaned that it was “not part of the history of antisemitism.”<sup>6</sup> The amount of literature specifically discussing the *Protocols* is staggering, but Norman Cohn’s *Warrant for Genocide* remains the most influential work tracing the development and spread of the book. Much effort has been spent attempting to identify the author of the *Protocols*, as in *The Non-Existent Manuscript* by Cesar De Michelis and Richard Newhouse, but more modern scholarship has focused more on the literary elements and cultural impact of the *Protocols* than its provenance.<sup>7</sup> Ironically, arguably the most complete study of the *Protocols* origins was completed in 1939 but remained almost undiscovered until the 1960s. Henri Rollin’s *l’Apocalypse de notre temps* was suppressed by the German occupation of France and remained almost unknown until its later rediscovery and reprinting. *l’Apocalypse* remains extremely valuable for its exhaustive study of the personal papers and correspondences of many of the *Protocols*’ potential authors and definite influences. I

---

<sup>6</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Orlando: Harvest Books, 1968), xvi.

<sup>7</sup> Yohannan Petrovsky-Shtern, “Contextualizing the Mystery: Three Approaches to the Protocols of the Elders of Zion,” *Kritika* 4, no. 2 (2003): 405.

have resisted over-comparison towards the *Protocols* in this paper, as these authors sometimes present earlier conspiracy theories as little more than warm-ups for the *Protocols*; while they are interested in discussing previous conspiracy theories as ways to uncover the origins, meanings, and significance of the *Protocols*, they do not pay much attention to the pre-*Protocols* conspiracy theories in and of themselves. Therefore, in this paper I won't be spending too much time comparing 19th century conspiracy theories to the *Protocols* but will instead consider the theories on their own (dubious) merits.

While most historical literature has focused on the *Protocols*, some authors have focused on conspiracy theories before the 20<sup>th</sup> century. *Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in Early Modern Europe*, an essay collection edited by Barry Coward and Julian Swann makes a sweeping examination of European conspiracy theories up to the French Revolution, and it recognizes the fundamental difference between early modern conspiracy theories (primarily created by and distributed among political elites) and the popular media of 19<sup>th</sup> century France. *Le complot dans la République* by Frédéric Monier tracks conspiracies, both real and theorized, through the complex political history of the Third Republic. Most French literature on these conspiracy theories follows Monier and mixes both real conspiracies (as by Boulanger and Déroulède) with conspiracy theories. The predominant conspiracy theory in Monier's account is that of a global Masonic conspiracy, a popular subject. *Jews and Freemasons in Europe* by Jacob Katz, for example, describes several anti-Masonic conspiracy theories, but focuses mainly on regions outside of France and pays particular attention to the realities of Jewish and Freemasons in Europe rather than the theories themselves.

The majority of works describing French conspiracy theories do so in terms of French antisemitism, not conspiracy theories. The ur-text in this regard is Robert Byrnes' *Antisemitism*

*in Modern France*, published in 1969 but still frequently cited as a major reference text. *The Pope of Antisemitism*, by Frederick Busi, makes the most complete examination of Drumont's life and works, and clarifies important details regarding his associates that other authors glance over. Michel Winock's *Nationalism, Anti-Semitism, and Fascism in France* nicely complements these two volumes by integrating cultural details of the Third Republic with a more standard political history. Though these are comprehensive and useful texts, they describe conspiracy theories as expressions of antisemitism and not as a genre of its own. Their analysis of these conspiracy theories is therefore always in terms of how they relate to older forms of antisemitism and anti-Judaism, not on the literary and rhetorical distinctiveness of conspiracy theories.

Information on Lèò Taxil and Papus, however, is mostly to be found in histories of occultism. Ruben van Luijk's *Children of Lucifer* is the most up-to-date history of Satanism in France, and the most exhaustive account of every step of the Taxil hoax. It is complemented nicely by Massimo Introvigne's *Satanism: A Social History* and Robert Ziegler's *Satanism, Magic, and Mysticism in Fin-de-Siècle France*. These works are in direct dialogue with van Luijk and offer useful alternative perspectives on van Luijk's very Catholic-centered analysis. Outside of Rollin's *l'Apocalypse*, however, Papus' conspiracy theories receive very little scholarly attention, perhaps due to the limited influence of Rollin's work.

These historical works tend to treat conspiracy theories as symptoms of larger societal movements (typically antisemitism) rather than forms to be analyzed on their own. Anthropologists, political scientists, and psychologists are more likely to group their works according to a shared theme of conspiracy theory, and more likely to attempt to explain the phenomenon as a whole. *Conspiracy Theories: A Critical Introduction* by Jovan Byford neatly combines a brief history of conspiracy theories with an informed theoretical framework. More

than other attempts at the same project, like Uscinski's *Primer*, Byford considers the widest possible range of conspiracy theories in considering their global popularity. The *Handbook of Conspiracy Theory and Contemporary Religion*, edited by Egil Asprem, David Robinson, and Asbjørn Dyrendal collects valuable essays linking belief in conspiracy theories and religion. However, the essays in this book are largely separate from conspiracy theory authorship and primarily concerned with conspiracy theory beliefs. Most other works in this type are too modern to be of much use, relying on a more modern belief in conspiracy theories predicated on television and the internet.

Besides the aforementioned titles on Satanism by van Luijk, Introvigne, and Ziegler, secondary writings on French occultism are scattered. *Eliphas Levi and the French Occult Revival* by Christopher McIntosh deals primarily in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but carefully traces the occult influences of Papus and his cohort. This work is essential mainly for its tracking of the various occult organizations and their disputes, laying out a clear chronology of influence that its subjects intentionally attempted to obscure. However, it makes no mention of Papus' conspiracy theories, nor of the occult writings of Drumont and Méry. *Des savants face à l'Occulte*, edited by Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent and Christine Blondel, attempts to bring together several disparate occult stories but casts its net a little too wide by focusing on the entire life of the Third Republic rather than just a few decades.

This paper is not the first project to address the occult influences of conspiracy theories. Dieter Groh, in the highly useful multi-disciplinary *Changing Conceptions of Conspiracy Theory* (edited by Carl F. Graumann and Serge Moscovici) links conspiracy theories with accusations of

witchcraft.<sup>8</sup> In *Enchanted America*, Oliver and Wood uncover a high correlation between belief in conspiracy theories and supernatural beliefs among modern Americans.<sup>9</sup> To explain this link, they define the “intuitionism” of their subjects, a value indicating a person’s tendency towards magical thinking, gut feeling, and belief in the powers of unobservable forces over empirical explanation.<sup>10</sup> Egil Asprem sought to explain the intersection of conspiracy theories and occultism through Colin Campbell’s “cultic milieu,” suggesting that the environment that enabled one also enabled the other—an environment which encouraged non-traditional forms of knowledge and truth-seeking.<sup>11</sup> Sanders and West, in their introduction to the anthropological collection *Power Revealed and Concealed in the New World Order*, cast conspiracy theories and magic as being part of the same “occult cosmology,” meaning any belief in a world where secret powers and mysterious events motivate history.<sup>12</sup> “Hermetic Histories: Divine Providence and Conspiracy Theory,” a 2007 article by Brian P. Bennett in *Numen*, comes closes to the argument of this paper by arguing for a literary connection between conspiracy theories and the divinatory powers of providence (a religious belief in a foreseeable future). All of these works consider the shared belief in conspiracy theories and the occult, and literary similarities between conspiracy theories and the occult, but none examine conspiracy theories and occult literature produced *by the same authors*.

---

<sup>8</sup> Dieter Groh, “The Temptation of Conspiracy Theories, or, Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People? Part 1: Preliminary Draft of a Theory of Conspiracy Theories,” in *Changing Conceptions of Conspiracy*, ed. Carl F. Graumann and Serge Moscovici (New York: Springer, 1987), 1, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Eric J. Oliver and Thomas John Wood, *Enchanted America: How Intuition and Reason Divide Our Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 57.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>11</sup> Egil Asprem and Asbjørn Dyrendal, “Close Companions? Esotericism and Conspiracy Theoreis,” in *Handbook of Conspiracy Theory and Contemporary Religion*, ed. Asbjørn Dyrendal, David G. Robertson, and Egil Asprem (Boston: Brill, 2018), 208-9.

<sup>12</sup> Todd Sanders and Harry G. West, “Power Revealed and Concealed in the New World Order,” in *Transparency and Conspiracy: Ethnographies of Suspicion in the New World Order*, ed. Harry G. West and Todd Sanders (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 6.

The goal of this paper is to bridge the gap between conspiracy theories and occult literature by treating both as a kind of literary form. While most of the historiography concerns itself with belief and political consequence, only a handful of articles and books have treated conspiracy theories as a specific genre of literature. Taking this approach allows us to make direct comparisons with the occult literature produced by the same authors. Rather than focusing on the effects of these works, be it in the minds of readers or in the political arena, a literary analysis makes the beliefs and behaviors of these authors clear. The existing literature on conspiracy theories becomes very useful in putting a name to the recurring tropes that appear in both conspiracy theories and occult writings, allowing us to name these connections and better understand why they exist. The first step, then, is using the existing literature to establish a working definition of “conspiracy theories” and “occultism” as they were in 19<sup>th</sup> century France.

## **Definitions**

No universally agreed-upon definition of a conspiracy theory exists. Authors find key elements to agree upon, some more than others, but each study presents their own definition of a conspiracy theory as it fits their narrative. I list some definitions proposed by other authors, then use them and other sources to create a list of recurring characteristics we can find in conspiracy theories. This step-by-step approach is necessary, as the qualities of a conspiracy theory can then be compared with the qualities of occult literature written by the same author. This necessitates a definition of occult literature, and all its related terms, particularly esotericism and divination. What becomes clear is that conspiracy theories and occult literature share a set of literary qualities, not just tropes of phrasing, but the same fundamental logic.

In *Les puissances de l'ombre*, a collection of French conspiracy theories, editor Emmanuel Kreis defines a conspiracy theory as “an alternate historical construction which sees everything as happening due to a secret plan by a small group of powerful and evil people.”<sup>13</sup> While at first blush this definition is needlessly broad (in that it refers to a conspiracy theory as encompassing “everything”), four other authors also noted the “totalizing” element of conspiracy theories.<sup>14</sup> Conspiracy theories expand to encompass any historical event, and any new political event. As Dyrendal puts it, conspiracy theories create a “coherent grand narrative about the world, explaining everything that is happening quite easily.”<sup>15</sup> Kreis’ definition makes several other important distinctions: conspiracy theories are a “historical construction,” deal with a “secret plan,” and are carried out by “powerful and evil people.”<sup>16</sup>

In relation to Kreis’ “historical construction,” philosopher Brian Keeley proposes the following definition of conspiracy theories: “a proposed explanation of some historical event (or events) in terms of the significant causal agency of a relatively small group of persons—the conspirators—acting in secret.”<sup>17</sup> Like Kreis, Keeley is attenuated to the historical focus of conspiracy theories. The conspiracy theory, according to Keeley, is centered around the “significant causal agency” of the conspirators. This is what Popper refers to as the inversion of the typical social scientific process: where the social sciences attempt to analyze the “unintended

---

<sup>13</sup> Emmanuel Kreis, *Les puissances de l'ombre: Juifs, jésuites, francs-maçons, réactionnaires: la théorie du complot dans les textes* (Paris: CNRS, 2009), 6.

<sup>14</sup> Jovan Byford, *Conspiracy Theories: A Critical Introduction* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 33-34; Melley, *Empire of Conspiracy*, 8; Brian P. Bennett, “Hermetic Histories: Divine Providence and Conspiracy Theory,” *Numen* 54, no. 2 (2007): 176; Aspren and Dyrendal, “Rational Enchantments,” 50.

<sup>15</sup> Aspren and Dyrendal, “Rational Enchantments,” 50.

