Contagious Folly: *An Adventure* and Its Skeptics

Terry Castle

What to make of someone who sees a ghost? In his 1830 attack on superstition, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft,* Sir Walter Scott was forthright: anyone who claimed to see an apparition was either mad or on the way to becoming so. Since ghosts, according to Scott, did not exist, to maintain that one had seen one was to be pathetically unbalanced—the victim of some "lively dream, a waking reverie, the excitation of a powerful imagination, or the misrepresentation of a diseased organ of sight." The skeptic was not to be deceived by the air of apparent reasonableness with which the ghost-seer typically described his or her visions: in the case of every such person he had met with, Scott wrote, "shades of mental aberration have afterwards occurred, which sufficiently accounted for the supposed apparitions, and will incline me always to feel alarmed in behalf of the continued health of a friend, who should conceive himself to have witnessed such a visitation."[1]

But what if *two* people claim to see a ghost? If specters are indeed to be understood, as Scott thought, psychologically—as hallucinatory products of an abnormally excited or "diseased" imagination—how then to account for an apparition seen by two people at once? Are we to conclude that hallucinations can be shared? Or that spectral delusions, like the germs of a virus, can somehow be transmitted from the brain of one person to another? What sort of psychical mechanism would explain such a

1. Sir Walter Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft, Addressed to J. G. Lockhart, Esq.,* 2d ed. (London, 1831), pp. 344–45.

Critical Inquiry 17 (Summer 1991)

strangely infectious brand of folly? Scott himself avoids the issue by refusing to allow that simultaneous sightings ever occur. Yet the omission is clearly tactical: for to acknowledge such a possibility, let alone debunk it, the resolute skeptic would have to work twice as hard, if only to remain half-convincing.

The question of the so-called collective hallucination (as it has come to be known to psychical researchers) is neither as arcane nor as irrelevant to everyday life as it might first appear. On the contrary, it illuminates a much larger philosophical issue. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,* his 1921 book devoted to the relationship between individual and group psychology, Sigmund Freud lamented that there was still "no explanation of the nature of suggestion, that is, of the conditions under which influence without adequate logical foundation takes place."[2] What the science of psychology lacked, in other words, was an understanding of ideological transference—the process by which one individual imposed his or her beliefs and convictions on another. How did an idea spread, so to speak, from one person to the next, resulting in the formation of a group consciousness? The phenomenon of the collective hallucination puts the issue starkly—if ambiguously—in relief. If a ghost or apparition can be said to represent, in Freud's terms, an idea "without adequate logical foundation," a *delusion,* then the process by which two people convince each other that they have seen one—and in turn attempt to convince others—might be taken to epitomize the formation of ideology itself.

In what follows I shall examine a case of collective hallucination—certainly the most notorious and well documented in the annals of modern psychical research—precisely as a way of spotlighting this larger problem. My goal in so doing is not so much to expose the folly of people who claim to see ghosts (though the notion of folly will play a crucial part in what I have to say) but the difficulty that inevitably besets anyone who attempts to debunk such claims on supposedly rationalist grounds. For in the absence of any satisfying explanation of how such "folly" spreads—how a private delusion becomes a *folie à deux* (or *trois* or *quatre*)—the labors of the skeptic are doomed to result only in a peculiar rhetorical and epistemological impasse.

The case I wish to resurrect—at some risk, I realize, of exciting

2. Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,* trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York, 1959), p. 22.

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readerly mirth—is that of the "Ghosts of Versailles." The case dates from 1911. In that year two eminent English women academics, Charlotte Anne Moberly and Eleanor Jourdain, the principal and vice-principal, respectively, of St. Hugh's College, Oxford, published under the pseudonyms "Miss Morison" and "Miss Lamont" a book entitled *An Adventure* in which they asserted that while on a sightseeing tour of the gardens of the Petit Trianon near Versailles on 10 August 1901, they had encountered the apparitions of Marie Antoinette and several members of her court precisely as they had existed in the year 1789. After jointly researching the matter for nearly ten years in the French national archives, Moberly and Jourdain wrote, they had been forced to conclude that they had travelled backwards in time—perhaps by entering telepathically into "an act of memory" performed by Marie Antoinette herself during her incarceration following the sacking of the Tuileries. In the central chapters of *An Adventure* (which quickly became a best-seller) they laid out this bizarre theory in detail, along with a mass of so-called historical and topographical evidence supposedly confirming it.

What prompted Moberly and Jourdain—the respectable daughters of clergymen both—to make such a fantastic claim? The story behind *An Adventure,* though a convoluted one, is worth relating in some detail. At the time of their fateful trip to Versailles in the summer of 1901, Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain, who were subsequently to live and work together for twenty-three years, were only slightly acquainted. Charlotte Anne Moberly (1846–1937), the older and better connected of the two (her father was the bishop of Salisbury), had been principal of the small Oxford women's college, St. Hugh's, since its founding in 1886. Eleanor Jourdain (1864–1924) was an Oxford graduate in history and the headmistress of a girls' school in Watford. When Jourdain was recommended for the vacant post of vice-principal at St. Hugh's, Moberly agreed to meet with her in Paris (where Jourdain was staying) to see if the two of them could work together compatibly. The trip to Versailles, a place neither woman had visited before, came at the end of several days of sightseeing together in the French capital.[3]

As the two recount it in the opening chapter of *An Adventure,* they set off by train for Versailles on 10 August. After touring the main palace (which left them unimpressed) they decided to venture out into the grounds in search of the Petit Trianon. At the time—or so they claimed—

3. In synopsizing the background to *An Adventure* I have drawn on Lucille Iremonger's *Ghosts of Versailles: Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain and Their Adventure: A Critical Study* (London, 1957), hereafter abbreviated *GV;* and Joan Evans's "End to *An Adventure:* Solving the Mystery of the Trianon," *Encounter* 47 (Oct. 1976): 33–47, hereafter abbreviated "E." Moberly's family memoir, *Dulce Domum: George Moberly, His Family and Friends* (London, 1911), provides additional information about her upbringing and milieu; further information about Eleanor Jourdain can be found in Hilary Spurling's *Ivy: The Life of I. Compton-Burnett* (New York, 1984), pp. 312–19.

Fig. 1.—Charlotte Anne Moberly (1846–1937)

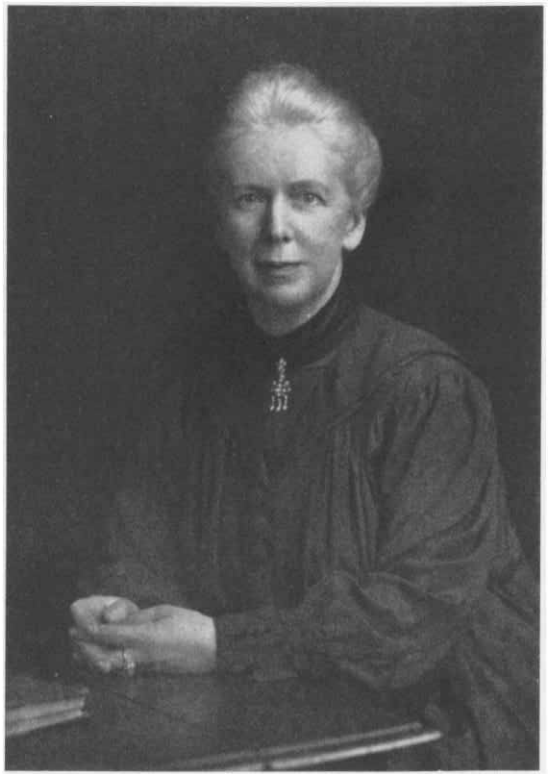

Fig. 2.—Eleanor Jourdain (1864–1924)

neither one of them knew much about French history, or indeed about the Trianon itself, except that it had been the favorite retreat of the ill-fated queen, Marie Antoinette, before the French Revolution. The day was pleasant, however, and both were in the mood for a walk. Soon after passing an imposing building at the bottom of the Long Water—the Grand Trianon—the two women got lost. They wandered for a while at random, passing a deserted farmhouse where Jourdain noticed a peculiar-looking old plough and began to feel (as she put it later) as if "something were wrong."[4] Moberly was surprised that Jourdain did not ask the way from a woman shaking a cloth out the window of one of the outbuildings, but concluded that her companion knew where she was going. Turning down a lane, they espied two men dressed in "long greyish-green coats with small three-cornered hats." Moberly remembered seeing "a wheelbarrow of some kind close by" and assumed that the men were gardeners, or else "dignified officials" of some kind (*A*, p. 4). Here Miss Jourdain did ask the way, and they were instructed to go down a path in front of them. As they began to walk forward, Jourdain saw a cottage on her right in front of which a woman and a girl were standing. Both were dressed unusually, with "white kerchiefs tucked into the bodice." The woman handed the girl a jug, and for a moment they seemed to pause, like figures "in a *tableau vivant*" (*A*, pp. 17, 18n).

As they continued down the path, Moberly and Jourdain next came upon something resembling a garden kiosk, shaded by trees. A man was sitting nearby. Moberly was instantly overtaken by an "extraordinary" sensation of depression. "Everything suddenly looked unnatural, therefore unpleasant; even the trees behind the building seemed to have become flat and lifeless, *like a wood worked in tapestry*. There were no effects of light and shade, and no wind stirred the trees. It was all intensely still" (*A*, pp. 4, 5). Jourdain had similar sensations—she had a feeling of "heavy dreaminess" as if she were walking in her sleep—but neither woman shared her forebodings with the other at the time. These feelings of distress intensified when the man by the kiosk looked up at them. According to Moberly he was "repulsive" in appearance: his complexion was "dark and rough," and despite the heat, he wore a heavy black cloak and a slouch hat (*A*, p. 5). Jourdain remembered him as "dark" with an "evil and yet unseeing" expression: she thought his face had been pitted by smallpox (*A*, p. 18). Both were relieved when a "red-faced" man wearing "buckled shoes" suddenly rushed up behind them, warned them (in oddly accented French) that they were going the wrong way, and then ran off in another direction.

