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INSCRIPTIVE MASCULINITY IN BALZAC'S *COMÉDIE HUMAINE*

by

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A DISSERTATION

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INSCRIPTIVE MASCULINITY IN BALZAC'S COMÉDIE HUMAINE

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University of Nebraska, 2009.

Adviser: Marshall C. Olds

This reading of *La Comédie humaine* traces the narrative paradigm of the young hero within Balzac's literary universe. A dynamic literary signifier in nineteenth-century literature, the young hero epitomizes the problematic existence encountered by the individual in post-revolutionary France. At the same time, he serves as a mouth-piece for an entire youthful generation burdened by historical memory. Left to assert his position in a society devoid of legitimate authority, the young hero seeks avenues for historical self-creation. And, at every turn, he is reminded of the illegitimacy of his own position. The historical dead-end experienced by the young hero serves therefore as a springboard upon which Balzac launches his own aesthetic enterprise. In the author's repeated denial of the possibility for restoration, underscoring the division between past and present in the nineteenth-century historical consciousness, Balzac wishes to simulate its reconciliation through a writing of continuity. In exploring the fatal legacy of Napoleon's self-generative imperative, Balzac reveals a lopsided vision of the young hero. Dictated by a politics of gender or the ideological softening of the masculine portrait portrayed in art and in literature, Balzac establishes a critical framework for an aesthetic reading of his disempowered or feminized young hero. His assertion of the textual model's corrective – to posit an absolute – is revealed in the poetic enterprise of

re-Creation; that is, the “creative pact,” or a poetical contract (a *poésie du mal*) designed to rewrite origins, and reinstate masculine authority. In pushing the dialectic for creation to its extreme, Balzac attaches a performative value to the young hero, scripting him thus as a literary signifier ordained to rival natural creation. However, the discourse of youth and the hero, emphasizing an important development in the Balzacian novel, reveals a young hero that is finally impotent. While Balzac does not give up on the potential for self-realization, the locus for recreation in post-revolutionary society is posited as exterior to France and, by extension, exterior to the French novel.

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List of Abbreviations

The following list of abbreviations for *La Comédie humaine* are taken from the Pléiade edition, (under the direction of Pierre-Georges Castex [Paris: Gallimard, 1976-1981, 12 vols.]). For all references to *La Comédie humaine*, the name of the work (in its abbreviated form), the volume (in Roman numerals), and the page or pages, will be indicated unless otherwise specified.

<i>Ad.</i>	Adieu.
<i>AEF</i>	Autre étude de femme.
<i>AR</i>	L'Auberge rouge.
<i>AS</i>	Albert Savarus.
<i>Ath.</i>	La messe de l'athée.
<i>B</i>	Béatrix.
<i>Be.</i>	La Cousine Bette.
<i>Bo.</i>	La Bourse.
<i>Bou.</i>	Les Petits Bourgeois.
<i>BS</i>	Le Bal de Sceaux.
<i>CA</i>	Le Cabinet des Antiques.
<i>Cath.</i>	Sur Catherine de Médicis.
<i>CB</i>	César Birotteau.
<i>Ch.</i>	Les Chouans.
<i>Ch-O</i>	Le Chef d'oeuvre inconnu.
<i>CM</i>	Le Contrat de mariage.
<i>Col.</i>	Le Colonel Chabert.
<i>Cor.</i>	Maître Cornélius.
<i>CP</i>	Le Cousin Pons.
<i>CSS</i>	Les Comédiens sans le savoir.
<i>CT</i>	Le Curé de Tours.
<i>CV</i>	Le Curé de village.
<i>DA</i>	Le Député d'Arcis.
<i>Dés.</i>	Une passion dans le désert.
<i>DF</i>	Une double famille.
<i>DL</i>	La Duchesse de Langeais.
<i>Do.</i>	Massimilla Doni.
<i>Dr.</i>	Un Drame au bord de la mer.
<i>DV</i>	Un début dans la vie.
<i>E</i>	Les Employés.
<i>EF</i>	Etude de femme.
<i>EG</i>	Eugénie Grandet.
<i>EHC</i>	L'Envers de l'histoire contemporaine.
<i>ELV</i>	L'Elixir de longue vie.
<i>EM</i>	L'Enfant maudit.
<i>Ep.T</i>	Un épisode sous la Terreur.
<i>F</i>	Ferragus.

<i>FA</i>	La Femme abandonnée.
<i>FC</i>	Facino Cane.
<i>FE</i>	Une fille d'Eve.
<i>Fir.</i>	Madame Firmiani.
<i>FM</i>	La Fausse Maîtresse.
<i>F30</i>	La Femme de trente ans.
<i>FYO</i>	La Fille aux yeux d'or.
<i>Gam.</i>	Gambara.
<i>Gau.</i>	Gaudissart II.
<i>Gb.</i>	Gobseck.
<i>Gr.</i>	La Grenadière.
<i>H</i>	Honorine.
<i>HA</i>	Un homme d'affaires.
<i>IG</i>	L'Illustre Gaudissart.
<i>In.</i>	L'Interdiction.
<i>IP</i>	Illusions perdues.
<i>JCF</i>	Jésus-Christ en Flandre.
<i>LL</i>	Louis Lambert.
<i>Lys</i>	Le Lys dans la vallée.
<i>Ma.</i>	Les Marana.
<i>MC</i>	Le Médecin de campagne.
<i>MCP</i>	La Maison du chat-qui-pelote.
<i>MD</i>	La Muse du département.
<i>Mes.</i>	Le Message.
<i>MJM</i>	Les Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées.
<i>MM</i>	Modeste Mignon.
<i>MN</i>	La Maison Nucingen.
<i>MR</i>	Melmoth reconcilié.
<i>P</i>	Pierrette.
<i>Pay.</i>	Les Paysans.
<i>PCh.</i>	La Peau de chagrin.
<i>PG</i>	Le Père Goriot.
<i>PGr.</i>	Pierre Grassou.
<i>PM</i>	La Paix du ménage.
<i>Pr.B</i>	Un prince de la Bohème.
<i>Pro.</i>	Les Proscrits.
<i>R</i>	La Rabouilleuse.
<i>RA</i>	La Recherche de l'absolu.
<i>Réq.</i>	Le Réquisitionnaire.
<i>S</i>	Sarrasine.
<i>Sér.</i>	Séraphîta.
<i>SetM</i>	Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes.
<i>SPC</i>	Les Secrets de la Princesse de Cadignan.
<i>TA</i>	Une Ténébreuse affaire.
<i>UM</i>	Ursule Mirouët.
<i>Ve.</i>	El Verdugo.

<i>Ven.</i>	La Vendetta.
<i>VF</i>	La Vieille Fille.
<i>ZM</i>	Z. Marcas.

Journal abbreviations

<i>AB</i>	Année Balzacienne
<i>CAI</i>	Cahiers de l'Association Internationale des Etudes Françaises
<i>CRIN</i>	Cahiers de Recherche des Instituts Néerlandais de Langue et de Littératures Françaises
<i>KFLQ</i>	Kentucky Foreign Language Quarterly
<i>MLN</i>	Modern Language Notes
<i>NCFS</i>	Nineteenth-century French Studies
<i>PMLA</i>	Publications of the Modern Language Association of America
<i>RHLF</i>	Revue de L'Histoire Littéraire de la France
<i>RSH</i>	Revue des Sciences Humaines

Introduction

Honoré de Balzac writes in his 1839 novel *Modeste Mignon*, "[. . .] il ne peut y avoir rien de grand dans un siècle à qui Napoléon sert de préface," thus underscoring the problematic path awaiting men of ambition who seek greatness in the nineteenth century.¹ With the exception of Balzac himself, who vowed to become the *Napoléon des lettres*, audaciously writing on a statuette of the Emperor kept at his writing table, "Ce qu'il a entrepris par l'épée, je l'accomplirai par la plume," the young men of *La Comédie humaine* dwell in the shadow of history, where they are left to reckon with its most heroic examples.² Why this is the case is multifold. As we devise a critical framework for a discussion of Balzac's young hero, and the importance of his role within the universe of *La Comédie humaine*, we consider first how the author's literary heritage, along with the politico-historical landscape of the period, gave rise to a previously undisclosed social category of individuals referred to as France's youth.

As is evidenced by the numerous studies on the Romantic hero, the Arriviste, the *Parvenu*, the Dandy, the Poet, the Artist, the Anti-hero, and the blurring of these distinctions afforded by these studies, the figure of youth in the nineteenth century is a critical point of interest.³ It has been masterfully shown by Goethe in Germany, Lord Byron in England, Walter Scott in Scotland, and by French authors such as Rousseau, Chateaubriand, Constant, Musset, Hugo, Stendhal, and Balzac, to name only a few, that the young hero is a dynamic literary signifier. Limiting our discussion to French

¹ *MMI*, 619.

² Thibaudet, 199.

³ See for instance Allan Pasco's study *Sick Heros: French Society and Literature in the Romantic Age, 1750-1850* (1997), Lloyd Bishop's study *The Romantic Hero and His Heirs in French Literature* (1984), Marjorie Taylor's study *The Arriviste* (1976), and Maurice Beebe's study *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts* (1964). Our study will focus principally upon the young hero.

literature in the early part of the nineteenth century, the young hero is, first and foremost, a figure of the Romantic movement. For our purposes here, the essential tenants of Romanticism might be summarized as: a break from classical tradition, an effort to valorize the individual, the founding of a new poetic ideology.

In the wake of the Revolution of 1789, the execution of Louis XVI on January 21, 1793, leading to the height of the Terror in that same year, the Romantic movement calls for a rediscovery of national history and its traditions.⁴ First, this retrospective vision provided a framework for reconciling the past (and its horrors) with the present. At the same time, it posited a path to transcendence: encapsulating the drama of individual existence, the Christian model simultaneously expresses man's duality – his earthly limitations and his dreams of infinity. Second, in its conscious break from classical tradition, the Romantic movement also sought a way to promote a shared experience via the arts. In *Racine et Shakespeare* (1823), Stendhal defines the role of Romanticism in terms of its capacity to “présenter aux peuples les œuvres littéraires qui dans l'état actuel de leurs habitudes et de leurs croyances sont susceptibles de leur donner le plus de plaisir.”⁵ Similarly, in his *Préface de Cromwell* (1827), Hugo calls for the "liberté de l'art" (everything is a worthy subject of art), insisting that the birth of modern genius is kindled by the infinite mixture of genres.⁶ The voice of the Romantic hero is commonly privileged as being that of a visionary, "un poète-prophète," or guide in this aesthetic quest. He is a *raconteur* in the personal novel. He is depicted as being a genius without

⁴ The French Romantic movement began at the end of the eighteenth century with Rousseau, who coined the term “romantique” in his writings (Bishop, 55).

⁵ Stendhal 1, 71.

⁶ Hugo insists on a mixture of genres; for instance, the ugly and the beautiful are both worthy subjects of art. In his *drame Hernani* (1829), he sought to break with the three tragic unities of theater: time, place, and action.

limit, a "rêveur solitaire," a being of desire reduced to inaction. Chateaubriand translates the expanse of personal lyricism in his character René as the "vague des passions," or, what is more generally referred to as the "mal du siècle"⁷ that afflicts the Romantic generation of which René is representative.⁸

As we approach the literature of 1830, the young hero undergoes an evolution. His "mal du siècle," while still bound to the cult of the individual, becomes a social phenomenon profoundly rooted in his historical, social, and political actualities. The early portion of the nineteenth century, a period of intense political upheaval, equally marked by revolution and successive regime changes, shows Napoleon taking the stage as First Consul in 1802 and crowning himself Emperor in Notre Dame Cathedral two years later.⁹ In 1815, after his triumphant return from the island of Elba, his monumental defeat at Waterloo, and subsequent exile on the island of Sainte-Hélène, the Bourbon monarchy is restored by the brothers of the martyr-king. In July of 1830, Charles X abdicates the throne and is succeeded by his cousin, Louis-Philippe, the self-insistent "Roi des Français."¹⁰ The reign of France's last king ends in 1848.