<sup>16</sup> These distinctions are more important than they appear. The conspiracy theories discussed in this paper, and those that people think of when they hear the phrase “conspiracy theory” are seldom small in scope. If one man thinks another is out to steal from him, we do not consider that a “conspiracy theory.” Nor do we worry about benign or banal conspiracy theories, even if they are widespread (in this type, Cass Sunstein suggests we consider the theories of children regarding the existence of Santa Clause).

<sup>17</sup> Brian L. Keeley, “Of Conspiracy Theories,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 96, no. 3 (1999): 116.

social repercussions of intentional human actions,” conspiracy theories advocate that “all results, even those which at first sight do not seem to be intended by anybody, are the intended results of the actions of people who are interested in these results.”<sup>18</sup> The attribution of intentional agency is the most recurring element in conspiracy theories, mentioned by six other authors.<sup>19</sup>

One final full definition of conspiracy theories, by Cass R. Sunstein in *Conspiracy Theories and Other Dangerous Ideas*, is: “an effort to explain some event or practice by referring to the secret machinations of powerful people who have also managed to conceal their role.”<sup>20</sup> There are several characteristics to note in this definition. First, the emphasis on secrecy: the plans of the conspiracy are secret, as are the conspirators. Only the conspiracy theorist can uncover these plans, as they have been granted some form of special knowledge. As Kreis puts it, conspiracy theories are “theories of pretense,” and create a division between the initiated and uninitiated worlds.<sup>21</sup> Other writers agree on the importance of this special knowledge as a crucial part of the conspiracy theory, empowering the theorist alongside the conspiracy they posit.<sup>22</sup>

Another important facet of Sunstein’s definition is that conspiracy theories are “attempts to explain.” They seek to make sense of events through explanation. Conspiracy theories are inherently rational, or at least seemingly rational. The conspiracy theorist accumulates evidence, often an unwieldy amount of evidence, to defend their argument.<sup>23</sup> They then apply this evidence to an interpretive framework. Conspiracy theories reveal hidden truths and do so by applying

---

<sup>18</sup> Popper and Gombrich, *The Open Society*, 307.

<sup>19</sup> Carl F. Graumann, “Conspiracy: History and Social Psychology – a Synopsis,” in *Changing Conceptions of Conspiracy*, edited by Carl F. Graumann and Serge Moscovici (New York: Springer, 1987), 247; Groh, “Temptation of Conspiracy,” 1, 11; Cass R. Sunstein, *Conspiracy Theories & Other Dangerous Ideas* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 6-7; Byrford, *Critical Introduction*, 44; Kreis, *Les puissances*, 7; Geoffrey Cubitt, *The Jesuit Myth: Conspiracy Theory and Politics in Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 2.

<sup>20</sup> Sunstein, *Conspiracy Theories*, 3.

<sup>21</sup> Kreis, *Les puissances*, 8.

<sup>22</sup> Graumann, “Conspiracy,” 248; Sunstein, *Conspiracy Theories*, 5; Cubitt, *Jesuit Myth*, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Hofstadter, “Paranoid Style”; Byrford, *Critical Introduction*, 71, 88.

their logic to their evidence.<sup>24</sup> In “Hermetic Histories,” Brian Bennett claims that conspiracy theories view the world as a “semiological system” open to active interpretation.<sup>25</sup> Conspiracy theories seek meaning in the world by interpreting hidden signs to reveal hidden enemies.

Taking all these definitions together, we can reach a workable definition of a conspiracy theory and a useful understanding of its key characteristics. A conspiracy theory, for the purposes of this paper, is a theory which proposes an explanation of some event as being the result of the specific actions and intentions of a hidden group of evil conspirators.<sup>26</sup> Conspiracy theories also possess the following characteristics: they are all-encompassing and their logic can be stretched to accommodate any addition; they assume that any historical consequence must be the result of a specific person or group’s intention and action; the conspiracy theorist possesses secret knowledge that allows them to uncover the truth behind the conspiracy theory; and finally, the world possesses signs and symbols that can be interpreted to reveal the truth of the conspiracy. These characteristics will later be referred to in short as: totality, intentional agency, privileged knowledge, and the interpretive framework.

How do these characteristics apply to occult literature, and what then even is occult literature? This question is made more complicated by the many names which these occultist subjects referred to themselves: magicians, priests, scientists, seers, psychics, and esotericists.

---

<sup>24</sup> Aspren and Dyrendal, “Close Companions,” 215; Svetlana Boym, “Conspiracy Theories and Literary Ethics: Umberto Eco, Danilo Kis, and the Protocols of Zion,” *Comparative Literature* 51, no. 2 (1999): 98; Frédéric Monier, *Le complot dans la République: stratégies du secret, de Boulanger à la Cagoule* (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 1998), 66; Kreis, *Les Puissances*, 8.

<sup>25</sup> Bennett, “Hermetic Histories,” 176.

<sup>26</sup> Perhaps the specificity of “evil” is odd, but no conspiracy theory studied here, or in any of the other academic works on conspiracy theories, considers the subject of their theory to be working for the benefit of society. Some consider the conspirators to be a form of “ultimate evil,” not just a political adversary but an enemy attempting to bring about the end of France, or European society, or Christianity. This concept appears in: Hofstadter, “Paranoid Style”; Wolfgang Behringer, “Detecting the Ultimate Conspiracy, or how Waldensians became Witches,” in *Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in Early Modern Europe: From the Waldensians to the French Revolution*, ed. Barry Coward and Julian Swann (London: Routledge, 2004), 23; Byford, *Critical Introduction*, 82; Monier, *Le Complot*, 68; Cubitt, *Jesuit Myth*, 2.

The occult is a blanket term used to refer to writings on subjects existing outside of mainstream religion and science (though occult practitioners often considered the occult to be the domain of one or both of those fields). This includes topics such as magic, spiritualism, and psychic powers. Occultism as a term first originated in 19<sup>th</sup> century France and was used frequently by the subjects of this paper.<sup>27</sup> You would not refer to medieval astrologers, alchemists, or magicians by the term occultist, as it is typically reserved for use in the 19<sup>th</sup> and later centuries.

Esotericism, however, is a broader term with a wider range of use and has been subject to greater debate on its proper definition (despite also originating in the 19<sup>th</sup> century). Olav Hammer, in “Mysticism and Esotericism as Contested Taxonomical Categories” has collated multiple definitions of esotericism. Antoine Favre defined esotericism as a school of thought possessing four characteristics: correspondence (the world is understood through symbolic connections); living nature (the world itself is alive); imagination and meditation (the world is understood through rituals and meditation); and transmutation (a person who achieves esoteric knowledge is themselves transmuted).<sup>28</sup> This definition is overly specific, but does interestingly parallel conspiracy theories, particularly in the principles of correspondence and transmutation. Wouter J. Hanegraaff’s definition of esotericism simply refers to it as a group of diverse intellectual elements that are not part of mainstream religious and rational thought.<sup>29</sup> Where Favre’s definition is overly specific, Hanegraaff’s is overly vague, and does not properly account for moments where esoteric material (as in 19<sup>th</sup> century France) was mainstream, well-researched, and popular. One final definition, that of Kocku von Stuckrad, also draws parallels to

---

<sup>27</sup> Papus, for example, who wrote several books titled with the phrase *L’Occultisme*, including his most famous *Traite methodique de Science Occulte*.

<sup>28</sup> Olav Hammer, “Mysticism and Esotericism as Contested Taxonomical Categories,” *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 29 (2020): 18.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 18-19.

conspiracy theories: esotericism is a “set of currents built on a discourse of having access to higher, restricted knowledge.”<sup>30</sup> Obviously, esotericism resists easy definition, but we can at least understand it as an intellectual tradition defined by secret knowledge and existing outside mainstream knowledge-producing institutions.

The last definition regarding magic I must make is that of divination. Divination, another frustratingly broad term, I use in this paper as any occult act which reveals information about the world, either as it exists now or will exist in the future. Divinatory practices like scrying or astral projection could be used to uncover hidden truths about the world, and techniques like palm-reading (chiromancy) or tarot readings (cartomancy) could reveal information that had yet to be made real. Divination features heavily into the occult practices of all the subjects of this paper, and has a special relationship with conspiracy theories, themselves a kind of divination.

## Historical Background

The Third Republic was a period of dense literary production, particularly in conspiracy theories and esotericism. Many scholars of conspiracy theories claim they flourish in times of crisis.<sup>31</sup> As such, a number of authors have pointed to 19<sup>th</sup> century France as a particular hotbed of conspiracy theory.<sup>32</sup> The Third Republic, with its tumultuous early years, was certainly unstable, and experienced a number of *actual* conspiracies towards the end of the century.

The Third Republic first took shape in a chaotic moment for France: the Second Empire fell apart in the midst of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 with the capture of Napoleon III, and

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>31</sup> This is largely treated as self-evident, though I have found no actual study attempting to prove this, nor any substantial definition of “times of crisis.” Examples of this argument can be found in: Groh, “Temptation of Conspiracy,” 11; Boym, “Literary Ethics,” 98; Bennett, “Hermetic Histories,” 190; Kreis, *Les puissances*, 11.

<sup>32</sup> Cubitt, *Jesuit Myth*, 3; Groh, “Temptation of Conspiracy Theory,” 26; Monier, *Les puissances*, 13.

held its first elections in February of 1871, and was forced to immediately negotiate an end to the war. Immediately thereafter, the National Guard took power in Paris to form the Paris Commune. Just a few months later, at the end of May, the Third Republic's forces managed to defeat the Commune and regain control of Paris. Only by June 1871 did the Third Republic begin to govern without immediate military crisis.<sup>33</sup>

The majority of the elected senate, however, was conservatives who favored a restoration of the monarchy.<sup>34</sup> The next five years saw the Republic embroiled in constant arguments between republicans, monarchists, Bonapartists, and socialists.<sup>35</sup> In 1875, at last, the government passed a series of constitutional laws, legally bringing itself into stable existence (laws passed by a margin of one vote).<sup>36</sup> Even with the form of the Republic decided, the Third Republic was a weak government, reluctant to heavily govern the lives of its citizens.<sup>37</sup> The stability of the Republic was always in question.

The propensity towards conspiracy theory only heightened due to the existence of actual conspiracies. General Georges Boulanger, ignoring army rules preventing a soldier from running for election, was in 1889 elected to the Chamber of Deputies for Paris. Boulanger, like most of the French military, was a conservative Christian who despised the weakness of the Third Republic.<sup>38</sup> Urged by his supporters to march on the Elysée, Boulanger balked, preferring to take power legally, and he was ultimately forced to flee to Brussels to avoid arrest for a planned *coup d'état*.<sup>39</sup> In 1899, antisemitic politician Paul Déroulède attempted his own *coup d'état*,

---

<sup>33</sup> Jean Marie Mayeur and Madeleine Rebérioux, *The Third Republic from Its Origins to the Great War, 1871-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 5.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 18, 36.

<sup>36</sup> George R. Whyte, *The Dreyfus Affair: A Chronological History* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 7.

<sup>37</sup> Mayeur and Reberieux, *The Third Republic*, 175.

<sup>38</sup> Ernest R. May, *Strange Victory: Hitler's Conquest of France* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 10.

<sup>39</sup> Whyte, *The Dreyfus Affair*, 10.

attempting to march his supporters in the army to the Elysée during the funeral of President Felix Faure. Some of Déroulède's allies lost their stomach for the plan, resulting in a comedic series of events in which Déroulède marched himself into army custody, largely by accident. Originally arraigned on minor charges of trespassing, Déroulède insisted he be tried for treason, and was ultimately acquitted.<sup>40</sup>

Amidst these coup attempts, both serious and slight, the Third Republic was periodically shocked by major political scandals. Two are particularly important: the Panama Scandal and the Dreyfus Affair. In 1879, the Panama Canal Company set out to build a canal across Panama, assuming success would come as easily as the Suez Canal project. To finance the expensive project, which only grew more costly over time, the company solicited for funds from average French citizens in the form of stocks and bonds. In 1888, the Panama Canal Company bribed journalists and hundreds of politicians to remain solvent, but ultimately collapsed in 1889, causing severe financial distress across France.<sup>41</sup> The collapse of the company was bad enough, but beginning 1891, key bankers involved in the affair leaked details of the bribery to the antisemitic press. The Panama Scandal became a prime example of the incompetence of the Third Republic and was used by antisemitic authors as proof of Jewish greed (and the Jews' plans to destroy France).

