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Marshall C. Olds
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, molds2@unl.edu

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MARSHALL C. OLDS

Globalisation and 'la pièce de cent sous': Balzac's nation-state

Seen from an Olympian perspective, globalisation in today's world denotes the use of a standard model to establish relationships – economic, cultural, and moral – across peoples in the absence of national boundaries capable of restraining the formation of such ties. From the national, or local, perspective, it is the invasive imposition of foreign influence in the form of a single model. From either vantage point, change and adaptation are the order of the day. Take-overs of one culture by another, whether hostile or friendly, are not historical novelties; what seems to distinguish globalisation is its planetary scope and impetus to take over all cultures with a single model. There is evidence of such a dynamic in *La Comédie humaine*, where French political and social instability of the post-revolutionary period was but an example, albeit the most important one, of a world-wide condition of developing capitalism. This dynamic was not leading to a world without borders, however, but to a changed cultural identity within the old confines; Balzac could not have known it, of course, but he was describing the formation of the modern nation-state. Of the many factors contributing to Balzac's social dynamism, I have chosen to focus on an aspect of the economic interplay between local currencies and the global monetary value represented by gold, specifically the embodiment of this interplay in the type of character who is able to move seamlessly between the two. That character-type is a transitional figure in Balzac's universe, ushering in new social and economic values that are not only foreign but also global in significance. Shunning the traditional stereotype of the Jew as such a figure, referring as it does to a now lost cultural past, Balzac privileges the figure of the partially assimilated Jew and its variants to mark specifically a society in transition.

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Globalisation is such a pervasive concept in today's geo-political and cultural climate as to make it virtually inoperative as a term applicable to literary analysis of any but the most contemporary texts. It is of course allied to the indeterminacy of shifting and unstable identities, whether personal or national and, in its theoretical applications, is allied for good or ill with what is perceived by some as the collapse of the modern nation-state. In his introduction to the English translation of Jürgen Habermas's *The Postnational Constellation*, Max Pensky characterises globalisation this way:

> On the one hand, globalization evokes the image of proliferating interconnections and interrelationships, of better communication between the most far-flung regions of the world, challenging old prejudices and pointing toward a future where the cultural, geographical, and political sources of social conflicts have become antiques. On the other hand, it calls forth panic-tinged images of global markets running out of control, of an unguided and uncontrollable acceleration of modernization processes, devastating the political infrastructures of nation-states and leaving them increasingly unable to manage their economies and the social and ecological crisis they generate.[1]

With globalisation seen either as a positive development or as a negative one, the nation-state is construed as obsolete and as having been replaced by new structures. I do not wish to debate this contention, which is fraught with a number of difficulties, not the least of which is the influence on our conception of the 'nation-state' brought about much earlier in the twentieth century by the transition of dominant Western societies from colonial to post-colonial powers. Implied in the premise that the nation-state is giving way to globalisation, however, is the contention that globalisation is a recent outgrowth of modernisation, and so born of the age of the nation-state. There is evidence to the contrary, that globalisation in its nineteenth-century form was anterior to the formation of most nation-states as that term is now generally understood and that it contributed, at least in Balzac's view, to the formation of what would become those nation-states.[2]

1 Jürgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation, Political Essays*, trans. by Max Pensky (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), p.vii.

2 Habermas points to the origins of the modern nation-state in Germany in 1846 (*The Postnational Constellation*, pp.1–25).