The literature of the period mirrors this tumultuous political climate; it is with great skill that novelists, Stendhal and Balzac in particular, animate a league of fictional young men to capture the essence of the times in all its splendid *and* sordid detail.

⁷ In his study on the Romantic Hero, Lloyd Bishop describes the different stages of romantic melancholy: le mal de René, *le vague des passions*, and *le mal du siècle* which is a "historization of the *vague des passions* that involves one's self-assessment as well as an assessment of History" (Bishop, 19). The hero, being adrift with history, is unable to follow in the path of his immediate predecessors (ibid., 19).

⁸ According to Armand Hoog in his article "Who Invented the Mal du Siècle?," Chateaubriand can be given credit for defining the characteristics for the *mal du siècle*: fatigue, uncertainty, disgust with life, perpetual analysis that inhibits spontaneity of feeling (Hoog, 43-44).

⁹ The chronology is as follows: the Consulate (1799-1804), the First Empire (1804-6 April 1814), the first Restoration (April 1814-March 1815), les Cent-Jours 20 March 1815-22 June 1815, the (second) Bourbon Restoration (1815-1830), and the July monarchy (1830-1848).

¹⁰ Throughout his reign, Louis-Philippe will struggle to assert his own legitimacy. Belonging to the cadet branch of the Bourbon family, his sovereignty is without a past, and is subject to "la Charte" (Furet, 328).

Reaching adolescence around the time of Napoleon's fall, this young hero belongs to a generation burdened with historical memory, looming over him like a ghost from the past.¹¹ One of the figures most representative of this generation is Julien Sorel.

Our first introduction to Julien in Stendhal's 1830 novel *Le Rouge et le noir* is atop the roof of his father's house where he reads his favorite book, the *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*.¹² Undoubtedly, this image is suggestive of Julien's impending quest to climb the social ranks, to rise above his plebian birth (and the brutish authority of his father), and to fantasize a lineage that would afford him privilege and glory.¹³ Pale in appearance, svelte, with dark hair and eyes, Julien is the picture of Napoleon in his youth (See figure 1): "C'était un petit jeune homme de dix-huit à dix-neuf ans, faible en apparence, avec des traits irréguliers, mais délicats, et un nez aquilin. De grands yeux noirs qui, dans les moments tranquilles annonçaient de la réflexion et du feu [. . .]."¹⁴ Upon his first meeting with Mme de Rênal, the youth's delicate features are mistaken for those of "une jeune fille déguisée."¹⁵ Julien's physical constitution, though slight, does not hide the ardent desire that boils beneath its surface, for to follow Napoleon's example and conquer society by force is not just limited to men of genius, but is dictated by history itself¹⁶: "Depuis bien des années, Julien ne passait peut-être pas une heure de sa

¹¹ In her study, *Trauma and Its Representations: The Social Life of Mimesis in Post-Revolutionary France* (2001), Deborah Jenson discusses this phenomenon in terms of "traumatic mimesis" where the inheritors of Revolutionary history experience trauma from reliving their own era as a secondary text (Jenson, 15). As she explains: "Romantic texts are read as post-Revolutionary, they often reveal the mimetic wound of the social under the poorly sutured scars of the rupture between reality and representation" (ibid., 17-18).

¹² The *Mémorial* was published in 1823 by the Count de Las Casas, companion to Napoleon on Sainte-Hélène.

¹³ Scorned by his biological father, Julien dreams that he is really the son of an aristocrat: a Napoleonic officer who passed through Verrières during one of Napoleon's military campaigns. Toward the end of the narrative, Julien is adopted, in a sense, by the Marquis de la Mole, who gives Julien the lineage he had dreamt of: de la Verney.

¹⁴ Stendhal 2, 26.

¹⁵ ibid., 36.

¹⁶ Petiteau, 77.

vie sans se dire que Bonaparte, lieutenant obscur et sans fortune, s'était fait le maître du monde avec son épée. Cette idée le consolait de ses malheurs qu'il croyait grands, et redoublait sa joie quand il en avait"¹⁷ The script for playing Napoleon forces the young peasant to act in the role of a consummate hypocrite. And the narrator hints early on as to Julien's ultimate failure in this regard: "C'était la destinée de Napoléon, serait-ce un jour [celle de Julien]?"¹⁸ From this brief sketch of Julien's appearance and temperament, Stendhal shows how youth in the novel of 1830 is organized along historical lines. In addition, Julien's portrait allows us to trace his literary heritage, identifying several characteristics common to the young hero of 1830:¹⁹ his poetic sensibility manifesting itself outwardly in his effeminate appearance; his personal identification with the Napoleonic myth coupled with the desire to historicize his own existence.²⁰ However, Julien's execution at the end of the novel reveals to what degree the young hero is left to relive the past, without finding a way to make his *own* history.

The symbolic evacuation of the father from the social realm, an effect produced by Louis XVI's beheading in 1793, and reinforced by the Romantic "enterprise de désymbolisation," contributed largely to the position held by the young hero in French literature prior to 1830.²¹ In seeking to eradicate the "sacred monster," the French

¹⁷ Stendhal 2, 32; 34.

¹⁸ Stendhal 2, 70.

¹⁹ Although we will distinguish between two separate generations of young heroes in Balzac's work, those who circulate in Restoration France versus those who live under the July monarchy, *all* of Balzac's young heroes are united under the title of "the young man of 1830" in that Balzac composed the bulk of his *Comédie* under the July monarchy regime.

²⁰ Julien fantasizes reprimand from an "ultra" should the portrait of his idol be discovered where it is hidden under his mattress. He also refers to his social maneuvers in military terms: acting in the spirit of the Emperor, he qualifies his thoughts and actions as being those of "Napoleon tout pur" (Stendhal 2, 73).

²¹ In the introduction to his book *L'Œdipe romantique: le jeune homme, le désir et l'histoire en 1830* (2002), Pierre Laforgue's discussion of Hugo's chapter "Ceci tuera cela" taken from his 1831 novel *Notre-Dame de Paris* beautifully explicates the crumbling symbolic system attached to images of the family, the father, and the King, as part of a Romantic campaign attacking the regime in place between 1827-1830 in order to liberate meaning and bring about a new mythology.

revolutionaries purged their society of its paternal icon *par excellence*.²² As Balzac perspicaciously remarks to this effect: "En coupant la tête à Louis XVI, la Révolution a coupé la tête à tous les pères de famille. Il n'y a plus de famille aujourd'hui, il n'y a plus que des individus."²³ Considering then the profound social and historical impact of the father's absence, the nineteenth-century novel has been dually hailed as a "gravestone text," and a "monument to paternity"²⁴ in that the literary transcription of the social order (or disorder) acts as a continual reminder of the traditional father's effacement.²⁵ Repeatedly alerting his reader to this fact, Balzac not only shows how the father's absence is supplanted by a social environment founded upon rivalry and self-interest, but reveals the tolls exacted, in excess, by this new value system. For instance, he portrays the son's attempts to assume the privileges of the father without respecting either the laws of social hierarchy or those associated with inheritance. Through a process of selective filiation(s), the son seeks out his own father figure, often multiple (rarely biological), as a means to an end – the most rapid course to personal success. Furthermore, the *fils sans père*, as is a more fitting title, will continually refer to his illegitimate state in a highly determined social or historical context (the Empire or the Restoration), while seeking to constitute himself as a social subject through his inscription in filial fantasies; this is to say, the historical invention of self.²⁶ Stendhal's Julien Sorel and Balzac's Eugène de Rastignac make their way from the provinces to seek glory in Paris. Both young men

²² Hunt, 11.

²³ *MJM* I, 243.

²⁴ Beizer 1, 181.

²⁵ Hunt, 23.

²⁶ Laforgue, 13-14.

make use of a series of adopted fathers, and paternity is considered in conjunction with their *parvenu* status and quest for social assimilation.²⁷

Thus far, I have tried to situate the prominence of the young hero as a figure who symbolically bridges the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in literature. First, the young hero serves as a point of intersection, as a literary signifier reflective of social and political upheaval. Second, on an individual level, he dramatizes the problem of inheritance, that is, the son's inability to assimilate himself in history. Turning now to Balzac and his immense *œuvre*, I would like to consider these points within a generous selection from Balzac's work.²⁸ The first chapter will consider "youth" both as a social and narrative category. In discussing the character "type" of the young hero, I will elucidate how certain consistencies in the youthful portrait (physical attributes, as well as phases in his social development), create a composite image of the young hero, providing thus a way to read his seminal role in *La Comédie humaine*.

In chapter two, I will consider Napoleon's formidable presence in Balzac's world as a way to qualify the drama inherent to the young hero's social formation, with an emphasis given to its historical features: his revolutionary heritage (including the role of individual rights), set against the changing social landscape leading up to 1830. Here Napoleon, this young man of energy, and of mythic proportion, populates Balzac's imaginary world at every level. Therefore, a thorough examination of this vast subject will not only allow me to explore more fully the role of history in the Balzacian novel, but to identify, in more explicit terms, the manner in which the young hero is subject to

²⁷ Rastignac must choose between the "Christ de la paternité," Goriot, or the way of revolt defined by the criminal-genius Vautrin (*PG* III, 231).

²⁸ Our study does not consider Balzac's *Œuvres de jeunesse*, his theater, his unfinished works, or his correspondence with Mme Hanska. Rather, it is limited to *La Comédie humaine*.

this history. Furthermore, an exploration of the relationship between text and image – the portrait of Balzac’s youth set against the mythic portrait of Napoleon – reveals an important aspect of Balzac’s critique of contemporary society. In exposing the tear in the social fabric left by the father’s demise (that was temporarily breached by Napoleon Bonaparte), the author places into question the historical viability of the procreative masculine authority, and thus the inheritance of the *filis sans père*.

Considering the unstable historical organization of masculinity projected by the figure of youth in chapter two, chapter three probes the question of recovery. That is, if the procreative masculine force cannot be reclaimed through historical means (the emulation of the Napoleonic model), can it be revived through aesthetic ones? I will show how the politics of gender, relating specifically to the ideological softening of the masculine portrait portrayed visually in the paintings of David and Girodet, for example, highlight the discourse of youth and heroism at work in France in the 1830s and, more importantly, validate Balzac’s contributions to this debate – that is, Balzac’s aesthetic reading of the feminized young hero and its proviso to restore male authority.

Comprising the final step in what could be called an “aesthetic crusade for reinstatement,” chapter four traces the development of the “creative pact,” or the *poetic* enterprise of re-Creation. Over the course of our study, we will document how the theme of destruction understood as part and parcel with the Romantic campaign of “désymbolisation,” inspires creative production in the form of new symbols, new myths, and new histories. Our consideration of these antithetical yet interdependent themes, dealt with in the confines of the creative pact, will serve to illustrate the performative value Balzac attaches to his young hero. In pushing the dialectic for creation to its

extreme, Balzac will attempt to script the masculine as a literary signifier ordained to rival natural creation, if not to surpass its authority. However, as this reading of *La Comédie humaine* will show, the discourse of youth and the hero, emphasizing an important development in the Balzacian novel, reveal the young hero as finally impotent. While Balzac does not give up on the potential for self-realization, the locus for recreation in post-revolutionary society is posited as exterior to France and, by extension, exterior to the French novel.

CHAPTER I

Youth in Balzac's Nineteenth Century

– Je trouve que les poètes et les romanciers n'ont pas assez connu ce sujet d'observation, cette source de poésie qu'offre ce moment rapide et unique dans la vie d'un homme.¹ -George Sand, *Histoire de ma vie* (1854-55).

When making generalizations about the fabric of Balzac's literary world, critics often describe it in terms of social dynamism, desire, and *volonté*; one ought also to add to this list the figure of the youthful hero who embodies these traits. As Pierre Barbéris aptly observes: "[Le jeune homme] est un accélérateur dans une société elle-même livrée à l'accélération."²⁹ This universe of *La Comédie humaine* churns with a sort of *sur-vie* or life in abundance and provides a fertile ground for the rise of different social types³⁰ left to toss about in the vast "océan" that is Parisian society.³¹ In his famous *Avant-propos* of 1842, Balzac states: "Il n'y a qu'un animal."³² He goes on further to explain how the social animal, modified by his various *milieux*, gives rise to a myriad of social species. But, unlike his zoological counterparts, the social animal adheres neither to established hierarchies nor to a fixed number of biological mutations, "what emerges is the concrete individual figure with its own physique and its own history, sprung from the immanence

¹ Quoted in O'Brien, p. 3.