The Panama Affair, though massive in its scope and political consequence, was minor in comparison to the Dreyfus Affair. In 1894, Jewish officer Alfred Dreyfus was arrested on suspicion of passing military secrets to the Germans. The evidence was scant, and to secure a guilty verdict in court martial a small conspiracy of French military officers falsified evidence and submitted a secret dossier to the judge, resulting in a guilty verdict. The Dreyfus case

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 237, 242.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 14.

inspired significant outrage from both those who believed him innocent (the Dreyfusards) and those who believed him guilty (anti-Dreyfusards). To antisemites, Dreyfus was proof (alongside Panama) of a Jewish conspiracy seeking to betray France to Germany. The real conspiracy, of course, was not with Dreyfus, but with the military, who conspired to keep Dreyfus imprisoned even after the real traitor, Charles Esterhazy, became apparent. After five years of nonstop press coverage, Dreyfus secured a revision—and was promptly found guilty a second time. Facing mounting international pressure, the President of the Republic Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau passed an amnesty law, freeing Dreyfus but also protecting the military officers who forged evidence against him. It was not until 1906 that Dreyfus' conviction was finally overturned by the Supreme Court, though this decision did little to affect the opinions of the anti-Dreyfusards, who saw it as only further proof of the corruption of the Republic.<sup>42</sup>

The Third Republic existed in a state of almost perpetual crisis. Even its senators did not believe in the Third Republic; the military in particular hated the republic and its steady secularization. This self-loathing persisted all the way to the Republic's demise: writing in 1940 following the defeat of France by Germany, Marc Bloch claimed that the military was run by officials bred and raised to hate the Republic.<sup>43</sup> In conspiracy theories from this period, the Third Republic is never cast as a bastion of light against an evil conspiracy; it is always being co-opted by the forces of evil, an ineffective and corrupt government destined for failure.

The circumstances in the Third Republic were ripe for conspiracy theories, but their concomitance with occultism is less obvious. France from 1800 to 1880 was interested in occult

---

<sup>42</sup> These details all come from George Whyte's *The Dreyfus Affair: A Chronological History*. By far the most complete accounting of the events of the affair, Whyte's text is invaluable to unpacking the extreme density of the affair.

<sup>43</sup> Marc Bloch, *Strange Defeat: A Statement of Evidence Written in 1940*, trans. Gerard Hopkins (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 160.

material, but not at the level of its final two decades. Occultists like Eliphas Levi and Collin de Plancy made good careers out of esoteric writing, and Spiritualism was as in vogue in France as in the United States, but it was not until the 1884 arrival of Helena Blavatsky that French occultism gained its most popular, and prolific, practitioners.<sup>44</sup> Blavatsky, born in the Ukraine in 1831, founded the Theosophical Society in 1875. She would go on to write several volumes of esoteric literature of great popularity, spend nearly a decade in India, and make the Theosophical Society the center of the occult world.<sup>45</sup> It was the Theosophical Society, already famous across Europe, that kickstarted the occult scene in Paris to which the authors of this study belonged.

Of these authors, their conspiracies all belonged to a single tradition. Beginning with the French Revolution, every conspiracy theory studied in this paper belongs in some form to the Illuminati-Freemason-Jewish conspiracy. The early history of this conspiracy theory is necessary as later authors plagiarized from these writings at length. The origin of this joint conspiracy theory was with the Catholic Church and came long before the formation of the Third Republic.

For Catholics and monarchists, the French Revolution was a moment of utter catastrophe, bringing with it the end of one of Europe's most powerful monarchies, and most powerful allies of the Church. One author's attempts to explain just how the combined powers of the church and the crown could be defeated gained widespread popularity across Europe. Augustin Barruel, a French Jesuit priest and publicist, wrote his 1797 book *Mémoires pour Servir à l'Histoire du Jacobinisme*, from exile in England.<sup>46</sup> *Mémoires* was a major best-seller in England, and gained

---

<sup>44</sup> Christopher McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1972), 157.

<sup>45</sup> Stephen R. Prothero, "Theosophy's Sinner/Saint: Recent Books on Madame Blavatsky," *Religious Studies Review* 23, no. 3 (1997): 257.

<sup>46</sup> Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World-Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967), 30.

popularity alongside a similar work by the scientist John Robison, published in the same year.<sup>47</sup>

Barruel's *Mémoires* did three editions a year between 1797 and 1802, and was published in all major European languages by 1812.<sup>48</sup>

Barruel explained the events of the French Revolution as being the product of a centuries-long plot by a secret society that had existed in various forms throughout history, though was always dedicated to the destruction of Christianity. The first known form of this secret society was the Knights Templar, and they had survived their supposed dissolution in 1314 by adopting other names: the Bavarian Illuminati, the Freemasons, and the Jacobins, among others.<sup>49</sup> Other indignities in French history were attributed to this secret society, including the Albigensian Heresy.<sup>50</sup>

Barruel's primary innovation was in focusing on secret societies, mainly the Freemasons in his account, over Protestants as the primary adversaries of the Catholic Church. These societies operated not for personal gain, but for the overarching goal of ending the monarchy and the Church. It was therefore possible for him to attribute every setback the Catholic Church had experienced in the past eight-hundred years to the machinations of this secret society. Barruel, and his cohort Robison, also proved the profitability of the conspiracy theory as a writing project. Both their works were popular not just in England but in France and especially Germany, where they would take root and germinate over the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Byford, *A Critical Introduction*, 45; Jacob Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe 1723-1939* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 219.

<sup>48</sup> Michael Taylor, "British Conservatism, the Illuminati, and the Conspiracy Theory of the French Revolution, 1797-1802," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 47, no. 3 (2014): 294; Daniel Pipes, *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From* (New York: Free Press, 1997), 70.

<sup>49</sup> Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide*, 30.

<sup>50</sup> Ruben van Luijk, *Children of Lucifer: The Origins of Modern Religious Satanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 232.

<sup>51</sup> Byford, *A Critical Introduction*, 45.

Religious and reactionary groups in Germany rallied around *Mémoires*, where it became inspiration for groups seeking to unify the country.<sup>52</sup>

An important distinction to make regarding Barruel as compared to his successors is that he made little no mention of Jews. France had only just emancipated the Jews a few years prior to the *Mémoires* being published, and they had yet to take a prominent place in public life. Barruel considered their involvement in the French Revolution minimal, seeing they had no prominent involvement on either side of the conflict, and Barruel was aware that French Freemasons were generally hostile to Jews and Jewish membership.<sup>53</sup> Barruel's attentiveness to at least some realities of Jewish experience was not taken up by his intellectual successors, however.

Theories about the secret activities of Freemasons gained particular popularity in Germany between the 1840s and 1860s. Popular writer E. E. Eckert reiterated the French Revolution and secret society connection, though he did not specifically mention Jews; the implication was plain enough, however, that contemporary Catholic press filled in the blanks.<sup>54</sup> Another German author, Alban Stolz, made the Jewish and Masonic connection explicit following the revolutionary events of 1848.<sup>55</sup> Eckert and Stolz's writing would serve to inspire the French author who would bring the anti-Freemasonic conspiracy roaring back to France: Roger Gougenot des Mousseaux.

Already considered an expert on magic and the occult by the Catholic Church, des Mousseaux, in his 1869 book *Le Juif, le judaïsme et la judaïsation des peuples chrétiens*, linked

---

<sup>52</sup> Pipes, *Conspiracy*, 71.

<sup>53</sup> Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide*, 31; Katz, *Jews and Freemasons*, 20.

<sup>54</sup> Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide*, 37.

<sup>55</sup> Katz, *Jews and Freemasons*, 150.

Freemasons, Jews, and occultists in a single massive plot.<sup>56</sup> Popular among Catholics, though not as popular as Barruel had been with the public, des Mousseaux was blessed by Pope Pius IX for his courage in exposing enemies of the church.<sup>57</sup> Well over 500 pages long, *Le Juif* made wide-ranging accusations towards Jews and Freemasons from nearly every possible angle.

Des Mousseaux explicitly stated that, while Freemasons had organized the French Revolution and conspired against the church, they did so at the behest of the Jews, who commanded the society in secret (citing the works of Stolz and Eckert).<sup>58</sup> Des Mousseaux dismissed the public leaders of Freemasonry, asserting that the real power was held in secret by Jews.<sup>59</sup> His anti-Jewish arguments were notably pre-modern, returning to classic allegations of blood libel and misinterpreting the Talmud to suggest that Jews thought themselves entitled to oppress Gentiles.<sup>60</sup> Though des Mousseaux accused Jews of using vast amounts of gold and their control of the press to perpetrate their conspiracy, he did not employ the racialized antisemitism that would become popular in the following decades.<sup>61</sup>

The most innovative sections of *Le Juif* were des Mousseaux's descriptions of the occult practices of Jews and Freemasons. des Mousseaux did not believe that magic was a force that could be wielded, but that all supernatural happenings emanated either from God or from the Devil.<sup>62</sup> He believed in the existence of evil spirits and vampires, and several years before publishing *Le Juif* he warned of "invisible enemies of the church, that is to say, the real enemies of civilization."<sup>63</sup> In *Le Juif* he cast assimilated Jews as demons, hiding in plain sight before

---

<sup>56</sup> van Lwijk, *Children of Lucifer*, 243.

<sup>57</sup> Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide*, 50.

<sup>58</sup> Katz, *Jews and Freemasons*, 154.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 156.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 154.

<sup>61</sup> Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide*, 49.

<sup>62</sup> van Lwijk, *Children of Lucifer*, 243.

<sup>63</sup> Frederick Busi, *The Pope of Antisemitism: The Career and Legacy of Edouard-Adolphe Drumont* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986), 44.

attempting to destroy civilization.<sup>64</sup> He claimed that the Freemasons practiced Kabbalah in secret, and foretold the birth of a Jewish Messiah that would destroy Christianity, inspired by prophecies of the antichrist.<sup>65</sup>

Combining the plots of Jews and Freemasons actually increased the apparent logic of des Mousseaux's argument. He characterized them both as "protagonists of free thinking," highlighting their shared secularity and success following the French Revolution.<sup>66</sup> The apparent motive of Jews was particularly clear: following the Revolution, Jews in France were emancipated. According to the "intentional agency" principle of conspiracy theories, which requires all consequences to be the result of intentional action, Jews must have arranged for the French Revolution to bring about their own emancipation.<sup>67</sup> Des Mousseaux's perspective is crucial to this history because it is his writing that would be most heavily referenced and plagiarized by the conspiracy theorists of the *fin-de-siècle*.

With all the historical components of both conspiracy theories and the occult in place, I will now begin a close reading of the works of our five 19<sup>th</sup> century French authors: Léo Taxil, Edouard Drumont, Gaston Méry, Papus, and Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre. I will examine how each of these three authors applied divination in both their conspiracy and occultist writing, then see how they constructed their own perfect world, before turning to how this writing allowed them to regain power they felt had been lost.

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>65</sup> Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide*, 47-48.

<sup>66</sup> Katz, *Jews and Freemasons*, 154.

<sup>67</sup> Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide*, 33.

## Divination

The methods by which occultism revealed hidden knowledge are fairly obvious. All of these authors described some method of revealing secret information, either about the world around them or about the future. However, the divinatory properties of conspiracy theories are less obvious. Many conspiracy theories did predict the future, but most simply revealed secret plans that had already taken place. This differed from garden-variety historical analysis in that the conspiracy theory revealed historical information that was not just difficult to find, but intentionally obscured. The conspiracy theory pierced the veil of secrecy put in place by the conspirators. Together, occultism and conspiracy theories were a way of finding answers traditional methods could not provide. They divided the world into an in-group of practitioners and believers, who could see the truth of the world, and an out-group of unenlightened dupes. Accessing this divinatory knowledge required the author to possess privileged knowledge, one of the four characteristics of conspiracy theories.<sup>68</sup> Different authors justified their access to privileged knowledge in different ways, some practical, and some spectacular.

