

II. THREE EXAMPLES OF "LITERARY SWEDENBORGIANISM"

CHAPTER 12

BALZAC AND HIS "BUDDHA FROM THE NORTH"

Do you know SWEDENBORG?
Only by name; I know nothing
about him, his books, his religion.
—Well, I will tell you all about
SWEDENBORG.

(*Séraphîta*)

Believe me, there is a certain measure in religious ideas beyond which everything is vicious. You know what my religions are. I am not orthodox and I do not believe in the Roman Church. I think that if there is any worthy plan, it is within the human transformations that make man march towards unknown zones: this is the law of superior creations. *Swedenborgianism*, which is only a repetition of ancient ideas within the framework of Christianity, is my religion, with my own addition of the incomprehensibility of God.

This (intentionally?) obscure paragraph in a letter from Balzac to Madame Hanska, dated March 31, 1837, has been often quoted incorrectly in order to prove the author's adherence to Swedenborgian ideas. It is

[†] Continued from *The New Philosophy* vol. 99 ns. 3 & 4 (July-December, 1996), pp. 451-485. See p. 427 (July-December, 1994) in the first installment for copyright statement and acknowledgements.

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evident that if Frédéric Ségu's quotation technique were used: "I am not orthodox and I do not believe in the Roman Church; Swedenborgianism is my religion,"¹ the matter would be quite clear. Balzac would be a Swedenborgian. However, the author of the *Comédie Humaine* never actually made the "extraordinary affirmation" that Latouche's biographer thought he discovered in this paragraph.

The true meaning of this text is, in fact, quite different. In addition to a warning against reading religious authors too frequently, (an idea that need not be emphasized here because Fernand Baldensperger has already drawn attention to it based on other extracts from letters),² and a pre-Nietzschean tendency which I will discuss later on in more detail, it is my opinion that the analysis of this text seems to provide two important elements for judging Balzac's religious beliefs.

The first is the *multiple* nature of his beliefs: "You know what my religions are." The following extract from another letter to Mme. Hanska, written more than five years later, which has also frequently served researchers and commentators as a definition of Balzac's religion, underlines the variety of beliefs of an author who poses as a defender of the Church he did not believe in:

So I will answer a serious question in your letter. *Politically*, I am in the Catholic religion; I am on Bossuet's side and on Bonald's side, from which I will never part. *Before God*, I am of St. John's religion, the mystic church, the only one to have kept the true doctrines. This is from the bottom of my heart. Soon, they will

¹F. Ségu, *Henri de Latouche*, doctoral thesis, Faculté des Lettres, Paris, 1931, p. 453.

²F. Baldensperger, *Orientations étrangères chez Honoré de Balzac*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 1927, p. 184:

In October 1836, he advised Mme. Hanska not to completely devote herself to reading mystics: "I am sorry to see that you read mystics," he wrote to her on September 30, 1836. "Believe me, this reading is fatal to souls constituted like yours. It is poison, it is an exciting drug. These books have a bad influence. There are madresses of virtue, like madresses of dissipation... Do not read anything of this sort, I have gone through it; I have experienced it." And two years later, on November 15, 1838: "I revolt only against the invasion of mystic ideas. And again by an admirable instinct of jealousy. And then, if I must say it, I hate the *devout nature*. It is not piety that scares me, but devotion. Take shelter here and there in God's arms, all right; as much as I admire these sublime impulses, meticulous practices harden my heart..."

These statements of the former author of the *Livre mystique* are very revealing.

know how deeply Catholic and monarchic is the work I have undertaken.³

Here Balzac alludes to the Introduction to his *Comédie Humaine*, drafted in the same month as the letter just quoted. By the year 1842, not much remained of what is known as “Balzac’s Swedenborgianism.” Some ten years earlier, when Balzac published his first edition of *Louis Lambert* and was preparing the complete text for his *Livre mystique*, we find he had the same variety of religious inspirers. Evidence of this may be found in his famous *Lettre à Charles Nodier*, published in the *Revue de Paris* on October 26, 1832, where he states:

You certainly know that Treuttel & Wurtz have reprinted several mystic works in which the abysses of infinity seem to be organized and in which feeble intellects, or those which are too strong perhaps, like to get lost, like a tourist underneath Rome; remember that I respect these works; you will find the complete works of Swedenborg, Madame Guyon, St. Theresa, Mademoiselle Bourignon, Jacob Boehme, etc., rebound by our friend Thouvenin, on a special shelf of my library.⁴

³ *Lettres à l’Etrangère*, Paris, Calmann Lévy, 1899-1950, vol. II, p. 48: Passy, July 12, 1842. Underlined by Balzac.

One could find grounds for pointing out that this dualism was very common at the time of the Saint-Simonians, Fourierists and many other followers of sects in the thirties. After all, hasn’t André Maurois described George Sand’s religion in the same terms? (A. Maurois, *Lélia ou la Vie de George Sand*, Paris, Hachette, 1952, p. 290). This observation is accurate, but it does not refute Balzac’s testimony. It merely illustrates the similarities and differences among the minds of this epoch.

⁴ Nodier had just spoken about Swedenborg in an article published in the same Review: *De la Palingénésie humaine et de la Résurrection*, 1832. In the same year, Pierre-Simon Ballanche, the author of the *Essais de palingénésie sociale*, Paris, Didot, 1827-1829, published his *Ville des expiations*. Ballanche, whose spiritual affinity with Victor Hugo is well known thanks to Jacques Roos’ work *Ballanche et Victor Hugo*, Paris, Nizet, 1958, would have also been indirectly at the origin of Balzac’s “Swedenborgianism.”

Cf. Baudelaire in his *Notice de “Révélation magnétique”* preceding his first translation of a story by Edgar Allan Poe, published in *La liberté de penser* on July 15, 1948:

We know *Séraphitus*, *Louis Lambert* and a great number of passages from other books in which Balzac, a great mind devoured by legitimate encyclopedical pride, tried to meld different ideas drawn from Swedenborg, Mesmer, Marat, Goethe and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire into a unitarian and definitive system.

And one year beforehand there is evidence of a literary vestige in the variety in Balzac's mystic or theosophical sources in *Les Proscrits*:

This branch of ancient theology has secretly remained in honor with us; Jacob Boehme, Swedenborg, Martinez Pasqualis, Saint-Martin, Molinos, Mesdames Guyon, Bourignon and Krüdener, the great sect of ecstasies, that is to say the Illuminati have at different times, maintained the doctrines of this science, whose purpose is something frightening and gigantic.⁵

Allow me to quote again Louis Lambert as an eminent judge of religions:

Swedenborg takes from Magism, Bramahism, Buddhism and Christian mysticism all that these four great religions have in common—what is real, divine, and which gives their doctrines so to speak a mathematical basis...Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus-Christ all had the same principles...Swedenborg will perhaps be the Buddha from the North.⁶

The quotes supporting my statement concerning the multiple facets of Balzac's beliefs could be considered as sufficient, but there is at least one more that is extremely important. Van der Elst reminds us that Balzac mentions Swedenborg in his *Comédie Humaine*:

but a bit pell-mell, together with about ten mystics and scientists, in order to prove the *unity of composition*. He will invoke his support in order to demonstrate that there has been just one religion since the origin of the world.⁷

⁵ *Les Proscrits*, Ed. Pléiade, X, p. 335. This quotation is important because this work was published in the *Revue de Paris* of May 1, 1831 and reprinted in the same year in Volume III of the *Romans et contes philosophiques*. It proves Balzac's interest in Swedenborg prior to the *Lettre à Charles Nodier*, which Marc Blanchard recorded as Balzac's first mention of Swedenborg (*Témoignages et jugements sur Balzac*, Complementary doctoral thesis, Faculté des Lettres, Paris, 1931, p. 123). However, Blanchard had quoted (op.cit., p. 104), from Fernand Baldensperger (F. Baldensperger, op.cit., p. 166), a paragraph concerning Dante's inferiority to Swedenborg, dated October 1831 by Baldensperger, cf Note 97 in this chapter.

⁶ Louis Lambert, Ed. Pléiade, X, p. 420.

⁷ J. Van der Elst, *Autour du Livre mystique*, in *Revue de littérature comparée*, 1930, pp. 113-114.

Van der Elst believes that Swedenborg should have received special mention in the introduction. If his thesis is correct, and if Swedenborg did in fact provide Balzac with the philosophical basis for his works, a basis which Van der Elst finds in: “the triad motive (or end)—cause—effect, or effect—cause—principle,” then Balzac’s system: “is the Swedenborgian doctrine of *degrees* which forms the basis of the doctrines of the New Jerusalem...”

Now if this were the case, it would have been quite natural for Balzac to pay homage to the great Swede. But in this instance, is it not strange that Balzac does not remember very clearly the debt he owes to Swedenborg, which he had formally acknowledged at the time he wrote *Séraphîta*, as Van der Elst states? Is it not more logical to examine Balzac’s notes *Sur les principes de la philosophie de Descartes et de Malebranche* which the young author drafted in 1818?⁸ This is what the Abbé Philippe Bertault did in his work *Balzac et la religion*, where concerning the future novelist he states: “The Cartesian principle *from cause to effect* is already engrained in his mind. He is beginning to give it an important place in his ethical system.”⁹

The principles or “ends” are missing. And the principles, according to Balzac, are the author. It is rather difficult to understand how Van der Elst could find a Swedenborgian basis in this approach. This point would be valid if by “author,” Balzac meant “God,” but there is nothing that allows such an interpretation of the text, which I will quote here at length because of its major interest:

The *Études de moeurs* will represent all the social effects...Assuming this to be true, the history of the human heart outlined idea after idea, the social history summarized in all its parts, this is the basis...Then the second foundation will be the *Études philosophiques*, for after the *effects*, there are the *causes*. In the *Études de moeurs*, I will have depicted the feelings and their effect, life and its pace. In the *Études philosophiques*, I will tell *why the feelings, on what basis life; what is the role, what the conditions are*

⁸See André Billy, *Vie de Balzac*, Paris, Flammarion, 1944, Vol. 1, p. 34.

⁹Philippe Bertault, *Balzac et la religion* Paris, Bouivin Cie, 1942, p. 85. Underlined by the author.

beyond which neither society nor man exist; and after having examined it in order to describe it, I will examine it again in order to judge it. So, in the *Études de mœurs*, there are individuals who are types, in the *Études philosophiques*, there are individualized types. Thus, I will have given life everywhere: to the type by individualizing him, to the individual by typifying him. I will have given thought to the fragment; individual life to thought.