Now, to use the term 'globalisation' in relation to Balzac may seem anomalous given that neither it nor its French equivalent, *la mondialisation*, existed in Balzac's day. The English noun is of very recent coinage, not even appearing in the 1971 *Oxford English Dictionary*. As for the French, according to the *Robert*, *la mondialisation* comes out of the immediate post-war period, its first recorded uses dating from the 1950s, well before acquiring either its negative anti-American overtones and the much more recent, and affirmative, European ones. Yet there is all the same a rough equivalent in Balzac, notional if not specifically lexical. It does have a linguistic identity, however, sometimes showing up in the form of lists, exhausting if not exhaustive, gesturing broadly to the horizon and beyond, and giving the sense of being well on the way toward new and much broader possibilities. A case in point is that of Nucingen, as Balzac traces the arc of his rise to immense wealth projecting even future action: 'Le papier de la maison Nucingen et son nom deviennent européens. Cet illustre baron s'est élevé sur l'abîme où d'autres auraient sombré. [L]e papier se fera en Asie, au Mexique, en Australie, chez les Sauvages'.[3] This is indeed a nineteenth-century vision of something very much like globalisation, especially with respect to its extent and supposed influence. One might argue that an important difference lies in the fact that Balzac's sense of the phenomenon is that it should emanate from the will of an individual and not be the result of the accrued influence of multinational companies. However, that is just the point: not only were there not yet any multinational companies with which to contend (although this is the vision of one in incipient form), there were no nations. What differentiates Balzac's world from our own (at least that part of our own as stated above that can be associated for heuristic purposes with postmodernism, allowing us to call it here *post-national*) is that the world of 1819, and even that of 1830, was *pre-national*. The list here, which is progressive, is instructive. Europe and Asia should be seen here as huge conglomerates of peoples with varying degrees of political autonomy and stability (Balzac, Mme de

3 Honoré de Balzac, *La Maison Nucingen*, in *La Comédie humaine*, 12 vols., ed. by P.-G. Castex and others (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1976–1977), VI, p.338. This edition is hereafter referred to as *CH*.

Staël and others used *nation*, *peuple* and *race* fairly interchangeably). The Republic of Mexico had just been declared in 1824. Australia was far from the 1901 Commonwealth though, in 1830, while still serving as a penal colony for Britain, was being explored for future development. We cannot even speculate as to which 'savages' Balzac has in mind here, but the sense is clearly that they represent an embryonic phase of political and economic development, even less advanced than that of Australia yet obviously alive. France does not merit mention in this list; it is at once too small to contain the field of Nucingen's operations and too unstable to be counted as a firm and separate entity within Europe. We know Balzac's sense of the turbulent social dynamism of post-revolutionary France. In his eyes, France clearly had a future though it may not have been fully apparent what form that future would take.[4] He could not have known that France, along with Mexico and Australia, was not yet a modern nation-state, yet there is a definite sense that that particularly Balzacian type of dynamic instability was not limited to France alone, a condition that she shared with much of the rest of the globe. France was more typical than exceptional in this regard though may be seen as the most illustrative case leading the way toward the future. It is instructive to note that if globalisation seems to mark the decline of the nation state in our world, it was associated in Balzac's mind with the formation of a new kind of state. For want of a better term, I will use globalisation in this pre-national sense.

'La pièce de cent sous' is of course what makes that globe go round, and we may recall the pæan to it delivered by Crevel in *La Cousine Bette*:

> Vous vous abusez, cher ange, si vous croyez que c'est le roi Louis-Philippe qui règne, et il ne s'abuse pas là-dessus. Il sait comme nous tous, qu'au-dessus de la Charte, il y a la sainte, la vénérée, la solide, l'aimable, la gracieuse, la belle, la noble, la jeune, la toute puissante pièce de cent sous! (*CH*, VII, 325)

4 It is revealing to compare the social vigour of *La Comédie humaine* with the dire social pessimism of a work like Mme de Duras's *Ourika*, which though very short is long on its sense of the Revolution and its aftermath as a dead end, and even with the moderate political pessimism of Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le noir*.

While it is indeed the coin of the realm, the *pièce de cent sous* is but a metonym for the power behind the throne. Well before France's adoption of that standard in 1879, globalisation's real currency was gold, which only for the purposes of local consumption was exchanged for *sous*.[5] Now, there is nothing new about the gold metaphor, and Balzac was far from having invented it. He did exploit it frequently, however, expressing value in terms of gold, not only financial value, but alchemical, social, and moral value as well. This leads to striking images like that in *Le Médecin de campagne* where Genestas compares Judith to the common people around her as 'un napoléon tout neuf dans un tas de vieux sous' (*CH*, IX, 579). The image is not only that of rare beauty in contrast with the mundane, the bright with the dull; it is also the foreign in contrast with the local (Genestas had been in love with French women before but with none like Judith) and also, significantly, the new France with the old (while the passage is set in Poland during the Russian retreat, the metaphor is in terms of French monetary values both old and new; Judith will eventually come to Paris). Judith is Jewish, and the coin in question is no ordinary one, but the gold piece struck with the effigy of that not-quite-French internationalist Napoléon Bonaparte. The lackluster *vieux sous* are coins most certainly minted before the Revolution and made from nickel; they are anything but *nickel* in today's familiar sense and bespeak local conditions that are as modest as they are traditional.[6]