Conspiracy theory made its divinations in a number of ways: through access to secret text, insider witnesses, or even divine revelation. It prioritized the insight of the individual author, but also privileged the accounts of “turncoats,” people who had turned against the conspiracy to reveal the truth. Léo Taxil made heaviest use of turncoats for, as far as anyone knew, he was one. Born Marie Joseph Gabriel Antoine Jogand-Pagés in Provence around 1854, Taxil spent his early life attending Jesuit schools under the supervision of his strict Catholic father. After Taxil and his brother attempted to flee France for Italy, armed with guns and knives,

---

<sup>68</sup> As a reminder, these four characteristics are: totality, intentional agency, privileged knowledge, and the interpretive framework.

he was sent to a juvenile penal establishment. Taxil, after leaving the penal establishment, was soon expelled from another Jesuit school, then fought in the Franco-Prussian War.<sup>69</sup> The end result of Taxil's tumultuous early life was a fierce anticlericalism which manifested itself in a series of books, pamphlets, and songs targeting the church (in particular, the sexual indiscretions of its leaders). At one point, Taxil fled to Geneva for eight years to avoid a prison sentence, but eventually was forced to leave due to selling an aphrodisiac pill with no real effect or special ingredient. Returning to France with the general amnesty for political prisoners in 1878, Taxil settled in Paris and founded an anticlerical league and bookstore.<sup>70</sup> In 1881, Taxil spent a brief year as a Freemason before leaving the organization due to its over-adherence to tradition (and, perhaps, their frustration with his own difficult personality).<sup>71</sup>

It came as a shock to both his anticlerical colleagues and his Catholic adversaries, then, when Taxil declared his conversion to Catholicism in 1885. A skeptical church assigned an experienced Jesuit priest to handle Taxil's conversion, but they were ultimately swayed by his seeming ardor for the faith (and, if Taxil's retrospective commentary is to be believed, his sensational confessionals, which included a supposed murder).<sup>72</sup> The fix was in: Taxil had convinced the Church, and the Catholic press of his conversion. The entire story, however, was a lie. Taxil believed he could do the most damage to the church from the inside. Taxil's post-conversion writings, fiercely Catholic and anti-Masonic, came from a genuine ideological place; the exact opposite place he publicly professed. Taxil occupies a complicated place amongst our authors. He was the only conspiracy theorist whom we know definitely did not believe in his own writings, magical or conspiracy, yet his works were received as being truthful, and taken as

---

<sup>69</sup> McIntosh, *Eliphas Levi*, 208.

<sup>70</sup> van Luijk, *Children of Lucifer*, 217.

<sup>71</sup> McIntosh, *Eliphas Levi*, 209; van Luijk, *Children of Lucifer*, 220.

<sup>72</sup> van Luijk, *Children of Lucifer*, 218.

seriously as other writers. Taxil may not have believed his own writing, but he certainly went to great lengths to make others believe it, and in doing so wrote in the style (and borrowing the content) of “authentic” conspiracy theories.

Taxil’s early writings were successful: By 1886, Catholic champion and master conspiracy theorist Edouard Drumont referred to Taxil as having “extirpated himself from degradation.”<sup>73</sup> In 1887 the church was enjoying having Taxil’s literary wit on their side, and he was called to an audience with Pope Leo XIII who lauded his conversion and polemical efforts.<sup>74</sup>

Taxil’s first years as a convert were spent targeting various enemies of the church: anarchists, free-thinkers, the Third Republic, and eventually Freemasons.<sup>75</sup> Seeing that the Pope had made the eradication of Freemasonry his personal mission, and the positive reception his anti-Masonic works had during his visit to the Vatican, Taxil decided to focus his efforts on the secret society.<sup>76</sup> Compared to Barruel or des Mousseaux, Taxil’s first volleys were fairly tame, and he found the most success with a book claiming that Freemasons allowed women entry into the order, and that Freemasons hosted massive orgies in their lodges.<sup>77</sup> Taxil was not reluctant to lean on his brief membership in the Freemasons; he had become the turncoat, revealing the secret truths of the Masons.

Taxil would not find his most profitable angle of attack, however, until the publication of an unrelated book in 1891. French author Joris-Karl Huysmans spent over a year attempting to locate a Satanist cult in France, and while his efforts were ultimately for naught, his research did put him in touch with the occult underground of Paris. Alongside his friend, reporter Jules Bois,

---

<sup>73</sup> Busi, *Pope of Antisemitism*, 82.

<sup>74</sup> van Luijk, *Children of Lucifer*, 218.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 219.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 237.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 208.

Huysmans eventually uncovered a defrocked priest in Lyon, practicing his own brand of magic, who revealed to Huysmans what he claimed were the authentic rites of Satanic cults. The result was the inspiration and source material for the novel *Là-bas*.<sup>78</sup> The novel was a tremendous hit with the French public, and interest in Satanism and the occult ballooned.

Here, Taxil saw a chance to combine occultism with his already-successful anti-masonic conspiracy theories. Taxil asserted that a secret order existed within Freemasonry, known as the Palladian Order or the Luciferians, and that they worshipped Satan, summoned demons, and conducted magical rituals. The Luciferians manipulated every modern force, from anarchism to capitalism. Even here, Taxil borrowed from older conspiracy theories, describing the Freemasons as practicing “Catharism.”<sup>79</sup> To better explain the source of this knowledge, and to better spread it to as many readers as possible, Taxil recruited a host of collaborators, many of whom were supposed turncoats as well.

He recruited Charles Hacks, a ship’s doctor who wrote travelogues in the guise of a Luciferian investigator; Domenico Margiotta, an actual Freemason with a grudge against the Grand Master of the Italian order; and the mysterious Diana Vaughan, a supposed Catholic convert from Luciferianism, who was in reality a typist and typewriter company representative.<sup>80</sup> Taxil set about tirelessly corresponding with his feverish audience, the most fervent of which were rural bishops and clergy.<sup>81</sup> In one letter, Taxil instructed Margiotta of how to approach these bishops, which details to mention, and which to conceal.<sup>82</sup> Taxil meticulously spread his conspiracy theory, corresponding with contacts under the name (and handwriting, courtesy of his

---

<sup>78</sup> Terry Hale, “Introduction,” in *Là-bas*, ed. Terry Hale (London: Penguin Books, 2001), xvii.

<sup>79</sup> Lea, “Lèò Taxil,” 13.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 224.

<sup>81</sup> Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide*, 53.

<sup>82</sup> Eugène Tavernier, “L’Entreprise Diana Vaughan,” *L’Univers et Le Monde*, December 22, 1896, Gallica.

typist) of Diana Vaughan. The validity of Taxil's claims were guaranteed by his turncoats, Margiotta and Vaughan, who revealed the secret truth of the world.

Taxil's hoax was dotted with occult details. According to one of Dr. Hacks' travelogues, the Luciferians had a secret base beneath Gibraltar, where "Dwarfish outcasts produced chemical and biological weapons."<sup>83</sup> Diana Vaughan herself was supposedly the daughter of a Protestant minister and a demon, and had herself been betrothed to the demon Asmodeus prior to her escape from the Satanists and conversion to Catholicism.<sup>84</sup> Another fictional priestess of Luciferianism, Sophia Walder, was said to be the great-grandmother of the antichrist, and the Luciferians had calculated the exact date of his birth.<sup>85</sup> The future was, according to Taxil's conspiracy theories, visible, and his writings urged the Catholic Church to action. Taxil's hoax had become mainstream in the Catholic Church, and Diana Vaughan received a letter of support from Cardinal Parocchi, the vicar of the Pope.<sup>86</sup> The International Antimasonic Congress of 1896, hosted by the Church in Trent, was Taxil's crowning moment. He basked in the adulation of his readers, giving high-minded speeches and delivering information as proxy for Diana Vaughan.<sup>87</sup>

The 1896 Congress was also the place that Taxil's hoax began to fall apart. The Church increased their scrutiny of Diana Vaughan and demanded that Lèò Taxil produce her in person to prove her existence (as Taxil claimed to be keeping her in seclusion, in hiding from Masonic assassins).<sup>88</sup> Nearly simultaneously, Margiotta and Hacks began selling the truth of the hoax to the newspapers, with Margiotta going straight to *La Libre Parole*, the popular newspaper of

---

<sup>83</sup> Van Luijk, *Children of Lucifer*, 211.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, 212.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 212.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 226.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 229.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 215.

Taxil's rival Edouard Drumont (who had, just a few years after lauding Taxil's conversion, grown to hate him on a personal and ideological level).<sup>89</sup> Realizing that the hoax had run its course, Taxil announced that Diana Vaughan would make her first in-person appearance in April of 1897, in Marseille.<sup>90</sup> Instead, Taxil took the stage, and gleefully announced the truth of his hoax to the audience of reporters: "I am here to announce the decease of something which has been very near the hearts of some of you. The Palladium exists no more. I was the creator of it, and I have destroyed it. You have nothing more to fear from its sinister influence. The great enemy of Christian men and of the Catholic Church is dead."<sup>91</sup>

The end of the Taxil Hoax brought about a great commotion in the Catholic press, from Taxil's supporters disavowing him, to those who had suspected all along gloating in the reveal, to a not insignificant number who believed that Taxil's *confession* had been the hoax, the latest maneuver of Freemasonry to protect itself from exposure (among the latter crowd was J.K. Huysmans himself, who in the years following the publication of *Là-bas* had himself become a ultramontane Catholic).<sup>92</sup> The general landscape of Catholic conspiracy theories did change following Taxil's confession. While anti-Freemasonic conspiracy theories continued apace, writers were more cautious of occult undertones, and most refused to even imply the existence of Satanism in Freemasonry; to do so would be to connect their theory to the thoroughly disproved and thoroughly mocked Taxil Hoax. For his part, Léo Taxil retired to Marseille with his wife, and spent the rest of his days ghost-writing pornography and cookbooks.<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 230.

<sup>90</sup> Henry Charles Lea, *Léo Taxil, Diana Vaughan, et l'Eglise Romaine: Histoire d'une Mystification* (Paris: Societe Nouvelle de Librairie et d'Éducation, 1901), 24.

<sup>91</sup> McIntosh, *Eliphas Levi*, 218.

<sup>92</sup> Lea, *Léo Taxil*, 27; van Luijik, *Children of Lucifer*, 279.

<sup>93</sup> Van Luijik, *Children of Lucifer*, 231.

Edouard Drumont may have praised Taxil's initial conversion to Catholicism, but he soon found himself opposed to Taxil. Drumont was a dedicated antisemite, and Taxil was reluctant to include any reference to the Jews in his hoax. Taxil had already publicly feuded with Edouard Drumont over his antisemitism, claiming that it was anti-Catholic to be antisemitic.<sup>94</sup> Taxil's readers, however, were well-accustomed to conspiracy theories that conflated Jews and Freemasons, and were eager to learn how the Jews factored into this Satanic conspiracy. Taxil's contacts in the church, including bishops, wrote him urging him to address the role Jews played in his conspiracy theory.<sup>95</sup> By 1896, Taxil had acquiesced to their wishes, and incorporated around a hundred pages of antisemitic content into his travelogues (at this point, Dr. Hacks had ceased to write for Taxil). Seeking to make an opportunity of this, however, Taxil sent the antisemitic pages to Edouard Drumont, hoping to secure a public endorsement.<sup>96</sup> Though this endeavor failed, Taxil must have been hoping to drag his long-time rival into the plot just a few months before revealing it as a hoax.