Then, after the effects and causes, will come the *Études analytiques*, to which the *Physiologie du mariage* belongs, for after the *effects* and *causes*, we should look for the *principles*. Morals comprise the scene, the causes are the *backstage* and *machinery*. The *principles* are the *author*...¹⁰

This text is extremely interesting, but it does not prove that the author used Swedenborg as its basis. It merely shows that Balzac wanted to construct his *Comédie Humaine* as a philosopher would construct his philosophy, or a scholar his science. The system of October 1834, which shows that Balzac had conceived the idea of his work many years before he found a title for it and began to classify his novels, logically led to his desire for dealing with pure science:

But after having dealt with poetry, in demonstrating a whole system, I will deal with science in the *Essai sur les forces humaines*.¹¹

The attentive reader will not fail to observe that the last sentence of my quotation from Van der Elst seems to be inconsistent with my statement on the multiple facets of Balzac's religions:

¹⁰ Underlined by Balzac. Did Balzac really make a pun using the word "author"? In this case, the following paragraph borrowed from Claude-Louis de Saint-Martin's *Tableau naturel des rapports qui existent entre Dieu, l'Homme et l'Univers*, Part I, Edinborough, 1782, p. 24, seems to be much closer to Balzac's system than Swedenborg's doctrines of series and degrees:

In the supreme principle having ruled the production of this Universe, and maintaining its existence, everything is essentially order, peace, harmony; so we must not attribute to it the confusion reigning in all the parts of our gloomy dwelling-place; and this disorder can only be the effect of an inferior cause that is opposed to this principle.

¹¹ *Lettre à l'Etrangère*, Vol. I, pp. 205-206: Paris, October 26, 1834.

He will invoke his support [Swedenborg's] in order to demonstrate that there has been just one religion since the origin of the world.

It will suffice, however, to compare this sentence with Louis Lambert's profession of faith in order to understand that the so-called oneness of religions according to Balzac only corroborates my thesis:

Of course, all religions are included in Swedenborg, or rather the one religion of mankind, for if worship has infinite forms, neither its meaning nor its metaphysical structures have ever varied; well, man has only had but one religion...¹²

What follows is a final quotation proving that Balzac had a variety of mystic and theosophical inspirers:

The way to find God is a much more elevated religion than Bossuet's, it is the religion of St. Theresa and Fénelon, of Swedenborg, of Jacob Boehme and Monsieur de Saint-Martin.¹³

Since this sentence is found in Balzac's letter defending *Séraphîta* against Madame Hanska's severe criticism,¹⁴ we might have expected the author to analyze his work and define Swedenborg's role in it. But other than some mild thoughts about the impossibility of judging between St. John and St. Peter,¹⁵ Balzac once again presents a Swedenborg surrounded

¹² *Louis Lambert*, Ed. Pléiade, X, p. 127. A similar text is to be found in *Pensées, Sujets, Fragments*, pp. 59-60:

At the core of the matter, all these religions, whose founders are not all known, have the same doctrines, but not worship, since Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus-Christ, Mohammed, Swedenborg have the same ideas. (Quoted from Philippe Bertault, *op.cit.*, p. 326).

¹³ *Lettres à l'Étrangère*, Vol. I, p. 336; Saché, end of June, 1836.

¹⁴ Van der Elst is credited with establishing proof that there was an abyss between the orthodox Catholicism of Madame Hanska and Balzac (J. Van der Elst, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-123; see also further on in this chapter).

¹⁵ "As far as the orthodoxy of the book is concerned, Swedenborg is diametrically opposed to the court of Rome; but who will dare to choose between St. John and St. Peter?"

by religious geniuses, three of whom with a divine call Swedenborg formally repudiated, the fourth, in turn, having repudiated Swedenborg.¹⁶

But Balzac probably did not know this. And it is in the area of the author's ignorance that we should look for the explanation of his passion for making various lists of his diverse religious sources, as well as his desire to be considered as an initiate, because, far superior to Louis Lambert, who had:

come back to Swedenborg after having made enormous studies on religions and proved to himself by reading all the works that long-suffering Germany, England and France have been publishing for sixty years, the deep truth of the ideas from my youth about the Bible,¹⁷

Balzac claims to have scrutinized all the fields of human activities:

Thus, society in all its stages, from the bottom to the top; thus laws, religions, history, the present time, everything has been analyzed and observed by me.¹⁸

¹⁶Swedenborg in a letter dated Amsterdam, July 13, 1771:

I have seen two volumes, in quarto, of miracles wrought by the Abbé Deacon, Paris, which are nothing but falsehoods, being partly fantastic and partly magical; *and it is the same thing with the other miracles of the Roman Catholics...* (Immanuel Tafel, *Documents concerning the Life and Character of Emanuel Swedenborg*, Augmented edition, Manchester-London 1855, pp. 235-236; underlining added by me)

Swedenborg on Boehme:

He is a simple man who might be of some use to some who are intelligent, but a danger for the others. (Quoted from G. Ballet, *Histoire d'un visionnaire au XVIII^e siècle: Swedenborg*, Paris, Masson & Cie, 1899, p. 158.)

Cf also Ballet, op.cit., pp. 213-214:

in a letter to Beyer, dated February 1767, he declares that he never read Boehme's writings, in which he could have found all sorts of fabrications and badly founded opinions!

J. Van der Elst (op.cit., p. 118) reminds us that Saint-Martin criticized Swedenborg and ranked him among the founders of "official religions."

¹⁷Louis Lambert, Ed. Pléiade, X, p. 419.

¹⁸*Lettres à l'Etrangère*, Vol. I, p. 16: end of March 1833.

However, the enumeration of all these names does not conceal Balzac's own lack of knowledge in the field of Swedenborgianism, even from those with a minimal knowledge of Swedenborg. I will return to this subject later on. It is now time to deal with the second important element in the quote at the beginning of this chapter; the *insufficiency of Swedenborgianism* in Balzac. We must, of course, consider this element in the light of what I have just stated about the author of the *Comédie Humaine's* claim to know everything and to judge everything.

While stating that Swedenborgianism is his religion, Balzac claims that it "is only a repetition of ancient ideas in the Christian sense," with this reservation; Swedenborgianism does not suit him perfectly. He does not find in Swedenborgianism "my own addition of the incomprehensibility of God." In fact, Balzac considered Swedenborg's religion as "the most obscure of all the Christian doctrines."¹⁹ Ahead of the Lambert-Balzac superman, Ernst Robert Curtius places emphasis on a Nietzschean tendency, finding a very clear expression of it in the following paragraph:

however obscure and diffuse his (Swedenborg's) books may be, they contain elements of a magnificent design. His theocracy is sublime, and his religion is the only one that a superior mind can accept.²⁰

In my opinion, the feeling goes beyond Victor Hugo's romantic pride, Alfred de Vigny's supreme contempt and Stendhal's egotism.²¹ The essential difference is that Balzac left the school of romantic literature in order to found a sociology of higher intelligences, and in doing so he foreshadowed Nietzsche and his doctrine of superman:

¹⁹ *Séraphita*, Ed. Pléiade, X, p. 493.

²⁰ E.R. Curtius, *Balzac*, Bonn, Verlag von Friedrich Cohen, 1923, p. 500. Those who have quoted "the only religion that can accept a superior mind" (for instance Henry de Geymuller, *Swedenborg et les phénomènes psychiques*, Paris, Ernest Leroux, s.d., p. 438), have, of course, given Swedenborgianism a supremacy that Balzac would not have admitted.

²¹ These phenomena could be summarized as "the worship of Ego" (le culte du Moi) by the romanticists. Concerning this, see the Introduction to Jacques Roos' *Ballanche et Victor Hugo* op.cit., p. 7 and those that follow.

In fact, the distance that exists between a man whose inert intelligence condemns him to apparent stupidity and the man to whom the exercise of his inner life has given any sort of force, ought to make us suppose that there may exist between people of genius and other human beings the same distance as the one separating the Blind from Seers.²²

In Balzac's correspondence, there is a doubly revealing paragraph concerning the following:

I need only one or two *steady* months, for this morning I have at last recovered all the energy which made me overcome the difficulties of my life, and it is not in being at the head of Europe's intellectuals that I will stop...

This *Notice biographique sur Louis Lambert* is a work in which I wanted to compete with Goethe and Byron, with Faust and Manfred, and it is a competition that is not yet finished, for the proofs are not yet corrected. I do not know whether I will succeed, but this fourth volume of the *Contes philosophiques* is to be the last response to my enemies and should portend an undeniable superiority.²³

The Swedenborgianism "à la Balzac" was to become the religion of the elect, while the great masses of people were to remain in the Catholic Church:

As far as the orthodoxy of the book (*Séraphîta*) is concerned, Swedenborg is diametrically opposed to the court of Rome; but who will dare judge between St. John and St. Peter? St. John's

²² *Louis Lambert*, Ed. Pléiade, X, p. 381. I should add that Balzac considered himself not only as a genius but also as a seer; cf Théophile Gautier, *Honoré de Balzac*, Augmented and revised edition, Paris, Poulet-Malassis & de Broise, 1859, p. 38: "Balzac was a seer."

²³ *Honoré de Balzac, Lettres à sa famille 1809-1850*. Edited by Walter Scott Hastings.—In order better to understand the psychological viewpoint indicated by this quotation, see Jean Pommier's article *Deux moments de la genèse de Louis Lambert*, in the *Année balzacienne* 1960, pp. 95-96.

mystic religion will be the one of the superior human beings. Rome's will be the one of the people.²⁴

There is, of course, a very great difference between Balzac's pre-Nietzscheism which foresees one Christian religion for the élite and another Christian religion for the masses, and a genuine Nietzscheism which regards Christianity merely as a system of morality for slaves. The following quotation proves that Balzac anticipated not only Nietzsche's idea concerning an aristocracy of higher intelligences but also his symbolic notion of the mediocrity of flat open country compared to the superiority of mountains:

God made me for smelling the perfume of flowers and not the stench of mud. Therefore why should I get entangled in pettiness? Everything leads me to greatness. I suffocate in flat open country; I live in the mountains! I have undertaken so much. We have reached the *era of intelligence*. The materialistic kings, the brutal force disappear. There are intellectual worlds, and that is where we may meet geniuses like Pizarro, Cortès, Columbus. There will be lords in the universal kingdom of philosophy.²⁵

Does Balzac foreshadow Nietzsche intuitively or should we conclude that he stole from Zoroaster's *Zend-Avesta*? We must not exclude the hypothesis of a contemporary intermediary. We are dealing with an epoch in which the study of the ancient religions of the East was in fashion.²⁶ But, what is important to note here is that this pre-Nietzschean tendency is completely foreign to Swedenborgianism.

In 1918, Lucien Pinvert published a study on *Deux prophètes: Balzac et Nietzsche* in the *Revue des Etudes historiques*.²⁷ None of the paragraphs quoted above are in this study. In fact, there are just two paragraphs which

²⁴ Cf Note 13.

²⁵ *Lettres à l'Etrangère*, Vol. I, p. 202: Paris, October 26, 1834.

²⁶ See Raymond Schwab, *La Renaissance orientale*, Paris, Payot, 1950.