5 One may recall Charles Grandet's return to France from America: 'Il possédait dix-neuf mille francs en trois tonneaux de poudre d'or bien cerclés, desquels il comptait tirer sept ou huit pour cent en les monnayant à Paris.' (CH, III, 1182). It is indicative of what might be called Balzac's 'symbolism of value' that this novel about the 'ancien tonnellier' contains two instances of barrels present in the narrative, both for holding gold. The other of course is the small cask in which he transports his gold to Angers. Charles has multiple claims to be his heir.

6 A carryover from the Ancien Régime and presumably still in circulation, the *sou* was worth 1/20th of the franc which the Convention established in 1795 as France's new monetary unit. Any newer *pièce de cent sous*, then, was the silver five franc piece.

One may of course comment further on the fact that Balzac should compare a Jewess with a gold piece. Both Frances Schlamowitz Grodinsky and Ketty Kupfer point to Balzac's use of gold to characterise the rare beauty of Jewish women, especially the Jewish courtesan.[7] These characters in Balzac are often of fully Jewish ancestry, the trope therefore serving to evoke clichés of both oriental exoticism as well as the mercantile aspect of prostitution. Far better known to readers of *La Comédie humaine*, Balzac's male Jews are of course also allied to gold through the standard topos of commerce, money lending and banking. Again like their female counterparts, they are foreign born and associated collectively with the foreign, but differ in what are, for the purposes of this argument, two crucial and interrelated aspects. Firstly, they are more developed as narrative characters and so are much more a part of the social fabric. Secondly and most importantly, they are not fully Jewish but rather are partly assimilated. While assimilation was attainable by various means, Balzac was not interested in any of those means primarily, be they of religion, citizenship, or race. As I hope to demonstrate, from his earliest maturity, Balzac makes use of this figure of partial assimilation as a potent indicator of a society in transition.[8] The assimilating Jew and related figures are both a sign of the change of which they are a part and agents of that change.

Implicit in Max Pensky's characterisation of modern globalisation, quoted above, is the inevitable by-product whereby nations lose not only internal fiscal control but just as threateningly witness the disappearance of their cultural and national identity in the face of dominant forces coming from the outside. Post-revolutionary France saw an early equivalent of this phenomenon. There was of course the

7 See Frances Schlamowitz Grodinsky, *The Golden Scapegoat: Portrait of the Jew in the Novels of Balzac* (Troy, NY: Whitson Publishing Co., 1989), pp.76–82; and Ketty Kupfer, *Les Juifs de Balzac*, (Paris: NM7 Éditions, 2001), pp.158–211.

8 I refer the reader to Kupfer's excellent pages on 'assimilation littéraire' in Balzac, where integration into the dominant society is suggested through metaphor – e.g. Gobseck characterised as 'le jésuite de l'or' (p.75). Yet, it should be kept in mind that Gobseck is *already* partly assimilated, as only his mother was Jewish.

attempt to export the revolution to neighboring countries and then, later, to extend the Empire. More pertinent to our topic, however, were the completely voluntary efforts of foreign or otherwise marginal populations seeking citizenship in France. This is the side of globalisation seen as assimilation, and the status of the Jewish populations in France had in fact been closely tied to it since the Revolution of 1789 when perhaps the dominant social issue before the *Assemblée nationale* became the debate over who could and could not qualify for citizenship.[9] Entry into the new society of post-Revolution-ary France was of paramount concern to many populations who had a marginal or an otherwise drastically reduced civic status. Being outsiders to that condition, all those seeking citizenship were in a very real sense alien or foreign, a fact seen in the telling conflation between groups who were at once foreign or domestically marginal. Consider the example of two such groups, former slaves and women. This first became a prominent subject for debate in 1789–1794 before the *Assemblée nationale* because of the combined philosophical, ethical, social and economic dimensions attendant on the abolition of slavery and the slave trade (Hunt, pp.101–18). From as early as 1790, in written tracts and in speeches before the *Assemblée* women seeking citizenship and their supporters began to make themselves heard. Considering themselves either somehow less visible in the social confusion of the times or less able to argue their case effectively if it were presented directly, leaders such as Etta Palm d'Aelders and Olympe de Gouges tied the language of women's rights to that of slaves' emancipation, a comparison that was surely as strategic as it was heart-felt (Hunt, pp.122–9).