It was no doubt Drumont's work that so primed Taxil's audience for a combined anti-Masonic, antisemitic conspiracy theory. Since his religious awakening in the 1870s, Drumont had become one of the Churches' fiercest defenders in the press.<sup>97</sup> Drumont, though a lifelong antisemite, continued to work at *La Liberté* up until 1886, despite the paper being owned by a prominent Jew.<sup>98</sup> Only once his latest book was ready to print (a process that required the assistance of novelist Alphonse Daudet, given the book's controversial subject and 600-page length) did Drumont leave his job at *La Liberté*.<sup>99</sup> Though slow-selling initially, a carefully

---

<sup>94</sup> Busi, *Pope of Antisemitism*, 97.

<sup>95</sup> van Luijk, *Children of Lucifer*, 275.

<sup>96</sup> Tavernier, "L'Entreprise Diana Vaughan."

<sup>97</sup> Busi, *Pope of Antisemitism*, 27.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

manufactured public controversy turned Drumont's book, *La France juive*, into a national sensation, doing 100 printings in a single year.<sup>100</sup>

Drumont framed the conspiracy theories in *La France juive* as a divine revelation: "It has pleased God, in his infinite mercy, to call the poor writer by his name, to exert on him that irresistible and gentle pressure which one cannot resist, to tap him on the shoulder in a friendly way [...] that great intelligences remained closed to such a light, it surpasses the imagination."<sup>101</sup> Blessed with this privileged knowledge, Drumont used *La France juive* to expose the hidden machinations of the Jews. A self-described national socialist, Drumont took particular exception with the Rothschild family, for whom he blamed almost every instance of financial malfeasance in French history.<sup>102</sup> "The parliament soon became the bazaar that Panama showed us, the bad place where consciences and votes were auctioned. [...] As money became the engine of everything, the Jew who personified the power of money, was to be the master of everything," Drumont wrote in 1901.<sup>103</sup> The Rothschilds never escaped Drumont's view either, and he wrote in *La Libre Parole* that "Thanks to the Jews, France, which was so prodigiously rich, will go bankrupt before Italy, which has never had a penny to its name and which lives only on the money that the Rothschilds took from us to lend to a nation that was part of the Triple Alliance."<sup>104</sup>

In describing this conspiracy, Drumont coined the term "the Syndicate" to refer broadly to Jews, Freemasons, and all those who worked alongside them to rule Europe.<sup>105</sup> Drumont also

---

<sup>100</sup> Katz, *Jews and Freemasons*, 161.

<sup>101</sup> Edouard Drumont, *La France juive* (Paris: C. Marpon & E. Flammarion, 1886), 310.

<sup>102</sup> Busi, *Pope of Antisemitism*, 62; Drumont, *La France juive*, 27-8.

<sup>103</sup> Edouard Drumont, "Le XIXe Siècle en France," in *Almanach de la Libre Parole Pour 1902*, ed. Edouard Drumont (Paris: Bureaux de La Libre Parole, 1902), 39.

<sup>104</sup> Edouard Drumont, "Crispi," in *Almanach de la Libre Parole Pour 1902*, ed., Edouard Drumont (Paris: Bureaux de la Libre Parole, 1902), 81.

<sup>105</sup> Busi, *Pope of Antisemitism*, 147.

dwelted on anecdotes about high society and backdoor politics. This included an improbable list of secret Jews, including but not limited to the executioner to Louis XVI, Jean-Paul Marat, and Napoleon Bonaparte.<sup>106</sup> *La France juive* was about revelation, uncovering the secret movements of Jews in French society. Though hardly original (as Drumont extensively plagiarized Gougenot des Mousseaux) *La France juive* made its mark due to its incredible scope and attention to popular culture, revealing conspiracies not just in the past, but amongst the celebrities of the day.

Compare *La France juive* to the divination of Drumont's magical writing. In *L'Echo de Merveilleux*, a glowing profile of Drumont's esotericism claimed, "Not only is he a spiritualist, but also a palmist, a graphologist, perhaps an astrologer; he admits the science of the ancient sorcerers, that of the magicians, and he believes in hauntings."<sup>107</sup> The article describes Drumont's own personal encounter with a spirit, which knocked on walls and tossed objects about. The profile describes Drumont as an "adept" at palmistry and references the occasion in which he read the hand of General Boulanger, would-be dictator of the Third Republic. Then, Drumont declared that he knew Drumont was doomed to fail, as his hand did not possess the necessary qualities of a leader.

Drumont explains his beliefs thusly: "The truth is that we are enveloped in mysteries, that we live in mysteries, that we ourselves are a mystery, a miracle of every moment, an incomprehensible enigma for he who does not accept the teachings of the Church."<sup>108</sup> Drumont saw both his conspiracy theories and occult work as being at the behest of God, who revealed to him the truth of these mysteries. Both his conspiracy theories and occult writings sprung from

---

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>107</sup> Georges Vitoux, "M. Edouard Drumont," *L'Echo de Merveilleux*, April 1, 1901, Gallica.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 132.

the same place: the belief that he had been granted privileged knowledge which allowed him to reveal the truth of the world.

*L'Echo de Merveilleux*, the paper this profile appeared in, was edited by Gaston Méry. In 1892, Drumont hired the then-26-year-old Méry to his antisemitic daily paper, *La Libre Parole*, as editor-in-chief. Méry, like Drumont, was an ardent antisemite, but also obsessed with the racial power of the Celts, from Northern France, as opposed to what he saw as the weak and corrupted Mediterraneans in Southern France. Méry was an admirer of the occultist Papus, and with Drumont shared a fascination of the supernatural and magical.<sup>109</sup> Personally fascinated with graphology (divination through handwriting) and prophecy, Méry's initial works were of such popularity that he decided to found a regular journal dedicated to magic. In 1897, Méry formed *L'Echo de Merveilleux*, a biweekly journal dedicated to the supernatural and occult. Méry received strong support from Drumont, who advertised the paper in *La Libre Parole* and regularly contributed to the paper and to Méry's books.<sup>110</sup>

Méry wrote most of the articles appearing in *L'Echo de Merveilleux*, and staked his reputation on a Mlle. Couedon, a seer who frequently made prophetic declarations in favor of antisemitic causes. In August of 1898, Méry lauded Couedon's accurate prediction that Zola would flee France after declaring his support for Dreyfus, "covered more and more with shame."<sup>111</sup> In his articles for *L'Echo*, Méry easily mixed occultism and antisemitism.

In an article from April of 1899, Méry described a (true) 1895 incident in which Mathieu Dreyfus consulted with a medium introduced by Dr. Gibert, a friend of President Felix Faure.<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> Busi, *Pope of Antisemitism*, 105.

<sup>110</sup> Robert Francis Byrnes, *Antisemitism in Modern France* (New York: H. Fertig, 1969), 145; "Echos," *La Libre Parole*, March 17, 1902, 3.

<sup>111</sup> Gaston Méry, "Zola et Mlle Couedon," *L'Echo de Merveilleux*, August 1, 1898, Gallica.

<sup>112</sup> Whyte, *The Dreyfus Affair*, 63.

This medium, a woman named Leonie, informed Mathieu that the military had secretly communicated information to the judge at his trial (a prediction which would turn out to be correct). Méry's article, however, questions whether Gibert, who was previously believed to be a believer in Dreyfus' innocence, believed so because of the assurances of Leonie. Gibert, in a letter to Edmond LeRoy and reprinted by Méry, assured LeRoy that Leonie had no bearing on his political opinions, and carefully disentangled himself from any implication that believed in clairvoyance. Méry concludes the report with the following statement: "For if [Leonie] is really clairvoyant, she would certainly not have directed the opinions of the good doctor in this [Dreyfus' innocence] direction!"<sup>113</sup>

Méry, a much less significant figure than Drumont or Taxil, on whom little personal information remains, was perhaps the most dedicated of his crowd to future-telling. His occult predictions, or the predictions he reported on, aligned perfectly with the future he envisioned in his antisemitic work. If Drumont alluded to occultism in *La France juive* and alluded to Boulanger and Jews in his occult work, Méry obliterated the distance between the two.<sup>114</sup> Conspiracy theories and magic were essentially the same tool, a way for Méry to reveal hidden knowledge. The divination he placed his faith in were of all types: the textual analysis of Nostradamus, and the divine inspiration of Mlle. Couedon (whose predictions were supposedly gifted to her by the Archangel Michael).<sup>115</sup>

One other regular correspondent in *L'Echo* was the illustrious Dr. Papus (Gerard Encausse, born 1865), a genuine medical doctor who split his time between scientific and magical pursuits. His magical divination relied on careful analysis and a deep knowledge of

---

<sup>113</sup> Gaston Méry, "Leonie: La Somnambule du Docteur Gibert," *L'Echo de Merveilleux*, April 1, 1899, Gallica.

<sup>114</sup> Busi, *Pope of Antisemitism*, 71.

<sup>115</sup> Méry, "Zola et Mlle Couedon," 283

religion, numerology, and symbolism, but the divination of his conspiracy theories was based entirely on his own status as a turncoat. Papus was leader of several occult organizations (most notably, the *Ordre Martiniste*) and publisher of multiple journals.<sup>116</sup> Papus' books were popular not just in France but abroad, particularly in Russia, where eleven of his books had been translated.<sup>117</sup> Papus' appearances in *L'Echo de Merveilleux* were varied: in 1899, he appeared briefly to explain that a previous article about a "Papuss" referred to an imposter, whom the true Papus was in the process of suing. In this article, Papus refers to Méry as his "dear friend."<sup>118</sup> A few months later he makes another appearance, this time mocking the pseudoscientific language and approaches of hypnotists. Papus, a genuine medical doctor who also fashioned himself a magical scientist, had great disdain for those who did not live up to his standards: "Hypnotists are therefore a class of experimenters confined to the most elementary and crude applications of induced sleep [...] the boy in the psychic laboratories shouts: "Suggestion, suggestion", at each phenomenon he observes, without trying to explain it any way other than by this word—empty and ridiculous, when one penetrates to the depth of things."<sup>119</sup>

The guiding impulse of Papus' magical writings was that they were overwhelmingly self-serious, and he looked down on those he considered uneducated or insufficiently rigorous. His long-form magical work was deeply esoteric, relying on complex numerology, mythology, and symbology from a variety of cultures and religions. One of Papus' most popular works, *Absolute Key to Occult Science: The Tarot of the Bohemians; The Most Ancient Book in the World; For*

---

<sup>116</sup> Julian Strube, "Occultist Identity Formations Between Theosophy and Social in Fin-de-Siècle France," *Numen* 64, no. 5/6 (2017): 576.

<sup>117</sup> Maria Carlson, "Fashionable Occultism: Spiritualism, Theosophy, Freemasonry, and Hermeticism in Fin-de-Siècle Russia," in *the Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, ed. Bernice Glazer Rosenthal (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 197), 151.

<sup>118</sup> Papus, "Papus Contre Papuss," *L'Echo de Merveilleux*, January 15, 1898, Gallica.

<sup>119</sup> Papus, "De l'Insuffisance de l'Hypnotisme," *L'Echo de Merveilleux*, June 1, 1898, Gallica.

*the Exclusive Use of Initiates* attempted to explain the tarot through complex numerological studies. Papus explains that the tarot represents the scientific knowledge of the ancients, and possess all ancient teachings (and therefore, can be used to divine the future).<sup>120</sup>

In a 1902 article in *L'Echo de Merveilleux*, Papus elaborated his beliefs on magical studies in an ominous tone:

Here is a country where, as our colleague Rozier remarks, magic is in honor in all classes of society. There is a constant threat of pernicious occult actions, and the higher planes are in a constant state of effervescence. [...] But man considers himself too strong to pray and too learned to heed prophetic warnings. So let events speak for themselves. The people of Europe, unwilling to take human solidarity into account, allow a weak people to be robbed and watch impassively as women and children are killed. [...] Men no longer know how to see and hear, so much pride blinds them and makes them deaf. They each claim to possess “the true system”, the only truth, and this claim makes them unfit for the only effective and living truths derived from the real practice of solidarity with all humanity. When “concentration camps” flourish in Europe, it will perhaps begin to be understood that a nation which is created to be the knight of the oppressed peoples should not calculate as a stockbroker. But it will be too late!<sup>121</sup>

Papus clearly took a bleak view of the future of Europe, though he attributed this dark future to no single enemy, but rather the degradation of European morality. Complicating this assessment of Papus’ magical politics, however, is another work of his that was also advertised in *La Libre Parole*, though not under his name: *La Russie d’Aujourd’hui*.