²⁷ The epoch was well chosen for discussing Pan-germanism, but the idea of making Balzac responsible for it is curious.

predict modern pan-Germanism, and as far as Balzac is concerned, Pinvert included just one page from *Séraphîta*. Nevertheless, the idea of comparing these two authors was a good one, and the epithet "prophet" was not a completely false one for Balzac, although, in my opinion, André Billy seems to have made an even better distinction when he speaks about the author of the *Comédie Humaine* as having been influenced by two English "Swedenborgian" ladies, Mrs. and Miss Place: "they found in him a disciple or rather an apostle,..."²⁸

No other statement is closer to the truth of the matter. Balzac was not among those who serve as disciples; and, despite his enormous pride, he was too astute to pose as a prophet himself. There was but one part for him to play; that of an apostle. His duty was to present the new prophet, the prophet of modern religion who was to correspond to the field of religion the way romanticism corresponded to literature and philosophy. The new school of thought, inspired by Mme. de Staël, finally and definitively triumphed with the first performance of Victor Hugo's play *Hernani*, on February 25, 1830. As early as 1800, Mme. de Staël had recommended that her compatriots adopt the new currents of thought from northern Europe and unite them with the temperament of southern Europe thereby creating a union of the North and the South that would give birth to a new literature.²⁹ It was certainly not by chance that the pioneer of the new school appeared in the person of Louis Lambert. I do not think it is too difficult to interpret the scene in which this precocious genius gives Mme. de Staël a copy of Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell*. He merely proposes a new religion to her, a religion for the élite, a very romantic religion in his apostle's opinion, because its founder is the "Buddha from the North." Balzac reiterates the concept of a marriage of two opposite cultures because, in the author's opinion, *Séraphîta* is "a holy book that wishes to have

²⁸ André Billy, op. cit., p. 210. André Billy makes use of the label "Swedenborgian ladies" a bit too freely. I have found no data on the Swedenborgianism of these two women. And the response to the letter from the Brothers Michel Lévy to Countess Guidoboni-Visconti, whom André Billy also called Swedenborgian, (p. 75 of file A.363 in the *Collection Spoelberch de Lovenjoul*: Versailles, January 23, 1875) is entirely negative, as the Countess was in possession of "neither letters nor correspondence of this eminent writer."

²⁹ See, for instance, Mme. de Staël, *De la littérature*, original edition, Paris, 1800, pp. 86, 91,99. Here I must remind you that Balzac was at first hostile to the Romantic movement. See L.-J. Arrigon, *Les Années romantiques de Balzac*, Third edition, Paris, Perrin & Cie, 1927.

the light from the East in the transparency of our beautiful language,..."³⁰ The connection between *Louis Lambert* and *Séraphîta* is an easy one to make. Balzac himself made it:

What a terrible agony the reprinting of *Louis Lambert* has been for me these last days. I tried to arrive at a point of perfection that would leave me in a state of tranquility about the work—and his thoughts when he was at Villenoix were yet to be written. I put up there like a hat left to reserve a place, or a covered dish for a meal. At last, they have been brought to a conclusion; it is a new formula for mankind forming the link between *Louis Lambert* and *Séraphîta*.³¹

This "new formula for mankind" was a mystic religion. Mme. de Staël in her work *De l'Allemagne*, devotes an entire section to *Religion and Enthusiasm*. In her opinion, religion should be a kind of mysticism whose main element constitutes a consciousness of the infinite. Balzac knew what he was doing in proposing his mystic religion to the celebrated deceased woman writer, and in trying to remain on the beaten track by creating a work that would, above all, give his readers a taste of the infinite. In October 1834, while in the middle of his work on *Séraphîta*, Balzac wrote to Madame Hanska:

Nothing wastes time like nonsense, so I need something very great to take me outside the circle in which I find the infinite. There is just one thing that can oppose it—the infinite, the infinite—a great love.³²

³⁰ *Lettres à l'Étrangère*, Vol. I, p. 241: Paris, February 10, 1835. Cf. in the *Aventures d'une idée heureuse* (Ed. Pléiade, X, p. 1165), in which Louis Lambert reappears, this beautiful image:

Asia is pleasure; Europe is banter. In Europe, ideas yap, mock, gambol, like everything that is worldly, but in the East, they are voluptuous, celestial, noble, symbolic. Dante was the only one to join these two kinds of ideas. His poem is a solid bridge launched between Asia and Europe,...

³¹ *Lettres à l'Étrangère*, Vol. I, p. 202: Paris, March 30, 1835.

³² *Lettres à l'Étrangère*, Vol. I, p. 202: Paris, October 26, 1834. This document is probably the most important of all the letters from Balzac to Madame Hanska. It also contains the already quoted Nietzschean paragraph and the general plan for *Comédie Humaine* (cf the *Revue des Sciences humaines*, edited by the Faculté des Lettres, Lille, 1950: Jean Pommier, *Les Préfaces de Balzac*, p. 21: "Nevertheless, in March 1835, according to his own avowal, he caught glimpses of this plan only at certain moments...").

But why was it that Balzac found the religion that suited modern times through Swedenborg and not through someone else? First of all, we should put aside the notion that Balzac, like Louis Lambert, had studied every religion and found one of them to be the only valid one.³³ An answer may be found in the same paragraph:

He is the only one to touch God, to create a thirst for Him; he brought out God in all His majesty from the swaddling cloths in which the other human worshippers had wrapped him, he left Him there where He is, making His innumerable creations and creatures gravitate around him by means of successive transformations constituting a more immediate and more natural future than the Catholic eternity.³⁴

In this paragraph, Van der Elst sees a device used by Balzac in order to:

make the "Buddha from the North" responsible, notwithstanding his ideas, for the "gyratory" hypothesis...³⁵

a Balzacian system taken from Dante³⁶ which appears for the first time in the *Les Proscrits*, then reappears in *Louis Lambert*. This is a probable explanation, but at this point is it not even more likely that Swedenborg was the first founder of a religion to take the great scientific discoveries into account, placing Balzac's God in the center of the universe? The formulation "making His innumerable creations gravitate around him" reminds us inevitably of Newton's famous law. A discovery made by Madeleine Fargeaud in the *Collection Lovenjoul* strongly corroborates this statement. In fact, Balzac deleted a magnificent statement of appreciation after Swedenborg's name in the proofs of the *Préface du Livre mystique*:

³³ Cf the beginning of this chapter.

³⁴ *Louis Lambert*, Ed. Pléiade, X, p. 420.

³⁵ J. Van der Elst, op. cit., p. 106.

³⁶ Philippe Bertault reminds us (op.cit., pp. 347-348) that, in the ancient times, the sphere was "the symbol of the Divine being."

the greatest scholar in the XVIIIth century who, like Newton, gave up science in order to contemplate the infinite.³⁷

I have already mentioned on several occasions Balzac's ambition to be regarded as a man of science. Allow me also to remind you that Sigier de Brabant:

revealed mathematically one of God's great thoughts in the coordination of different human spheres³⁸

and that Louis Lambert gives new life to the scientific criterion of the true Christian religion:

Swedenborg takes from Magism, Bramahism, Buddhism and Christian mysticism all that these four great religions have in common, what is real, divine, and gives their doctrines, so to speak, a mathematical basis.³⁹

This series of mathematical proofs applied to spiritual life can be further illustrated by quoting Balzac's defense of *Séraphîta* in his letter to Madame Hanska dated June, 1836:

The proof drawn from the infinity of numbers surprised the scholars. They bowed their heads. This was to beat them on their own ground, with their own weapons.⁴⁰

I must add that the theosophist who provided Balzac with such literal, even to the point of word-for-word inspiration, was not Swedenborg, but Saint-Martin, as Pauline Bernheim proves in her study of the influence of these two authors on Balzac's novels.⁴¹ However, the point here is not to

³⁷ Madeleine Fargeaud, *BALZAC et la Recherche de l'Absolu*, Librairie Hachette, 1968, p. 502.

³⁸ *Les Proscrits*, Ed. Pléiade, X, pp. 419-420.

³⁹ *Louis Lambert*, Ed. Pléiade, X, p. 572.

⁴⁰ *Lettres à l'Etrangère*, Vol. I, p. 336: Saché, end of June 1836.

⁴¹ Pauline Bernheim, *Balzac und Swedenborg. Einfluss der Mystik Swedenborgs und Saint-Martins auf die Romandichtung Balzacs = Romanische Studien veröffentlicht von Dr. Emil Ebering*. Heft XVI, Berlin, 1914, p. 109.

prove any direct influence from Swedenborg, but rather to emphasize the need that the author of the *Comédie Humaine* felt to corroborate spiritual truths scientifically. I will return to the "Unknown Philosopher" and the intermediary role he played between Swedenborg and Balzac.

In my opinion, *Séraphîta* is not a good example of Balzac's religious scientism. The work ends with a paragraph I must quote because it indicates that science, though not a criterion of religion, is like God Himself, in all His power:

Is not God the very science, the very love, the source of all poetry? Cannot His treasure even excite cupidity? His treasure is inexhaustible, His poetry infinite, His science is infallible and without mystery.⁴²

Also within this context, is Balzac's idea of occultism as being a science, rather than a religion. Mrs. Ferguson and the Abbé Bertault have sufficiently commented on this point,⁴³ so I need not comment on it any further. One could add, however, that purists have felt the need to make the distinction between mysticism and theosophy. After all, theosophy is defined as a "science of God"⁴⁴ including the supposition that an active part is played by intelligence, while mysticism is based on feeling and affection.⁴⁵ Thus, on one hand, it is natural that Balzac chose Swedenborg, both a theosophist and an eminent scholar, as the prophet of his "new formula for mankind." Furthermore, it is evident that Balzac himself was not aware of this difference because he ranked mystics like St. Theresa, Molinos, Fénelon and Mme. Guyon together with theosophists such as Boehme, Swedenborg and Saint-Martin. And by using this criterion, I can demonstrate that the essence of the *Livre mystique: Séraphîta* is much closer to mysticism, as generally defined by scholars, than it is to theosophy. This

⁴² *Séraphîta*, Ed. Pléiade, X, p. 572.

⁴³ Muriel Blackstock Ferguson, *La Volonté dans la Comédie humaine de Balzac*, Paris, Georges Courville, 1935. See, for instance, p. 34: "Balzac conceived the possibility of a link between mysticism and science."

⁴⁴ *Nouveau Larousse Universel*, Paris, 1948, Vol. II, p. 916.

⁴⁵ Gilbert Ballet, op.cit., p. 164.

is evident from reading of the book in question and also from Balzac's letters to Madame Hanska where he comments on its conception. In July, 1834, he wrote the following:

Séraphîta has worried me to death. There must be exaltations that can only occur at the expense of life.⁴⁶

And eight months later:

To be inspired for *Séraphîta*, I must hear the music of angels, and also be ill from ecstasy, ...⁴⁷

In addition to the previously mentioned proof of the existence of the infinite derived from numbers and the conclusion quoted above, *Séraphîta*, despite its biographical section about Swedenborg stolen from the *Abrégé* published in Strasbourg in 1788, has very little to do with science and theosophy. Its focus is mysticism, a pure spiritualism, "human angelization," as Albert Béguin⁴⁸ has expressed it so well. *Séraphîta* marks the last step of Balzac's religious evolution: from occultism to theosophy, and from theosophy to mysticism. The novels illustrating these steps are, of course: *Les Proscrits*, *Louis Lambert* and *Séraphîta*.⁴⁹

The assumption that there is an evolution of Balzac's religious philosophy, does not mean that Balzac draws any closer to the New Jerusa-

⁴⁶ *Lettres à l'Etrangère*, Vol. I, p. 167: Paris, July 1, 1834.