In their bid for social recognition in the aftermath of the Revolution, Jews of France tied themselves rhetorically to the example of the Protestants whose case was the first to be raised among those of the social and religious minorities (Hunt, p.20). Like the Protestants, Jews had been in France for centuries, settling both in Avignon and, especially, in Bordeaux as a result of their expulsion

9 See *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History*, ed. and trans. by Lynn Hunt (Boston and New York: Bedford-St. Martin's, 1996). Hereafter referred to as Hunt.

from Spain in 1492.[10] By the time of the Revolution and during the period leading up to Balzac's first major novels, a Jewish population was growing in eastern France, especially in Alsace–Lorraine. These included the so-called German Jews who came to France, and were continuing to come, from Germany and northern European countries like Holland. The movement toward assimilation was strong from the beginning of the post-Revolutionary period, beginning with the question of citizenship. Abbé Grégoire had argued as early as 1788 on behalf of relaxing the sanctions against Jews in France in order to encourage their assimilation, through conversion to Christianity and through intermarriage. After the Revolution he also fought for their citizenship.[11] The 1790 petition from French Jews themselves pleads for the rights of citizenship, following the Protestant model. While full political rights would be granted in 1791,[12] the question of full social assimilation would continue.[13] It has been argued that the Napoleonic *Consistoire* of 1808 restoring the pre-Revolutionary right of Jews to

10 Alphonse Cerfberr de Médelsheim, 'Le Juif,' in *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes. Encyclopédie morale du XIXe siècle,* 9 vols., ed. by L. Curmer (Paris: L. Curmer, 1842), VIII, 169–92. This valuable essay provides a balanced history of the Jews in France, a listing of Jewish names and professions in France, and discusses assimilation from a progressive point of view. The article did not pass without criticism from within the Jewish community, however. Professor Maurice Samuels of the University of Pennsylvania informs me that the influential author Ben-Lévi, writing for the *Archives Israélites*, attacked Médelsheim's positions as too progressive. It should be noted that Ben-Lévi was himself also a proponent of assimilation.

11 Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall, 'Eliminating Race, Eliminating Difference: Blacks, Jews, and the Abbé Grégoire,' in *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France*, ed. by Tyler Stovall and Sue Peabody (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), p.28–41.

12 Pétition des juifs établis en France, adressée à l'Assemblée Nationale, le 28 janvier 1790, sur l'ajournement du 24 décembre 1789 (Hunt, pp.93–7). Hunt attributes this document to the Jews of Paris, Alsace, and Lorraine (p.93), though the petition appears to speak for all Jews in France.

13 Citizenship was one issue, social invisibility was another. Throughout the first half of the century, the obstacle was not religious and had not yet become racial in the modern sense. It seemed to have more to do with social customs. Those who maintained traditional modes of behaviour and dress were considered hopelessly backward in a country that saw itself as thoroughly modern.

adjudicate social and religious issues amongst themselves according to religious law, was also intended to promote over time – through social progress, conversion to Christianity, and intermarriage – a fuller absorption of the Jewish population.[14] As we move into the period of Balzac's activity, the 1824 novel *Dina, ou la fiancée juive*, by the popular and prolific writer Marie Aycard, gives us at least a glimpse of the situation during the increasingly reactionary restored monarchy. It is the tale of two lovers from archly conservative families – his catholic and royalist, hers rabbinical – who are finally married by a sympathetic priest (the rabbi refusing to entertain such a union), but who are compelled to emigrate to Germany where they feel their union will be more acceptable than in France.[15] Into the 1840s, opinions remained divided with respect to the desirability of eradicating the Jewish presence in France: in his afore-cited article of 1842, Alphonse Cerfberr de Médelsheim, himself assimilated to the point of referring to himself explicitly as among the *goyim*, argues passionately for a dignity that would come from the preservation of religious observance within a population otherwise socially transformed and modernised. 'Nous respectons trop l'antique foi de nos pères pour ne pas désirer de voir Israël renaître à la fois véritable, et se relever devant Dieu et les hommes et à ses propres yeux' (p.192).