Published under the pseudonym Niet, *La Russie d’Aujourd’hui* first appeared as a column in *L’Echo de Paris*, a respected Parisian daily newspaper (the same newspaper that serialized Huysman’s *Là-bas*), from 1901 to 1902. Upon the column’s conclusion, a compilation with a handful of extra chapters was released in book form (which was then available at the Librairie Antisémite and was advertised in *La Libre Parole*). The introduction to the series describes the work as proceeding “with complete impartiality, without hatred, violence, or complacency” to

---

<sup>120</sup> Papus, *The Tarot of the Bohemians*, (London: Senate, 1994), 9, 868.

<sup>121</sup> Papus, “A Propos de la Martinique,” *L’Echo de Merveilleux*, July 15, 1902, Gallica.

explain the inner workings of the Russian empire.<sup>122</sup> Niet casts themselves (as Niet was actually both Papus and Jean Carrère, a relatively unknown figure) as an insider to the Russian government, and a supporter of the newly formed Franco-Russian alliance. They promote the potential of the Franco-Russian alliance but also warn against those who oppose it, particularly those ministers in the bureaucracy seeking to limit the Tsar's power. Curiously, the newspaper version of *La Russie d'Aujourd'hui* features significantly less inflammatory language than the book version.

While the newspaper edition makes mention of wanting to expose those who oppose the Tsar and the French alliance, the book makes significantly more clear to whom Niet is referring: "This party includes very high-level figures, even ministers, and it is driven, externally, by the international agents of a large financial syndicate, the same one to which France owes a debt of gratitude for the troubles of recent years, and the troubles in which she is still struggling."<sup>123</sup> Here is Drumont's syndicate, returned to make covert references to the activities of Jews. The "recent troubles" to which Niet refers are undoubtedly the Panama Scandal and Dreyfus Affair, events which would have loomed large in the minds of contemporary French readers.

Niet generally avoids making specific references to Jews in *La Russie d'Aujourd'hui*, though there are a handful of moments where the veil slips. In describing the enemies of Alexander III, Niet lists "the Jews, scattered all over the territory. One understands, therefore, what easy support the international agents in charge of disrupting Russian power were to find in the country itself."<sup>124</sup> In another section, Niet notes that the Russian government had to act to prevent "Israelite bankers" from taking advantage of peasants and driving them into debt.<sup>125</sup> Niet

---

<sup>122</sup> Niet, "La Russie d'Aujourd'hui: Un enquete impartiale," *L'Echo de Paris*, October 24, 1901, Gallica.

<sup>123</sup> Niet, *La Russie d'Aujourd'hui* (Paris: Felix Juven, 1902), 3.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, 19-20.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, 143.

also names specific collaborators of this syndicate, namely the Foreign Office and the Russian police, specifically Pyotry Rachkovsky, head of the secret service in Russia.<sup>126</sup>

Niet certainly seemed to possess insider information on the Russian court, at one point describing in detail the daily routine of the Tsar. The accuracy of this information, and the inflammatory language directed towards high-ranking officials in the Russian government, seems to have panicked Rachkovsky. Soon, a manhunt was underway to uncover the true identity of Niet, and Ratchkovsky enlisted the aid of the Foreign Office and the Sûreté. Constant surveillance was set on the office of *L'Echo de Paris* to uncover Niet.<sup>127</sup> The final installment of *La Russie d'Aujourd'hui* makes light of these efforts, delighting in mocking all the various guesses of who the author was: "Is he a journalist? Niet. A diplomat? Niet. An office worker? A woman or a man of the world? An officer? Niet! Niet!"<sup>128</sup> Niet even takes a moment to briefly entertain the guess that the author was "a mage with a well-documented but indigestible style, who would be quite bewildered and perhaps annoyed to be attributed Niet's pompous sentences."<sup>129</sup>

Of course, this guess was in fact the truth. With the help of a foreign contact, the French Foreign Minister Théophile Delcassé had positively identified Niet as being the magician Papus. This guess was apparently sufficient, as Rachkovsky was successful in suppressing a follow-up series slated to appear in *L'Echo de Paris*. Hard proof of Papus' involvement only came decades after his death, when in 1939 Henri Rollin uncovered drafts of *La Russie d'Aujourd'hui* among

---

<sup>126</sup> Henri Rollin, *L'apocalypse de notre temps: les dessous de la propagande allemande d'après des documents inédites* (Paris: Allia, 2005), 478-479.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, 481.

<sup>128</sup> Niet, *La Russie d'Aujourd'hui*, 300.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, 303.

Papus' personal papers.<sup>130</sup> How did Papus, a medical doctor and magician from Paris, have access to secrets of the Russian government?

The popularity of Papus' work in Russia meant that he made several trips there, at some point founding a Martinist lodge in St. Petersburg.<sup>131</sup> It was rumored that the Tsar joined the lodge, and definitely true that two of his uncles and a grand duke did join. Papus became a favored consultant of the tsar and tsarina, making several trips to Russia to advise them and spread Martinism abroad.<sup>132</sup> In this way Papus came into contact not only with members of the Russian court but also with the conspiracy theories popular in Russia at the time. Like in Germany and France, theories of a union of Jews and Freemasons were popular in Russia, and antisemitic conspiracies were generally popular even with the Tsar. Following the failed 1905 revolution, Tsar Nicolas II wrote to his mother and indicated that "nine-tenths" of the revolutionaries were Jews.<sup>133</sup>

Papus, like Taxil, was a kind of turncoat. He crafted his conspiracy theory through the use of actual insider knowledge, combined with a great deal of supposition about the motives of Russian ministers (and their supposed Jewish allies). In this case, Papus' privileged knowledge was (partially) real, not manufactured like Taxil's or divinely inspired like Drumont's. In both Papus' magical predictions and his political ones, a hidden force could be discerned, one guiding the fate of Europe.

While *La Russie d'Aujourd'hui* gives every indication that Papus was an antisemite, his other works and personal history complicate that narrative. Papus considered himself a

---

<sup>130</sup> Rollin, *L'Apocalypse de notre temps*, 482.

<sup>131</sup> Carlson, "Fashionable Occultism," 149.

<sup>132</sup> Rollin, *L'Apocalypse de notre temps*, 471.

<sup>133</sup> Leon Poliakov, "The Topic of the Jewish Conspiracy in Russia (1905-1920), and the International Consequences," in *Changing Conceptions of Conspiracy*, ed. Carl F. Graumann and Serge Moscovici (New York: Springer, 1987), 106-107.

Kabbalist, and frequently used Hebrew and references to Jewish mysticism in his occult writings. However, Papus indicated in one of his more famous works that Jews no longer possessed the “spirit of the occult” in their traditions, and that Freemasons, who used occult symbolism, did not possess any powerful occult knowledge.<sup>134</sup> Papus’ cohorts, who had joined the Theosophical Society alongside him in the 1880s, tended to be socialists. Papus expressed an admiration of socialists, but limited himself to the July Monarchy socialists, and did not affiliate with contemporary strands.<sup>135</sup> When the order split, Papus joined the new French Rosicrucian Order alongside Josephin Peladan in 1888. However, Papus and other Rosicrucian leader Stanislas de Guaita ousted Peladan in 1890, whose ultramontane politics were beginning to dictate the direction he wanted to take the order.<sup>136</sup> Papus never indicated either that he felt strongly about Catholicism, but he did oppose the “Eastern” flavor of Blavatsky’s Theosophical Society, and desired to focus on a French tradition of occultism.<sup>137</sup>

Papus’ political leanings were practically fluid: he praised some socialists, but downplayed the socialist politics of his idol, Eliphas Levi.<sup>138</sup> He lauded Blavatsky, and then two years later turned against her for neglecting Western magical traditions.<sup>139</sup> The only political philosophy that Papus expressed wholehearted, long-lasting support for was the “synarchy,” a construct of his spiritual master, Joseph Alexandre Saint-Yves, Marquess d’Alveydre.

Saint-Yves belonged to an older generation than Papus. Born in 1842, Saint-Yves published his first book in 1874, then married a Russian aristocrat in 1877. His wife, Marie-Victoire de Riznich, was herself a medium and occultist and supported Saint-Yves until her

---

<sup>134</sup> Papus, *Tarot of the Bohemians*, 5, 7.

<sup>135</sup> Strube, “Occultist Identity,” 583.

<sup>136</sup> van Luijck, *Children of Lucifer*, 204.

<sup>137</sup> Strube, “Occultist Identity,” 575.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, 582.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, 577.

death in 1886.<sup>140</sup> There was no shortage of divination in his magical work (which included astral projection and attempts to measure the state of the universe) as well as in his elaborate political theories, which predicted the future of European civilization and revealed the hidden truth behind all world religions. Saint-Yves first proposed the concept of the synarchy in his book *Clefs d'Orient* and elaborated on it in each of his following works. In essence, the synarchy was a system of governance driven by councils formed from every religion, governing according to the shared wisdom of all faiths and intellectual paths. This enlightened form of government would bring an end to fighting between different ethnic and religious groups and bring about a utopia in the world.<sup>141</sup> Saint-Yves spent much of his life advocating for the synarchy, using his connections to lobby politicians and send letters to the president of the republic, and especially believed that France was the only country that could lead the world back to synarchy.<sup>142</sup> The state of the modern world, he argued, was the result of a failure by religions to live up to their actual theocratic principles.<sup>143</sup>

Saint-Yves 600-page volume, *Missions des juifs*, presents a secret history of Judaism that actually argues in favor of the Jews, urging them to join the synarchy.<sup>144</sup> In his 1886 book *Le Mission de l'Inde*, Saint-Yves revealed that he had been contacted by an actual synarchy, the society of Agarththa, which was secluded in caverns somewhere beneath India. Saint-Yves, who was receiving tutoring in Hindi, claims that his instructor was a representative of Agarththa who wanted to spread synarchy on the surface. Saint-Yves then astral projected himself into the city

---

<sup>140</sup> Come Carpentier de Gourdon, *A French Prophet of India's Resurgence in the Nineteenth Century: Saint Yves d'Alveydre and His "Mission de l'Inde"* (New Delhi: India International Centre, 2010), 3-4.

<sup>141</sup> Olivier Dard, *La synarchie, ou, le mythe du complot permanent* (Paris: Perrin, 1998), 48.

<sup>142</sup> Richard F. Kuisel, "The Legend of the Vichy Synarchy," *French Historical Studies* 6, no. 3 (1970): 379.

<sup>143</sup> Dard, *La synarchie*, 50, 54.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid*, 53.

for a spectral tour of their advanced technologies and universities.<sup>145</sup> Saint-Yves wrote to Jules Grevy, president of the Republic, as well as Tsar Alexander III asking them to liberate Agartha by ending British imperialism in India.<sup>146</sup>

Saint-Yves' writing often defies description. The conspiracy advocated by Saint-Yves, that of the existence of a secret kingdom awaiting its time to return to the surface and rule the world, was not the work of an evil group. Instead, Saint-Yves welcomed the return of Agartha and the advent of the synarchy and did everything possible to bring it about as soon as possible.

## **The Perfect World**

As we can see, both conspiracy theories and occult literature revealed hidden truths about the world. They did so through granting their authors a kind of privileged knowledge which allowed them to perceive realities the average observer could not. For some authors, this was “insider” knowledge revealed by going turncoat, and for others it came from a more esoteric, possibly divine, source. The truths divined via occultism, however, all came from interpretations of signs and signals natural to the universe. Drumont read the lines on the palm, Papus interpreted the tarot, and so on. Rather than just revealing hidden truths, conspiracy theories and occultism made the world legible. Everything could be explained through these interpretive methods.