4. Elizabeth Morison and Frances Lamont [Charlotte Moberly and Eleanor Jourdain], *An Adventure*, 2d ed. (London, 1913), p. 17; hereafter abbreviated *A*. *An Adventure* went through five editions in all—in 1911, 1913, 1924, 1931, and 1955. Each edition was also reprinted. The different editions vary considerably: some, for instance, include the appendices and "A Rêverie," while others do not.

Quickly they set off after him, crossed over a small bridge with a stream under it, and at last came in view of what they presumed to be the Petit Trianon. At this point Moberly saw a fair-haired woman sitting on a stool with her back to the house, apparently sketching. The woman wore a large white summer hat and a curiously old-fashioned dress "arranged on her shoulders in handkerchief fashion" (*A*, p. 8). The dress, which Moberly thought unusual at the time, was covered with a pale green fichu. As she and Jourdain went up the steps of the terrace to the house, Moberly, looking back at the sketching woman, had once again an unaccountable feeling of gloom. Suddenly a young man dressed like a footman came out of a second building opening out onto the terrace. Slamming a door behind him, he hurried towards them with a "peculiar smile" and told them that the main entrance was on the other side of the house (*A*, p. 20). Accordingly, they went around to the front of the house where a French wedding party was waiting to tour the rooms. Recovering their spirits, Moberly and Jourdain attached themselves to the happy group and the rest of the day passed off uneventfully. They returned to Paris that evening.

For a week neither woman alluded to the afternoon at the Trianon. One day, however, as Miss Moberly began to write about it in a letter to her sister, her uneasiness returned:

> As the scenes came back one by one, the same sensation of dreamy unnatural oppression came over me so strongly that I stopped writing, and said to Miss Lamont [Jourdain], "Do you think that the Petit Trianon is haunted?" Her answer was prompt, "Yes, I do." I asked her where she felt it, and she said, "In the garden where we met the two men, but not only there." She then described her feeling of depression and anxiety which began at the same point as it did with me, and how she tried not to let me know it. [*A*, pp. 11–12]

There the matter rested, however, until both returned to England. That November, three months after their visit, Miss Jourdain (who in the meantime had accepted Moberly's offer of the St. Hugh's vice-principalship) came to stay with her new friend and the two took up the subject again. In the course of their conversation Moberly referred in passing to the "sketching lady" and was shocked to discover that Jourdain had not seen her. "I exclaimed that it was impossible that she should not have seen the individual; for we were walking side by side and went straight up to her, passed her and looked down upon her from the terrace." Having uncovered this new "element of mystery" (*A*, p. 13), each resolved to write a separate, detailed account of what she had seen, to be shown to the other later. Moberly completed her account on 25 November; Jourdain hers on 28 November.

Comparing narratives, the two soon noticed more eerie discrepan-

cies. Besides the sketching lady, Miss Moberly had seen a woman shaking a cloth out of a window—Miss Jourdain had seen neither. Moberly in turn had not seen Jourdain's "woman and girl with a jug," even though, according to Jourdain, they had walked right past them. But this was not all: Jourdain had also discovered two startling pieces of information. While turning over a set of school lessons on the French Revolution, she had suddenly realized that the day on which they had visited the Trianon, 10 August, was the anniversary of the sacking of the Tuileries. On that day in 1792, Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette had witnessed the massacre of their Swiss Guards and been imprisoned in the Hall of the Assembly. Struck by this ominous coincidence, Jourdain immediately asked a French friend if she had ever heard anything about the Petit Trianon being haunted. To her amazement the friend confirmed that indeed, "on a certain day in August," Marie Antoinette was regularly seen in the Trianon garden, wearing a light flapping hat and a pink dress. The queen's servants and courtiers also appeared in the vicinity, reenacting their distinctive "occupations and amusements" for a day and a night (*A*, p. 22).

At once they started to wonder (in Moberly's words)

> whether we had inadvertently entered within an act of the Queen's memory when alive, and whether this explained our curious sensation of being completely shut in and oppressed. What more likely, we thought, than that during those hours in the Hall of the Assembly, or in the Conciergerie, she had gone back in such vivid memory to other Augusts spent at Trianon that some impress of it was imparted to the place? [*A*, pp. 23–24]

They began reading up on the life of Marie Antoinette—with thrilling results. Leafing through Gustave Desjardins's *Petit Trianon* (1885), Moberly found a portrait of the doomed queen by Wertmüller in which, astonishingly, she recognized the face of the sketching lady. The clothes were also identical. Could the lady, Jourdain asked her friend, have been an apparition of the queen herself? Conjecture turned to conviction after Jourdain made a second visit to Versailles in January 1902. Not only was she unable to retrace their steps, all the grounds around the Trianon seemed mysteriously altered. (Nowhere, for example, could she find the strange "kiosk," or the bridge with the stream under it.)[5] She did gather, however, another crucial bit of information: on her last day at the

5. There were uncanny moments during this second visit: Jourdain remembered feeling "the swish of a dress" close by her at one point, and later thought she heard eighteenth-century music being played somewhere by an unseen orchestra. She wrote down twelve bars of this music from memory afterwards and in 1907 showed them to an unnamed "musical expert" who said they dated from "about 1780." After researching the matter further at the Conservatoire de Musique in Paris, Jourdain concluded that "the twelve bars represented the chief motives of the light opera of the eighteenth century" and could be

Fig. 3.—Miss Moberly in youth and in middle age

Trianon—supposedly 5 October 1789—Marie Antoinette had been sitting in her garden when a page ran towards her with a message that a mob from Paris would be at the gates in an hour's time. Suddenly, the two women realized, it all made sense. While imprisoned in the Hall of the Assembly in 1792, Marie Antoinette must undoubtedly have thought back to that day in 1789 when she first heard the awful news that her crown was in danger. This would indeed explain the terrible "depression" both of them had experienced in the grounds. The "red-faced" man who had run past them in such a hurry near the kiosk, they concluded, was probably the very messenger running to the queen with the news: they had literally stepped "into" her memory.

Exalted by their discovery, Moberly and Jourdain sent a letter to the Society for Psychical Research asserting that the Trianon was haunted and including their written accounts from 1901 as evidence. To their chagrin the accounts were returned as unworthy of investigation. They realized they would have to put their case more compellingly. What better way to

found, in different variations, in the works of "Sacchini, Philidor, Monsigny, Grétry and Pergolesi" (*A*, pp. 94–95). Her findings were rudely satirized by a writer in the *Musical Times* of 1 September 1912, who pointed out that she had conveniently neglected to print the "ubiquitous twelve bars" in *An Adventure*. In a subsequent letter about *An Adventure* to the same journal, the distinguished music critic Ernest Newman—referring to "those wildly ludicrous pages dealing with the phantom music"—dismissed Jourdain's musicological claims as "grotesque" (quoted in *GV*, pp. 293–94).

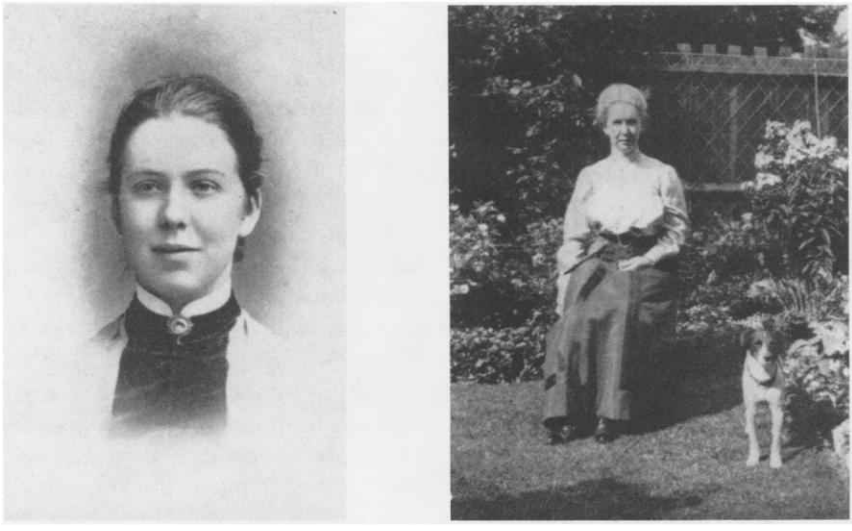

Fig. 4.—Miss Jourdain in youth and in middle age

do so, they surmised, than to demonstrate that everything they had seen at the Trianon—from the moment they found themselves lost to the moment they joined the wedding party—had in fact *only* existed in the year 1789? Accordingly, they set out to do just this. For the next nine years, in libraries, historical archives, and at the Trianon itself, they carried out an elaborate, if not obsessional, search for evidence. In 1911, convinced they had found just the proofs they needed, they published the fruits of their research in the pages of *An Adventure.*

In their central chapter—"Summary of Results of Research"—the two laid out this "proof" in surreal detail. They began with the first object they had seen, the peculiar-looking plough noticed by Miss Jourdain just after they had lost their way. Questioning a gardener at the Trianon in 1905, they reported, they had learned that no ploughs had been kept there in 1901, there being "no need of one" (*A,* p. 41). Some time later, in 1908, another gardener told them that the shape of ploughs had "entirely altered in character since the Revolution" (*A,* pp. 41–42) and that the one seen by Miss Jourdain was definitely of an "old type" no longer found anywhere in France. True, they conceded, on a document they had uncovered in "the Archives Nationales" listing all the gardening tools bought for the Trianon between 1780 and 1789, there had been no mention of a plough. But as they had learned "from Desjardins's book," during the reign of Louis XVI, "an old plough used in his predecessor's reign had been preserved at the Petit Trianon and sold with the king's other properties during the Revolution" (*A,* p. 42). The implication was obvious: Miss

Jourdain had seen a plough that could only have emanated from the eighteenth century.