Reflecting, then, the France of the *Restauration* and the *Monarchie de Juillet*, Balzac's Jewish characters may be seen as well down this road of social and racial assimilation. Balzac makes this absolutely clear with regard to the two who most prominently interact with society in *La Comédie humaine*: Nucingen is 'le fils de quelque juif converti par ambition' (*CH*, VI, 338) and Gobseck's parentage is

14 Michael Graetz, *The Jews in 19th Century France: From the French Revolution to the AIU* (Stanford University Press, 1996), pp.4–5.

15 Marie Aycard. *Dina, ou la fiancée juive* (Paris: Sanson, 1824). I have not been able to verify Aycard's claim, in her preface, that she was publishing a true account that had come to her by a member of Dina's family who had translated the account into French for the original Hebrew. Whether that claim is true or itself part of the fiction, the novel remains a plea for increased tolerance from both the Catholic and Jewish communities. Similarly, though set in a fifteenth-century Switzerland, Fromental Halévy's 1835 opera, 'La Juive', takes up the topos of intermarriage within these mutually defiant communities.

Jewish on his mother's side and Dutch (and so probably Protestant) on his father's (*CH*, II, 966). It remains for us to see how, in Balzac, society in turn might change, or assimilate, in response to their presence.

As my principal example from *La Comédie humaine*, I would like to turn to *Eugénie Grandet*. This novel is of fundamental importance not only because it analyses, from a provincial perspective, the social movement in France from 1789 through 1830. In the provinces–Paris opposition dramatised by the double relationship between Eugénie and her father and with her cousin Charles, Balzac's 1833 novel also pits the values of historical France against those of the new. Moreover, in the tension between local and outside interests, this opposition creates a sense of the local referring both to Saumur and to France, and of an outside that is both Paris and influences extending far beyond the French capital. I shall argue that, as outsiders, both Félix Grandet and his nephew are themselves, in a special sense clearly designated by Balzac, to be compared with partially assimilated Jews.

Nicole Mozet has pointed out that the archeological exploration of the provinces is a phenomenon of post-revolutionary France, in part an outgrowth of the preceding century's infatuation with travel literature.[16] In the opening paragraphs of the novel, the discovery of the history of France in Saumur's façades by the Parisian visitor with a taste for antiquities, frames the story to come. To paraphrase Mozet paraphrasing Flaubert who was probably thinking of Balzac, 'Saumur vaut bien Paris.' Or, to quote the late Guillaume Grandet's Parisian creditors, 'Grandet de Saumur paiera!' The Paris–provinces tension is of course trumped: Grandet from Saumur never does pay up or, rather, when Eugénie finally erases the debt, it is for other reasons, as financial and social matters momentarily shrink in importance before moral ones, as Paris shrinks in importance before the provinces. The victory is short-lived: Eugénie's quixotic gesture is unable to prevent her and the values she espouses from slipping into powerlessness, as she moves toward marriage with the marquis de Froidfond and so is

16 Nicole Mozet. *Balzac au pluriel* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990), pp.105–9.

unable to escape the dynamism of social reconfiguration occurring through the alliance of immense new wealth with old family prestige.

The tension is not only between Saumur and Paris, but between France and the world outside. Balzac dramatises two business deals that put Grandet in a league with the likes of Gobseck and Nucingen: his pair of preemptive strikes, the first against his fellow vintners through the sale of his wine to the Dutch and Belgians, and then the equally surprising sale of his gold to the 'spéculateurs arrivés à Angers' to finance the marine outfitting in Nantes. It is worth noting that, according to Médelsheim (op. cit.), the business of naval armature was traditionally handled by Jews, an association that would have been readily accessible to Balzac's readers. Grandet is as at home in the greater economy as he is in the local one, at ease amid the dizzying array of currencies circulating at the time: *francs*, *louis*, *livres*, *écus*, *sous*, including of course local exchange rates, such as that applied to his purchase of Charles's gold buttons: 'Le mot *en livres* signifie sur le littoral de la Loire que les écus de six livres doivent être acceptés pour six francs sans déduction' (p.164). Gold is definitely the standard amid this variety.