Remember three of the key characteristics of conspiracy theories: that they can be applied to any subject and accommodate any addition, that the world contains hidden signs and symbols to be interpreted, and that they always assume a historical consequence was the result of

---

<sup>145</sup> Joscelyn Godwin, “Saint-Yves D’Alveydre and the Agarthian Connection,” in *The Kingdom of Agartha: A Journey into the Hollow Earth* (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2008), n.p.

<sup>146</sup> de Gourdon, “A French Prophet,” 13-14.

intentional agency. Occultism operated along the same principles. Writing about providentialism and conspiracy theories, Brian Bennett described them both as hermetic systems of thought: all-encompassing, air-tight, and completely immune to counterargument. Providence and conspiracy theories made the world into a “semiological system,” one that can be interpreted to create meaning.<sup>147</sup> Bennett also elaborates on the advantage of divination, calling it a “problem-solving discourse,” one which reassures the user by revealing to them all the secrets of the world.<sup>148</sup> In essence, conspiracy theories and providence both created a perfect world, one that could always be explained, and that could always provide answers.

While Bennett primarily wrote about the kind of divination found in providential literature, the texts bear out the same connection between occultism and conspiracy theories. The perfect world of these two genres meant that anything and everything was explicable, even the tumultuous world of the Third Republic. In *La France juive*, Drumont does not limit himself to a single kind of conspiracy theory. He explains the world through financial conspiracies, racial conspiracies, and sensational anecdotes about daily life.

“At the horse show, every prize is for Israel,” Drumont wrote of betting at the racetrack. He related lurid stories about jockeys being murdered by their competitors, and fans who protested obviously rigged races being beat in secret rooms. Drumont names the Jewish owner of the racetrack and describes him as a “fat Jew who looks like a chief of Abyssinian eunuchs.”<sup>149</sup> Of Léo Taxil’s old anticlerical publications and subsequent conversion, he writes “[Taxil] was ashamed to be the man of the Jews and he braved their anger by separating himself from them.”<sup>150</sup> Drumont claimed that should a priest speak out against the Freemasons, an agent will

---

<sup>147</sup> Bennett, “Hermetic Histories,” 176.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid*, 179.

<sup>149</sup> Drumont, *La France juive*, 149-150.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*, 459.

be dispatched to collect (fabricated) blackmail on them, to be spread through the Jewish press, an agent who, even if caught in the act, cannot be prosecuted by the “well-trained” magistracy.<sup>151</sup> Drumont could explain everything, from the top of society to the bottom, in terms of his conspiracy.

Drumont described Jews as possessing “that famous hooked nose, blinking eyes, tight teeth, protruding ears, square fingernails instead of round, ankles sticking out, the soft and melting hand of the hypocrite and the traitor. They often have one arm shorter than the other.”<sup>152</sup> Drumont’s application of racial antisemitism, to explain the physical and moral failings of Jews, shares the same logical basis of his palmistry. Jews were born with certain evil characteristics, and Boulanger failed to take over the Republic because he was born with the wrong kind of characteristics in his palm.

Méry applied his own kind of analysis to the world, and while he was much more preoccupied with racial differences than Drumont, he focused his efforts on seers. Though he primarily relied on the predictions of Mlle. Couedon, he also frequently publicized the prophecies of Nostradamus, complete with careful, line-by-line interpretation, to reveal their hidden meanings.<sup>153</sup> Even when faced with a failed prophecy, Méry’s faith in their validity never wavered. Instead, their failure was part of the prophetic process, and his occult worldview remained unshaken.<sup>154</sup>

The primary advantage of this epistemological perfection was not that a conspiracy theory, or occult practice, could never be challenged or disproved, but that it could make sense of things that traditional rational or religious thought could not. The Taxil Hoax, which purported a

---

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 467.

<sup>152</sup> Busi, *Pope of Antisemitism*, 62.

<sup>153</sup> Elisee de Vignois, “Nostradamus et l’affaire Dreyfus,” *L’Echo de Merveilleux*, September 1, 1899, Gallica.

<sup>154</sup> Méry, “Zola et Mlle Couedon,” 283.

global conspiracy of Satanists actively conspiring against the Church, and indeed all of Europe, was ridiculous on its face. Yet, already primed by decades of anti-Masonic conspiracy theories, the Catholic press devoured the Taxil Hoax (not unanimously, as several publications refused to bite, but enough to ensure wealth for Taxil and his collaborators). Taxil's stories of Satanism, while wild, also conveniently grouped the enemies of the church under a single banner. Hacks wrote, in one of his popular travelogues, that all non-Christian religions of the world were secretly run by Satanists.<sup>155</sup> Freemasons were not opposed to Christianity because they were just free-thinkers, or republicans, but because they were Satanists, and worshipped the embodiment of Christian evil. The logic of Taxil's hoax was perfect and explained not just how the Church had lost so much power in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (as per Barruel's theories) but also why (they were being opposed by literal Satanists attempting to bring about the antichrist).

Of French 19<sup>th</sup> century conspiracy theories, Frederic Monier saw their main political value in their ability to unite disparate groups of enemies into a single banner.<sup>156</sup> The Anti-Dreyfusards were not all raving antisemites, but also hardline Catholics who opposed antisemitism on religious principle, and Catholic military officers who paid little attention to the Jews. The perfect world of conspiracy theories and occultism made political struggle infinitely more comprehensible. With this thought process, the slow march of the Third Republic towards secularization was not a major cultural shift, or the changing tides of history, but the actions of dedicated enemy. Any setback that the conspiracy theorist faced could be explained: the Jews were emancipated not by chance, but because the Jews conspired to originate the French Revolution in the first place. Occultism and conspiracy theories crafted a world in which chance

---

<sup>155</sup> van Luijik, *Children of Lucifer*, 211.

<sup>156</sup> Monier, *Le complot dans la Republique*, 71.

did not exist. Everything happened for a reason and that reason could be divined through careful analysis.

Conspiracy theories and occultism both revealed hidden truths about the world through divination, and together they provided an analytical framework for unveiling the reasons behind those truths. Besides providing pure comfort there was another advantage to creating a view of the world where nothing occurred accidentally. The authors of these conspiracy theories were all uniformly dissatisfied with the Third Republic, and the France they lived in, and sought to explain how their government and society had degraded so far.<sup>157</sup> If they could explain the destruction of the monarchy and the secularization of France, they could combat it. Occultism and conspiracy theories essentially created enemies, and a path to restoration.

## **Reclamation of Power**

The logical process I have outlined in the previous two sections (the use of divination to reveal hidden truths followed by an analysis of those truths to make the entire world perfectly comprehensible) does not take place without reason. All of these authors, for their own reasons, hated the Third Republic and wished to effect some major change. Occultism and conspiracy theories were their way of confronting the world and attempting to enact their will. Augustin Barruel, the first conspiracy theorist in this narrative, used this process to understand how the French Revolution destroyed the monarchy and the Church in France. In doing so, he identified a single root cause for the Revolution in the *Illuminati-cum-Freemasons-cum-Knights Templar*. In

---

<sup>157</sup> The exception, of course, is Léo Taxil, who gave no indication he saw anything wrong with the way the Republic was running. However, he was posing as an ultra-Catholic malcontent for the duration of the Hoax, so the persona under which he wrote the hoax was at least expressing this viewpoint.

doing so, Barruel did not just explain the Revolution but also created a way to reverse it: root out and destroy the secret society.

The authors of the *fin-de-siècle* had a similar problem they wished to confront. Drumont and Méry were ultramontane Catholics and saw the very existence of the Third Republic as a great evil. When Pope Leo XIII declared the policy of *ralliement* (encouraging the participation of Catholics within the Third Republic, so as to return the government to being pro-Catholic from within, as opposed to encouraging revolution or resistance), Drumont reacted with incredible anger, and attacked the Pope directly.<sup>158</sup> Drumont's conspiracy theories explained every evil of the Third Republic, from its financial scandals down to its racetracks. Like Barruel, Drumont created a Jewish conspiracy that could be fought and defeated, ensuring the return of France to Drumont's ideal. Drumont was not content with just identifying the causes of France's moral decline.

When Alfred Dreyfus was arrested on charges of high treason, Drumont used *La Libre Parole* to lead a massive campaign against Dreyfus. *La Libre Parole*'s circulation had been reduced from a peak of over 200,000 during the Panama Scandal to just a few thousand.<sup>159</sup> Though not the first paper to announce Dreyfus' arrest, *La Libre Parole* followed its competitors by only a day.<sup>160</sup> They covered every aspect of the case, but also conducted their own research; on November 4<sup>th</sup>, just three days after first covering Dreyfus' arrest, *La Libre Parole* published the number of officers with Jewish last names serving in the army: "Bloch, - ten officers in the active army. [...] Halphen, - a single one with this name, garrisoned at Vincennes."<sup>161</sup> *La Libre*

---

<sup>158</sup> Byrnes, *Antisemitism in Modern France*, 334.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, 338.

<sup>160</sup> Whyte, *The Dreyfus Affair*, 37.

<sup>161</sup> C.Z., "Les Officiers Juifs: Simple Statistique," *La Libre Parole*, November 3, 1894. 1.

*Parole* took an active part in the case, berating government officials for incompetency and stirring up unrest in the streets and at key trials.<sup>162</sup>

The prolonged relevance of the Dreyfus Affair, stretching as it did into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, guaranteed that *La Libre Parole* would enjoy a continued place of prominence. Not just dedicated antisemites but any anti-Dreyfusard could find relevant news and speculation in *La Libre Parole*. Following the suicide of Hubert-Joseph Henry (the intelligence officer who repeatedly forged evidence to incriminate Dreyfus), Drumont launched a fund to support Henry's widow, in memory of Henry who was "murdered by the Jews."<sup>163</sup> Even on the occult end, Drumont applied himself to the fight against Jews (and their Freemasonic puppets). In a March 1900 book review of a booklet examining the symbolism of Freemasonry, Drumont doubts the value of the author's approach, but concedes that the Jews must have some hidden meaning in their "Oriental" imagery.<sup>164</sup>

Drumont and Méry's motivations were fairly straightforward, and Taxil's were essentially similar (if disingenuous). Papus and Saint-Yves, however, carried the dream of the synarchy, and used their occult and conspiracy writings to envision a way for their radical, far-fetched government to become reality. Papus saw the synarchy as a perfect blending of social sciences and esotericism, as well as the utopian strands of socialism that gained prominence during the July Monarchy.<sup>165</sup> Before his trips to Russia, Papus consulted with Saint-Yves on the political situation, and transmitted some of Saint-Yves ideas to a receptive Russian court, who

---

<sup>162</sup> Busi, *Pope of Antisemitism*, 145.

<sup>163</sup> Whyte, *Dreyfus Affair*, 231.

<sup>164</sup> Edouard Drumont, "Une Lettre De Drumont," *L'Echo de Merveilleux*, March 15, 1900, Gallica.

<sup>165</sup> Strube, "Occultist Identity," 586.

then made visits to his chateau in Versailles.<sup>166</sup> Saint-Yves was enthusiastic about the Franco-Russian alliance, the same alliance which inspired Papus to write *La Russie d'Aujourd'hui*.<sup>167</sup>

Papus' cryptic comments on the state of magic and Europe in *L'Echo de Merveilleux* are made legible when considered through the context of the synarchy.<sup>168</sup> Papus excoriates those who hold to their "true path" without considering solidarity with other groups. The synarchy, a composite government of all religions, would allow Europe to stand together and fend off the invisible threats it faces. Papus' antisemitism was not born then of the same Catholicism or racial creed as Drumont or Méry, but out of a bizarre desire to see all religions united. The "syndicate" he identifies in *La Russie d'Aujourd'hui* worked directly against that goal by dividing France and Russia and using its considerable wealth to prevent common understanding. Papus believed that man was happier before the Revolution and saw magic and the synarchy as a way to build a better society.<sup>169</sup>

Conspiracy theories and the occult allowed these authors to reach beyond themselves. They allowed the authors to no longer think in terms of individual action, or individual power, but instead in the movements of history. The conspiracy theory is often described as an attack, a lie created and distributed to stir up political resentment against a specific group. In these writings, however, we can see that these authors were acting out of fear. They sought to describe, explain, and defend themselves against the changes of society. Drumont made the Jews the

---

<sup>166</sup> Dard, *La synarchie*, 63.