²⁹ Barbéris 3, 138.

³⁰ According to Maurice Samuels's study *The Spectacular Past*, many Walter Scott-inspired historical novels, like Balzac's, depict the young man from the provinces who makes his way to Paris. This prototypical figure was destined to appeal to an ideal national subject; this is to say, the Parisian reader (Samuels 2, 178). As Hava Sussman comments to this effect: "L'entrée dans la vie coïncide avec le passage de la province à Paris, ce qui signifie que les adolescents doivent non seulement s'intégrer à la société des adultes, mais aussi s'adapter à une organisation d'un type nouveau" (Sussman, 47).

³¹ As Balzac writes in the beginning of *Le Père Goriot*: "Mais Paris est un véritable océan. Jetez-y la sonde, vous n'en connaîtrez jamais la profondeur" (*PG* III, 59). The image of Balzac's "océan" as considered in the context of Leo Bersani's article "Realism and the Fear of Desire," becomes an expression of Balzac's concern to write against a society where "chaotically fierce human energies" threaten social disorder (Bersani, 60).

³² *A-P* I, 4.

of the historical, social, physical, situation."³³ It is this particular notion of social progress and its generative capacity that allow us to approach the emergent category of "youth" in the nineteenth century.

Youth: An Emergent Social and Literary Category

Before we can begin to center our discussion on Balzac's young hero type, we must first attempt to shape a more general definition of this often vague social category called "youth." During the Ancien Régime, youth became a subject of pre-industrial sociology³⁴ where research sought to examine the "agents" of youth's social transformation resulting from educational,³⁵ penal, and welfare institutions (as opposed to studying youth's response to changes imposed by these institutions).³⁶ According to John Gillis's study *Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations*, "youth" as a social category was once painted with very large brush strokes because it was intimately linked to economic, social, and legal status. For instance, the term "boy" ("garçon" in French, and "knabe" in German) designated a male child as young as seven or a man as old as 40, functioning in a servile position. With few clear distinctions drawn to distinguish between childhood and adulthood, the young male remained in a subordinate or dependent position (under the father's roof) or that of semi-independence

³³ Auerbach, 475.

³⁴ I use the term "sociology" here not as it was understood in the first part of the nineteenth century, but rather in twenty-first century terms in order to refer to the study of human society and its various populations.

³⁵ Maurice Crubellier's study *Enfance et la jeunesse* (1957) provides a discussion of the scholarly practice of forming the youth population, and its role in social progress. In an effort to familiarize myself with prominent sources on youth in the nineteenth century, I found that Gerald Soliday's *History of the Family and Kinship: A Select International Bibliography*, provides an interesting overview of the period in question. There is much regarding marriage, procreation, fertility, statistics on birth mortality, population evolution, and population growth in certain regions of France. There are sources concerning the dynamics of the rural family, legislation on illegitimate offspring, and divorce, but little on the youth population, including orphans and foundlings. This may support what Gillis calls the lack of social recognition for the youth population: one either assumes the status of child *or* that of adult.

³⁶ Gillis, 1.

(an apprenticeship) until he attained, through marriage or inheritance, the status of head of household and the full rights reserved to such a position.³⁷

When we then fast-forward to the period in which Balzac was writing, primarily in the 1830s and 1840s, we must take into consideration the changing structure of the "decapitated" Family that paved the way for the Cult of the Individual, thus creating a shift in the social existence of nineteenth century youth.³⁸ One of the ways in which this social shift can be appreciated is by the population influx into the capital between 1804-1851. It is estimated that during this period the number of Parisians doubled, through immigration from the provinces, and that most of the newcomers were young males.³⁹ By 1840, roughly 65 of every 100 Parisians were aged between 15-29 years.⁴⁰ Therefore, the elevated presence of youth in the capital, of which the majority are young men previously unrecognized as constituting a social category under the patriarchal social model of the Ancien Régime, invites further reflection on the subject of youth. At the same time, in assigning this group a name, society both recognizes a new stage in social development, but, more importantly, isolates the transition between childhood and adulthood under the title of adolescence.⁴¹

When discussing the role of the adolescent in literature, a distinction must be made between the adolescent subject and the birth of "adolescent literature," where the latter, often associated with the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud (namely *Le Bateau ivre*

³⁷ *ibid.*, 9.

³⁸ I borrow this term from Claudie Bernard who in her article, "Familles de chair, familles d'esprit, familles de papier" discusses Balzac's obsession with the Family in a post-revolutionary society (11).

³⁹ Nesci, 152.

⁴⁰ Gillis, 22.

⁴¹ It appears that the term "youth" is being substituted for another equally vague term, "adolescence." It is the recognition of an intermediary stage between childhood and adulthood that lends greater specificity to the term "youth." I will therefore use the two terms, youth and adolescent, as well as youth and adolescence, as synonyms in my discussion of Balzac's young hero.

[1871]), delineates the adolescent phase as an ideological space of revolt; it serves as a form of personal expression, rather than a mouthpiece for an adolescent reading public.⁴² Albert Thibaudet aptly defines adolescent literature as works that "tirent leur loi littéraire d'eux-mêmes, appliquent immédiatement à une vision puérile, refusent de considérer leur âge comme un passage [. . .]."⁴³ Another important characteristic of adolescent literature is the intrinsic moral value that the author places on "l'inquiétude juvénile."⁴⁴ While Balzac's treatment of adolescence can be understood in the space of social development preceding adulthood (but does not exclude the voice of experience represented by the narrator, as well as by singular personages like De Marsay or Vautrin), it merits critical attention in a discussion on adolescent literature because the author experiments with the youthful point of view, as it is informed by the young hero's social education.

In spite of this fact, many critics would dismiss Balzac's adolescent (*enfant, jeune homme, parvenu*, etc.) altogether. Jean-Paul Bruyas states in passing that Balzac's adolescents are "des adultes jeunes . . . non des adolescents" who possess the same thoughts, desires, and reflexes of men 10 to 30 years their senior.⁴⁵ Others would insist that Balzac's adolescent diverges little from an established "type."⁴⁶ Justin O'Brien, in his study on *The Novel of Adolescence in France*, accords Balzac one sentence (where he cites another critic) to Louis Lambert, "the adolescent who begins to think."⁴⁷ According

⁴² O'Brien, 69.

⁴³ Quoted in O'Brien, *ibid.*, 69.

⁴⁴ Sussman, 84.

⁴⁵ Bruyas, 12.

⁴⁶ Marjorie Taylor in her study *The Arriviste* shows rather ineffectively how Balzac strips his hero of subjective influences in order to create a definite *arriviste* type. He combines his type with other social animals, such as the villain, in order to produce a caricature of the original *arriviste*, called the "rogue-arriviste" (Taylor, 2).

⁴⁷ O'Brien, 7. According to this study, the adolescent has no place in the novel before 1890 because it was at the turn of the century that any real research was dedicated to the subject within the domains of the social

to O'Brien, the example of Louis Lambert offers two possible outcomes for the thinking adolescent: premature aging and paralysis of one's ability to think. In Hava Sussman's brief but intelligent study *Balzac et les "débutants dans la vie": Etude sur l'adolescence dans La Comédie humaine* (1978) (the only study of its kind that pairs Balzac and his treatment of adolescence),⁴⁸ she, also commenting upon *Louis Lambert* (1832), states that Lambert is the best example of Balzacian adolescence. She defines Balzac's adolescent as a being of desire who oscillates between the reality of an adult existence and that of the desired ideal. Therefore, Lambert's example shows us that adolescence for Balzac "est une période, non d'apprentissage de la vie mais d'assimilation d'idées sur la vie, idées qui au contact des faits se révèlent erronées et insuffisantes."⁴⁹

Other critics have chosen to read Balzac's adolescent in an autobiographical light: Balzac *is* this young hero.⁵⁰ This approach is most skillfully demonstrated in Pierre Citron's study *Dans Balzac* (1986). This compelling work of biographical criticism portrays Balzac's young heroes as phantasmagoric projections of his own unhappy youth.⁵¹ Following the idea taken from Pierre Abraham's study *Créatures chez Balzac*

and medical sciences (9). However other critics, such as Pierre Barbéris and Pierre Laforgue, would assert that the figure of youth truly emerges as a creation of 1830 (Laforgue, 11).

⁴⁸ In Chapter 5 of her study, Sussman discusses the extended stays of Balzac's heroes in boarding schools, but notes that Balzac rarely comments upon the negative repercussions of formal education on the adolescent. She further states that this question was part of Balzac's consciousness with respect to the adolescent subject, and that he, in works such as *Le Curé de village*, expressed a desire to treat this question from a scientific point of view, and, in a sense, rewrite Rousseau's *Emile ou l'éducation* (13; 68). Although, I am not interested in this particular facet of the question, Sussman's general bibliography on adolescence has been particularly useful in my research.

⁴⁹ Sussman, 85.

⁵⁰ A good deal is known about Balzac's life and work by his critics. This is due in large part to his immense correspondence, (the most important of which being that which he kept with Mme Hanska, his future wife, and with his sister Laure Surville whose biography of her brother, *Balzac, sa vie et ses œuvres*, was published in 1858).

⁵¹ Some of the best known examples detailed in this study include parallels drawn between Balzac's experience at the Collège de Vendôme and the example of Louis Lambert. Or, Rastignac's arrival in the capital and how it mirrors that of young Balzac: they share the birth year of 1799; arrive in Paris at age 21; they both occupy the post of law clerk. The protégé of the surgeon Desplein, Horace Bianchon, not only shares his creator's initials, but seems to occupy a peripheral narrative space similar to the narrator.

(1929) where Abraham refers to Balzac's characters as "les fantômes dans le miroir," or what Balzac himself referred to as his "sosies" (Lucien de Rubempré being his "contresosie"⁵²), Citron shows how Balzac's life and *œuvre* cross-pollinated one another, thus providing a preliminary understanding of Balzac's brand of "realism" (the mixture of real and fictional elements) at work, a point to which I will return in the following chapter.

The Narrative Construction of Youth in *La Comédie humaine*

Turning now to *La Comédie humaine*, it is clear that the teeming population of young men in Paris during the 1830s and 1840s, does not go unnoticed by Balzac. In the nearly 90 works that comprise his *Comédie*, Balzac specifically dedicates his *Scènes de la vie privée* to youth: "[elles] représentent l'enfance, l'adolescence et leurs fautes."⁵³

However, he does not faithfully adhere to this proclamation. Throughout at least half of these titles, Balzac threads his story of youth; often he recounts the point at which the young hero makes his initial contact with the social domain – Parisian society. While Balzac passes over the period of childhood almost entirely,⁵⁴ he permits himself this

Bianchon is always a secondary figure, never the main character of any story, and, along with his medical profession that allows him to stand as a witness to the human condition, he is a lively story teller. Other examples afford a more profound glimpse at the author's psychology, particularly because they predate Freudian thought. In *El Verdugo*, a son executes his entire family. In *Le Lys dans la vallée*, considered to be Balzac's most personal novel, the young Félix de Vandenesse, an object of his mother's scorn since birth, falls passionately in love with Mme de Mortsauf, who was modeled after Balzac's first mistress, Mme de Berny. Following in this same theme, Citron discusses the section entitled "Le Doigt de Dieu," from *La Femme de 30 ans*, where Hélène d'Aiglemont, "l'enfant du devoir," pushes her younger brother, Charles, "l'enfant de l'amour," over a bridge where he drowns in the river below. In the manuscript, it was an elder brother who commits this act of violence. Balzac was always openly jealous of the affection lavished on his younger brother Henri, the offspring of Mme Balzac's adulterous affair with Jean de Margonne (Citron 1, 119-121).

⁵² *ibid.*, 216.

⁵³ *A-P I*, 14.