Grandet's possible significance in the greater scheme of things was evidently of some concern to Balzac, as his narrator muses hypothetically on what may have been a lost calling of diplomatic service to France:

> Si le maire de Saumur eût porté son ambition plus haut, si d'heureuses circonstances, en le faisant arriver vers les sphères supérieures de la société, l'eussent envoyé dans les congrès où se traitaient les affaires des nations, et qu'il s'y fût servi du génie dont l'avait doté son intérêt personnel, nul doute qu'il n'eût été glorieusement utile à la France. Néanmoins, peut-être aussi serait-il également probable que, sorti de Saumur, le bonhomme n'aurait fait qu'une pauvre figure. Peut-être en est-il des esprits comme de certains animaux, qui n'engendrent plus transplantés hors des climats où ils naissent (p.123).

Idle speculation, we might say: Grandet could no more redirect his focus than could have Voltaire's *éperviers*, it being vain to argue against the power of nature that is as essentialist ('Grandet as miser') as it is geographically specific.

And yet, as Balzac's contradictions are known to be as revealing as his certitudes, we should not be surprised by those two celebrated naturalist similes in this novel that argue against seeing in Grandet a purely local species: 'Financièrement parlant, M. Grandet tenait du tigre et du boa' (*CH*, III, 1033). The predatory nature of the one and the digestive system of the other are apt comparisons, but it must be owned that, even in a pre-Proustian world, these two figures seem a bit of a stretch in a novel set in the Loire valley. No dietetically local colour is to be found here; rather, there is clearly something about the Angevine miser that seems to be an import from elsewhere.[17]

Balzac hints early on at the split in Grandet's character between the local and the global. It comes as mention is made of the pride that the townsfolk take in the wealth of their native son: 'Quelque Parisien parlait-il des Rothschild ou de M. Laffitte, les gens de Saumur demandaient s'ils étaient aussi riches que M. Grandet' (*CH*, III, 1034). Beyond the Saumur–Paris rivalry is the reference to two of the principal modes of wealth in Balzac's post-revolutionary France. One example is local and the other global. Jacques Laffitte was a carpenter's son who made good by virtue of the opportunities afforded by the Revolution. His story is a more exalted version of Grandet's own, and of Goriot's, but similar in its broad outline. The Rothschilds in the plural refer, of course, to the five brothers of the Jewish banking family from Frankfurt who, between 1798 and 1820 opened their phenomenally successful establishments throughout Europe and were acquiring, like Nucingen, interests around the globe.[18] If, at the mention of these famous names, the Saumurois can only look at one

17 It is true that when he first arrives in Saumur, Charles is compared to a giraffe, but one that is safely observable behind bars at the *Jardin des Plantes* (*CH, III*, 1056). M. Grandet is a foreign species circulating in its natural environment: 'dans le pays [...] chacun, après l'avoir étudié comme un naturaliste étudie les effets de l'instinct chez les animaux, avait pu reconnaître la profonde et muette sagesse de ses plus légers mouvements (*CH*, III, 1034).

18 Of these two famous names, that of Rothchild would prove the most enduring. While the first readers of the novel in 1833 might not have recalled that Jacob Rothschild had opened the Paris bank in 1817 – just two years before the events of the novel – they certainly would have been aware that Laffitte had lost his fortune just two years earlier, in 1831.

another, 'hochant la tête d'un air d'incrédulité' (CH, III, 1034), for the reader the gesture has been made; Grandet is compared to both.