Other objects received similar glosses. The cottage, for example, in front of which they had seen the woman and the girl with the jug, they argued, most closely resembled a structure "not now in existence" shown on an old map from 1783 found in the Trianon archives in 1907 (*A*, p. 47). The mysterious kiosk—nowhere to be seen in the present garden—was identical, they had discovered, to a lost "ruine" pictured on another old eighteenth-century plan (*A*, p. 48). As for the little bridge with a stream under it, this corresponded to an obscure "'*pont rustique*'" mentioned by the Comte D'Hezecques in his *Souvenirs d'un page de la cour de Louis XVI* (1873)—also no longer in existence. It was definitely *not*, they asserted, the more famous (and obvious) Rocher Bridge, which, according to calculations they had carried out on the spot, was "too high above the lakes" to be the same one they had crossed (*A*, p. 67). Most eerily perhaps, the door they thought they had heard slamming as they went up the steps of the Trianon terrace—the door from which the footman with the "peculiar smile" had emerged—led only to a ruined chapel that had never been used, according to a guide, "since it was used by the Court." Indeed, when Miss Jourdain attempted to open the door from the inside, some time in 1906, she found it "bolted, barred, and cobwebbed over from age and disuse" (*A*, p. 81).

Their evidence relating to people, however, was no less extensive. The two men in "greenish-grey coats" to whom they had first spoken, they contended, were members of Marie Antoinette's famed *gardes Suisses:* only royal bodyguards from the 1780s, they had learned, ever wore liveries of this color at the Trianon. Indeed, they had concluded, they were probably "two of the three Bersy brothers," said to have been on duty on the fateful day of 5 October 1789 (*A*, p. 46). The woman and the girl with the jug were identified as the wife and daughter of one of Marie Antoinette's undergardeners: the girl was the same age as "Marion," a gardener's child they had read about in Julie Lavergne's 1879 *Légendes de Trianon* (*A*, p. 54). The sinister pockmarked "kiosk man," in turn, was none other than the wicked Comte de Vaudreuil, who had acted "an enemy's part" toward the queen by encouraging her to permit a performance of Beaumarchais's politically dangerous play *Le Mariage de Figaro* in 1784. Vaudreuil was a Creole and marked by smallpox: this explained the kiosk man's "dark and rough" complexion. The fact that the latter wore a large slouch hat and heavy black cloak on a hot summer's day confirmed the identification: according to Pierre de Nolhac's *La Reine Marie-Antoinette* (1890), they noted, Vaudreuil had himself once taken the role of Count Almaviva in Beaumarchais's drama, dressing for it in "a large dark cloak and Spanish hat," and often wore his costume on other occasions (*A*, p. 52). In a similar fashion, the "running man" was identified as Marie Antoinette's page De Bretagne (his Breton origins supposedly explained

his unusual French accent), and the "chapel man" as a footman named Lagrange, who in 1789 had had rooms near the Trianon terrace (*A*, pp. 65, 85).[6]

But Moberly and Jourdain's crowning proofs, not surprisingly, had to do with the sketching lady seen by Miss Moberly. The Wertmüller portrait had made them suspect from the start of course that the lady might be the queen herself: the features were identical, they confirmed, right down to the short nose and somewhat "square" face (*A*, p. 74). This particular portrait, moreover, had always been considered, they had found, the truest likeness of the queen. But their clinching piece of evidence once again was sartorial. In 1908, looking into the journals of Madame Éloffe, Marie Antoinette's *modiste*, they had discovered to their amazement that in July and September of 1789 Madame Éloffe had made for the queen "two green silk bodices" and several "white fichus." This information "agreed exactly" with the dress worn by the sketching lady in 1901. What Miss Moberly remembered as the lady's unusual-looking "pale green fichu," they realized triumphantly, was actually one of Madame Éloffe's green bodices, with a light-colored "muslin, or gauze" fichu over it (*A*, pp. 75–76). The lady was none other than Marie Antoinette herself.

After completing these demonstrations, all of which were supplemented with numerous scholarly footnotes, appendices, and diagrams, Moberly and Jourdain concluded with something they called, rather more lyrically, "A Rêverie." Subtitled, "A Possible Historical Clue," "A Rêverie" was actually an imaginary account—composed in a suitably pathetic, pseudo-Carlylian manner—of the supposed meditations of Marie Antoinette during her imprisonment with Louis XVI and the Dauphin following the sacking of the Tuileries on 10 August 1792. In the course of this florid narration (which Moberly and Jourdain clearly intended as a kind of royalist apologia as well as an explanatory coda to their "adventure" itself) the much-abused queen, worn out by her sufferings at the hands of the revolutionary mob, is depicted sinking into a trancelike state in which she sees a series of phantom images of her beloved Trianon: an "old plough" from her husband's boyhood, two of her loyal bodyguards,

6. Moberly and Jourdain drew most of their basic historical information about Marie Antoinette and her court from various late nineteenth-century popular histories: Pierre de Nolhac's *La Reine Marie-Antoinette* (Paris, 1890), Julie Lavergne's *Légendes de Trianon, Versailles et Saint-Germain* (Paris, 1879), Gustave Adolphe Desjardins's *Le Petit Trianon: Histoire et description* (Versailles, 1885), and the Comte de Reiset's *Modes et usages du temps de Marie Antoinette* (Paris, 1885). That these sources gave a somewhat romantic, unscholarly, and anecdotal picture of life at the Trianon was pointed out by several of Moberly and Jourdain's critics. "What is Julie Lavergne's *Légendes de Trianon*," asked Iremonger dismissively, "but a charming imaginative creation, built upon the bones of fact perhaps, but the merest rainbow tissue of flights of fantasy? What is de Nolhac's *Marie Antoinette the Queen* but a gorgeous picture-book with all the difficulties of considering France under the Revolution made easy and engaging, a chocolate éclair for a serious student?" (*GV*, p. 286).

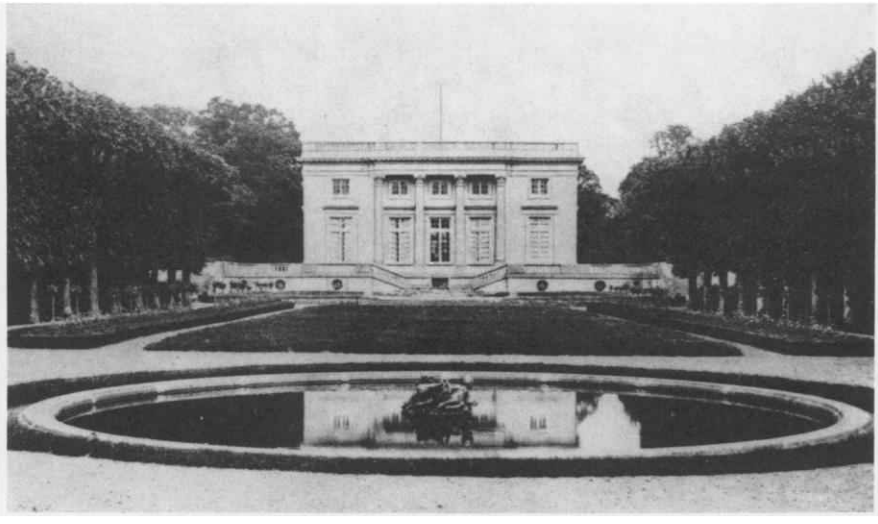

Fig. 5.—The Petit Trianon, west front, showing the terrace from which Miss Moberly espied the "sketching lady"

the Bersy brothers, in "long green coats," the "rustic cottage" where the gardener's daughter Marion and her mother lived, the Comte de Vaudreuil in his "Spanish" costume, and so on. What she hallucinates, in short, is everything seen by Moberly and Jourdain in 1901—with one significant addition. Thinking back to her last day at the Trianon, and how she sat sketching on the lawn, she suddenly remembers "the two strangers" who walked past her "onto the terrace." Thus did Moberly and Jourdain, imagining the doomed queen imagining them, seek to lend telepathic credibility to their own richly phantasmagorical vision.[7]

Dare one call *An Adventure* preposterous? Certainly most people who read the book in 1911 thought so. From the start *An Adventure* provoked both extraordinary public interest (11,000 copies had been sold by 1913) and an extraordinary number of skeptical attacks. The first and most wounding of these assaults was unquestionably the review published in the journal of the Society for Psychical Research by Mrs. Henry Sidgwick, the

7. Both Iremonger and Evans credited the effusions of "A Rêverie" to Moberly; her prose style was purportedly more "emotional" than Jourdain's. Moberly's brother Robert, it is worth noting, won the Newdigate Prize in 1867 for a poem about Marie Antoinette, the lachrymose sentimentality of which may well have influenced "A Rêverie":

> In simple peace she moves; more joyously
> Here 'mid the shame, and on the road to die—
> Than when of old her royal beauty shone
> Mid the triumphant splendour of a throne. . . .
> —Naught rests but heaven:—no form of woman this—
> It is a spirit divine that moves to bliss.
>
> [quoted in *GV*, p. 287]

Fig. 6.—The Wertmüller portrait of Marie Antoinette

Fig. 7.—A plate from the journal of Madame Éloffe, dressmaker to Marie Antoinette, showing a transparent fichu worn over a bodice, as described by Moberly

wife of the Society's president, late in 1911. Not only did she find Moberly and Jourdain's voluminous "evidence" ridiculous, Mrs. Sidgwick (who was the sister of Lord Balfour) took a distinctly satirical attitude toward the ladies themselves. Citing one "M. Sage," a French associate of the society who had walked over the Trianon gardens with *An Adventure* in hand, she maintained that Moberly and Jourdain ("who at best do not seem to be very good at topography") had simply gotten lost in the grounds and then misidentified what they had seen—after the fact. What they encountered there, she argued, were merely "real persons and things" from 1901, which they had subsequently "decked out by tricks of memory (and after the idea of haunting had occurred to them) with some additional details of costume suitable to the times of Marie Antoinette."[8] Her factotum M. Sage provided examples: Moberly and Jourdain's two "Swiss guards," for instance, were undoubtedly ordinary Trianon gardeners; the latter wore little caps, or *képis,* which could easily be mistaken for parts of a uniform. Likewise, all the buildings and objects they had seen could be correlated with existing structures in the Trianon grounds—the Temple of Love, the Belvédère, the Rocher bridge, and so forth.