<sup>167</sup> de Gourdon, "A French Prophet," 14-15.

<sup>168</sup> "The people of Europe, unwilling to take human solidarity into account, allow a weak people to be robbed and watch impassively as women and children are killed. [...] Men no longer know how to see and hear, so much pride blinds them and makes them deaf. They each claim to possess "the true system", the only truth, and this claim makes them unfit for the only effective and living truths derived from the real practice of solidarity with all humanity." Papus, "A Propos de la Martinique," 269.

<sup>169</sup> James Smith Allen, "Papus the Misogynist: Honor, Gender, and the Occult in Fin-de-Siècle France," in *Confronting Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle France: Bodies, Minds and Gender*, ed. Christopher E. Forth and Elinor Accampo (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 119.

subject of his conspiracy theories because he was an antisemite, but the reason he made conspiracy theories at all was because he wanted to bring the Catholic Church back into power in France.

Conspiracy theories and occult literature both served the same functions, according to the same desires of their authors. Both genres were truth-discovering, written around the unveiling of secret facts about the universe. Both genres were built on perfect, self-correcting logic that was so tight and self-referential that no new development or counterevidence could shatter the theory. And both occultism and conspiracy theories were reactionary, a response to the highly volatile social and political circumstances of the Third Republic. Regardless of political affiliation, occult literature and conspiracy theories were reactionary forms of literature, designed to comfort and empower its writers and readers.

## Bibliography

- “Echos,” *La Libre Parole* (Paris: FR), Mar. 17, 1902.
- Allen, James Smith. “Papus the Misogynist: Honor, Gender, and the Occult in Fin-de-Siècle France,” in *Confronting Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle France : Bodies, Minds and Gender*, edited by Christopher E. Forth and Elinor Accampo, 112-129. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Orlando: Harvest Books, 1968.
- Asprem, Egil, and Asbjørn Dyrendal. “Close Companions? Esotericism and Conspiracy Theories.” In *Handbook of Conspiracy Theory and Contemporary Religion*, edited by Asbjørn Dyrendal, David G. Robertson, and Egil Asprem, 207–33. Boston: Brill, 2018.
- Behringer, Wolfgang. “Detecting the Ultimate Conspiracy, or how Waldensians became Witches.” In *Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in Early Modern Europe: From the Waldensians to the French Revolution*, edited by Barry Coward and Julian Swann, 13-34. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Bennett, Brian P. “Hermetic Histories: Divine Providence and Conspiracy Theory.” *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions* 54 (2): 174–209. 2007.
- Bloch, Marc. *Strange Defeat: A Statement of Evidence Written in 1940*. Translated by Gerard Hopkins. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999.
- Boym, Svetlana. “Conspiracy Theories and Literary Ethics: Umberto Eco, Danilo Kis, and the Protocols of Zion.” *Comparative Literature* 51 (2): 97–122. 1999.
- Busi, Frederick. *The Pope of Antisemitism: The Career and Legacy of Edouard-Adolphe Drumont*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1986.
- Byford, Jovan. *Conspiracy Theories: A Critical Introduction*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Byrnes, Robert Francis. *Antisemitism in Modern France*. New York: H. Fertig, 1969.
- C.Z. “Les Officiers Juifs: Simple statistique,” *La Libre Parole* (Paris: FR), Nov. 3, 1894.
- Carlson, Maria. “Fashionable Occultism: Spiritualism, Theosophy, Freemasonry, and Hermeticism in Fin-de-Siècle Russia,” in *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, edited by Bernice Glazer Rosenthal, 135-152. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.
- Cohn, Norman. *Warrant for Genocide; the Myth of the Jewish World-Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967.
- Coward, Barry, and Julian Swann, “Introduction.” In *Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in Early Modern Europe: From the Waldensians to the French Revolution*, edited by Barry Coward and Julian Swann, 1-12. London: Routledge, 2004.

- Cubitt, Geoffrey. 1993. *The Jesuit Myth: Conspiracy Theory and Politics in Nineteenth-Century France*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.
- Dard, Olivier. *La synarchie, ou, le mythe du complot permanent*. Paris: Perrin, 1998.
- de Gourdon, Come Carpentier. *A French Prophet of India's Resurgence in the Nineteenth Century: Saint Yves d' Alveydre and His "Mission de l'Inde."* Vol. 24. New Delhi: India International Centre, 2010.
- De Michelis, Cesare G., and Richard. Newhouse. *The Non-Existent Manuscript: A Study of the Protocols of the Sages of Zion*. Studies in Antisemitism. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004.
- Drumont, Edouard. "Crispi," in *Almanach de la Libre Parole Pour 1902*, edited by Edouard Drumont, 78-81. Paris: Bureaux de La Libre Parole, 1902.  
<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k991048p/f46.item>
- Drumont, Edouard. "Le XIXe Siècle en France," in *Almanach de la Libre Parole Pour 1902*, edited by Edouard Drumont, 35-40. Paris: Bureaux de La Libre Parole, 1902.  
<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k991048p/f46.item>
- Drumont, Edouard. "Une Lettre De Drumont," *L'Echo de Merveilleux*, (Paris: FR), Mar. 15, 1900.  
<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k205141t>
- Drumont, Edouard. *La France juive*. Paris: C. Marpon & E. Flammarion, 1886.  
<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k82371f>
- Godwin, Joscelyn. "Saint-Yves D'Alveydre and the Agarthian Connection," in *The Kingdom of Agarttha: A Journey into the Hollow Earth*. Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2008.
- Goldberg, Robert Alan. *Enemies Within : The Culture of Conspiracy in Modern America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.
- Graumann, Carl F. "Conspiracy: History and Social Psychology – A Synopsis," in *Changing Conceptions of Conspiracy*, edited by Carl F. Graumann and Serge Moscovici, 245-252. New York: Springer, 1987.
- Groh, Dieter. "The Temptation of Conspiracy Theory, or: Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People? Part I: Preliminary Draft of a Theory of Conspiracy Theories," in *Changing Conceptions of Conspiracy*, edited by Carl F. Graumann and Serge Moscovici, 1-14. New York: Springer, 1987.
- Hale, Terry. "Introduction," in *Là-bas*, ed. Terry Hale, vii-xxxii. London: Penguin Books, 2001.
- Hammer, Olav. "Mysticism and Esotericism as Contested Taxonomical Categories." *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 29: 5-27. 2020.

- Hofstadter, Richard. "The Paranoid Style in American Politics." 1964. Harper's Magazine. November 1, 1964. <https://harpers.org/archive/1964/11/the-paranoid-style-in-american-politics/>
- Introvigne, Massimo. *Satanism: A Social History*. Leiden: Brill, 2016.
- Katz, Jacob. *Jews and Freemasons in Europe 1723-1939*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970.
- Keeley, Brian L. "Of Conspiracy Theories." *The Journal of Philosophy* 96 (3): 109–26. 1999.
- Kreis, Emmanuel. *Les puissances de l'ombre: Juifs, jésuites, francs-maçons, réactionnaires: la théorie du complot dans les textes*. Paris: CNRS, 2009.
- Kuisel, Richard F. "The Legend of the Vichy Synarchy." *French Historical Studies* 6 (3): 365-398. 1970.
- Lea, Henry Charles. *Léo Taxil, Diana Vaughan, et l'Eglise Romaine: Histoire d'une Mystification*. Paris: Société Nouvelle de Librairie et d'Éducation, 1901.
- Marcus, George E. *Paranoia within Reason: A Casebook on Conspiracy as Explanation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- May, Ernest R. *Strange Victory: Hitler's Conquest of France*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2000.
- Mayeur, Jean Marie, and Madeleine Rebérioux. *The Third Republic from Its Origins to the Great War, 1871-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- McIntosh, Christopher. *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1972.
- Melley, Timothy. *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016.
- Méry, Gaston. "Leonie: La Somnambule du Docteur Gibert," *L'Echo de Merveilleux*, (Paris: FR), Apr. 1, 1899. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k205140f>
- Méry, Gaston. "Zola et Mlle Couedon," *L'Echo de Merveilleux*, (Paris: FR), Aug. 1, 1898. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k204594n>
- Monier, Frédéric. *Le complot dans la République: stratégies du secret, de Boulanger à la Cagoule*. Paris: Editions La Découverte, 1998.
- Niet. "La Russie d'Aujourd'hui: Un enquête impartiale," *L'Echo de Paris*, (Paris: FR), Oct. 24, 1901. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k8030675>
- Niet. *La Russie d'Aujourd'hui*. Paris: Felix Juven, 1902.
- Oliver, J. Eric, and Thomas John Wood. *Enchanted America: How Intuition and Reason Divide Our Politics*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018.
- Papus, *The Tarot of the Bohemians*. London: Senate, 1994.

- Papus. "A Propos de la Martinique," *L'Echo de Merveilleux*, (Paris: FR), Jul. 15, 1902.  
<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5550562d>
- Papus. "De l'Insuffisance de l'Hypnotisme," *L'Echo de Merveilleux*, (Paris: FR), Jun. 1, 1898.  
<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k204594n>
- Papus. "Papus Contre Papuss," *L'Echo de Merveilleux*, (Paris: FR), Jan. 15, 1898.  
<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k204594n>
- Petrovsky-Shtern, Yohanan. "Contextualizing the Mystery: Three Approaches to the Protocols of the Elders of Zion." *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 4 (2): 395–409. 2003.
- Pipes, Daniel. *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From*. New York: Free Press, 1997.
- Poliakov, Leon. "The Topic of the Jewish Conspiracy in Russia (1905-1920), and the International Consequences," in *Changing Conceptions of Conspiracy*, edited by Carl F. Graumann and Serge Moscovici, 105-114. New York: Springer, 1987.
- Popper, Karl R., and E. H. Gombrich. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.
- Prothero, Stephen R. "Theosophy's Sinner/Saint: Recent Books on Madame Blavatsky." *Religious Studies Review* 23 (3): 257-262. 1997.
- Rollin, Henri. *L'apocalypse de notre temps: les dessous de la propagande allemande d'après des documents inédits*. Paris: Allia, 2005.
- Sanders, Todd, and Harry G. West. 2003. "Power Revealed and Concealed in the New World Order." In *Transparency and Conspiracy: Ethnographies of Suspicion in the New World Order*, edited by Harry G. West and Todd Sanders, 1-37. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Strube, Julian. "Occultist Identity Formations Between Theosophy and Socialism in Fin-de-Siècle France." *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions* 64 (5/6): 568–95. 2017.
- Sunstein, Cass R. *Conspiracy Theories & Other Dangerous Ideas*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014.
- Tavernier, Eugène. "L'Entreprise Diana Vaughan," *L'Univers et Le Monde* (Paris, FR), Dec. 22, 1896. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7093487>
- Taylor, Michael. "British Conservatism, the Illuminati, and the Conspiracy Theory of the French Revolution, 1797-1802." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 47 (3): 292–312. 2014.
- Uscinski, Joseph E. *Conspiracy Theories: A Primer*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020.
- van Luijk, Ruben. *Children of Lucifer: The Origins of Modern Religious Satanism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

- Vignois, Elisee du. "Nostradamus et l'affaire Dreyfus," *L'Echo de Merveilleux*, (Paris: FR), Sep. 1, 1899. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k205140f>
- Vitoux, Georges. "M. Edouard Drumont," *L'Echo de Merveilleux*, (Paris: FR), Apr. 1, 1901. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5550413k>
- Whyte, George R. *The Dreyfus Affair: A Chronological History*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Ziegler, Robert. *Satanism, Magic, and Mysticism in fin-de-siècle France*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.