⁴⁷ *Lettres à l'Etrangère*, Vol I, p. 240: Paris, March 18, 1835.

⁴⁸ *Hommage à Balzac*, Paris, Mercure de France, 1950, p. 79; *Notes sur Balzac*, in *Hommage et Reconnaissance à Karl Barth* (= *Cahiers théologiques de l'actualité protestante*, Hors série 2, Neuchâtel-Paris, 1946, p. 150.

⁴⁹ I do not intend to deal here with *Ursule Mirouet* (1841) which marks a rather backward step in Balzac's religious philosophy. He certainly appears there as a "Swedenborgiste," but, as Pauline Bernheim (op. cit., pp. 117-118) already observed, he is a somnambulist, a phrenologist and a physiognomist, which makes an apparent contradiction in the eyes of Swedenborg who condemned formally the practices of occult sciences. Pauline Bernheim concludes:

One finds in this novel nothing of the essence of Swedenborg's doctrines, but the inspiration given by Swedenborg is evident;

which is, however, a contradiction. Should we conclude that it is Swedenborg's very life that was Balzac's source of inspiration? But viewed from this perspective, the book gives only a caricature of Swedenborg.

lem. In the first step he sees an opportunity for an opening to a "mystic" religion, which he took in *Les Proscrits* and in his *Lettre à Charles Nodier*. At that time "Balzac moves to Romanticism," to quote an important chapter of the *Années romantiques de Balzac* by L.J. Arrigon.⁵⁰ Thus, his literary ambitions to become an equal of Byron and Goethe⁵¹ went hand in hand with his mystic propaganda.

Moreover, when he had to demonstrate the theoretical proof, the task proved to be far more difficult than he had imagined. *Louis Lambert* required several revisions, the last one of which, as Henry Evans demonstrated,⁵² was much more flattering to Swedenborg than the first one; the "superstitions" became "beliefs," and "Baron Swedenborg" became "Prophet Swedenborg" etc.

This "Swedenborgianized" version is a contemporary to *Séraphîta*. In my opinion, *Louis Lambert*, with its discussions of the origin of religions, the twofold nature of human beings and "angelization" is closer to Swedenborg and his doctrines than the mysterious and quite vague *Séraphîta*, in which all the information on Swedenborg and his religion is copied from the *Abrégé*.⁵³ As Pauline Bernheim has already maintained,⁵⁴ it is certainly true that Louis Lambert's ideas are much too vague to be characterized as Swedenborgian. As a hero he is closely connected with Sigier de Brabant in his efforts to explain God and religion by means of reason. Therefore, Louis Lambert can be considered as a theosophist, while *Séraphîta* is a pure angel, a being who has lost all contact with this world.

It is also true, however, that Louis Lambert, too, has an aspect that recalls the state of mind in which Balzac had to put himself in order to write *Séraphîta*. In fact, he had visions when he, or rather his "interior being...came to a high degree of ecstasy or a great perfection of seeing." Pauline Bernheim hoped to discover a parallel between this state and

⁵⁰ L. J. Arrigon, op.cit., pp. 97-120.

⁵¹ See quotation from Balzac made at the beginning of this chapter.

⁵² Henri Evans, *Louis Lambert et la philosophie de Balzac*, Paris, José Corti, 1951, p. 206.

⁵³ *L'Abrégé des Ouvrages d'Emmanuel Swedenborg*, Strasbourg, 1788.

⁵⁴ Pauline Bernheim, op.cit., p. 30.

Swedenborg's ecstasies.⁵⁵ One is tempted here to compare Balzac himself with his "Buddha from the North," for he seems to have been obsessed by the idea that he had to be in a state of ecstasy in order to write his *Séraphîta*.⁵⁶

A tremendously important difference arises from this comparison when ascertaining the degree of mysticism present in the author of the *Comédie Humaine*. Swedenborg himself never did anything to bring about his visions. In fact, as far as he was concerned these phenomena were "natural." As for Balzac, nothing seems to have been less natural than the design and elaboration of *Séraphîta*. It has been stated on several occasions that Balzac had felt compelled to write the work.⁵⁷ It is evident that he believed he must write it. But the imperative that obliged him to do so certainly came less from his internal inclinations than his need to represent a side of contemporary life indispensable to someone who wanted to portray an entire society. Without doubt, Théophile Gautier was correct when he stated that, after *Séraphîta*, Balzac's mysticism vanished immediately into thin air:

Perhaps his beautiful genius would have disappeared too rapidly if he had continued to ascend into the unfathomable immensities of metaphysics, and we should consider it as a good thing that he limited himself to *Louis Lambert* and *Séraphîta-Séraphîtus*, which sufficiently represent the supernatural side in the *Comédie Humaine*, and open up a broad enough door to the invisible world.⁵⁸

The "supernatural side" had to be there; and it was the fundamental reason for *Séraphîta's* existence. But what efforts it took to write it! On November 20, 1833, Balzac told Madame Hanska that during a visit to the sculptor Bra he had gotten an idea for

⁵⁵ Pauline Bernheim, op.cit., p. 30.

⁵⁶ See further on in this chapter.

⁵⁷ See, for example: J. Van der Elst, op. cit., p. 89; Albert Béguin in *Hommage à Balzac*, p. 79; Sophie de Korwin-Piotrowska, *Balzac et le monde slave*, Doctoral thesis, Faculté des Lettres, Paris, 1933, p. 208.

⁵⁸ Théophile Gautier, op.cit., p. 144.

a most beautiful book, a small volume for which *Louis Lambert* would serve as a preface, a work called *Séraphîta*.⁵⁹

However, this “small volume” did not appear until December 1835, and the letters from its author to his Foreign Lady reveal how painfully he progressed. In a letter dated, August 25, 1834, he exclaims:

On the other hand, I cannot go away without delivering the conclusion of *Séraphîta* to the *Revue de Paris*, and how can I determine the time necessary for finishing this work, so angelic for the others, so diabolical for me?⁶⁰

On December 22, in the same year, he simply acknowledges:

The end of *Séraphîta* is a very difficult work.⁶¹

And three months later he heaved a great sigh of anguish:

To terminate this work crushes and kills me. I have a temperature every day. Such a large project has never been before a man. I am the only one who knows what I have at stake.⁶²

Balzac's own words illustrate very clearly the pain that *Séraphîta* caused him compared with his other novels: “You can write *Goriot* any day, but you can only write *Séraphîta* once in a lifetime.”⁶³ However, it would be wrong to draw the conclusion that Balzac always commented on

⁵⁹ *Lettres à l'Etrangère*, Vol. I, p. 85.

⁶⁰ *Lettres à l'Etrangère*, Vol. I, p. 185. Cf p. 194 (Paris, October 18, 1834):

I hoped to finish *Séraphîta* in Touraine; but I wore myself out with work like Sisyphus, in superfluous efforts. You cannot go to heaven every day.

and p. 242 (Paris, March 30, 1835):

The world is unaware of these immense works; it sees and it only should see the result. But I had to devour all mysticism to put it into form. *Séraphîta* is a devouring work for those who believe.

⁶¹ *Lettres à l'Etrangère*, Vol. I, pp. 218-219.

⁶² *Lettres à l'Etrangère*, Vol. I, p. 237: Paris, March 11, 1835.

⁶³ In the same letter, however, the fragment from Balzac's youth that Albert Béguin (*Homage à Balzac*, p. 79) told us about proves the contrary. For the details of this *Falthurne-Séraphîta* filiation, see Balzac. *Le livre du centenaire*, Paris, Flammarion, 1952: Pierre-Georges Castex, *Quelques aspects du phantastique balzacien*, pp. 111-113, 117-118.

Séraphîta in this fashion. Often he would speak about it with a levity and irony, clearly revealing that he did not always take it very seriously himself. Thus, in the letter announcing the initial concept of *Séraphîta*, he observes:

But the plan for this thundering *Séraphîta* has exhausted me; it has been sending blood pulsing through my veins for two days.⁶⁴

Later on, the angel's wings served as the butt of Balzac's jokes thereby proving his facetious attitude toward his celestial heroine:

Séraphîta is you and me. So let us spread our wings together in a single motion, let us love each other in the same way.⁶⁵

Your beautiful *Séraphîta* suffers a great deal; she has folded up her wings, waiting for the moment she will be yours.⁶⁶

It seems to me that these statements reflect Balzac's twofold attitude. On the one hand there was his feeling of powerlessness in face of the work to be accomplished. On the other hand were his too frequent jokes, sometimes in bad taste, proving that there never was a question of an imperious internal and spiritual need motivating the author.

But let us continue to search for the reasons why Balzac preferred Swedenborgianism, or *his* Swedenborgianism, to the other Christian doctrines. I have mentioned his need for proving religious truths scientifically. Many other reasons have been suggested. In his *Lettre à Charles Nodier*, Balzac himself refers to the "reprinting" of mystic books, some by Swedenborg, printed by Treuttel & Wurtz. Madeleine Fargeaud's discovery of an invoice for binding dated 1833 proves that his "special shelf" of mystic writers did not exist.⁶⁷ This does not mean, however, that his sister Laure prevaricated when she claimed that he "devoured" these authors.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ *Lettres à l'Etrangère*, Vol I, p. 88: Paris, November 20, 1833.

⁶⁵ *Lettres à l'Etrangère*, Vol. I, p. 134: Paris, February 22, 1834.

⁶⁶ *Lettres à l'Etrangère*, Vol. I, p. 150, Frapesle, April 10, 1834.

⁶⁷ Madeleine Fargeaud, *op.cit.*, p. 202.

⁶⁸ Laure Surville, *Balzac, sa vie et ses oeuvres*, p. 106.

In this particular case, Balzac's reading did not teach him anything about Swedenborg and his doctrines, because, later on, in drafting *Séraphîta*, he slavishly copied from the *Abrégé des Ouvrages d'Emmanuel Swedenborg*. The *Abrégé* was published in Strasbourg in 1788, the very year in which Saint-Martin met there with Baron Silfverhjelm, Swedenborg's nephew. At that time, the "Unknown Philosopher" had not yet made his choice between Boehme and the Swedish prophet. He came to prefer the German mystic, and later on strongly rejected the teachings of the famous Swede. However, about thirty years later, some of his followers declared they were Swedenborg's disciples. Captain Bernard was certainly the most ardent among them to amalgamate the two doctrines. Balzac, without being an "initiated" Martinist, due to the fact that initiation was no longer in existence,⁶⁹ did the same. Pauline Bernheim has been able to prove that in regard to Swedenborg, he merely copied the *Abrégé*, and that the quotations he used from Saint-Martin were taken from his works,⁷⁰ some of which support so-called Swedenborgian ideas.