⁵⁴ In *Une Double famille* (1830), Balzac provides a brief sketch of an infant toddler. In *Pierrette*, the author recounts the experience of a child abused by her cousins. However, it is in *La Grenadière* that Balzac provides the most interesting example of childhood. In this short story, a boy called only Louis must develop his extraordinary intellect, and find a station in life that will provide for him and his younger brother. Commenting upon this phenomenon, Sussman states that the rapid mental assumption of adulthood is a phenomenon exclusive to an underprivileged class. And therefore, adolescence is a stage associated with a class of privilege (Sussman, 15). Several of Balzac's youth, like Henri de Marsay, appear

lengthy pause on the adolescent, citing in *Un Drame au bord de la mer* (1834) that the age of immense desires "pour tous les hommes se trouve entre vingt-deux et vingt-huit ans."⁵⁵ He dedicates fundamental works like *Illusions perdues* (1835-1843) to the adolescent subject. In other works, such as *Eugénie Grandet* (1833), the story of the young hero, while poignant, is crowded among tales of *mal mariées*, petty bourgeois, Napoleons of finance, criminals, spinsters, and old misers.⁵⁶ What remains to be explored here, and throughout the remaining chapters in our study, is how Balzac's narrative distills youth into a social category. Furthermore, what role or roles does the figure of youth play in his creative endeavors? Finally, we will ask to what extent Balzac's fiction comments upon the youth of his times, and, therefore, contributes to, or lays the foundation for, the adolescent as a source of poetic inspiration privileged in the latter portion of the century.

young but are prematurely old by their experience. This phenomenon is referred to as "puer senex" (Bishop, 19).

⁵⁵ *Dr. X*, 1159. The full quote reads: "Cet âge, qui pour tous les hommes se trouve entre vingt-deux et vingt-huit ans, est celui des grandes pensées, l'âge des conceptions premières, parce qu'il est l'âge des immenses désirs, l'âge où l'on ne doute de rien : qui dit doute, dit impuissance. Après cet âge rapide comme une saison, vient celui de l'exécution." This passage indicates that while adolescence is associated with the age of immense desires, it is not necessarily a corollary to age, but does seem to fall between the ages 18-21 years. Taken from Pierre Mendousse's *L'âme de l'adolescent*: "Les phénomènes adolescents apparaissent parfois dans toute leur intensité dans un âge avancé [. . .] où une certaine personne connaît] une série d'émotions entièrement nouvelles qui lui étaient inconnues dans son jeune âge" (cited in Sussman, p. 14). Balzac provides an example of this phenomenon in the character the Baron de Nucingen. In *Splendeurs et misères*, Nucingen's passion for Esther Gobseck, La Torpille, causes him to experience a tardive adolescence: "Cette éclosion subite de l'enfance au cœur d'un Loup-Cervier, d'un vieillard, est un des phénomènes sociaux que la Physiologie peut le plus facilement expliquer. Comprimée sous le poids des affaires, étouffée par de continuel calculs, par les préoccupations perpétuelles de la chasse aux millions, l'adolescence et ses sublimes illusions reparaît, s'élance et fleurit, comme une cause, comme une graine oubliée dont les effets, dont les floraisons splendides obéissent au hasard, à un soleil qui jaillit, qui luit tardivement. Commis à douze ans dans la maison d'Aldrigger de Strasbourg, le baron n'avait jamais mis le pied dans le monde des sentiments" (*SetM VI*, 577).

⁵⁶ O'Brien labels this practice as one of preoccupation because it detracts from the theme of adolescence, and leads to a failure to reproduce the adolescent psychology in the adolescent novel of the nineteenth century (8). In the light of the literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this criticism may carry weight, but continues to be short-sighted when establishing a base-context for a discussion on the adolescent's prominent role in nineteenth-century literature.

The renewed interest in the hero is a hallmark of nineteenth-century literature. Reed Walter, in his study *Meditations on the Hero: A Study of the Romantic Hero in Nineteenth Century Fiction* (1974), defines the hero as "the single and energetic individual whose character contains his fate, who dominates as well as represents the society around him."⁵⁷ Balzac's youth is specifically influenced by the Romantic tradition and the figure of the Romantic hero.⁵⁸ While not altogether heroic, and often appearing to be quite mediocre, Balzac's young hero is a product of historical, political, and social upheaval.⁵⁹ He is also an heir to the heroic ideal whose most recent example is Napoleon. Balzac organizes his young heroes into two relatively distinct generations of young men whose social escapades generally take place during the periods of the Bourbon Restoration (1814-1830), and the July Monarchy (1830-1848). This tentative grouping allows me to introduce Balzacian youth in a systematized fashion.⁶⁰ From the works upon which I have elected to comment, there are 30 such characters who will serve, over the course of our study, to demonstrate to what degree Balzac was preoccupied by the youthful male subject. This list is not exhaustive, nor will each of

⁵⁷ Walter, 10.

⁵⁸ In his study on the Romantic hero, Lloyd Bishop defines the Romantic hero as "a composite of Prometheus, Satan, Faust, Don Juan, the Byronic Hero, and the Napoleonic legend (the self-made man seeking and obtaining power)" (Bishop, 19). Balzac himself seemed to embody many of these traits. One of his biographers, André Maurois, entitles his 1965 biography of the author, *Prométhée ou la vie de Balzac* (1965).

⁵⁹ Maurice Samuels, referring to Lukács study on the historical novel, states that the substitution of the mediocre hero for the historical figure was another one of Scott's contributions to the genre (Samuels 2, 168).

⁶⁰ Many studies on *La Comédie* create divisions or categories, into which Balzac's characters can be organized. See Pierre Barbéris' *Le Monde de Balzac*, and Félicien Marceau's lively study, *Balzac et son monde* where Balzac's 2000 plus characters are arranged in a directory of sorts and grouped according to their unique histories and attributes. Marceau's study is particularly useful because it offers synthesized portraits of Balzac's characters, and reunites them into one accessible source. In a conscious effort not to reproduce that kind of study here, I will not provide general histories of the young men as they appear in the world of *La Comédie humaine*, or create sub-groupings beyond the parameters of my generation classifications. I will instead introduce relevant characteristics and history pertaining to individual young heroes as it proves necessary to support the arguments being here presented.

these figures be treated in detail. Balzac's young heroes vary in example, as in their appeal.⁶¹

An overview of Balzac's young men-characters can be made according to a list of general categories and characteristics: social class and station, family relations and origins, age, physical appearance, dress. In his *première jeunesse*, the character of the young hero may exhibit a certain degree of emotional *élan*, enabling him to impulsively express kindness, sincerity, timidity, reverie, idealism. Whereas, once he becomes enmeshed in society, a physical space that awakens in him insatiable desires, he is required to make moral compromises in order to become one of its functional members.⁶² That is, the young hero ceases to occupy a peripheral, and thus problematic space in society once he has integrated himself into his adult existence (marriage and the establishment of his own family).⁶³ The path to his social *déniaisement*, otherwise known as adulthood, directly correlates to fulfilling his ambitions. However, he may require the guidance of others in this task, seeking the help of a mentor or protectress to guide him along the way. Or, he may rely on the fraternity of others, becoming a member of *la bande*,⁶⁴ or a secret society, in order to accomplish these same ends.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Upon reading Lucien de Rubempré's suicide near the conclusion of *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (1838-1847), Oscar Wilde commented that it was the saddest day of his life: "One of the greatest tragedies of my life is the death of Lucien de Rubempré. It is a grief from which I have never been able completely to rid myself. It haunts me in my moments of pleasure. I remember it when I laugh" (quoted in Robb, xvi).

⁶² This is one of the points that is often considered when comparing Balzac and Stendhal. Unlike Balzac's characters, Stendhal's young hero can enter into commerce with society, sometimes skillfully, but is able to retire from society having preserved his moral integrity (Lukács 3, 81).

⁶³ Laforgue, 11.

⁶⁴ According to Barbéris, Balzac was obsessed with the myth of *la bande*: a secret society as a way to remake society in a miniature form (Barbéris 3, 441). Balzac creates several such examples in his *Comédie: le Cénacle*, a group of literary purists who refuse to sell their talents to the world of journalism; the *Chevaliers de la désœuvrance*, a group of young hoodlums led by an ex-captain in the Imperial Guard, Maxence Gilet in rural Issoudun; *Les Treize*, a group of outlaws who live by their own laws and who have infiltrated every level of society; *la Société des Dix Mille*, an underworld group of convicts led by Vautrin. *Les Frères de la Consolation*, a group of Christians, led by Mme de la Chanterie, who seeks to secretly perform charitable acts in Parisian society. We will return to a discussion of *la bande* later in our study.

The first generation of young men in *La Comédie humaine* were born between the years 1790-1800, and are between the ages of 15-25 at the time of the Second Restoration in 1815 (See Table 1).⁶⁶ Half of these youth are aristocrats, while others are of common origin. Rubempré's father was a pharmacist named Chardon; Bridau's father was a Secretary in the Ministry of the Interior under Napoleon; Lambert's parents were tanners. Those of aristocratic descent often possess little to no fortune; their title does not correspond to privilege and this fact ignites in them a longing to "*parvenir*" in society by whatever means at their disposal. Valentin, for instance, is left nearly penniless after his father's death. In an effort to succeed by his own genius, he retreats to a mansard where he composes his *Traité sur la Volonté*. He settles instead for the dark power granted him by the wild ass's skin. Rastignac, a descendant from *la petite noblesse provinciale* of Angoulême, whose meager annual income amounts to 3,000 francs, makes his fortune by allying himself with his mistress's husband, the Baron de Nucingen.⁶⁷ Maxime de Trailles, who attests to being a descendant of a noble family dating back to François 1er, is a strikingly solitary figure with no known relative in the universe of the *La Comédie*

⁶⁵ In her study *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (1992), Lynn Hunt uses Freud's definition of the "family romance," the child's fantasy to replace his parents with those of a nobler status, to discuss the unconscious images of the familial order underlying revolutionary politics (Hunt 1, xiii-xiv). Her discussion of the royal family and specifically the person of King Louis XVI, can be summarized as the evacuation of the father that paves the way, in the nineteenth century, for the "band of brothers": men bound in solidarity due to the guilt of their common crime of regicide (ibid., 58). Although Hunt's point is not without merit, and political chaos does ensue in the father's absence, the band of brothers, as we will explore in the next chapter, was a revolutionary slogan that did not exceed the rhetorical realm (Courteix, 399).

⁶⁶ The lists consist of only French men, (except Albert Savarus who is the illegitimate son of a Belgian lord, and Wenceslas Steinbock, a Polish count exiled in France), and does not include foreigners like the Spaniard, Félipe Hénarez, Baron de Macumer who marries Louise de Chaulieu in *Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées* or the Marquis Miguel d'Ajuda-Pinto, "un riche seigneur portugais" who is Mme de Beauséant's lover in *Le Père Goriot*.

⁶⁷ Acting as a sort of straw man in one of Nucingen's three liquidations, the banker rewards Rastignac for 20 years of service; this is to say, assuming his conjugal duties with Delphine (*MN VI*, 388).

humaine.⁶⁸ Portrayed at middle-age in the unfinished work, *Le Député d'Arcis* (1839), he continues to seek a position in society and enlists Rastignac's support in this effort.⁶⁹

This first generation of Balzac's young men-characters is both diverse in their social origins, as well as in their physical appearances.⁷⁰ The socially ambitious ones among them have a flair for fine clothing, jewelry, wax-seared boots, new gloves, and often are compared to women: of fair complexion, slight of build, or dainty in their features. (Those who are ambitious *par l'esprit*, like D'Arthez, Savarus, and Marcas are less concerned by their outward physical appearance because their life's work dictates that they lead a rather cloistered existence). Balzac's blonds, like Rubempré, are often depicted as physical and moral weaklings. Darker-featured individuals, such as Louis Lambert, are of a more virile nature:⁷¹

Louis était un enfant maigre et fluet, haut de quatre pieds et demi; sa figure hâlée, ses mains brunies par le soleil paraissaient accuser une vigueur musculaire que néanmoins il n'avait pas à l'état normal [. . .] Sa tête était d'une grosseur remarquable. Ses cheveux, d'un beau noir et bouclés par masses, prêtaient une grâce indicible à son front.⁷²

Returning again to Balzac's definition of the social animal, one's physical exterior, including one's milieu, corresponds directly to one's thoughts or character. Balzac's

⁶⁸ *B II*, 911.