But other attacks soon followed. In a chapter on apparitions in his book *Psychical Research,* also from 1911, W. F. Barrett, a physicist and Fellow of the Royal Society, declared that Moberly and Jourdain's visions were the result of "lively imagination stimulated by expectancy" and lacked "any real evidential value."[9] Interestingly, he wondered whether the two had been influenced by a 1907 account in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* of a young woman who claimed to have been in communication with the spirit of Marie Antoinette since girlhood. He also reminded his readers of another recent case of Marie Antoinette-obsession: that of the celebrated medium Hélène Smith, who believed herself to be a reincarnation of the queen. Smith's bizarre accomplishments, which included being able to produce bits of automatic writing in Marie Antoinette's hand, had been exhaustively documented in a book published in 1900 by the Swiss psychologist Theodore Flournoy.[10]

Meanwhile Moberly and Jourdain were not silent. In 1913 they

8. Mrs. Sidgwick's anonymous review appeared in the June 1911 supplement to the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research.* It is also reprinted in full in chapter 12 of *GV.*

9. W. F. Barrett, *Psychical Research* (London, 1911), pp. 200, 201.

10. The first case mentioned by Barrett is described in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 13 (June 1907): 90–96. The young woman in question had nightly visions of Marie Antoinette during her childhood and subsequently developed such an obsession with the dead queen that she spent most of her waking hours at the South Kensington Museum "gazing at Marie Antoinette's bust, examining her toilet table with its little rouge pots, etc." On the renowned Swiss medium Hélène Smith, who claimed to be the reincarnation not only of Marie Antoinette but also of Cagliostro, several "Hindoo" sheiks and princesses, and a mysterious personage from Mars named "Pouzé Ramié," see Theodore Flournoy, *From India to the Planet Mars: A Study of a Case of Somnambulism,* trans. Daniel B. Vermilye (1900; New York, 1963).

issued a revised edition of *An Adventure* including a section called "Answers to Questions We Have Been Asked," designed to deflect such assaults. Here they reiterated their belief that they had indeed seen people from the eighteenth century—and not unusually dressed gardeners, tourists, or people in masquerade costume, as Sidgwick and others had suggested. No "historical fetes" had taken place at the Trianon on 10 August 1901, they had discovered, nor had any "cinematographs" in which costumed actors might have appeared been filmed on the grounds that day (see *A*, pp. 111–17). Responding to Barrett's insinuation that they had been influenced by stories of other apparitions, the two denied any morbid interest in spiritualism or the occult ("we are the daughters of English clergymen, and heartily hold and teach the faith of our fathers") and stoutly reaffirmed their native good sense (*A*, p. 101). Finally, by way of rejoinder to those who thought the whole thing a hoax, they now reproduced the "original" accounts each had written—supposedly independently —in November 1901, along with two "fuller" accounts, composed a few weeks later for the benefit of readers "unfamiliar" with the Trianon grounds.[11]

Yet these gambits seemed merely to inflame the skeptics further. For the next sixty years, in fact, books and articles disputing the claims of *An Adventure* (which itself went through three more editions) continued to appear. Neither the death of Jourdain in 1924, nor that of Moberly in 1937, did anything to stop the flow: indeed, the posthumous revelation that the pseudonymous "Miss Morison" and "Miss Lamont" were in fact two distinguished Oxford lady dons only intensified popular fascination with the case.[12] J. R. Sturge-Whiting published a book-length study *The Mystery of Versailles* in 1938, shortly after the death of Moberly; David Landale Johnston's *Trianon Case, A Review of the Evidence* appeared in 1945. In 1950 W. H. Salter's detailed examination of the supposedly "original" 1901 accounts—"'An Adventure': A Note on the Evidence"—was published in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research,* followed in 1952 by the first French article on the subject, Léon Rey's "Promenade hors du temps" in the *Revue de Paris.* (An annotated French translation of

11. In the appendix to the 1913 edition Moberly and Jourdain called their original accounts, respectively, "A1" and "A2" and the subsequent "fuller" accounts "B1" and "B2." Confusingly, later writers—following W. H. Salter—referred to the first accounts as "M1" and "J1" and the second as "M2" and "J2." In this obsession with alphabetical nomenclature, *Adventure* scholarship often reads like a parody of biblical textual scholarship.

12. Moberly and Jourdain's authorship was publicly revealed for the first time in the fourth edition of *An Adventure,* ed. Edith Olivier, with a note by J. W. Dunne (London, 1931). Yet the fact of their authorship was already by then widely known. Moberly and Jourdain had told officials at the Society for Psychical Research about the Trianon apparitions in 1902; in later years they shared their story with virtually anyone who would listen. Thus Evans's assertion—in the preface to the 1955 edition of *An Adventure*—that even in 1911 the identity of the book's authors was largely a "*secret de Polichinelle*" (p. 20), that is to say, no secret at all.

An Adventure, complete with sardonic preface by Jean Cocteau, appeared in 1959.)[13] Perhaps the most damning as well as most exhaustive assault on the book came in 1957—in the shape of Lucille Iremonger's 300-page *ad feminam* attack, *The Ghosts of Versailles: Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain and Their Adventure.* But even twenty years later the Trianon case was still arousing controversy: seventy-five years after Moberly and Jourdain's first encounter with the "sketching lady" and her ilk, Joan Evans, Eleanor Jourdain's literary executor and holder of the copyright to *An Adventure,* put forth her own debunking explanation of the Trianon apparitions in an essay entitled "An End to *An Adventure:* Solving the Mystery of the Trianon" in *Encounter* in 1976.[14]

Few of Moberly and Jourdain's numerous critics, to be sure, explicated the Trianon "ghosts" in precisely the same way. Most were convinced, certainly, that there had to be some commonplace explanation for what the two women had seen—the likeliest being that Moberly and Jourdain had simply mistaken ordinary people and objects from 1901 for those of the ancien régime. But given the intricacies of the case, there was little agreement on specific details—whether the kiosk was "really" the Temple of Love or "really" the Belvédère, whether the men in greenish coats were gardeners or officials, and so on. Certain features of the case became much-debated cruxes—the mysterious "chapel door," for instance, to which Sturge-Whiting (whose on-the-spot investigations became as tireless as Moberly and Jourdain's own) devoted an entire chapter of *The Mystery of Versailles.*[15]

Opinion was also divided on the subject of Moberly and Jourdain themselves. The chivalrous Sturge-Whiting, writing in the 1930s, was inclined to see the authors of *An Adventure* in relatively flattering terms, as a pair of eccentric spinsters, harmlessly caught up in a sentimental flight

13. See Moberly and Jourdain, *Les Fantômes de Trianon (Une Aventure),* trans. Julliette and Pierre Barrucand (Monaco, 1959). As well as the preface by Cocteau, the French edition includes a lengthy (mostly skeptical) introduction by Robert Amadou.

14. Moberly and Jourdain were not entirely without defenders: following the unexpected death of Jourdain in 1924, Olivier, a former protegée of Moberly's from St. Hugh's, took on the task of preparing the third edition of *An Adventure* and remained a lifelong partisan. A few scientific writers were also sympathetic: Dunne, the author of *An Experiment with Time* (New York, 1927), suggested that Moberly and Jourdain's story confirmed Einstein's theory of relativity; G. N. M. Tyrrell, an electrical engineer and later president of the Society for Psychical Research, reviewed the case, apparently seriously, in a book on apparitions in 1942. Rather more tongue-in-cheek was the advocacy of Cocteau: in the preface to the 1959 French translation of *An Adventure,* he eulogized "les dames d'Oxford" (Moberly had died in 1937) for their futuristic assault on conventional notions of space and time. Despite the fact that Moberly and Jourdain hailed from "Grande Bretagne"—"ou les histoires de fantômes abondent"—their book, Cocteau wrote, constituted "une manière de scandale non conformiste de la plus haute valeur" (*Les Fantômes de Trianon,* p. 9).

15. See J. R. Sturge-Whiting, *The Mystery of Versailles: A Complete Solution* (London, 1938), pp. 125–34.

of fancy. Though their claim to have encountered Marie Antoinette was nothing more—in his view—than a "pathetic illusion," they had elaborated it, he thought, in perfectly good faith: he saw no reason to question their integrity. Far from intending to deceive anyone, the "brave ladies," he gallantly intoned, had simply been swept away by a conception of the greatest "beauty and pathos."[16]

Others were less sure. Salter, writing in 1950, suspected—as Mrs. Sidgwick had done earlier—that Moberly and Jourdain had in fact tampered with the "evidence" in order to make their time-travel story more convincing. Salter was particularly dubious about the two sets of "original" accounts—supposedly written in November and December of 1901—printed in the 1913 edition of *An Adventure.* How reliable could such eyewitness accounts be, he asked, when they had been produced almost three months after the events described? What proof was there that Moberly and Jourdain had not collaborated on them? Most damagingly, he presented evidence, gleaned from the abortive correspondence between Moberly and Jourdain and the Society for Psychical Research in 1901, that the second, "fuller," or more elaborate set of accounts—which Moberly and Jourdain claimed to have composed only a week or two after the first set—had not been written in 1901 at all, but possibly as late as 1906.[17] Since a number of crucial details in Moberly and Jourdain's story—that the chapel door had been "slammed," for example—only appeared in the longer accounts, much of the so-called proof for their identifications suddenly became suspect. To claim in 1901 that they had heard the door slam was one thing: it made the subsequent discovery, several years later, that the chapel door had been "barred and bolted" all the more exciting and remarkable. But if the slamming sound was a