The local side of the equation, the similarity with Laffitte, needs no comment; it is the very stuff of *La Comédie humaine*. On the other side of the comparison, Grandet–Laffitte, it should be noted that Grandet's foreign traits are not only part of his nature (the tiger and the boa) but also the result of learned behavior. I am of course referring to his 'second-language acquisition,' the stammer he uses to such good effect. Much is made by the narrator of this purported tic which, we are told, was in reality a trick that Grandet had learned early in his career from the only business adversary who ever got the better of him, a man referred to variously within the space of a single paragraph as: 'un Israélite, ce malin juif, le damné juif' (*CH*, III, 1110–11). Balzac is not *anti-israélite*. The undeleted expletives express Grandet's point of view and are more correctly seen as expressions of a grudging admiration. As important as the *discours indirect*, I think, is Balzac's aim here to pit the foreign against the local. The stammer learned from the Jew is meant to be *foreign* speech: 'Personne, dans l'Anjou, n'entendait mieux et ne pouvait prononcer plus nettement le français angevin que le rusé vigneron'(*CH*, III, 1110). Not simply a reference to local speech patterns, the unaccented purity of French as spoken in the Loire valley has the same historical and cultural resonance of the allusions in the novel to the Renaissance, to the salamander of François I, and to the associated values incarnated by Eugénie. Quite aside from its comic value and the polite bow to Harpagon's sentence-twisting as he prepared his own (*rarissime*) dinner party, Grandet's stammer has the same cultural meaning as Balzac's treatment in other novels of Nucingen's heavily accented French:[19] the language is understandable but understandable primarily as foreign.

Grandet, then, draws together both Rothschild and Laffitte, sharing with them what they have in common (new wealth) and joining in his person that which separates them (place of origin). In this, he is not only the modern divinity incarnate 'l'Argent,' (Folio 49) as the narrator calls him in a moment of rapt admiration; he is the iconic first

19 Notably in *Le Père Goriot* and *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*.

generation of the new man in the new France. Icon will move to social in-tegration in Grandet's worthy successor and unwitting pupil, Charles, who takes what had been for his uncle 'le commerce des hommes' (*CH*, III, 1110) to the literal plane of the slave trade. Charles's venture is global in all senses of the term; 'Il vendit des Chinois, des nègres, des nids d'hirondelles, des enfants, des artistes; il fit l'usure en grand. L'habitude de frauder les droits de douane le rendit moins scrupuleux sur les droits de l'homme.' His private affairs had the same profile: 'les négresses, les mûlatresses, les blanches, les Javanaises, les almées, ses orgies de toutes les couleurs et les aventures qu'il eut en divers pays effacèrent complètement le souvenir de sa cousine, de Saumur, de la maison, du banc, du baiser pris dans le couloir' (*CH*, III, 1181). His acquired name during this period, the Germanicised Carl and the vaguely Hebraicised Sepherd, give him less of a new identity than an expanded one.[20] By his marriage, Charles will be much more integrated in the social landscape than his uncle. His existence is not without symbolic content, however. Balzac writes of Charles, 'partout infatigable, audacieux, avide, en homme qui [...] se dépêche d'en finir avec l'infamie pour rester honnête homme pendant le restant de ses jours. *Avec ce système*, sa fortune fut rapide et brillante' (My emphasis). Then, he's off to Saint-Thomas to 'acheter à vil prix les marchandises volées par les pirates, et les [porter] sur les places où elles manquaient.' I don't wish to dispute Balzac's reputation as a realist; it may indeed have been possible in the 1820s to make a rapid fortune in the slave trade and black market. Let us not overlook the highly-charged symbolism of these activities, however. Charles sells men, children and artists, then buys stolen goods, 'à vil prix,' from *pirates* no less. Balzac would have us see this

20 Balzac originally had Charles's pseudonym as the British 'Chippart', equally foreign but unrelated to the theme that I am exposing. As further support, I refer the reader to P.-G. Castex's observations that Charles and Gobseck share both the same itinerary and the same scepticism concerning the universality of moral values. Castex also points to the revealing fact that Gobseck's moral relativism was written into the novel bearing his name – first written in 1830 – *after* the 1833 composition of *Eugénie Grandet*. See Honoré de Balzac, *Eugénie Grandet*, ed. by P.-G. Castex (Paris: Éditions Garnier Frères, 1965), p.232, notes 1 and 3.