Like Captain Bernard, and also Baron Silfverhjelm in his time, Balzac combined magnetism together with his "Swedenborgian" mysticism. One hundred and twenty years after *Le Boys des Guays*,⁷¹ Madeleine Fargeaud reminds us that the 1830 publication of the *Essai de psychologie physiologique* by Casimir Chardel, a well-known magnetizer at that epoch, includes an appendix to the third edition of this work dated 1844, bearing the title: *Notions puisées dans les phénomènes du somnambulisme et les révélations de Swedenborg sur leur état pendant la vie et après la mort*. It is evident that this type of Swedenborgianism, rejected categorically by *Le Boys des Guays*, was pleasing to Balzac, who prided himself on being a "healer."⁷²

⁶⁹ See Robert Amadou, *Balzac et Saint-Martin*, in the *Année balzacienne* 1965, p. 46.

⁷⁰ Pauline Bernheim, *op.cit.*, pp. 91-95.

⁷¹ Madeleine Fargeaud, *op.cit.*, p. 204. *Le Boys des Guays* stated this fact in his 8th letter to the *New Jerusalem Magazine*, Boston (January 7, 1847).

⁷² Philippe Bertault, *op.cit.*, p. 347:

I am ready to defend Christianity against all. The XVIIIth century was wrong in questioning the miracles of Christianity. But nothing is easier; I who am speaking to you have performed miracles by laying on hands...

Cf H. de Balzac, *Correspondance*. Vol. I (1809-June 1832). Texts collected, classified and annotated by Roger Pierrot, p. 974:437: To Dr. Chapelin/Paris, about April 14, 1832/:

If I had not been in bed for a week and in a state that does not allow me to go out, as a theoretician, I would have gone out or rather risen to the honors of practice, found

Also, had Balzac not just acquired the work the *Vrai Messie* by Guillaume C gger? C gger was converted by Captain Bernard to Swedenborgian Illuminism in the eighteen-twenties. He tried later on without success to draw closer to Le Boys des Guays' own orthodoxy and spent the last days of his life in a lunatic asylum.⁷³

In 1830, C gger and the future leader of the Swedenborgian group in Paris, Emile Broussais, who, like Balzac's Mrs. Berny, lived on the rue d'Enfer, both appealed in vain in favor of Swedenborg's followers in France to the *Intellectual Repository*, the official New Church magazine in England. Madeleine Fargeaud briefly summarizes the relationship between C gger, Broussais and the sculptor Bra, (who was the direct source of inspiration for *S raph ta* according to Balzac⁷⁴) on the one side, and Balzac on the other when she discusses (notably after Andr  Billy), the importance of Henri de Latouche's *Fragoletta*.⁷⁵

In 1830, Lamennais launched his journal *Avenir*, which proclaimed every freedom, drawing admiration and enthusiasm after the political revolution. Balzac fell under his influence, too, but we can see that in creating his own "new form of life for mankind," he did not refrain from severely criticizing Lammenais' *Paroles d'un Croyant*, a work written by the man whom he considered as a rival reformer:

I failed to be devoured because I had said, literarily speaking, that the form which was previously used by Volney and Lord Byron, was just silliness, and that, as far as the doctrines were concerned, everything had been stolen from the Saint-Simonians. Really, these kings on a green and stinking rock are well-suited to children.⁷⁶

a somnambulist and tried to convince myself of the nothingness or power of our discovery in order to learn whether it is good or infinite...

⁷³Bernard Guyon, *La pens e politique et sociale de Balzac*. Doctoral thesis. Facult  des Lettres, Paris, 1947, pp. 141, 414; cf Henri Evans, *A propos de Louis Lambert. Un illumin  lu par Balzac: Guillaume C gger*, pp. 37-48 in the *Revue des Sciences humaines*, Facult  des Lettres, Univ. of Lille, 1950.

⁷⁴*New Jerusalem Magazine*, Boston, IV (1830-31), pp. 357-360.

⁷⁵Andr  Billy, op. cit., pp. 99-101.

⁷⁶*Lettres   l'Etrang re*, Vol. I, p. 184: August 20, 1834.

Thus, in order to diminish Lammennais' worth, Balzac made use of the state of disrepute into which Saint-Simonism had fallen following the sentencing of *Enfantin* and *Chevalier*. There is certainly a lack of gratitude reflected in this attitude, for as Bruce Tolley states:

His religious idea of the artist's task calls to mind the priest-poet of the Saint-Simoniens.⁷⁷

About 1830, there were many who considered Saint-Simonism as the universal religion of the future. Balzac was too discerning to believe in it for very long. The Abbé Bertault detected quite well the role of the apostle played by the author of the *Comédie Humaine*:

Balzac did not doubt that the sublime Swedenborgian religion would spread over the whole world. It was in order to popularize it in France, by adapting it to the Cartesian genius, that he composed *Louis Lambert* and *Séraphîta*.⁷⁸

But how can we reconcile this activity as a popularizer of the Swedenborgian doctrines in France with the role Abbé Bertault attributes to Balzac as a defender of the Roman Church? There is only one solution: between 1831 and 1836, far from being a defender of the old Church, Balzac was one of those who prepared its downfall. In his role as a conscientious researcher, Philippe Bertault knew quite well how to interpret Balzac's efforts to popularize the Swedenborgian religion. But as a priest, the Abbé Bertault never dared imagine the complete fall of the Roman Church and its replacement by another. At that time, however, this possibility was imagined not only by Balzac; inside the Church itself some strong-minded priests rebelled against Rome. Not only Lamennais, of course, but also Guillaume Cægger, the former first vicar of Notre-Dame and the Queen's confessor, who resigned his office in order to found the New Church in France according to Swedenborg's doctrines, and also the Abbé Ledru, the spiritual leader of the small parish in Lèves, near Chartres,

⁷⁷ Bruce Tolley, *Balzac et les saint-simoniens*; in the *Année balzacienne* 1966, p. 55.

⁷⁸ Philippe Bertault, op. cit., p. 375.

who aligned himself with the New Jerusalem, along with all his parishioners.

At the same time that Balzac was preparing his “new form of life for mankind,” the future Swedenborgian leader in Paris, Emile Broussais, wrote a letter to his co-religionists in London explaining how the Swedenborgian doctrines might conquer the French:

France will not take this event like England, the United States, and more recently Germany, that is to say, like a single small event only of interest to some personal convictions. She will consider it to be an immense event of interest to the entire population and it will be necessary to support or to suppress it by every method of advertising. With the French, everything takes place by spontaneous impulsions, and in mass; and at present, it would be less possible than ever to divide this great nation. He who does not succeed at once will never succeed at all. France either comes into the New Church rapidly, or the New Church will not take root in her...⁷⁹

This was the environment in which Balzac wanted to launch Swedenborg, or *his* Swedenborg. Balzac’s “unintelligible mysticism” was not capable of judging Swedenborg in the same light as was Le Boys des Guays’, the first true receiver of the doctrines of the New Jerusalem in France, having converted to Swedenborg’s religion in 1834. It was during this time that Balzac re-wrote *Louis Lambert* and composed *Séraphita*,⁸⁰ barely connecting the revelator’s name with the actual teachings of the New Church.

For the future members of this Church, there was no doubt concerning this “betrayal.” Edmond Chevrier, the anonymous author of the *Histoire sommaire de la Nouvelle Eglise*, judges Balzac very severely:

So the New Church has no more dangerous friends in France and elsewhere than those who mix its doctrines with ideas and

⁷⁹ *New Jerusalem Magazine*, Boston, VIII (1834-35), p. 238.

⁸⁰ Auguste Viatte, *Victor Hugo et les illuminés de son temps*, Montreal, 1942 (2nd ed.), pp. 51-52.

practices of illuminati and spiritists, as Balzac did in his novel, *Séraphîta*. Those who took this wrong path have done considerable harm to the spreading of the new doctrines.⁸¹

The reaction overseas was not any more flattering. In the *Annals of the New Church*, 1835, is the following:

Paris—H. de Balzac, the celebrated novelist, introduces into his *Séraphîta*, *Louis Lambert* and other romances, his distorted and absurd conceptions of 'Swedenborgianism,' thereby attracting considerable attention in the literary world but at the same time doing much harm to the New Church...⁸²

Among the members of the Society of Balzac's Friends, and especially among the women, was a fear of a conspiracy against the untouchable originality of the author of the *Comédie Humaine* that appeared each time a researcher made an effort to re-establish the truth instead of enfolding himself in the "state of Balzacian grace" requiring "confidence and abandon."⁸³ In 1914 Pauline Bernheim proved indisputably that in *Séraphîta* Balzac had copied all the references to Swedenborg and Swedenborg's doctrines from the *Abrégé des Ouvrages d'Emmanuel Swedenborg*.⁸⁴ I must add that this remarkable discovery has never been acknowledged in France. Twenty years later, Sophie de Korwin-Piotrowska exclaimed:

What does it matter to us that he (Balzac) poorly understood Swedenborg, for which Miss Bernheim reproaches him, and that he has perhaps copied some paragraphs from the *Abrégé*?⁸⁵

⁸¹ *Histoire sommaire de la Nouvelle Eglise*, p. 89.

⁸² C.T. Odhner, *Annals...*, Vol. I, p. 404—Balzac's name is not in the *Index of the persons mentioned*.

⁸³ Cf Claude Mauriac, *Balzac chez Garnier*; in *Le Figaro* of June 3, 1964.

⁸⁴ See my *Paper presented at the XIVth Congress of the Association Internationale des Etudes Françaises* on July 28, 1962: *Balzac et Swedenborg*, published in the no. 15 of the *Cahiers* of this association, March 1963.

⁸⁵ Sophie de Korwin-Piotrowska, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

In the *Année balzacienne* 1965, Suzanne Bérard regrets that Pauline Bernheim “simplifies and confuses” the facts:

Finally, there is not the least doubt about Swedenborg’s importance in the formation of Balzac’s mysticism; it remains to be determined when, where and how Balzac read Swedenborg, which is very difficult and which I will not try to do.⁸⁶

However, Bérard, the author of this article on *La “Spécialité,”* has also contributed to the doubts concerning Balzac’s Swedenborgianism by noting the absence of Swedenborg’s works in the library of the Collège de Vendôme.

Moreover, friends of Balzac are not fond of negative issues. In her thesis on *Balzac et la Recherche de l’absolu*, awarded with the Prix de la Critique, Madeleine Fargeaud mentions neither Pauline Bernheim nor Van der Elst. Yet Van der Elst concludes his study by proving that Madame Hanska, far from encouraging Balzac in his “Swedenborgian” mysticism, represented the other extreme: Catholic orthodoxy.⁸⁷

This important discovery leads me to this question: to whom did Balzac want to introduce his new religion? He himself had no need for it personally. At the time he was composing his *Traité de la prière*, he declared with pride:

None of the existing religions satisfy me, none of them suit me. I reject them all. If, because of social conventions, I think I should sometimes be subjected to external rites of the State religion, I do not give up the creation of my own religion for this conformity. I have sensitiveness and imagination enough for giving alluring appearances to my dreams. The true religion is the one that it will please me to found for my own use, away from the path made by errors and superstitions.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Suzanne Bérard, *Une énigme balzacienne: La “Spécialité”*; in the *Année balzacienne* 1965, p. 67.