16. Ibid., pp. 147, 158, 146.

17. See W. H. Salter, "'An Adventure': A Note on the Evidence," *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 35 (Jan.–Feb. 1950): 178–87. His findings are also reviewed at length in *GV.* Salter's reasoning was as follows: in the second edition of *An Adventure* (1913), the first edition in which all four of the accounts were published, Moberly and Jourdain claimed that the first accounts (M1 and J1) had been written on "November 25" and "November 28," and the second (M2 and J2) in "November 1901" and "December 1901," respectively. Yet, he observed, when the two of them wrote to Mrs. Henry Sidgwick at the Society for Psychical Research about the Versailles apparitions in October 1902, they sent only M1 and J1 as evidence. Why, he asked, if the more detailed accounts M2 and J2 were already then in existence, having supposedly been written "'for those who had not seen the place'" (p. 181), had Moberly and Jourdain not sent them instead? When asked later what had happened to the original manuscripts of M2 and J2, Moberly and Jourdain said only that they had destroyed them, after copying them along with "a few introductory sentences" into an exercise book in 1906. Concluded Salter, as summed up by Iremonger, "it does look rather as if M2 and J2, instead of having been written, as Miss Moberly claims, a matter of days after M1 and J1, were written *at best a year afterwards,* and perhaps much later than that!" (*GV,* pp. 190–91). Tellingly, almost all of the additional information provided in M2 and J2 served to strengthen Moberly and Jourdain's claim that they had seen eighteenth-century personages.

superaddition from 1906, after they had already gone back and *seen* the door, then it began to look as though Moberly and Jourdain had been embellishing—for dramatic effect—all along.

Still even Salter was reluctant to say anything directly incriminating about two long-deceased and "much respected" ladies. No such scruples inhibited Iremonger, author of *The Ghosts of Versailles* (1957). Iremonger had been a student at St. Hugh's, where memories of Moberly and Jourdain loomed large. She was also a descendant of the Comte de Vaudreuil—the "repulsive-looking" kiosk man—and may have wished to vindicate her unprepossessing ancestor, for her book is without question the most gossipy attack on *An Adventure,* being largely devoted to compromising rumors and anecdotes about its authors' private lives. Among Iremonger's more provocative findings was that despite their protestations to the contrary, both Moberly and Jourdain had had paranormal experiences before and after the Trianon visit, and that Moberly in particular was prone to aural and visual hallucinations. As a child she had heard the words "PINNACLED REALITY" as she stared at the spires of Winchester Cathedral; on the day her father, the bishop, died in 1885, she had seen two strange birds with dazzling white feathers and immense wings fly over the cathedral into the west. In Cambridge in 1913 she saw a procession of medieval monks; and at the Louvre the following year, she saw a man "six or seven feet high" in a crown and togalike dress whom she at first took to be Charlemagne, but later decided was an apparition of the Roman emperor Constantine (*GV,* pp. 40–45).

But Iremonger's most sensational revelations had to do with Moberly and Jourdain's relationship itself. That the two were lesbians, and hence morally and psychologically suspect, was one of Iremonger's barely concealed assumptions. After they had "joined forces" following their experience at Versailles (*GV,* p. 89), she declared, their relationship was that of "'husband and wife.'" In the beginning Miss Moberly—the older, shyer, and plainer of the two—was the "husband" and Miss Jourdain the "wife":

> The shy woman liked the sociable one; the rugged woman liked the smooth one; the plain unfeminine creature warmed to the little charmer, flowery hats, silken ankles and all. The clumsy Miss Moberly fell for the airs and graces of 'French' Miss Jourdain. [*GV,* p. 86]

Very quickly, however, the roles reversed. Jourdain was the more powerful personality, according to Iremonger, and over the years came to dominate her friend more and more, especially after 1915, when Moberly retired and Jourdain succeeded her as principal. Jourdain ruled over Moberly and St. Hugh's in equally peremptory fashion, becoming increasingly subject to paranoid delusions. During the war she became convinced a German spy was hiding somewhere in the college; later, in a fit of mega-

lomaniac pique, she accused several members of the St. Hugh's faculty of plotting against her and Moberly. She dropped dead of a heart attack—literally—during the resulting scandal, and Moberly was left to mourn her for the next thirteen years. Given such pathological goings-on, Iremonger insinuated, it was not hard to see the Trianon ghost story as symptomatic—of the "unhealthy" emotional tie that existed between its perpetrators.[18]

Iremonger's exposé prompted a rebuttal; reviewing the literature surrounding the *Adventure* case in 1976, Joan Evans—who as a child had known both Moberly and Jourdain and was herself a distinguished don of English literature—censured Iremonger for being indiscreet and "less than generous to Miss Jourdain" ("E," p. 42n). Evans's own explanation of the Trianon mystery was in part a not-so-subtle attempt to defend Moberly and Jourdain against the suggestions of double-dealing and sexual deviance. Evidence had come to light, she wrote, that, while failing to substantiate the time-travel thesis, nonetheless "vindicated" the two women and confirmed "the accuracy of their observations" ("E," p. 45). What this "evidence" turned out to be was a 1965 biography of Robert de Montesquiou (1855–1921), the wealthy dandy and aesthete on whom Marcel Proust modeled his character of the Baron de Charlus, in which it was alleged that Montesquiou had at one time lived in a house at Versailles and held fancy-dress parties there.[19] Though it was not clear in what year Montesquiou's parties had taken place, or whether he had ever held one near the Trianon, this did not stop Evans from indulging in a fairly elaborate fantasy of her own. Moberly and Jourdain had inadvertently wandered into a "rehearsal" for a kind of homosexual garden fete, she maintained, in which Montesquiou, his young lover Gabriel Yturri (formerly "a salesman in a smart tie shop") and various male friends were "trying out" their costumes. The two men in "greenish coats" were probably Montesquiou and Yturri; the others were probably members of the Montesquiou clique. The "sketching lady" was most likely a transvestite: "the well-bred Miss Moberly," Evans noted, had thought "she showed 'a good deal of leg.'" Evans was not exactly sure who the repulsive "kiosk man" was, but she was confident that Moberly and Jourdain's discomfort

18. Though she never once used the word *lesbian* to describe them, Iremonger's interest in her subjects' emotional predilections verged on the prurient. Quoting an unnamed St. Hugh's source, she described Jourdain's "unhealthy" relationships with various students in the college, who reciprocated by falling in love with their principal. "An illuminating punning phrase which had currency at that time," wrote Iremonger, "was, 'Have you crossed Jordan yet?' In other words, have you fallen under the sway of this woman who is acknowledged to be consciously exercising her charm to bind students to her?" According to "the Mistress of Girton," Iremonger noted, "'a lot of kissing went on'" (*GV*, p. 88).

19. See Philippe Jullian, *Robert de Montesquiou, un prince 1900* (Paris, 1965); trans. John Haylock and Francis King, under the title *Prince of Aesthetes: Count Robert de Montesquiou, 1855–1921* (New York, 1968).

in his presence was "a credit to their morals and their breeding" ("E," p. 46). Neither woman had any previous knowledge of "the more decadent aspects of the aristocratic, plutocratic and artistic classes in *'la belle époque,'*" nor of "the London world of Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley"; hence the disgust they felt toward the kiosk man, Evans concluded, "may well have arisen from the instinctive reaction of a decent woman to a pervert" ("E," pp. 45, 47).

What to make of these theories and countertheories? To the reader confronting them for the first time the controversies surrounding *An Adventure* are likely to seem as bizarre as *An Adventure* itself. For in their own way the skeptics were as bewitched by the Trianon apparitions as Moberly and Jourdain were. The task of proving Moberly and Jourdain wrong became for many of them a compulsion—a kind of *idée fixe.* In a revealing aside in *The Ghosts of Versailles,* Iremonger warned of the "*Adventure-manie*" that so often overtook those (like herself) who began delving too deeply into the details of the case. "There have been many enthusiastic amateurs," she wrote,

> who, coming to it often as believers in *An Adventure,* but unable to overlook its weaknesses, have permitted themselves what Nietzsche called the luxury of scepticism, and have submerged themselves in its intricacies almost to the abandonment of a sense of proportion. No doubt many more will do so in the future, for interest in this story can grow first into an absorbing hobby and then into a real *Adventure-manie.* [*GV,* p. 298]

The prime symptom of *Adventure*-mania was a passion for invoking "evidence"—often of a strikingly dubious sort.[20] Yet in this Moberly and Jourdain's critics simply followed in the footsteps of the ladies themselves. If Moberly and Jourdain, rummaging through archives, had fallen victims to a kind of hermeneutic *folie*—a befuddling obsession with proving themselves right at any cost—it was precisely this obsession which, like an infection, they succeeded in transmitting to their critics.

20. *An Adventure*'s critics were especially fond of invoking racial or occupational stereotypes as evidence. Iremonger, for example, attributed Moberly's mystical and excitable streak to the fact that she was supposedly of Russian extraction. (Moberly claimed to be descended from Peter the Great.) Moberly's face, wrote Iremonger, was "perfectly Slavonic. She might have been Mr Molotov's twin sister" (*GV,* p. 59). Somewhat differently, though equally disparagingly, Evans described Moberly as having "the narrow square head often found in the middle ranks of the Anglican clergy"—thus explaining, presumably, her lack of critical intelligence (Evans, preface, *An Adventure,* p. 14). Even the commonsensical Salter was inclined toward ruminations of this nature: explaining, in 1950, the strange clothing worn by the people described in *An Adventure,* he spoke of the typically "French" predilection for unusual uniforms. Likewise he added, "the cloaks and sombreros (or slouch hats) of the sitting and running men were, unless my recollection of that period is wholly wrong, an attire much affected by contemporary artists" (Salter, "A Note on the Evidence," p. 185).