economic activity as organised by a cold intelligence. But Charles's barrels of gold come not from his own ruthless *système* (there is nothing at all systematic in what he does), but rather from a moral system of the author's invention, perceptible elsewhere in *La Comédie humaine*. True, Charles is especially odious, but the source of his wealth is similar to that of many others whose fortunes derive from traditional, *value-laden* commodities. Children and artists fall into the same *patrimoine* as church properties, flour, wine, and (my favourite example) poplars cynically nourished for profit in the near-sacred waters of the Loire.[21] It is noteworthy how much the hyperbolic exploitation of *traditional* (for our purposes *local*) sectors of the economy figures in Balzac's creation of new wealth, in contrast, say, with Indiana's husband Delmare who is a factory owner and so owes his new wealth to new means to wealth. There is a further consequence to the Balzacian phenomenon of new wealth created by the exploitation of tradition: it cuts off the way back. In Sand's 1832 novel, Indiana and Ralph can return to an original, egalitarian primitivism by shunning the new (or relatively new) economic sectors of industrialism and colonial capitalism (which included slavery). In Balzac's scheme (as expressed in his novel that concludes historically at the same moment as Sand's), no matter how much the traditional monarchy may have meant to the novelist, there was no way to return to the *status quo ante*. The past was radically transformed having been brought to the service of the new.

Charles Grandet is not the only character of his generation to bear this heritage, though his case is the most explicit. At least two other significant examples can be found of characters who will be used throughout the *Comédie humaine* as representatives of the new society. They are Derville and Rastignac. As a law student, Derville becomes 'le disciple de Gobseck' in no less a sense than the moral

21 It is true that capitalism will evolve in *La Comédie humaine*: Nucingen will deal eventually in fiduciary papers not in commodities or usury, like Grandet and Gobseck. Let us not forget, however, that Nucingen started his fortune with the massive sale *to the new government* of champagne acquired from Guillaume Grandet (*CH*, VI 338). See also: Armine Kotin Mortimer, 'La Maison Nucingen, ou le récit financier', *Romanic Review*, 69 (1978), pp.60–71.

one, learning the subtleties of human relationships and so of contractual agreements. Gobseck is of the same generation as Félix Grandet and is this latter's social template, being literally a partly assimilated Jew as he has a Jewish mother and a Dutch (probably Protestant) father. In *Gobseck*, a novel which projects socially and historically beyond the alliances that are the foundation of *Eugénie Grandet* and *Le Père Goriot*, Balzac provides the disintegration of the petit-bourgeois–aristocratic union of the Restaud household. Gobseck is the provisional beneficiary of this economic and moral collapse and, in turn, Derville becomes the ultimate beneficiary of the values derived from that incident which synthesised all of Gobseck's experience. Rastignac's case is at once simpler and more convoluted. His apprenticeship, as we know, is much more varied than Derville's, but he will witness similar collapses of past and provisional models of social and moral value. The final part of this apprenticeship interests us here: as we learn in *La Maison Nucingen*, Rastignac will owe his fortune to the illustrious baron who in the end resembles more a father-in-law than a rival for Delphine's affections (*CH*, VI, 337). In both Derville's and Rastignac's cases, the 'assimilated lineage' is clear, both for them as characters and as iconic figures of the future of France.

Thus propelled by forces that were in some measure alien to it, France had but one way to go, and that was toward a future as yet indistinct in all of its detail but one marked by irreversible change. The face of this change was seen in the social and political question of assimilation. Other populations who could be viewed as foreign appear in *La Comédie humaine* in this respect, as do the Bretons whose equivocal status with respect to citizenship subtends *Les Chouans*.[22] In the 1790s of that novel, citizenship was the goal; it should be noted, however, that its status was in part mythical, loftily proclaimed if not fully realised by the ideals of the Revolution. The contemporary debate over the assimilation of foreign and marginal

22 See the illuminating article by Marie-Pierre Le Hir, 'Balzac's Bretons: Racism and National Identity in *Les Chouans*,' in *Peripheries of Nineteenth-Century French Studies: Views from the Edge*, ed. by Timothy Raser (Wilmington: University of Delaware Press, 2002), pp.197–216.

populations was founded on the ideal of a normative society. It is certainly among Balzac's greatest insights that such a society did not yet exist. In the unstable but developing France of his day, where the author saw parallels in Mexico and Australia, the figure of the partially assimilated Jew was an especially potent icon. There was none better to represent this society in transition that was in a very real sense adapting to external influences of a global character. Figured by characters such as those discussed in this essay, as well as responding to them and inheriting from them, society was itself assimilating to the new norms that they provided. It might thus be taken as an emendation offered by Balzac to our own debate on these issues: that the nation-state in formation owed much to globalisation.