⁸⁷ J. Van der Elst, *op.cit.*, pp. 88-123.

⁸⁸ Introduction to the *Traité de la prière*, p. 15; quoted from Philippe Bertault, *op. cit.*

Thus, he created his "St. John's religion" on the basis of fragments of the Cabala, the scientism born of the great discoveries in the XVIIIth century that led to Mesmer's magnetism, Lavater's physiognomy, Gall's phrenology, Captain Bernard's unorthodox saint-martinism, Chardel's "physiological psychology," Henri de Latouche's androgeny, Saint-Simonism, and Lamennais' anti-clericalism. Having begun with his own literary fragments from youth, he added to them the influences of literary geniuses like Goethe and Byron.

For whom did he want to create this religion? The answer is "for others," since he had no need of it for himself. Balzac was self-sufficient, and was, in fact, his own God. And above all "the others" was Madame Hanska. An excellent little study exists on this subject, written by Claire Richardot and published as a "Document" in the journal *Évangile et Liberté* from July 8, 1971, bearing the title *Oberlin, Balzac et Swedenborg*. The study proves that the author of the *Comédie Humaine* wrote *Séraphîta* in order to tear his Foreign Lady away from the Roman Catholic Church, for:

As a practising Catholic she is deprived of the sacraments; if she persists in her love for Balzac, absolution will be denied.⁸⁹

No, don't go to Freiburg, I adore you religiously, but no confession at all,⁹⁰

he wrote to her. Thus *Séraphîta* was not written for Madame Hanska, but against her, or rather against the religion she represented: Catholicism. And the angel would have spread its broad wings in order to protect their beautiful love against thunders of the Vatican, which would have only seen her as a vile adulteress.

As for explaining this sweet belief to Wilfrid, that is to say, the reader, Balzac had recourse to a Protestant pastor for the first and last time in the entire *Comédie Humaine*. The model for this character had already appeared in the *Médecin de campagne*. In his essay on *Balzac et Oberlin*, Georges Gougenheim has made an inventory of the Alsatian sources of this novel, which Balzac used in a fashion similar to the way he used the

⁸⁹ Op. cit., p. IV.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Abrégé for *Séraphîta*. Claire Richardot, in turn, proves that Oberlin served as a model for Pastor Becker, thus corroborating my hypothesis on this subject in the *Année balzacienne 1966*.⁹¹

Should we look for other sources, other models for Balzac's "Swedenborgianism"? Madeleine Fargeaud continues to maintain that Edouard Richer, the Breton writer who was Louis François de Tollenare's friend in Nantes, deserves a good place on the list of candidates. To support her hypothesis, she uses the same document in the *Collection Spoelberch de Lovenjoul* that Pauline Bernheim uses to prove the contrary.⁹² But even if Balzac did not read Richer, it is evident that a title like *The Religion of Good Sense* must have struck a responsive chord in Balzac. Casting Richer as "one of the models for Louis Lambert" is too easy a conclusion to draw. Although Madeleine Fargeaud indicates that he was the very source of a "descriptive" influence on *Un drame au bord de la mer*, this does not prove that Balzac had actually read the *Voyage pittoresque dans le département de la Loire inférieure*, a work by Richer that has nothing to do with Swedenborg at all.⁹³

Must we conclude that Balzac's "Swedenborgianism" was just a myth, a "betrayal" of the doctrines of the New Jerusalem, an aberration or perhaps an attempt made by Balzac to "put another feather in his literary cap"?⁹⁴ Let us not forget that Balzac became Swedenborg's defender at a

⁹¹ *Remarques sur le "swedenborgisme" balzacien*, p. 43.

⁹² Madeleine Fargeaud, *op.cit.*, p. 203. Pauline Bernheim, *op.cit.*, p. 97.

⁹³ Moïse Le Yaouanc, *Introduction à Un drame au bord de la mer*; in the *Année balzacienne 1966*, pp. 141-144.

⁹⁴ An unpublished letter from Eugène Rollet to Le Boys des Guays of June 10, 1837; Le Boys des Guays, who had not read Balzac, had at first rather a favorable opinion about his importance for the New Church; let me quote his unpublished letter of March 24, 1837 (Private collection of Mme. Charles Sainmont, Eugène Rollet's grand-daughter):

They say that Balzac is very spiritual; I have read none of his works; but I certainly have doubts about his profoundness. [Crossed out: Besides] he did not prove his serious studies by confounding mysticism with Catholicism as crassly as he did. Besides, to my delight, I saw that he places Swedenborg above Jacob Boehme; but I think he scarcely understands one of them better than the other. I would prefer this avowal coming from the mouth of a less frivolous man.

One year later, his opinion on Balzac's indirect influence was still more positive. (In the same collection: Le Boys des Guays to Eugène Rollet: Saint-Amand, January 5, 1836):

Whatever the intention of *Séraphîta*'s author may have been, it is to our advantage that he dealt with such a subject... So I consider Balzac's novel as a piece of good luck;

time when the New Church did not yet exist in France. His pseudo-Swedenborgianism was not any worse than Pernetý's alchemy, Captain Bernard's somnambulism, or the Abbé Egger's illuminism. All three men were considered to be Swedenborg's followers, while the author of *Louis Lambert* and *Séraphîta* found grace only in the eyes of de Tollenare, the ecstatic, who, from the year 1835 on, understood that even an imperfect adherence to the doctrines on the part of a celebrated author could result in valuable publicity for the New Church.⁹⁵

Where would Swedenborg's doctrines be today, if the author of the *Comédie Humaine* had not given him a famous "leg-up"—which receivers of the New Church did not really want? Is it not true that a number of followers were initiated by reading *Séraphîta* before delving further into the study of the writings of the revelator of the New Jerusalem? Of course some have preferred Balzac's "Swedenborgianism" to the genuine works of his "Buddha from the North." Such was the case of August Strindberg,

without knowing, he is, like many others, a tool that Providence uses for leading its work to many others, a tool that Providence uses for leading its work to an end. The enthusiasm for this new production that you speak about comes all the more opportunity since Mr. de Tollenare has just put out the last four volumes of Richer's *New Jerusalem*;

But in Le Boys des Guays' opinion, Balzac's religion changed into an "unintelligible mysticism."

⁹⁵Madeleine Fargeaud, *Madame Balzac, son mysticisme et ses enfants*; in the *Année balzacienne* 1965, p. 31. In de Tollenare's letter to Samuel Noble, partly reprinted in the *New Jerusalem Magazine*, Boston, Vol. XI, Oct. 1836, p. 71, this opinion is somewhat altered.

A writer of romances much in fashion, M. Balzac, who, in fact, is an author of great distinction, has thought it proper to take the doctrine of the New Jerusalem for the text of some papers in the fashionable review. Under the title of *Séraphîta*, he has proposed to himself to give a commentary exposition of the system of Swedenborg. He certainly has not properly understood it. He has, however, succeeded in causing the name of Swedenborg to reach with favor the ears of people who, otherwise, might never have heard it. His object is merely literary fame; but Providence makes use of his labors for the accomplishment of its own designs.

Cf Le Boys des Guays' judgment quoted in the preceding Note, as well as the Note on p. 204 in Maurice Bardèche's monumental biography of *Balzac* (Paris, Juillard, 1980) with his point of view as an unconditional admirer of Balzac:

Let us note that Swedenborg's followers are hard on Balzac. They accuse him of having distorted his ideas and of having been, after all, merely an estimable advertising agent for the New Church. This condemnation, which may interest the receivers of the Swedenborgian Church, is of a secondary importance for students of Balzac.

who, after reading *Séraphîta*, which he found to be “great and marvellous,” returned to the original source and read the *Arcana Coelestia*. The disappointment caused by the cruelty of Swedenborg’s God led him back to *Séraphîta*’s saving theology before he re-read the Revelator.⁹⁶

Balzac compelled the admiration of the great Swedish playwright just as the poet Swedenborg drew the attention of the author of the *Comédie Humaine*. Balzac had Louis Lambert rank him above Dante,⁹⁷ associated him with Beethoven⁹⁸ and also classified him together with the “divine Rabelais.”⁹⁹ To be frank, Balzac admired Swedenborg because of his enormous capacity for work:

It is impossible not to be astonished that, in thirty years’ time, this man published twenty-five volumes in-quarto about the truths of the spiritual world, written in Latin, the smallest one of which was five hundred pages, and all of which were printed in small type.¹⁰⁰

Now this was something to make the man who was preparing one hundred volumes of the *Comédie Humaine* dream about!

⁹⁶ Inge Jonsson/Olle Hjern, op. cit., p. 94.

⁹⁷ “Dante Alighieri’s poem has scarcely any effect at all on the man who wants to delve into the countless verses by means of which Swedenborg made the celestial worlds tangible.” Quoted from Marc Blanchard, op. cit., p. 110.

⁹⁸ “...like Beethoven built his palaces of harmony with thousands of notes”; quoted from F. Baldensperger, op. cit., p. 166; see also J. Van der Elst, op. cit., p. 123.

⁹⁹ See Balzac’s statements: in the *Elixir de longue vie*, Ed. Pléiade, X, p. 404: “the divine Rabelais”; in the *Prologue of the Contes drôlatiques*: “nostre digne compatriote, éternel honneur de Tourayne, François Rabelays”; in *Cousin Pons*: “Rabelais, the greatest mind of modern mankind, the man who summarized Pythagoras, Aristophanes and Dante” (quoted from Geoffroy Atkinson, *Les Idées de Balzac d’après la Comédie humaine*, Vol. III, Geneva-Lille, 1949, p. 89).

¹⁰⁰ *Séraphîta*, Ed. Pléiade, X, p. 504.

CHAPTER 13

THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN LE BOYS DES GUAYS
AND GEORGE SAND

In the chapter on *Balzac and his Buddha from the North*, we saw that followers of the New Church did not at all appreciate Balzac's position in favor of Swedenborg. Neither did they appreciate the appearance of the Swedish "early follower" in *Joseph Balsamo*, a work by Alexandre Dumas senior.¹ Evidence of this negative reaction appears in the following letter from Le Boys des Guays to George Sand on December 23, 1852:

Dear Madame,

As one of your neighbors in the Berri region, allow me to take your mind off your work for a while; I will be brief, for I know the value of time, from personal experience.

I have just read your article on *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. A thousand thanks for the elevated and touching way in which you speak of Mrs. Stowe. Having paid this homage to your talent and generous feelings, I would like state my purpose in writing to you.

For 20 years, I have been solely occupied with the translation from Latin into French of the voluminous writings of a most extraordinary man, Swedenborg, of whom Balzac and Alexandre Dumas have dared speak without actually having knowledge of him; and as the reading of Swedenborg's works requires an introduction, I have published a volume to this effect bearing the title *Lettres à un homme du monde*. I am sending you this volume by mail, asking you to peruse it; on the last page you will find a catalogue of the works whose translation I have mentioned here, and if you would like to own them, I will be very happy to offer them to you, as your neighbor.

Yours sincerely,

Les Boys des Guays

¹Vol. I. Introduction. Original edition, 1848.