At the same time the skeptics were strangely oblivious to what now seems the most intriguing psychological aspect of the case. The peculiar fervor, the near-hysteric nature of the response generated by *An Adventure* can only be explained, it seems to me, by the fact that the book was the work of *two* authors—and two women at that. The "united front" presented by Moberly and Jourdain, their openly collaborative intellectual and emotional relationship, served without question as a subliminal goad to their critics. As female dons, Moberly and Jourdain represented a new and hitherto unprecedented generation of independent educated women; as single women living their lives together (in however enigmatic a dyad) they stood as a threat to conventional sexual arrangements as well. In a society in which masculine prestige was under assault on a number of fronts, the spectacle of two eminent women speaking, uncannily, "as one"—even on so fantastical a theme—must have seemed unusually disturbing to those concerned with upholding patriarchal values. To prove such women wrong—to show them up as victims of the most comical and exquisite folly—was also to validate reactionary sexual and intellectual hierarchies.[21]

And yet it was precisely this "conglomerate" aspect of *An Adventure* that the skeptics seemed unprepared—or unable—to elucidate. There was, if not exactly a logical flaw, what one might call a theoretical absence at the heart of the skeptical point of view. If it were true (as even hostile critics such as Iremonger allowed) that Moberly and Jourdain were women of at least some dignity and intelligence, then why had neither one of them ever once questioned the judgment of the other? If it were possible (barely) to imagine one of them inventing the Marie Antoinette fantasy, how had the other one gotten sucked into it, too? How to explain the bizarre mutuality of their conviction, the intense, self-perpetuating, seemingly symbiotic exchange of illusion that must have taken place between them for nearly twenty-five years? While obsessed with what they regarded as Moberly and Jourdain's "folly," what the skeptics failed to explain, paradoxically, was its most curious feature—its spectacularly collaborative nature.

21. Even some of Moberly and Jourdain's defenders, paradoxically, managed to discredit them. In "Is There a Case for Retrocognition?" a bizarre essay published in the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 44 (Apr. 1950): 43–64, W. H. W. Sabine—while willing to accept Moberly and Jourdain's story whole hog—argued that they had not in fact gone back in time: they had simply had a "precognition," or foreglimpse, of the results of their future research. Their "hallucinatory visions," he maintained, "did not contain any information not ascribable to clairvoyant awareness of documents and books, and/or precognition of the coming experience of looking them up" (p. 63). Why, then, were their visions specifically of Marie Antoinette? Because, Sabine argued, they suffered from "lingering schoolgirl sentimentality" (p. 61). They were already obsessed with the dead queen in 1901; they "precognized" the future researches they would undertake regarding her; and through a kind of maudlin, back-to-front ESP, thought they *saw* her.

At this point a brief authorial confession is in order. When I first began to think of writing about *An Adventure* I was convinced—perhaps as a result of my own creeping "*Adventure*-mania"—that I could in fact clarify this most bewildering aspect of the Trianon case.[22] What, I asked myself, was the partnership of Moberly and Jourdain—so intimate and yet so bizarre—if not but an instance of the psychological phenomenon known as *folie à deux*? Wasn't a *folie à deux* precisely a kind of "double" or "shared" delusion? But even as I invoked the concept, doubts assailed me: I realized I had only the vaguest notion of how a *folie à deux* actually worked, and no idea at all when the term itself originated. My ignorance led me to a perusal of the psychoanalytic writing on the subject—with problematic results. For if here indeed was a theory of collective folly, it was hardly one to resolve the enigmas of *An Adventure*. On the contrary, far from "explaining" Moberly and Jourdain, the concept of the *folie à deux* merely reinstated the theoretical problem in a new way.

What is a *folie à deux*? The term, which literally means "psychosis of two," was coined in the late nineteenth century by two French psychiatrists, Charles Lasègue and J. Falret, whose 1877 paper, "La Folie à deux (ou folie communiquée)," is still regarded as the classic clinical description of the phenomenon.[23] Clinicians in the early part of the century had been much puzzled by something they usually referred to, for want of a better term, as "infectious insanity" or "insanity by contagion": the apparent transmission of delusional ideas between two persons. Heredity alone, it seemed, was not sufficient to explain such cases: though two family members were sometimes involved, numerous instances of shared insanity had been documented between persons who were unrelated to one another.[24] Lasègue and Falret were the first writers to explain "contagious insanity" as a function of interpersonal dynamics. Of course, as they were quick to point out, under ordinary circumstances insanity was *not* contagious; nurses in asylums, after all, seldom contracted lunatic ideas from their

22. In April of 1990 this "mania" led me, like Sturge-Whiting and others before me, to visit the Trianon and retrace Moberly and Jourdain's steps in the hope—unrealized—of seeing an apparition.

23. See Charles Lasègue and J. Falret, "La Folie à deux (ou folie communiquée)," *Annales Medico-Psychologiques* 18 (Nov. 1877); trans. Richard Michaud, under the original title, *American Journal of Psychiatry (Suppl.)* 121 (Oct. 1964): 1–23; hereafter abbreviated "F."

24. The alienist D. Hack Tuke was the first British clinician to appropriate Lasègue and Falret's term; see his essay "Folie à Deux," *Brain: A Journal of Neurology* (Jan. 1888): 408–21. On the subsequent history of the concept, see Alexander Gralnick, "Folie à Deux—The Psychosis of Association: A Review of 103 Cases and the Entire English Literature," *Psychiatric Quarterly* 16 (Apr. 1942): 230–63, 491–520; Berchmans Rioux, "A Review of Folie à Deux, the Psychosis of Association," *Psychiatric Quarterly* 37 (July 1963): 405–28; and Robert A. Faguet and Kay F. Faguet, "La Folie à Deux," in *Extraordinary Disorders of Human Behavior*, ed. Claude T. H. Friedmann and Robert Faguet (New York, 1982), pp. 1–14.

patients. But under pathological conditions, they warned, "delusional conceptions" could in fact spread—exactly like an infectious disease—from one person to another, resulting in the syndrome of *folie à deux.*

A *folie à deux,* wrote Lasègue and Falret, necessarily involved an active and a passive partner.[25] The active partner—that is, the one "carrying," or initiating the delusion—typically suffered from some sort of hereditary insanity. The passive partner, though not insane in a social or legal sense, was usually a person of somewhat "low intelligence, better disposed to passive docility than to independence" ("F," p. 4). Close proximity over a long period of time was essential for the delusional conception to spread from one partner to the other: the two almost always lived together in relative isolation, away from other friends or family. In isolation, the passive partner gradually yielded to the unremitting "moral pressure" applied by the actively insane partner. Women who lived alone together (often sisters or mothers and daughters) were especially prone to *folie à deux,* though the syndrome was known to affect married couples as well.

Crucial to Lasègue and Falret's analysis was that the delusion itself be of what they called a "moderate" or semi-plausible nature. Grossly lunatic fancies were not easily transmissible, they thought, only those that had a certain probability inherent in them already. "The less preposterous the insanity," they noted, "the easier it becomes communicable." Typically, the delusion related to some past or future event and thus was difficult to disprove on evidentiary grounds:

> If the insane person gives persuasive and lengthy details about these events, it is difficult to prove either to him or to one's self that this event has not taken place. The deluded person has developed his ideas so consistently and logically that no gaps are apparent. His topical memory excludes everything except his morbid ideas. He is never caught at fault, whatever the date of the event he describes, and the more monotonous and circumscribed his persuasive description becomes, the more likely that his listener will be convinced. ["F," p. 4]

The delusion had also to strike a "sentimental" chord in the passive partner, reinforcing existing hopes or fears. Delusions regarding lost legacies, or persecution by hidden enemies, were common. Among the case histories related by Lasègue and Falret was one involving a poverty-stricken mother and daughter who moved to Paris under the delusion (initiated by the daughter) that they were about to inherit a huge legacy; another involved an elderly spinster who persuaded her orphaned niece that someone was attempting to poison them. In the case of the twin

25. Later clinicians sometimes substituted the terms *parasite* and *infected one, inductor* and *inductee, transmitter* and *receiver, activator* and *victim, aggressor* and *recipient,* or *sadist* and *masochist* for Lasègue and Falret's *active* and *passive* partners. See Gralnick, "Folie à Deux—The Psychosis of Association," pp. 235, 237.

Fig. 8.—The twins, "Marie and Maria," suffering from *folie à deux,* 1950s. From Berchmans Rioux, "A Review of Folie á Deux, the Psychosis of Association," *Psychiatric Quarterly* 37 (July 1963): 405–28

sisters, "Joséphine" and "Lucille," Joséphine's conviction that police were threatening to "expose" her and her sister for living together resulted in a joint suicide attempt.[26] Admittedly, wrote Lasègue and Falret, the passive partner sometimes resisted, yet this initial resistance only prompted the active partner to modify the delusion so as to make it more plausible to his or her associate. The passive partner gave way by gradual stages, "fighting at first, giving in little by little, and finally identifying himself completely with the conceptions that he has slowly assimilated" ("F," p. 8). At that point, after countless rehearsals and much discussion of "evidence," the delusion became their "common cause," "to be repeated to all in an almost identical fashion." The only therapeutic indication in such cases was to separate the partners, in the hope that at least one of them might recover, especially the passive partner, who would be thereby "cut off from his source of delusions" ("F," p. 18).

Subsequent studies of *folie à deux* seemed to confirm Lasègue and Falret's clinical observations. Though Freud did not write about the phenomenon of *folie à deux,* several of his protégés, including A. A. Brill, C. P. Oberndorf, and Helene Deutsch, did.[27] Deutsch, in a 1938 article, was the first to connect the syndrome explicitly with homosexuality, especially between women. The paranoid nature of most shared delusions could almost always be attributed, she thought, to strong homosexual bonds between the two partners, and offered two case histories—one involving a mother and daughter, and the other, a pair of sisters—to demonstrate the

26. The theme of double suicide, usually between sisters, crops up frequently in the *folie à deux* literature. Tuke in 1887 described the case of the baronesses Anna and Louisa Guttenburg, who "committed suicide by drowning themselves in the Starnberg Lake, on the identical spot where the King of Bavaria was found dead eleven months before" and were discovered the next day "in the soft clay, firmly clasped in each other's arms" (Tuke, "Folie à Deux," pp. 414–15). A case of sororal double suicide (with distinctly lesbian overtones) occurred, interestingly enough, in the family of Compton-Burnett, the novelist and companion of Margaret Jourdain, Eleanor Jourdain's younger sister. Compton-Burnett's sisters Primrose and Topsy committed suicide together in 1917 by taking an overdose of Veronal. Later it was suggested that the two had been involved in an incestuous affair, having been found dead in one another's arms in the bed they always shared. See Spurling, *Ivy,* pp. 234–36.