⁶⁹ *DA VIII*, 806.

⁷⁰ Balzac's vast work, composed over twenty years and spanning over 12,000 pages in the Pléaïde edition of 1976-1981 under the direction of Pierre-Georges Castex, (rendered from the *Furne corrigée*, the edition corrected by Balzac himself), is currently considered to be the definitive collection of *La Comédie humaine*. A collection of this magnitude does reveal a certain number of errors or narrative inconsistencies. Fernand Lotte, in his well known article on Balzac's recurring characters discusses the different appearances of characters, (a change in hair or eye color, age, important dates such as the year of De Marsay's death which occurs in 1833 or 1834), at each of their appearances in *La Comédie humaine*. More recently, Anthony Pugh, continuing in Lotte's footsteps, discusses these narrative discrepancies not as a mark of Balzac's bad faith, but as belonging part and parcel to Balzac's creative process.

⁷¹ As Fernand Lotte has noted, the change in hair color of a given character, (Paul de Manerville is blond in *Bal des Sceaux* and brunette in *Le Contrat de mariage*; Esther van Gobseck in *Splendeurs et misères* is first blond, and then described as having black hair), reflects a change in the author's attitude toward his character with respect to the role they will play in a given work (Lotte, 253).

⁷² *LL XI*, 605.

physical descriptions of his young men announce their various destinies. As he states in his *Avant-Propos*: "Ainsi l'œuvre à faire devait avoir une triple forme: les hommes, les femmes et les choses, c'est-à-dire les personnes et la représentation matérielle qu'ils donnent de leur pensée; enfin l'homme et la vie."⁷³ In the case of Lambert, his large head is significant of the force of his intellect, but is disproportionate to his body or his worldly existence. This is suggestive of Lambert's philosophical conflict between the flesh and the mind, a conflict to which he is particularly susceptible because adolescence is "un terrain favorable à l'éclosion du sentiment voire du 'sentimentalisme mystique.'"⁷⁴ Balzac, drawing upon Swedenborg's definition of the "ange,"⁷⁵ demonstrates how Louis's desire reveals to him his double existence, causing him to gravitate toward the world of the Idea.⁷⁶ This leads to insanity and premature death.⁷⁷

The young men belonging to the first generation, with small exceptions, circulate in a close-knit world where their interests often collide.⁷⁸ De Marsay, De Trailles and Montriveau are all members of *Les Treize*. Raoul Nathan attempts to seduce Félix de

⁷³ A-P I, 5.

⁷⁴ Sussman, 60.

⁷⁵ As Balzac writes in *Louis Lambert*: "Il y aurait en nous deux créatures distinctes [. . .] l'ange serait l'individu chez lequel l'être intérieur réussit à triompher l'être extérieur. Un homme veut-il obéir à sa vocation d'ange, dès que la pensée lui démontre sa double existence . . ." (LL XI, 617).

⁷⁶ The world of the Idea is envisioned by Lambert in the following manner: "Aussi, peut-être un jour le sens inverse de l'ET VERBUM CARO FACTUM EST, sera-t-il le résumé d'un nouvel évangile qui dira: ET LA CHAIR SE FERA le VERBE, ELLE DEVIENDRA LA PAROLE de DIEU" (LL XI, 689).

⁷⁷ Conflicted by the prospect of assuming a more worldly existence in marrying Pauline de Villenoix, that which would impede his ability to exercise his "second sight," Louis attempts to divorce himself completely from the flesh in a failed act of self-castration. Then, after suffering a series of cataleptic attacks, he dies in 1824 (LL XI, 677-79).

⁷⁸ In spite of their birth years, and due in large part to their commerce with Rastignac, both Valentin and Marcas merit their place among the list of first generation Balzacian youth. Valentin is an acquaintance of the Rastignac in *La Peau de Chagrin* (predating the Rastignac we've come to know in *Le Père Goriot*). Z. Marcas, a tardive work, places Marcas in a mansard much like one that a boarder in the Maison Vauquer would have occupied. In Marcas's case, he is a man of 35 living next to two young students, Charles Raboutin, a law student, and Juste, a medical student. One automatically thinks of the dynamic duo, Rastignac and Bianchon (although Bianchon was interned at the hospital and only dined at the Vauquer Boarding House). Therefore, Marcas more appropriately belongs in this first generation of heroes because he seems to resemble a Rastignac who, *faute de mieux*, remained in the *pension bourgeoise*.

Vandenesse's wife in *Une Fille d'Eve* (1833). In *Illusions perdues*, D'Arthez corrects Lucien's historical novel (written in the style of Walter Scott), *L'Archer de Charles IX*, to which he writes a preface.⁷⁹ However, among the significantly less populated second generation of young men, born between the years 1801-1815, there exists a tangible disconnect with their period and with each other. In *La Cousine Bette* (1846-1847), Victorin Hulot, whom Balzac dubs as the representative of the young man of 1830, is described as a sort of automaton: "Ces gens sont des cercueils ambulants qui contiennent un Français d'autrefois; le Français s'agite par moments [. . .] mais l'ambition le retient, et il consent à y étouffer. Ce cercueil est toujours vêtu de drap noir."⁸⁰ Hulot, like the youth of his generation, appears to be a rather passionless figure. His mediocrity lies in his inability to translate words into actions.⁸¹ Balzac further insists on this generation's social impotence in instances where the two generations enter into commerce with one another. In *Le Cabinet des antiques* (1837), De Marsay and Rastignac precipitate the social and financial demise of a *nouveau venu* from Alençon, Victurnien d'Esgrignon. They encourage him to buy all the accessories associated with modern luxury, and introduce him to the notorious Diane de Maufringeuse, a woman known for having already devoured several fortunes.⁸² In *Béatrix* (1838), Mme de Grandlieu enlists the help of Maxime de Trailles in order that he cure her son-in-law, Calyste Du Guénic, of

⁷⁹ *IP* V, 335.

⁸⁰ *Be.* VII, 97.

⁸¹ Hulot's inaction should be considered in the context of his dealings with Jacqueline Collin, alias Mme de Saint-Estève, who will replace "l'œuvre du hasard" in order that Hulot preserve his wife's fortune and dispense with Mme Marneffe, his father-in-law's second wife. Jacqueline Collin, acting on behalf of her nephew, Jacques Collin, alias Vautrin, alias Carlos Herrera, the Paris Chief of Police since 1843, translates ideas into actions. Apparently Collin has diverged little from his philosophy of 1819 where he proclaimed to Rastignac in the garden of the Maison Vauquer, "Je suis un grand poète. Mes poésies, je ne les écris pas: elles consistent en actions et en sentiments" (*PG* III, 141), however it is curious that it is his aunt, and *not* Collin himself, who commits words into actions.

⁸² *CA* IV, 1014-1015.

his illusions regarding his mistress Béatrice de Rochefide, a *rouée*, and return him to his wife and family. While the rest of this chapter will focus primarily on the first generation of young men, a discussion of Balzac's second generation will be critical to our discussion in the conclusion of this study.

(Table 1) First Generation (1790-1800): major players⁸³

Maxime de Trailles (n. 1791 or 1793)
 Armand de Montriveau (n. ?)⁸⁴
 Henri de Marsay (n. 1792)
 Daniel d'Arthez (n. 1795)
 Félix de Vandenesse (n. 1796)
 Philippe Bridau (n. 1796)
 Louis Lambert (n. 1797)
 Lucien de Rubempré (n. 1798)
 Eugène de Rastignac (n. 1799)
 Albert Savarus (n. 1799)
 Zéphirin Marcas (n. 1803)
 Raphaël de Valentin (n. 1804)

First Generation: minor players

Maxence Gilet (n. 1789 or 1790)
 Charles de Vandenesse (n. 1790)
 Luigi Porta (n.?)
 Athanase Granson (n. 1793)
 Ferdinand du Tillet (n. 1793)
 Paul de Manerville (n. 1794)
 Charles Grandet (n. 1797)
 Etienne Lousteau (n. 1799)

⁸³ The major players are those young heroes who recur frequently within Balzac's world, and/or there is a novel dedicated to their story (as opposed to the minor players who recur infrequently or not at all, and whose story is peripheral to the principal story of a particular novel or short story). Marceau refers to this group as "Les Lions," a term he borrows from Frédéric Soulié: "Le lion s'est appelé autrefois raffiné, muguet, homme à bonnes fortunes; plus tard muscadin, incroyable, merveilleux; dernièrement enfin dandy et *fashionable*" (39). Marceau adapts the definition of the "lion" to designate he who wishes to conquer the world, and, through his commerce with women, make an immense fortune: "Les lions de Balzac sont les frères cadets de ces colonels de trente ans qui, dernière Napoléon, ont dérangé toute l'Europe" (40). Balzac refers to his young men as "lions" as well. As Vautrin says to Rastignac: "Vous êtes un beau jeune homme, délicat, fier comme un lion et doux comme une jeune fille" (*PG* III, 185). Marcas physically resembles a lion: "L'animal de Marcas était le lion. Ses cheveux ressemblaient à une crinière, son nez était court, écrasé, large et fendu au bout comme celui d'un lion, il avait le front partagé comme celui d'un lion par un sillon puissant, divisé en deux lobes vigoureux" (*ZM* VIII, 834-35). Lucien's first sojourn in Paris graduates him to the title of "lion": "Lucien était passé à l'état de *Lion* ; on le disait si beau, si changé, si merveilleux, que les femmes de l'Angoulême noble avaient toutes une velléité de le revoir" (*IP* V, 675).

⁸⁴ The question mark indicates that the date of the young hero's birth is not divulged in the body of *La Comédie humaine*, but can only be approximated with respect to the description of the character, or the year in which his formative experience in society occurs. We know that Montriveau was a general in the Imperial army, but that he left France after Napoleon's abdication at Fontainebleau in 1815. After two years in Africa, he returns to Paris in 1818. One might assign him a birth year between 1790-1793.

Gaston de Nueil (n. 1799 or 1800)
 Melchior de Canalis (n. 1800)
 Raoul Nathan (n. ?)⁸⁵
 Jules Demarets (n. ?)

(Fig. 2) Second Generation (1801-1815): major players

Victurnien d'Esgrignon (n. 1800 or 1801)
 Godefroid (n. 1806)
 Charles-Edouard Rusticoli, comte de La Palférine (n. 1812)
 Calyste Du Guénic (n. 1814)

Second Generation,.: minor players

Wenceslas Steinbock (n. 1809)
 Charles Rabourdin (n. 1815)
 Victorin Hulot (n. ?)

To insist on a list of general characteristics as an adequate means for defining Balzac's young hero is only partial to the equation. In order to establish youth as a social category in *La Comédie humaine*, and bring the adolescent subject's significance to the forefront of our discussion, it is necessary to develop a language for talking about Balzacian youth in its respective generations. To accomplish this, we turn to the list of terms that Balzac employs when referring to his young hero specifically: *l'enfant*, *l'adolescent*, *le jeune homme*, *le poète*, *l'artiste*, *le héros*, *le parvenu/l'ambitieux*, and *le dandy*.⁸⁶ Although it would be unreasonable, if not impossible, to examine how each of these terms appears under Balzac's pen, it is essential that an adequate sampling be considered in order to demonstrate how the author manipulates these terms. While

⁸⁵ Little is known about Nathan's origins, but it is implied that he is of Jewish descent. This narrative practice of masking the full truth from the reader, although infrequent in Balzac, does occur in reference to discovering one's *parenté*. We see another instance of this in *La Rabouilleuse* (1842) when it is a question of Maxence Gilet's paternity. The narrator indicates having knowledge of the truth, but chooses not to disclose this information to his reader.