P.S. Between 1838 and 1848, I edited a monthly journal, whose title you will find at the end of the Catalogue; I still have a few copies of it. If you desire to have one, I will send it to you with pleasure.²

The idea that Le Boys des Guays had in mind when writing this letter is easy to guess. It is logical to conclude that if Balzac and Alexandre Dumas had spoken about Swedenborg “without having knowledge of him,” perhaps George Sand could spread his ideas *after gaining knowledge of them*. Of course, Le Boys des Guays could not have known that about ten years before, George Sand had written to her friend Godefroy Cavaignac requesting information on Swedenborg. On reading her novels, Le Boys des Guays certainly must have recognized the “latent Swedenborgianism” that Jean Gaulmier has observed.³ The reply he received by return mail was affirmative:

Dear Sir,

I have heard a great deal about you and your important works on Swedenborg. Since I know little and am poorly acquainted with this extraordinary man, I have always desired to read him more and better. I just have not had the time for it. If you would be kind enough to send me the interesting collection you wish to offer me, I would be very grateful to you, and while taking the time, for I have very little time for leisure of the Spirit, it will be thanks to you that I will have an enlightened opinion on this metaphysical and religious fact, which has been judged so diversely until now. I am first of all going to read the volume you sent me, and I think I will understand it well, judging from some pages I read immediately, which seemed very clear to me. I must confess to you that my brain is no longer practised in metaphysi-

²This letter as well as the following ones have been reproduced from the copies that Le Boys des Guays made of the majority of his letters. *Chevrier Collection*.

³Jean Gaulmier, *Gérard de Nerval et les Filles du Feu*, Paris, Nizat, 1956, p. 146. About the role played by Godefroy Cavaignac, see my *Remarques sur le “swedenborgisme” balzacien*, in the *Année balzacienne 1966*, pp. 44-45.

cal studies, if ever it was in my youth. But I see here nothing of the tiresome obscurenesses that I generally dread.

Yours sincerely and gratefully,

George Sand

Nohant, 26 October 52.⁴

On the evening of the day after Christmas in 1852, Les Boys des Guays thanked George Sand for her favorable response:

Dear Madame,

Allow me to add a brochure to the Collection published in London in 1851 at the time of a Meeting there of the New Church. This brochure bears the title *de la religion considérée*, etc.⁵

A thousand thanks for the way you have accepted my offer.

My greetings to you again,

Le Boys des Guays

We do not have in our possession the full text of George Sand's next letter saying she duly received this consignment, but thanks to Edmond Chevrier, who published an extract from it in his *Histoire sommaire*, we know its contents and date: January 5, 1853:

I know the respect due to your character, your convictions, and in such a case, it is sweet to compel oneself to gratitude...I began reading all that concerns *rules of behavior*, all the philosophy of this religion does not pose any obstacle for me. The metaphysical part requires more meditation...I never mock ecstasies, but this type of revelation cannot be accepted lightly, and according to

⁴I found the original of this manuscript letter during my visit to the *Archives Départementales du Cher* in Bourges in the spring of 1963. According to the request of my late "sponsor" in the CNRS, Jean Pommier, I transmitted its text to Georges Lubin to be published in the *Correspondance de George Sand* together with the letters dated Nohant, January 31, 1855, and Nohant, May 11, 1861 (instead of June 11; see below), indicating the paragraphs already quoted, and sometimes modified, by Edmond Chevrier in his *Histoire sommaire*, pp. 209-212.

⁵J.F. Le Boys des Guays, *De la religion considérée dans son action sur l'état de la société*, London, Swedenborg Society, 1851.

your *Letters to a man of the world*, I know that you will approve the deferring of my judgment until fuller information is available.⁶

These few lines had both a reassuring and a disappointing aspect; reassuring because George Sand had started reading Swedenborg in Le Boys des Guays' translation, and disappointing because "the metaphysical part" had not been accepted, or at least not yet. After two years, Le Boys des Guays made an effort to get in touch again with George Sand:

Dear Madame,

The kindness with which you accepted some translations of Swedenborg I sent to you two years ago makes me presume that you will also accept those published since then and which complete some of the former ones. Please forgive me for sending you a second shipment without advance notice together with this letter.

One of my best friends, who was my collaborator in the publication of the *Revue*, intends to retire to la Châtre; if, as I hope, this plan is carried out, I will often go to spend a few days with him; and if, during one of these visits, there would be an opportunity for me to make your personal acquaintance, I would seize this opportunity with the greatest readiness.

Four days later, George Sand acknowledged the receipt of the second package of Swedenborg's works:

Dear Sir,

I am very grateful for the second consignment you were kind enough to send me. I will have to study a whole year in order to know and judge the very great mind of Swedenborg, who seems to me to be in the main stream of great truths. I will not be informed enough to discuss him with you, but it will always be

⁶*Histoire sommaire*, p. 209.

interesting and useful for me to hear you speak about him. Besides, anyhow...[torn document]...for me not to be honored by your visits.

I beg your pardon for my answering so briefly just now. I was struck by a great suffering in my family⁷ and my health is very shaken at the moment.

Yours faithfully and respectfully,
George Sand

Nohant, January 31, 1855.⁸

The friend of whom Le Boys des Guays spoke was J.A. Blanchet, a former lawyer and councilor of the Prefecture in Tarbes, who was to settle down at La Châtre during the summer of 1855. On August 6, 1855, Blanchet wrote to Le Boys des Guays:

I have heard nothing about Madame G.S., except that she is in the region; she came to la Châtre the day before yesterday.⁹

Blanchet's visit to Saint-Amand-Mont-Rond in the autumn 1855 provided Le Boys des Guays with a pretext for getting into contact with George Sand once again. On October 10, he wrote to her:

Dear Madame,

Your kind reception of my two first consignments gives me hope that you will accept two more new volumes which have just been published; I am taking advantage of the visit I received from the friend of whom I spoke in my last letter in order to have the two volumes delivered to you.

⁷ Cf A. Autissier, *Il y a 140 ans, un ancien sous-préfet fondait à Saint-Amand une nouvelle religion "LE CULTE DE LA NOUVELLE JERUSALEM,"* in the *Berry Républicain* of December 30, 1977: "But it is a moment of deep mourning for George Sand. Her grand-daughter Jeanne had died..."

⁸ I found this manuscript letter and that of May 11, 1861 (cf Note 4) in the *Musée du Berry*, which Brody Delamotte had lent for an exposition on George Sand. They are now with Mme. Couëtdic in Saint-Amand (cf Note 10).

⁹ *Chevrier Collection.*

Please, excuse me for not having asked permission to pay you a visit. I have not yet been in Nohant; but I hope I will soon have this honor.

Respectfully again.

Six weeks later on November 20, 1855,¹⁰ Le Boys des Guays paid a visit to George Sand in Nohant Castle. This visit did not escape notice. What follows is Les Boys des Guays' own account of what transpired is documented in a letter of thanks to George Sand, dated April 24, 1856:

Dear Madame,

I am really ashamed of having been so slow in thanking you for the kind way in which you received me at Nohant last autumn. Here is my excuse briefly.

Nothing was simpler than my visit, and nothing was interpreted in a worse way: while we were talking about things so far removed from politics, an individual left Nohant and went in haste to the commune in which the detachment of gendarmes is stationed in order to give notice about my visit with you; at once, one of the gendarmes left for Châteauroux where he arrived during the night and undoubtedly interrupted the Prefect's sleep; the matter was as important as that. When I awoke on the following day, I learned all the details, for they had been sent from Châteauroux to the administration in la Châtre; and what aston-

¹⁰Brody Delamotte (cf Note 17) and Chevrier (*Histoire sommaire*, p. 210), places this visit in 1856. André-Jean Boyer (who published the three letters I had sent to him as a member of the family, as the nephew of Mrs. Couëtdic, Le Boys des Guays' great-grand niece, completed by the texts already published in the *Histoire sommaire de la Nouvelle Église Chrétienne*, under the title *George Sand et le Boys des Guays* [N° 2, 1973 of the *Cahiers de l'Homme Esprit*, 5, Avenue Général De Gaulle 0620 Beausoleil]) repeats this false information. A. Autissier was better informed giving the correct date of this visit in the article mentioned. Moreover, Le Boys des Guays had recorded it in a letter to Chevrier dated December 20, 1855 (*Chevrier Collection*). Chevrier, in turn, wrote to George Sand, as his letter to Le Boys des Guays of April 7, 1860, proves; "Since I wrote to you, I received from Mme. George Sand, to whom I had sent my essay on Joubert, a very nice letter, in which she speaks to me about *this respectable and amiable Monsieur Le Boys des Guays*. I was delighted to see my own feelings expressed by such a famous pen." (*Chevrier Collection*)

ished me most was that my name, which is not easy to remember, had been correctly transmitted.

In my desire to tell you of this incident, I waited for Mr. Blanchet, the friend with whom I was staying at la Châtre, to make the trip to Paris he had spoken to me about, so that he could give you my letter himself. The delay of this trip is the cause of this silence which has been painful for me. I deeply wish to express my thanks to you for the courtesy that you showed to a man who, living far removed from society for some time, has forgotten its ways, and accordingly fears having abused your kindness during a discussion that should have been more brief.

I have not forgotten that you promised me to another visit during my next journey to la Châtre. The petty annoyances of the police absolutely will not hinder me; if from your point of view you do not see any disadvantage, I would be happy if, on your return from Berri, instead of going directly to Nohant via Châteauroux, you passed through Bourges and St. Amand to give yourself several days to allow yourself to become acquainted with our surroundings.

Did not the police of the Empire fear that these two personalities, (who did not conceal their sympathy for the Republic), were hatching a sordid plot against the national security? In this context, we must not forget that several members of the Saint-Amand community had to go into exile in Great Britain for political reasons.¹¹ Now Le Boys des Guays had several reasons to be on his guard. Would not the best way to stop ill-natured gossip be to visit Nohant again and discuss with George Sand how to put an end to the matter? Le Boys des Guays presented this idea to his friend Blanchet, who replied the following on June 5, 1856:

What you say about your project of paying a visit to Madame G.S. is perhaps the most reasonable thing to do in the present circumstances given the people with whom we deal.¹²

¹¹ The bookseller Gilbert Porte, Abbé Bayot and Le Boys des Guays' brother-in-law Eugène Rollet. See my chapter on the New Church Society in Saint-Amand.

¹² *Chevrier Collection.*

Concerning the issue of religion, a note sent from George Sand to Le Boys des Guays in 1856 asking him to visit again, raises the possibility that there was an element of disagreement between the two. Unfortunately, this note has not been preserved, but its contents are undoubtedly pertinent to the discussion of November 20, 1855:

I hope that you will know that our differences are only the desire to make you express your ideas, which I feel are of a very high order.¹³

It could also be possible that these “differences” had dashed Le Boys des Guays’ enthusiasm a bit. After all, he had waited several months before thanking George Sand for her kindness in receiving him. It is true that he, in turn, invited her to spend a few days at Saint-Amand, but could he have acted otherwise to reciprocate her courteousness? In any case, it appears to me as though the tone of Le Boys des Guays’ following letter, dated February 19, 1857, is a bit colder than the previous ones.