27. Freud's silence on the subject of *folie à deux* is intriguing. The closest he came to touching on it was in a striking passage on identification in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego.* "Supposing," he wrote,

> that one of the girls in a boarding school has had a letter from someone with whom she is secretly in love which arouses her jealousy, and that she reacts to it with a fit of hysterics; then some of her friends who know about it will catch the fit, as we say, by mental infection. The mechanism is that of identification based upon the possibility or desire of putting oneself in the same situation. The other girls would like to have a secret love affair too, and under the influence of a sense of guilt they also accept the suffering involved in it. [P. 39]

Later psychoanalytic writers inevitably cited this passage when explaining *folie à deux.* "Freud's basic example of the mechanism of identification," wrote Oberndorf, "concerns

point.[28] Reviewing the clinical literature on *folie à deux* in 1942, Alexander Gralnick reiterated the connection: not only did most reported cases of *folie à deux* involve female couples, "the impression one gets from reading the cases in the literature is that homosexual drives are often present in a marked degree. If the Freudian-minded are correct," he wrote, "homosexuality must be a large element in these cases, because persecutory ideas are so prominent."[29]

With a little imagination, much here obviously could be made to apply to Moberly and Jourdain. If we take the Trianon story to be the sign of a *folie à deux,* then the "active" partner, it seems clear, would have had to have been Jourdain: she was the first to introduce the all-important figure of Marie Antoinette into the discussions of the Versailles events; she was the first to make the crucial connection between 10 August 1901 and 10 August 1789; she was the more enthusiastic of the two in the subsequent search for "evidence." Moreover throughout her adult life—at least according to the muckraking Iremonger—she seems to have suffered from increasingly vehement paranoid fantasies.[30] Jourdain's sister, the furniture historian Margaret Jourdain, always referred to the Trianon case as "my sister's folly"; the novelist Ivy Compton-Burnett, Margaret Jourdain's companion for over thirty years, said she could not think of anyone more likely than Eleanor "to delude herself into believing *An Adventure.*"[31]

But much about the Trianon story itself—quite apart from the obsessional manner in which Moberly and Jourdain defended it—also suggests the classic *folie.* If we accept, in however etiolated a form, the rumor that Moberly and Jourdain were lesbians, then the Trianon "delu-

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related hysterical manifestations involving several boarding-school girls when one of their number goes through a crisis in a blighted love affair. Such a group situation, transient and evanescent in its character, bears a psychological resemblance to the more profound and continued disturbances grouped under *folie à deux*" (C. P. Oberndorf, "Folie à Deux," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 15 [Jan. 1934]: 15). What the Freudian paradigm also reinforced, obviously, was the longstanding psychiatric connection between "mental infection" and women—particularly women living in all-female environments.

28. Helene Deutsch, "Folie à Deux," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 7 (Apr. 1938): 307–18; reprt. Deutsch, *Neuroses and Character Types: Clinical Psychoanalytic Studies* (New York, 1965), pp. 237–47; hereafter abbreviated "FD."

29. Gralnick, "Folie à Deux—The Psychosis of Association," pp. 239–40.

30. Jourdain was the first of the two women to return to the Trianon—in January 1902. Unlike Moberly, Jourdain spoke some French and had something of an obsession (disavowed in *An Adventure*) with French history and culture. That she had imposed her fancies on Moberly was clearly Iremonger's conclusion: Iremonger quoted a St. Hugh's source who remembered Jourdain saying that she had difficulty distinguishing between "the dream world and reality" and that she believed in second sight and auras (quoted in *GV,* p. 99).

31. Spurling, *Ivy,* p. 314.

sion," with its incriminating admixture of romantic and paranoid elements, seems almost too good to be true. How else, one might ask, might two repressed female homosexuals express their relationship than through such a story? Whether or not Moberly and Jourdain were aware of the lingering rumors regarding Marie Antoinette's own lesbianism (rumors that persisted well into the early twentieth century) the choice of Marie Antoinette—a sentimental emblem both of female sexuality and unjust persecution—seems inspired.[32] Indeed the whole Trianon "adventure" might be read as a sexual allegory—a kind of Freudian dream quest—symbolizing, through the imagery of the queen and her court, the formation of a female-female erotic bond. The wandering through mysterious wooded glades, the two male guides (would-be suitors?) who give wrong directions, the encounter with, and subsequent flight from, the repulsive-looking man, the revelatory vision of the sketching lady, the final meeting up with the joyful wedding party (celebrating Moberly and Jourdain's own symbolic marriage?) outside the gynocentric pavilion of the Petit Trianon itself—all suggest a turning away from masculine sexuality toward a world of female-female love and ritual.[33] It is worth nothing, perhaps, that the Wertmüller portrait of Marie Antoinette, in which Moberly and Jourdain took such an interest, depicts the queen with her two children—combining the themes of maternal love and erotic triangulation. For Moberly and Jourdain to have triangulated their relationship

32. In his 1933 biography of the queen, Stefan Zweig discussed rumors about her "Sapphic inclinations" at length. Owing to Louis XVI's inability "to gratify her physiological requirements," as Zweig quaintly put it, Marie Antoinette turned to female companions to "relieve her spiritual and bodily tensions." "'There have very generally been ascribed to me two tastes,'" she was supposed to have written to her mother, "'that for women and that for lovers.'" The Comtesse de Polignac was her most notorious favorite: Zweig described their passion as "a sudden and overwhelming interest, a clap of thunder, a sort of superheated falling in love" (Zweig, *Marie Antoinette: The Portrait of an Average Woman,* trans. Eden and Cedar Paul [New York, 1933], pp. 119–21). The rumors about Marie Antoinette have always had particular currency among lesbians: an early issue of *The Ladder,* the underground lesbian periodical published in the United States between 1956 and 1972, contained an essay about the relationship between Marie Antoinette and the Comtesse de Polignac. See Lennox Strong, "The Royal Triangle: Marie Antoinette and the Duchesse de Polignac," in *Lesbian Lives: Biographies of Women from "The Ladder",* ed. Barbara Grier and Coletta Reid (Oakland, Calif., 1976), pp. 180–85.

33. Sabine hinted at a psychoanalytic interpretation when he spoke of *An Adventure*'s dreamlike, "story-book" aspects: "This definitely 'bad man' [the kiosk man] who is awaiting the women in a lonely spot has to be escaped from. So—as though in response to the wish—on the scene runs the young and handsome page, quite an incipient story-book hero, and the two ladies are saved from a most disagreeable encounter" (Sabine, "Is There a Case for Retrocognition?" p. 54). What Sabine's reading neglects, however, is precisely the "feminocentric" pull of the story—toward the queen and her symbol, the Petit Trianon. On the role of the "pavilion" as an emblem of female erotic and intellectual independence in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fiction, see Nancy K. Miller, "Writing from the Pavilion: George Sand and the Novel of Female Pastoral," *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York, 1988), pp. 204–28.

with one another, so to speak, through the figure of the dead queen does not seem so improbable when one considers other similarly "spiritualizing" triangles between women in the period, such as that between Radclyffe Hall, Lady Una Troubridge, and Hall's deceased ex-lover, "Ladye," Mabel Batten, with whom she and Troubridge communicated regularly through a spirit medium for over twenty years.[34]

And yet how much does the diagnosis of *folie à deux* really tell us? As even its earliest formulators seemed to realize, the concept is something of an ambiguous one. Lasègue and Falret, for example, were clearly troubled by the clinical difficulties involved in identifying the syndrome at all—so deceptively "probable" were the stories often told by their patients. "How often the doctor, even an experienced one," they wrote, "asks himself whether the original fact reported has not really happened rather than being imaginary, and hesitates between an exaggeration and an emotional aberration" ("F," p. 4). Precisely because *folie à deux* was a form of mental alienation "sitting," as they put it, "between reason and confirmed insanity," the clinician often found himself in the position of the passive partner—on the verge of being persuaded himself of the supposedly "lunatic" idea ("F," p. 9).

In several telling passages Lasègue and Falret associated the delusions of *folie à deux* with the seductive fantasies of literature. The case histories of *folie à deux,* they wrote, were "intimate tragedies" of a sort "familiar to physicians, unknown to novelists" ("F," p. 16). (Their own case histories, replete with quasi-novelistic details of life in the less salubrious environs of late nineteenth-century Paris, often recall Émile Zola.) Couples suffering from shared delusions typically elaborated their tales with "the apparent sincerity with which one relates the events of a romantic novel" ("F," p. 10). The clinician was put into the role of literary critic: on the lookout for those palpably "imaginative" touches by which the maddened pair revealed their joint alienation. The danger, of course, was that he might fall under the narrative spell himself, transforming the *folie à deux* into a *folie à trois.*

In an attempt to allay the problem (which was at bottom an epistemological one) later clinicians sought to clarify the interpsychic mechanism by which the so-called *folie* spread from one person to another. In her much-cited essay on the subject, Deutsch proposed that *folie à deux* was a pathological form of "identification" in which each partner sought through fantasy to reconstitute a "lost object" from his or her psychic past.

34. See Michael Baker, *Our Three Selves: The Life of Radclyffe Hall* (New York, 1985), pp. 84–97. Hall and Troubridge's relationship paralleled Moberly and Jourdain's in interesting ways. Not least was the fact that both couples felt themselves profoundly susceptible to occult influences: in Brighton in 1920, Hall, in the company of Troubridge, saw the apparition of a mutual friend inspecting an automobile in a garage. The two published an account of their experience in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 20 (Apr. 1921): 78–88.