⁸⁶ It is thanks to the partnership between the Groupe International de Recherches Balzaciennes, the Maison de Balzac (musée de la Ville de Paris) and the ARTFL project of the University of Chicago, that one has on-line access to a critical edition (the Furne edition from 1842-1855) of *La Comédie humaine*. See <http://www.v1.paris.fr/musees/balzac/furne/presentation.htm>. It is because of this powerful research and reference tool that I can provide a few statistics that aid in establishing a global image of youth in Balzac's work, and is based on the occurrence of certain key words: *enfance* occurs 277 times, *enfant* 2,701 times, *jeune homme* 1,615 times, *jeunesse*, 578 times, *dandy*, 65 times, *poète*, 736 times, *artiste*, 530 times, *héros*, 127 times, *parvenu* 77 occurrences and *ambitieux*, 183. The term *adolescent* occurs six times, and *adolescence*, 22 times. By comparison, the term *adulte* occurs a mere eight times.

Balzac can often clump these expressions together, using them interchangeably, what is of primary interest here is how, in their isolation, they create a semantic *parcours* suggestive of his young hero's transition from adolescence to manhood.⁸⁷ It is in tracing this path to maturity that we may come to understand the boundaries that Balzac places on his young men in their respective generations.

Social Boundaries, Dandyism and the Example of Charles Grandet in *Eugénie Grandet*

The term “le dandy” provides an interesting point of departure in this discussion because of its ambiguous status in the social hierarchy.⁸⁸ Henri de Marsay is considered the dandy *par excellence*. Before his death, De Marsay is Prime Minister of France. Thus, he is commonly referred to as “le premier dandy,” “le fameux dandy,” and even “le terrible dandy.” Others, like Eugène de Rastignac and Lucien de Rubempré, can only aspire to such a position at the beginning of their social careers. In a society where money is shown to level social hierarchy, “[m]oney is a kind of universal shuttle that turns everything into something else; that erases the borders between entities.”⁸⁹ Hence, social status directly correlates to wealth and to its material manifestations. However, Balzac distinguishes between an accomplished dandy, like De Marsay, and an aspiring dandy who has yet to master the artifice of playing the elegant man around town: fine

⁸⁷ Taken from *Illusions perdues*: “[. . .] dans tous les *moi* que présentent *l'ambitieux*, *l'amoureux*, *l'heureux*, *le dandy*, *le parisien*, *le poète*, *le voluptueux* et *le privilégié*. Tout en [Lucien] s'était brisé dans cette chute icarienne” (*IP V*, 716, my emphasis). In his article “Monsieur de Balzac: Le dandyism de Balzac et son influence sur la création littéraire,” Charles Gould refers to the dandy as “*l'arriviste* par excellence, et en même temps un *artiste* qui cherchait la perfection en matière de goût d'expérience” (Gould, 389, my emphasis).

⁸⁸ Dandyism in France, an English export, was initially bound up in revolutionary politics. In its beginning phase, dandyism was a political statement of dressing in an aristocratic style in order to distinguish its members from the Third Estate. However, dandyism did exist under the Restoration period (Amossy and Rosen, 247). Dating from the second part of the nineteenth century, the dandy in France was considered “as an ethical system of romantic revolt.” Stanford Raney refers to dandyism as “the last great heroism in times of decadence.” (Raney, 449).

⁸⁹ Kelly 1, 116.

clothing, carriages (to keep from soiling his shoes in the Parisian mud), a chic bachelor pad, and the protection of an aristocratic woman. When the term dandy is employed in an ironic sense, Balzac narratively pokes fun at a *nouveau venu* in the capital: Lucien de Rubempré arrives at the opera dressed in a ridiculous green suit that he purchased from a tailor who claimed to be current on Parisian fashion trends.⁹⁰ In other instances, Balzac's use of irony in this regard underlines a dandy's fall from glory. In *Gobseck* (1830), the financial machinations concocted by Maxime de Trailles nearly land him in debtor's prison for his gambling debts. He saves himself from this fate by convincing his mistress, Anastasie de Restaud, to sell the Restaud family diamonds to the usurer Gobseck.

While one's social identity is determined by material possessions, the dandy underscores the tentativeness with which such identity is forged. As Christopher Prendergast comments in his study on mimesis: "The dandy is a point of maximal social ambiguity. Is elegance a sign of aristocracy or of the parvenu – a sign that isn't backed by collateral? The dandy is a sign without a grounded signified (real property)."⁹¹ Therefore, following this argument, Vautrin's financial acrobatic acts in *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (1838), where he seeks to give his *protégé*, Lucien, the airs of a dandy, produce "a false mimesis," (the illusion of a great fortune) in order to marry him into the Paris elite.⁹²

Although he belongs to the category of minor players listed among Balzac's first generation youth, the droll presentation of Charles Grandet in *Eugénie Grandet* captures succinctly the essence of what it means, materially speaking, to be an aspiring dandy.

⁹⁰ *IP* V, 272.

⁹¹ Prendergast 2, 93-94.

⁹² *ibid.*, 102.

Leaving Paris for the first time, Charles, wants to show provincial France "la supériorité d'un jeune homme à la mode."⁹³ The outward indications of his dandyism consist of the perfunctory wardrobe and accessories, and lend him an effeminate quality⁹⁴:

Il emporta toutes les variétés de cols et de cravates en faveur à cette époque. Il emporta deux habits de Buisson, et son linge le plus fin. Il emporta sa jolie toilette d'or, présent de sa mère. Il emporta ses colifichets de dandy, sans oublier une ravissante petite écritoire donnée par la plus aimable des femmes, pour lui du moins, par une grande dame qu'il nommait Annette, et qui voyageait maritalement, ennuyement, en Ecosse, victime de quelques soupçons auxquels besoin était de sacrifier momentanément son bonheur.⁹⁵

Unlike many of Balzac's young heroes whose social debut and acclimation correspond to the novel's beginning and end, Charles's social baptism in Paris is already well underway at the novel's debut. Prior to Charles's departure, Balzac's narrator indicates that he has already obtained the protection of an aristocratic woman who paid his carriage expenses to Saumur and who is referred to only as "Annette, la grande dame." This descent from the capital to the province, what Nicole Mozet refers to as a space of "maternage," or metamorphosis, interrupts the course of Charles's social indoctrination.⁹⁶ Balzac insists on this fact when he writes: "A vingt-deux ans, les jeunes gens sont encore assez voisins de l'enfance"⁹⁷ pour se laisser aller à des enfantillages."⁹⁸ This suggests that the young hero's geographical displacement, equivalent to a spiritual *retour en arrière*, allows Charles to reconnect with the integrity of his adolescent self.

⁹³ *EG* III, 1056.

⁹⁴ "Le dandy se laissa aller sur le fauteuil comme une jolie femme qui se pose sur son divan [. . .] (ibid., 1087).

⁹⁵ *EG* III, 1056-1057.

⁹⁶ Mozet 1, 113.

⁹⁷ Sussman notes that the terms "adolescent" and "adolescence" appear more frequently after 1835 in Balzac's *Comédie* (Sussman, 23). It is my contention that Balzac's use of the terms "enfance" and "enfant" in *Eugénie Grandet* effect a synonymous meaning.

⁹⁸ *EG* III, 1055.

In Saumur, Charles's dandy status is indeed suspended when he and his cousin, Eugénie, embark upon a bucolic romance *à la Bernardin de Saint Pierre* and make plans for their future together.⁹⁹ However, the spell is broken when Charles learns the sobering news of his father's recent financial ruin and consequent suicide. It is at this moment in the narrative that Charles's dandy image seems to disintegrate: "Charles et Eugénie s'entendirent et se parlèrent des yeux seulement; car le pauvre dandy déchu, l'orphelin se mit dans un coin, s'y tint muet, calme et fier [. . .]."¹⁰⁰ The term "déchu" narratively echoes Charles's loss of his father, and also translates his socially impotent status. In this scene, Balzac subtly underscores the paradigmatic role that the father's absence will play in the young hero's social development. This fact is further emphasized by the use of the expression "mirliflor," a term employed exclusively by Grandet (or the narrator speaking from Grandet's point of view).¹⁰¹ While the narrator's assessment of the scene reveals a tone of gentle mockery, it remains sympathetic when referring to Charles as a fallen dandy and an orphan. In contrast, Grandet's repeated use of the term "mirliflor" is a manner of calling the dandy's bluff: Charles's social station *is* without "collateral" because he is barred from the fortune and privileges associated with the father's domain. (And Grandet makes sure of this fact when he agrees to pay his brother's debts in exchange for Charles signing a "renonciation à la succession paternelle" before the tribunal of Saumur).¹⁰² Let us briefly examine a few of these examples:

⁹⁹ "L'enfance et l'amour furent même chose entre Eugénie et Charles: ce fut la passion première avec tous ses enfantillages, d'autant plus caressants pour leurs cœurs qu'ils étaient enveloppés de mélancolie. En se débatant à sa naissance sous les crêpes du deuil, cet amour n'en était d'ailleurs que mieux en harmonie avec la simplicité provinciale de cette maison en ruines" (ibid., 1135).

¹⁰⁰ ibid., 1109.

¹⁰¹ According to *Le Robert* dictionary of French language, the term "mirliflor" is used to refer to "un jeune élégant content de lui."

¹⁰² *EG* III., 1136.

1) Quant à toi, mademoiselle Eugénie, si c'est pour ce *mirliflor* que tu pleures, assez comme cela, mon enfant. Il partira, d'arre d'arre, pour les grandes Indes.

2) Charles ne nous est de rien, il n'a ni sou ni maille; son père a fait faillite; et, quand ce *mirliflor* aura pleuré son soûl, il décampera d'ici ; je ne veux pas qu'il révolutionne ma maison.

3) Quant [à Grandet], son avarice satisfaite et la certitude de voir bientôt partir le *mirliflor* sans avoir à lui payer autre chose que son voyage à Nantes, le rendent presque indifférent à sa présence au logis. Il laissa les deux enfants, ainsi qu'il nomma Charles et Eugénie, libres de se comporter comme bon leur semblerait sous l'œil de madame Grandet [. . .].

4) Quoi ! ce méchant *mirliflor* m'aurait dévalisé... Il regarda sa fille qui restait muette et froide.¹⁰³

Grandet's speech repeatedly underlines that one's value depends on one's monetary worth. He therefore denounces the social prestige associated with the dandy's image. (In revolutionized France, where the opposite is now true, men such as Grandet hide their immense fortune behind their bourgeois profession and frugal lifestyle). In Grandet's view, Charles's destitute economic and legal position reduce him to the social standing of an "enfant."¹⁰⁴

What begins as a show of elegance, requires much more than a new wardrobe to achieve its desired effects. Charles's detour in the provinces does prove to be metamorphosing, transforming him from Parisian dandy to orphaned son. Cultivating the sympathies of his cousin, Charles Grandet accepts her small fortune, an act akin to violating the father's law. Eugénie's gold coins allow Charles to circumvent the traditionally observed social and legal rights of succession in order to depart from zero

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, 1084, 1094, 1134, 1155.

¹⁰⁴ Matured by his grief, Charles restates this fact in a letter to his protectress: "Ma chère Annette, rien ne devait nous séparer, si ce n'est le malheur qui m'accable et qu'aucune prudence humaine n'aurait su prévoir. Mon père s'est tué, sa fortune et la mienne sont entièrement perdues. Je suis orphelin à un âge où, par la nature de mon éducation, je puis passer pour un enfant ; et je dois néanmoins me relever homme de l'abîme où je suis tombé" (*ibid.*, 1122)

and remake himself in society.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, by going to Java and beyond, Charles takes his ambiguous social status one step further. The "enfant" who passes from dandy, to "mirliflor," and then to orphan, performs another social metamorphosis when he assumes the pseudonym Carl Sepherd.¹⁰⁶ This false identity allows Charles to commit moral and social transgressions at will, such as entering into the slave trade, as a means to rapidly rebuild his fortune and to later integrate into Parisian society as the Vicomte d'Aubrion.¹⁰⁷ The example of Charles Grandet emphasizes the permeable quality of the dandy's identity, if not the plurality of Balzac's portrait of youth. At the same time, a clear social line is drawn, because to become a true dandy requires that the young hero make moral compromises, thus translating his desires into actions. This activity draws him away from his adolescent self. Therefore, in a continued effort to constitute the adolescent subject semantically, the dandy's role marks the first tangible subdivision within the category of Balzacian youth. We will next consider the role of *le parvenu*, also called *l'ambitieux* in *Le Père Goriot* (1834).