Dear Madame,

As my trip to La Châtre has been delayed until now for various reasons, and as I do not know the time when I will be able to travel there, I send you by mail the second volume of *Conjugal Love*, which was published more than half a year ago but which I deferred sending you because I hoped to be able to give it to you myself. Several other works by Swedenborg have also been published since I visited Nohant, and I keep them in reserve in order to give them to you when I have the opportunity to meet you again.

Yours truly,...

In Le Boys des Guays’ opinion, George Sand remained the only French writer receptive to promoting the doctrines of the New Jerusalem. His letter of March 20, 1857, he clearly reminds her of this point:

¹³ *Histoire sommaire*, p. 210.

Madame,

First of all, allow me to congratulate you on the noble independence of which you have just given further proof by stating this eternal, although contested truth at this time: "a nation always has the government it deserves." So to your beautiful motto *Vitam impendere vero*, you have the right to add this one, which is a corollary: *Amicus Plato, magis amica veritas*. But concerning the subject of truth, although certain circumstances have obliged me to postpone my visit to another time, please allow me some reflections: do not be astonished, you, who more than any other judges according to the heart and who tries to rank the heart, that is to say the will, the good, first, and the lungs, that is to say understanding, the truth, second. Do not be astonished, I say, by the foolish persistence by which the best minds still are continuing to follow the old events. The "I think, therefore I am," by Descartes is still admired, however, Descartes missed the truth; he should have said: "I will (or I love), therefore I am," for it is the will or the affection that makes man's essential being, the understanding or the power is only the manifestation of the will; so, instead of principles, Descartes chose that which is secondary; a disastrous mistake of the founder of modern philosophy.

As long as men place actual truth above the good, as they always have since ancient times, societies will be badly constituted. The truth should be subjected to good, then the order exists both in society and in the individual. The truth without the good is merciless, and good without truth becomes harmful; there must be a marriage of the two. This association of good and truth will be a true panacea; if mankind arrives at this marriage, it will be saved.

Who better than you, Madame, to push mankind imperceptibly toward this way to true happiness? Add to your motto the *conjugium boni et veri* that you have foreseen yourself for a long time, and your literary works will continue in a still broader way toward the construction of the new social order.

Yours faithfully,...

This letter is the exception to the rule; most pieces of Le Boys des Guays' correspondence are very brief and are of a rather business-like nature. I must add that, had they been otherwise, he would not have been able to answer all his correspondents while continuing his work as a translator and serving as an advocate for the New Church.

But how could George Sand reply to this beautiful flight of oratory? Intransigent, she refused the mission with which Le Boys des Guays wanted to entrust her: "push mankind *imperceptibly* toward this way to true happiness," adding "the marriage of good and truth" to her own search for truth. But Le Boys des Guays' proposal was flattering, and George Sand hastened to explain her refusal:

Nohant, March 22, 1857.

Thank you, Sir, for your kind remembrances. I have read your last letter with interest and I have found very beautiful things in it, very high morals, which are mine, to which I have always aspired in my mind. The part I call symbolic or fantastic, or in the style of Dante, does not satisfy me as much, and I have tried in vain with all my heart to allow this belief in form of things revealed come to me. I would deceive you if I said that this is possible for me and that I can see anything else there than the dazzlement of an overexcited mind. Swedenborg is, nevertheless, in my view a very sincere and great mind. What I call (excuse me my irreverence, which is neither hostile nor mocking) his ecstasies have a very particular character in that imagination never carries him away into visions in disagreement with his philosophy, his metaphysics and his morals. In this regard, he resembles Campanella, who has much more art and talent than he has, that is to say he is much more a poet, but whose ideas are less complete, less just, and whose morals are infinitely less upright and pure.

In stating like Monsieur de Maistre that "a nation always has the government it deserves," I was not as firm in this belief as the character in which I expressed it. A novel is not a treatise, nor a manifest. Its characters speak according to their nature, according to their their impressions, without the author having responsibil-

ity for them, other than the traits he has given them. Concerning all this, I have had a great deal of trouble over nothing; to which I have replied by discretely placing my blame on a formally inconvenient and unjust process, grossly hostile expressions, absurd interpretations.

The way I am treated does not allow me to *deign* to reply concerning the content: I will not do so with such people, who are otherwise honorable, but extremely ill-bred pedants.

What you write to me has given me something to think about and makes me think it is possible that Mr. de Maistre was more correct than I thought he was in a moment of indignation against Neopolitan *lazzeronism*. I ask your permission to reflect on this further before accepting your encouragement.¹⁴

What you say to me about *good* and *truth* seems very right and excellent to me. I am so much of your opinion that I think I myself have said exactly what you said to me about Descartes:...The *I think, therefore I am*, should be: I love, therefore I am.

Awaiting the pleasure of talking with you about all this, you have my great esteem, even my veneration because of your character, your works and your persevering convictions, Yours faithfully,

George Sand.¹⁵

This categorical clarification could have put an end to the epistolary relationship between Le Boys des Guays and George Sand. But it did not. André-Jean Boyer even claims, on strength of Brody de Lamotte, that

¹⁴ In his letter of October 20, 1963, Georges Lubin thanks me for the three letters to be published in *George Sand's Correspondence*, observes that Chevrier's comment on this subject (*Histoire sommaire*, p. 211) was incorrect: "The paragraph does not allude to reflections made in 1852 but to what is known as the *Daniella* affair, her novel published in the *Presse*, which served as a warning to the journal."

¹⁵ This letter has been published at length in the *Histoire sommaire de la Nouvelle Eglise Chrétienne*, pp. 210-211.

George Sand paid a visit to Le Boys des Guays in Saint-Amand in 1857.¹⁶ A. Autissier, who published an article on the subject in the *Berry Republicain* of December 30, 1977, notes that “some people think that she came there in 1857, others, like the late G. Imbault do not discuss this. The question remains unanswered.”¹⁷

Le Boys des Guays’ letter to George Sand of August 30, 1858, seems to invalidate the possibility of her having come to Saint-Amand:

Dear Madame,

I am taking advantage of the opportunity given to me by a friend in la Châtre¹⁸ to reintroduce myself to you, begging your forgiveness for the long silence I have kept since receiving your very kind letter.

I am asking the friend to give you some new translations of Swedenborg. The treatise on representations and correspondences¹⁹ may, in a few months, interest Mr. Maurice, your son, to whom I send my greetings.

Whatever your opinion of the author of whom I am only a translator, I ask you to believe, dear Madame, that I will always make a point of telling you of my admiration for your talent and that I care more than ever about holding a place in your esteem, and even, if this is not too daring, in your friendship.

Yours faithfully,...

¹⁶Edouard Brody de Lamotte, article quoted, p. 164, Note 1: “He (Le Boys des Guays) went to spend a few days at Nohant, in 1856, and George Sand came to Saint-Amand, where she stayed two days in order to talk with him, in 1857.” In the light of Le Boys des Guays’ correspondence and Chevrier’s silence about George Sand’s visit to Saint-Amand in 1857, these two statements seem to be false.

¹⁷In answer to my question put to Gaston Imbault concerning this during my visit to Saint-Amand in the spring of 1963, he simply reminded me about Brody de Lamotte’s quoted paragraph.

¹⁸J.A. Blanchet, the friend already mentioned.

¹⁹Emmanuel Swedenborg, *Traité des Représentations et des Correspondances*. George Sand’s son Maurice had partially participated in Le Boys des Guays’ discussion with her, according to Le Boys des Guays’ account mentioned under Note 10.

Having received no answer to this letter, Le Boys des Guays then waited for two and a half years before contacting George Sand again. On February 19, 1861, he wrote:

Dear Madame,

Once again, I allow myself to send you a book; it is that of a Breton writer who died at a young age twenty years ago and who was loved by the whole élite of Brittany;²⁰ it is an appropriate book; its title is sufficiently clear; if your senses allow you to perceive it, which I do desire. You will probably not approve all of its ideas, but I am convinced beforehand that a great number of them will strike you by their cleverness as much as their depth. The highest philosophical, moral and religious questions are dealt with in a familiar style peculiar to this author, who, while focusing on the contents, often neglected the form.

I am taking the opportunity in this situation to contact you again and to pay you my respects.

To the volume, *La Religion du bon sens*, I add another by the same author bearing the title *Mélanges*;²¹ it is also worth perusing.

I have just read *The Red Town* and *The Marquis of Villemor*; *The Red Town* will do much good for the working classes, but I fear that the Marquis of Villemor will have no influence on people in these classes, which is probably not the author's fault. My wife, who, like me, read these books with pleasure, asks me to thank you for them, as do I, dear Madame, with acknowledgment of this new opportunity to contact you and to pay you my respects.

²⁰ Edouard Richer's *Religion of Good Sense*, and the first volume of the *Mélanges* was composed, like the second one, of texts by Edouard Richer, and had, in fact, just been published at the *New Jerusalem Bookshop* in Saint-Amand. Le Boys des Guays' accusing Richer of "lack of form" seems too harsh coming from a translator whose own co-religionists criticized him for his "unintelligible" prose. Cf the critical statements made by Blanchet concerning this, quoted in my chapter on Le Boys des Guays.

²¹ *Ibid.*

But George Sand was absent from Nohant. Le Boys des Guays had to wait until the summer before receiving the final letter she sent him. The letter is dated May 11, 1861, but Georges Lubin informed me (after my sending him a text to be published in the *Correspondance de George Sand* together with the other two letters I found in Bourges in the spring of 1963), that the correct date should be June 11, 1861.²²

Dear Sir,

After having been absent for four months, I found a letter at home from you of February 19 and also books which you were kind enough to send me. Many thanks for them. I will read them with attention as soon as possible, knowing that the reading recommended by you must be useful and good.

I am very happy to have given Mme. Le Boys des Guays some agreeable moments, and her thanks are a recompense for me. Please, pay her my respects.

Yours faithfully,

Nohant, 11 May / = 11 June 1861 George Sand²³

Neither Le Boys des Guays' *Letters to a Man of the World*, his journal *La Nouvelle Jérusalem*, his translation of Emanuel Swedenborg's *Arcana Coelestia*, nor Edouard Richer's *Religion of Good Sense* were to bring George Sand into the New Jerusalem group. Should this astonish us? Had she ever sought in Swedenborg something other than a good subject for a novel or as intellectual entertainment? From 1852 on, she had the opportunity of receiving a marvellous introduction to Arcana of the New Jerusalem through an incomparable initiate. Unlike Balzac and Alexandre Dumas, she was able to go to the very sources of the Swedenborgian religion. Although she refused to taste its celestial water, at least she did so on good grounds.

²² George Lubin's letter of October 20, 1963. Cf Note 4.

²³ It seems evident to me that if George Sand had paid Le Boys des Guays a visit in Saint-Amand, as Brody de Lamotte states (cf Note 16), she would have asked him to remember her to Madame Le Boys des Guays instead of "paying her her respects" to her.

(To be continued)