The contagion metaphor was somewhat misleading, she thought: in cases of true *folie à deux,* it was not so much that one partner "infected" the other, but that "both already possessed in common, repressed psychic contents which broke out earlier in one and later in the other." "Close living together, apart from others," did not induce the *folie à deux;* it was merely the first expression of those "unconscious bonds" which later brought both parties to similar delusional ideas ("FD," p. 316).

But at the same time Deutsch's invocation of unconscious forces made the underlying diagnostic problem more glaring. The same process of identification at work in a *folie à deux,* she noted, "can also be found in a psychic state so universally human that its character of 'normality' cannot be denied: 'being in love.'" On a grander scale, at the level of mass psychology, the same process also explained the behavior of "large groups of men, entire nations and generations." It was necessary, she concluded, to

> distinguish here as with individuals between hysterical, libidinally determined mass influences, and schizophrenic ideas held in common; likewise between mass liberations of instincts under the guise of ideals, and paranoid projections, etc. Many things have their place in these *folies en masse* and the approval or disapproval of the surrounding world is often the sole criterion as to whether a particular action is deemed a heroic deed or an act of madness. ["FD," p. 318]

But how to distinguish them? If the psychic process behind *folie à deux* was identical to that behind supposedly "normal" phenomena—such as falling in love or sharing in some collective social ideal—what made the *folie à deux* pathological? Deutsch's cryptic final sentence gave it away: only the "approval or disapproval of the surrounding world."

Yet if society alone decided which shared beliefs were "normal" and which were not, it was not hard to see how the diagnosis of *folie à deux* might be exploited for social and political ends: to demonize relationships between persons in whom intellectual or emotional solidarity was suspect. It is not perhaps accidental that what might be called the "invention" of *folie à deux* coincided with the rise of a number of emancipation movements in Europe and the United States—notably the women's suffrage movement, the organized labor movement, and the incipient homosexual emancipation movement.[35] How better to discredit new and threatening political associations than by labeling their proponents—in advance—as prone to shared insanity? A number of early writers on *folie à deux* displayed their animating prejudices quite openly. In an essay on *folie à deux*

35. The British socialist and freethinker Edward Carpenter (1844–1929) was one of the first writers to call for homosexual emancipation: his pamphlet *Homogenic Love, and Its Place in a Free Society* appeared in England in 1894. In Germany the homosexual emancipation movement developed under the leadership of the sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935), who founded a group called the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee in

in the *Journal of Mental Science* from 1910, for instance, the psychiatrist Arthur W. Wilcox took as his prime example of "contagious political insanity" the "unlawful and in every way extraordinary conduct of the suffragettes."[36] Later clinicians associated *folie à deux* not only with women and homosexuals—always the primary target groups—but also with other "dangerous" minorities, including the laboring poor, immigrants, and blacks.[37]

To be sure, in many of the cases related in the annals of *folie à deux* one is hard pressed to say what role social or political determinants may have played in the diagnosis, so patently "mad" do the beliefs involved seem to be. To read Oberndorf's 1934 case history about a husband and wife, Mr. and Mrs. V., who refused to leave their house for two years because both experienced an uncontrollable sensation of "whirling" and "fear of slipping" when they did so, is to feel oneself in the presence of a deep-seated and ultimately obscure mental aberration. (This same couple, wrote Oberndorf, also practiced "an unusual sexual perversion—a compulsion which involved the plunging of Mrs. V. fully dressed into a bath tub of water.")[38] Yet in other cases, such as that of the famous "silent twins" June and Jennifer Gibbons—two black twins who grew up in an immigrant West Indian family in Wales in the 1970s, invented their own private language, wrote novels and stories together, and refused to communicate

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Berlin in 1897. His periodical devoted to the homosexual cause, *Yearbook for Sexual Intermediate Types,* appeared between 1899 and 1923. On the involvement of lesbians in Hirschfeld's movement, see *Lesbians in Germany: 1890's–1920's,* ed. Lillian Faderman and Brigitte Eriksson (Tallahassee, Fla., 1990).

36. Arthur W. Wilcox, "Communicated Insanity," *Journal of Mental Science* 56 (July 1910): 481. Along the same lines, at the conclusion of his 1887 essay on the subject, Tuke warned that "we should discourage susceptible young women, and especially hysterical ones, from associating with persons having delusions, or even entertaining wild eccentric notions short of insane delusions" (Tuke, "Folie à Deux," p. 421).

37. In "A Study of *Folie à Deux,*" *Journal of Mental Science* 85 (Nov. 1939): 1212–23, Stanley M. Coleman and Samuel L. Last argued that economic distress was "the ground upon which *folie à deux* flourishes. . . . [It] is a most potent reason for causing dissatisfaction with reality." This same "dissatisfaction with reality" on a grander scale, they argued, led to the creation of "new creeds and religions" and political ideologies such as "Communism and fascism" (p. 1220). On the association between *folie à deux* and blacks, see J. W. Babcock, "Communicated Insanity and Negro Witchcraft," *American Journal of Insanity* 51 (Apr. 1895): 518–23. Babcock, who was the superintendent of the South Carolina Lunatic Asylum in Columbia, described a case in which a white man, "B. S.," became "infected" with religious delusions after meeting a black faith healer, "Doctor" George Darby, who claimed to effect magical cures with the assistance of "Little Solomon," a bundle of roots tied up in cloth. B. S. in turn passed his delusions on to his wife and brother and "five negro men." After B. S. was committed to an asylum, his wife and brother recovered; the five black men apparently did not. What is especially striking about the case history is the author's implicit assumption that blacks are more prone to collective delusions than whites, and that once infected, become incurable.

38. Oberndorf, "Folie à Deux," p. 17.

with adults—one senses that much of their so-called madness was in fact merely an adaptive response to intolerable social alienation and emotional deprivation.[39]

To invoke the concept of the *folie à deux* as a way of discrediting Moberly and Jourdain, therefore, is to involve oneself, at the very least, in rhetorical and epistemological difficulties. To dismiss "les dames d'Oxford" (as Cocteau called them) as crazy is clearly not enough: the challenge, as we have seen, is to explain how the two of them could have been "crazy" in exactly the same way. Yet the only possible psychological explanation—that Moberly and Jourdain suffered from some kind "contagious insanity" or psychosis by association—is fraught with ideological problems. From the start the theory of *folie à deux* reinscribed a host of late nineteenth-century cultural prejudices—that women were more "delusional" than men, that pairs of women were untrustworthy, that women exhibiting "morbid" sexual tendencies (lesbians, in other words) were the least trustworthy of all. Nor have modern-day psychiatrists and clinicians entirely dispensed with these problematical assumptions: most recent studies of *folie à deux* have continued to rely, uncritically, on the antiquated etiological principles established by Lasègue and Falret over a hundred years ago.[40]

Have we thus arrived at a backhanded vindication of the authors of *An Adventure*? After a fashion, perhaps. True, the skeptic will still object, it remains difficult to credit Moberly and Jourdain's most pressing claim—that on 10 August 1901 at the Petit Trianon, they "entered into an act of memory" and encountered Marie Antoinette and her court. The so-called evidence marshalled on behalf of this claim—the business of antique ploughs, footmens' liveries, unusually buckled shoes, pockmarked faces, garden kiosks, and green fichus—will remain for most of us, perhaps, eternally unconvincing: a testament to folly alone.

And yet skepticism too has its pitfalls. Skepticism is liable, as we have seen, to its own kind of folly—that debunking "mania," or compulsion to disprove, so ruefully acknowledged by Iremonger in *The Ghosts of Versailles*. To disbelieve—at least in the case of *An Adventure*—is to risk losing oneself in an alienating welter of evidence and counterevidence. But more troublingly, skepticism is silent on what one might suppose to be the central issue of the case: how a belief ostensibly as "delusional" as Moberly and Jourdain's should have grown up between the two of them in the first place. Rationalism holds, above all, that delusions are a disease of subjectivity—that they come about, as Deutsch put it, when an individual

39. See Marjorie Wallace, *The Silent Twins* (New York, 1986).

40. See Faguet and Faguet's "La Folie à Deux," in *Extraordinary Disorders of Human Behavior*. The authors, both professors of psychiatry at the University of California, Los Angeles, repeat without dispute Lasègue and Falret's one-hundred-year-old observation that women suffer from *folie à deux* more than men (p. 7; see "F," p. 16).

fails to separate "inner content" from "perception." "It is a complicated developmental process," she observed,

> to be able to distinguish inner content from perception. The simplest criterion is: perception is that which others accept as perception. A contact with the surrounding world is indispensable in applying this criterion. A psychotic individual has not only given up the differentiation of the inner world from the world of reality, but he has given up the need for confirmation from the latter by destroying the bridge between himself and other objects. The ego then takes its delusion for reality and professes it as truth. ["FD," p. 317]

Yet according to such logic, we notice, Moberly and Jourdain were not delusional. Neither one gave up her "contact" with the surrounding world; indeed, precisely in their contact with one another, each found the primordial confirmation that she needed.

Here, then, is the impasse into which skepticism leads: it becomes impossible to distinguish so-called normal collective convictions from pathological ones. If folly is contagious, paradoxically, then it can no longer be folly; for folly is defined by the very fact that it is *not* contagious. Indeed, at the collective level, one might argue, folly ceases to exist: it is transformed into ideology. Were Moberly and Jourdain the victims of *folie à deux* or the inventors of a new romantic ideology? Were they "insane" or were they "in love"? And how to dismiss them, or even to begin to dismiss them, without revealing one's own ideological presumptions and prejudices? As long as skepticism is unable to answer such questions—to make, in short, any coherent distinction between collective dogma and collective hallucination—*An Adventure* will remain what Moberly and Jourdain intended it to be: a rebuke to scoffers, a challenge to the incredulous.