Narrative Composite: Rastignac and the Path of Ambition in *Le Père Goriot*

In *Le Père Goriot*, a novel published one year after *Eugénie Grandet*, Balzac elects to paint his young hero's quest from a social point of departure less compromised

¹⁰⁵ It should also be noted that Balzac creates a metonymic discourse between Eugénie, Charles's desire to succeed socially, and the money he borrows from his cousin to fuel his efforts abroad. Eugénie's fortune, consisting of gold coins given to her each year on her birthday by her father, of which some are rare and out of circulation, are suggestive of the shifting social terrain in post-revolutionary France; traditional manners and values, represented in the novel by the provincial space, are consequently transgressed, compromised, sold, and distributed beyond France's borders. In this way, Charles does succeed in revolutionizing his uncle's home (*EG* III, 1129).

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, 1180-82.

¹⁰⁷ Upon his return voyage to France after seven years spent abroad, Charles has an affair with a Mme d'Aubrion, who has a daughter of marrying age. As Vicomte d'Aubrion, Charles becomes a "gentilhomme ordinaire de la chambre du roi" (*ibid.*, 1182, 1183, 1187).

than that of his predecessor, Charles Grandet.¹⁰⁸ In so doing, Balzac accomplishes two critical effects: he further demarcates the category of youth, and he reveals to his reader how youth should be read in his *Comédie*. Let us begin by addressing this second point because it will allow a deeper context in which to appreciate Rastignac's role in the novel, as well as to continue our discussion on the key words Balzac employs to make reference to the young hero in his *Comédie*.

For many reasons, Rastignac is a singular example of success in *La Comédie humaine*. While he may not be the most frequently named recurring character,¹⁰⁹ he is a *figure charnière*, elevated to the role of sponsor *par excellence* to all aspiring youth.¹¹⁰ As Calyste Du Guénic testifies to this point in *Béatrix* (1838-44): “[Félicité des Touches] m'a raconté la vie à Paris de quelques jeunes gens de la plus haute noblesse, venant de leur province comme je puis en sortir, quittant une famille sans fortune et y conquérant par la puissance de leur volonté de leur intelligence, une grande fortune. Je puis faire ce qu'a fait le baron de Rastignac, au ministère aujourd'hui.”¹¹¹ From the reader's point of view, the Rastignac of *Le Père Goriot* equally merits superlative commentary: his is among the most memorable portraits of the young hero in all of Balzac's *Comédie* because of his psychology, and because he offers a ready introduction to the composite

¹⁰⁸ While the idea of recurring characters in *La Comédie humaine* predates the publication of *Le Père Goriot*, 1834 marks the epoch when Balzac felt confident in their deliberate use. In his study *Balzac's Recurring Characters* (1974), Pugh draws from successive editions of novels published during Balzac's lifetime, namely those revised by the author's hand, and provides a more profound context in which to appreciate Balzac's innovative technique.

¹⁰⁹ According to Fernand Lotte, the Baron de Nucingen is the most frequently named recurring character, cited in 31 separate works of *La Comédie humaine*, whereas Rastignac appears in only 25 (Lotte, 274-275).

¹¹⁰ Later in the century, Gustave Flaubert reiterates this point, although to different effects. In his 1869 novel *L'Education sentimentale*, Deslauriers, speaking to his friend Frédéric Moreau, exclaims: “ Mais je te dis là des choses classiques, il me semble? Rappelle-toi Rastignac dans la Comédie humaine! Tu réussiras, j'en suis sûr!” (Flaubert, 18).

¹¹¹ B II, 729.

image of youth within Balzac's writing.¹¹² In narrative terms, this technique consists in the author's ability to piece together disparate characters, plot scenarios, and narrative descriptions, for the purpose of creating a young hero character type, as well as an overarching plot, capable of unifying his *Comédie*. In this way, Balzac facilitates a plural reading of his figure of youth. Through a series of silhouettes and partial images, as well as highly developed portraits of the young hero, like that of Rastignac, the author compounds his portrait of the young hero: one portrait evokes the portraits of many, as the many recall the singular portrait.¹¹³ Therefore, when Rastignac overlooks Paris from the Père Lachaise cemetery and declares "A nous deux maintenant!"¹¹⁴ at the end of *Le Père Goriot*, we understand how, on a metanarrative level, other young men like Jules Demarets in *Ferragus* (1833) or Lucien de Rubempré in *Illusions perdues* (1835-43) also looking out on the panorama of Paris, are bolstered in the reader's memory by the experience of their *confrère*, Rastignac, as is he by theirs. It is in examining each young hero's reaction to the vision of Paris below that the reader has an opportunity to appreciate this varied and yet unified vision of the young hero. In viewing Balzac's literary production synchronically, the reader sees Rastignac's challenge as giving

¹¹² In his article, "Naissance d'un héros: Rastignac," Jean Pommier discusses the recurrence of Rastignac in *La Comédie humaine* and how three separate characters appear under the same name. Pommier attributes this to the fact that Rastignac existed before Balzac thought to use reappearing characters. In any case, there are some inconsistencies to his character. For instance, in *La Peau de chagrin* (1830), Rastignac appears as Raphaël de Valentin's partner in debauchery; the two share their gambling winnings (*PCh.* X, 191). Rastignac tells Valentin about his impending marriage to an Alsatian widow who is charming, plump, and has six toes on her left foot (*PCh.* X, 192). However, after completing his social education at the end of *Le Père Goriot*, he goes on to become a successful statesman (Minister of Justice, a Pair of France, and Count), and amasses an immense fortune.

¹¹³ While our study is not necessarily centered on the specific recurrence of any given character, but rather the recurring appearance of the youthful hero in general, I will not be addressing the various reappearances of characters in any great depth beyond the period of their youth. For more on the use of recurring characters, see: Janet Beizer's study *Family Plots* (1986), Anthony Pugh's study *Balzac's Recurring Characters*, Allan Pasco's work *Balzacian Montage* (1991), as well as James Madden's more recent study, *Weaving Balzac's Web: Spinning Tales and Creating the Whole of La Comédie humaine* (2003).

¹¹⁴ *PG* III, 290. Marthe Robert aptly calls Rastignac's statement "le défi de sa génération" (271).

dimension to characters who pursue a similar social path, and allows us to judge their actions beyond the role of character “type.” While Balzac does create various character types to different effects throughout his *Comédie*, the young hero type is dynamic and multi-dimensional as opposed to a more reductionist practice where character types are formulaic variations of the same character. Balzac also recycles dates, names, plot scenarios, and images (such as the *pension bourgeoise* in *Le Père Goriot* and again in *Z. Marcas* [1840]), in order to produce a young hero whose experience, while not necessarily imitative, echoes the youth of his generation, creating thus a certain *air de famille* among his young men.¹¹⁵ As Balzac writes: "Une phrase, un mot, un détail dans chaque œuvre, les lie ainsi les unes aux autres et prépare l'histoire de cette société fictive qui sera comme un monde complet."¹¹⁶ Therefore Balzacian youth, a social species in its own right, becomes one of the narrative elements capable of translating the author's unified literary vision. This is a fundamental point to which we will return throughout our study.

The beginning of Rastignac's social education coincides with the novel's debut: "Ses illusions d'enfance, ses idées de province avaient disparu, son intelligence modifiée, son ambition exaltée lui firent voir juste au milieu du manoir paternel, au sein de la famille."¹¹⁷ With his childhood behind him, the awakening of his desires, marking his entrance into the adolescent phase, motivates the young hero to make his initial challenge against society and *parvenir* at any cost. The formula for the success of "le jeune

¹¹⁵ In the novels *Ferragus*, *Le Père Goriot*, *Illusions perdues*, and *Eugénie Grandet*, the action begins in 1819.

¹¹⁶ Quoted in Pugh 1, p. 72.

¹¹⁷ *PG* III, 74.

ambitieux" consists of serving his ambitions in combination with the protection of an influential woman:

Être jeune, avoir soif du monde, avoir faim d'une femme, et voir s'ouvrir pour soi deux maisons ! mettre le pied au faubourg Saint-Germain chez la vicomtesse de Beauséant, le genou dans la Chaussée-d'Antin chez la comtesse de Restaud ! [. . .] et se croire assez joli garçon pour y trouver aide et protection dans un cœur de femme ! se sentir assez ambitieux pour donner un superbe coup de pied à la corde roide sur laquelle il faut marcher avec l'assurance du sauteur qui ne tombera pas, et avoir trouvé dans une charmante femme le meilleur des balanciers ! [. . . Q]ui n'aurait comme Eugène sondé l'avenir par une méditation, qui ne l'aurait meublé de succès ? Sa pensée vagabonde escomptait si drûment ses joies futures qu'il se croyait auprès de madame de Restaud, quand un soupir semblable à un *han* de saint Joseph troubla le silence de la nuit, retentit au cœur du jeune homme de manière à le lui faire prendre pour le râle d'un moribond. Il ouvrit doucement sa porte, et quand il fut dans le corridor, il aperçut une ligne de lumière tracée au bas de la porte du père Goriot.¹¹⁸

In a remarkable fashion, Balzac captures the limitless optimism of this energetic youth, while metonymically pairing the young hero's social ascension with the father's decline. This passage establishes what will prove to be a fundamental pattern in Rastignac's social trajectory. Balzac prepares the narrative terrain, in the two visits Rastignac pays to Anastasie de Restaud.

Upon paying his first visit to Restaud residence, Rastignac comes up against a dandy roadblock of sorts, in the person of Maxime de Trailles.

Rastignac se sentit une haine violente pour *ce jeune homme*. D'abord les beaux cheveux blonds et frisés de Maxime lui apprirent combien les siens étaient horribles. Puis Maxime avait des bottes fines et propres, tandis que les siennes, malgré le soin qu'il avait pris en marchant, s'étaient empreintes d'une légère teinte de boue. Enfin Maxime portait une redingote qui lui serrait élégamment la taille et le faisait ressembler à *une jolie femme*, tandis qu'Eugène avait à deux heures et demie un habit noir. Le spirituel

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, 78. As Sussman comments on the protectress's role: "Selon toute apparence, l'admiration qu'ils vouent à la femme généreuse, influente [. . .], trouve son origine dans le sentiment que brûler les étapes, rattrapper leur retard sur le monde où ils vivent, est une tâche au-dessus de leurs forces. Souvent l'admiration suscitée par la femme qui, telle une fée, détient le pouvoir d'aplanir toutes les difficultés devient chez les héros balzaciens une composante de l'amour adolescent" (Sussman, 47).

enfant de la Charente sentit la supériorité que la mise donnait à ce *dandy* mince et grand, à l'œil clair, au teint pâle, un de ces hommes capables de ruiner *des orphelins*.¹¹⁹

Rastignac's encounter with M. de Trailles is significant because it designates a shift in the object of the young hero's desire; he no longer aspires to the father's place directly, but is seduced by what the dandy's path appears to yield – ready access to the father's domain (money and women). The youth's desire becomes mimetic in the extent to which he seeks to copy a certain image of reality – De Trailles's example. However, this is in spite of the implication that dandyism, the social persona and lifestyle, is posed on a potentially faulty social foundation:

Tout à coup, en se souvenant d'avoir vu ce jeune homme au bal de Mme de Beauséant, il devina ce qu'était Maxime pour Mme de Restaud; et avec cette audace juvénile qui fait commettre de grandes sottise ou obtenir de grands succès, il se dit: – Voilà mon rival, je veux triompher de lui. L'imprudent ! il ignorait que le comte Maxime de Trailles se laissait insulter, tirait le premier et tuait son homme.¹²⁰

In keeping with Balzac's depiction of the Parisian dandy, De Trailles's portrait underlines his elegance and effeminacy (of which Rastignac is the converse image both by his naivety, and unpolished appearance), but also the breadth of his moral corruption that evokes fear, the underlying source of his virility and social prowess.¹²¹ Again, Maxime is described as being someone so corrupt that he is capable of ruining orphans.

Therefore, in naming him as a rival, Rastignac articulates a precise social goal, thus

¹¹⁹ *PG* III., 97, my emphasis.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, 98.

¹²¹ As Vautrin explains to this effect in a conversation with Rastignac: “Avoir de l'ambition, mon petit cœur, ce n'est pas donné à tout le monde. Demandez aux femmes quels hommes elles recherchent, les ambitieux. Les ambitieux ont les reins plus forts, le sang plus riche en fer, le cœur plus chaud que ceux des autres hommes” (*PG* III, 137). Therefore, in order to arrive socially, one must not only be charming, good looking, and polished in appearance, but be ruthless in the pursuit of one's ambitions. The fear this evokes in others elevates the man of ambition to a position of power and social influence.

initiating his social education. If we take his declaration one step further, to become like De Trailles can be understood as a quest for illegitimacy. I will explain below.

In her influential study *Roman des origines et origines du roman* (1972), Marthe Robert discusses how, in taking Freud's text "le roman familial des névrosés" and applying it to purely literary arguments, every novel at its origin expresses the same need to break up the order of things. This leads the child, or the young hero, to create fictive parents: " [le] héros romanesque est toujours soit l'Enfant trouvé, qui refait le monde à sa guise, soit le Bâtard, qui cherche à imposer sa volonté au monde."¹²² However, without Napoleon's example (the subject of the next chapter in our study), the Bastard myth would have remained confined to his relatively small, personal universe: "[A]près lui, [le genre] a le monde entier pour scène, des peuples pour héros, et pour sujets tous les problèmes soulevés par l'expérience [. . .]. Napoléon ouvre au roman l'accès à des terrains d'action positivement illimités."¹²³ Furthermore, Robert identifies a series of "caractéristiques napoléoniennes du roman," that are particularly apt in a discussion of Balzac's young hero: 1) the hero displays an intense desire to succeed, by women if necessary, as a way to overcome his socially mediocre position; 2) often an adolescent of a low social origins, the youth betrays his family because it stands in his way; there is a direct correlation between his desire to make a name for himself, and willingness to

¹²² Robert, 31. Laforgue, adapting Robert's argument, claims that the myth of Oedipus epitomizes the *mal-être* of the young man of 1830. And the young man, deprived of his Oedipal desire is unable to constitute himself as a social subject. This gives rise to a generation of young men who are either real or symbolic orphans (bastards, foundlings), and who seek imaginary filiation with potential father-figures (Laforgue, 13). Marceau, in his discussion of young men in *La Comédie humaine*, remarks that, with the exception of the Vandenesse brothers (Charles and Félix), the majority of young men are orphans, illegitimate offspring, or "orphelins à moitié" designating those young heroes who live separated from their families (Marceau, 95). We will pursue the theme of the son's illegitimacy in the next chapter of our study.

¹²³ Robert, 242-43.

commit social and moral transgressions.¹²⁴ While these Napoleonic characteristics do not wholly apply to Rastignac (he is noble and is partial to manipulation as opposed to open betrayal), he does assimilate the prototypical existence of a Balzacian hero attempting to rewrite his origins in order to inherit from the "father" (Goriot, Vautrin, and Mme de Beauséant). Nevertheless, in situations provoking a crisis of conscience, the recalling of his veritable origins will provide him comfort and solace.

The narration supports this argument where, until the last scene of the novel, Rastignac will alternate between two potential selves: the uncompromised adolescent who naturally would develop into a man of principle, or the dandy who would bury the embodiment of paternity in order to live by no law but his own. Rastignac's quest for a social identity further gives substance to Balzac's categorization of youth where, in the name of ambition, the young hero will "plier pour ne pas rompre, résister à l'assaut sans s'y briser, savoir se retirer en soi pour y mûrir la ressource d'un rebondissement futur."¹²⁵ Rastignac's "intermittence," fueled by his desires, leads to the expansion of the young hero's desires, and is then counterbalanced by contractive efforts of his conscience. In the narration surrounding Rastignac's intermittent episodes, Balzac provides a series of portraits of his young hero in order to mark his social progression. As Rastignac successively deviates from his original form, every mutative enactment of his desire leaves behind a trace of his former self. This leads us to reexamine the connection between the social animal's integrity with respect to his acts of social transgression.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, 243.

¹²⁵ Referring to all of Balzac's creatures of ambition, Jean-Pierre Richard, in his *Etudes sur le romantisme* (1970), comments upon their intermittent nature. When making specific reference to Rastignac's "intermittence," Richard recognizes it as a key element to his success (Richard, 49). Leo Bersani, commenting on this phenomenon in the Balzacian narrative suggests that "the rigid structure of a Balzac narrative is both menaced and energized by desires which may destroy characters, but which the narrative manages to contain at least formally" (Bersani, 73).

In paying his second visit to the Restauds, Rastignac commits a social *faux pas* when he attempts to challenge the social hierarchy and connect high and low society (his articulation of the ties binding the Restauds and his neighbor from the Maison Vauquer, Goriot).¹²⁶ He then denounces Goriot, the primary father figure in the novel: “En prononçant le nom du père Goriot, Eugène avait donné un coup de baguette magique, mais dont l'effet était l'inverse de celui qu'avaient frappé ces mots: parent de Mme de Beauséant . . . –Allons, se dit-il, je suis venu faire une gaucherie dont j'ignore la cause . . . Vieux drôle du père Goriot, va!”¹²⁷ As long as Rastignac acts according to the dictates of sentiment, instead of reason, the workings of society are unintelligible to him. Therefore, when Rastignac asks Mme de Beauséant to reveal to him “le mot d'une énigme,” this is to say the gravity of his decision to speak “d'un père,” she educates the young hero in the ways of paternal sacrifice. When Rastignac is then openly moved and expresses sympathy for Goriot's mistreatment at the hands of his daughters, his emotions allow him to reconcile himself with the father's position:¹²⁸ “Quelques larmes roulèrent dans les yeux d'Eugène, récemment rafraîchi par les pures et saintes émotions de la famille, encore sous le charme des croyances jeunes, et qui n'en était qu'à sa première journée sur le champ de bataille de la civilisation parisienne.”¹²⁹ In the same breath Mme de Beauséant counsels her young cousin in the ways of individualism. Ultimately, in order to succeed, one must not sacrifice oneself, like Goriot, but use others as instruments to one's own ends.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Nesci, 158. It should also be noted that the Restauds' reaction to Rastignac, and his decision to speak “d'un père,” is due to the double meaning of “père”: a term used to designate paternity, as well as to refer to someone of no social status.

¹²⁷ *PG* III, 102.

¹²⁸ *ibid.*, 109.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*, 113.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, 116.

Rastignac attempts to resolve his "double existence," or his hesitation between the example of self-sacrifice and that of self-interest, in his decision to pursue both endeavors simultaneously:¹³¹ "[Il] résolut d'ouvrir deux tranchées parallèles pour arriver à la fortune, de s'appuyer sur la science et sur l'amour, d'être un savant docteur et un homme à la mode. Il était encore bien enfant! Ces deux lignes sont des asymptotes qui ne peuvent jamais se rejoindre."¹³² The further impossibility of this venture is revealed in the letters Rastignac writes to his mother and sisters where he asks for their savings, their treasures, and their discretion. When he requests a sum amounting to nearly half of the family's annual earnings, 1200 francs, Rastignac betrays his egotistical leanings. Similar to his "sosie" Charles Grandet, the young hero understands that money will allow him to bypass the father in order to arrive at the same ends, women and fortune: "J'ai besoin de douze cents francs, et il me les faut à tout prix. Ne dis rien de ma demande à mon père, il s'y opposerait peut-être, et si je n'avais pas cet argent je serais en proie à un désespoir qui me conduirait à me brûler la cervelle."¹³³ Rastignac tempers his threat of suicide (knowing full well that this is a particularly egregious threat to direct at his mother, who has sacrificed much), with a testament of his uncompromised moral position, only to return to his original menace: "Je n'ai pas joué, ma bonne mère, je ne dois rien; mais si tu tiens à me conserver la vie que tu m'as donnée, il faut me trouver cette somme."¹³⁴ As an instrument of manipulation, the epistolary form projects a certain image of the son. It

¹³¹ This is Sussman's expression to describe the central problem of Balzac's adolescents who are impatient to participate in the adult world while at the same time fear leading a morally corrupt life. Robert refers to this phenomenon using stronger language: "[le Bâtard] tourne sans fin autour de sa mauvaise conscience et de sa révolte, scandalisé par les limitations de son être, coupable, honteux, hanté par l'expiation et le châtement. Quoiqu'il en dise pour se justifier dans ses thèmes, le meurtre, la subversion, l'usurpation sont sa loi, et jusque dans le moralisme de façade qu'il affiche souvent avec prédilection" (Robert, 60).

¹³² *PG* III, 118.

¹³³ *ibid.*, 120.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, 120.

further reveals that Rastignac is playing for very high stakes: "Ces beaux sentiments, ces effroyables sacrifices allaient lui servir d'échelon pour arriver à Delphine de Nucingen. Quelques larmes, derniers grains d'encens jetés sur l'autel sacré de la famille, lui sortirent des yeux."¹³⁵ In order to compete with the likes of M. de Trailles, he will use his filial status as collateral, speculate his paternal heritage, and gamble away his place in his family.¹³⁶

The scene where Rastignac receives the money requested from his mother and sisters, occurring half-way through the novel, reflects the crossroads at which the youth has arrived between his adolescence and adulthood. He then commissions himself proper dandy attire from a tailor who "avait compris la paternité de son commerce, et qui se considérait comme un trait d'union entre le présent et l'avenir des jeunes gens."¹³⁷ As Dorothy Kelly comments: "The tailor as father symbolizes the fact that in this new era, the social constructions sewn together by others determines one's identity."¹³⁸ First, the reflection of the youth in his new clothes reproduces three simultaneous portraits of Rastignac, past, present, and future, underscoring his social mutability, as well as his liminality. Second, it reflects Rastignac's potential for further permutation because he cannot remain indefinitely hyphenated between adolescence and adulthood. Therefore,

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, 120.

¹³⁶ As he drops his letters into the mail, Rastignac exclaims: "Je réussirai. Le mot d'un joueur du grand capitaine, mot fataliste qui perd plus d'hommes qu'il n'en sauve . . . Il avait ainsi quinze mois de loisirs pour naviguer sur l'océan de Paris, pour s'y livrer à la traite des femmes, ou y pêcher la fortune" (*PG* III, 122). This scene is further echoed when Rastignac steps into the gaming house for the first time in order to place a bet on Delphine's behalf. At the roulette table, he places Delphine's purse on 21, corresponding to his age. This act carries greater significance than it might have otherwise because of the way that Balzac combines the two ingredients, youth and gambling, in order to mark the event that wins Rastignac Delphine's favor and takes him one step closer to the fulfillment of his social ambitions (*ibid.*, 171).

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, 130.

¹³⁸ Kelly 1, 115.

we see how new clothing, like the use of a pseudonym, affords the young hero the opportunity to sire his own social identity.

Given the transformative quality of Balzac's youth, Rastignac will cultivate his individualism under the guise of his adolescent self. Before a mirror, Rastignac admires his image in his new clothes, which allows him to consider himself on an equal footing with his dandy rival, Maxime de Trailles: "Quand il eut essayé ses habits du soir, il remit sa nouvelle toilette du matin qui le métamorphosait complètement. "Je vaux bien M. de Trailles, se dit-il. Enfin j'ai l'air d'un gentilhomme!"¹³⁹ However, in order to surpass the dandy's example, penetrating the social sphere beyond petty duels and outlandish gambling debts, Rastignac must undergo further metamorphoses: "il devait déposer à la barrière sa conscience, son cœur, mettre un masque, se jouer sans pitié des hommes, et [. . .] saisir sa fortune sans être vu, pour mériter la couronne."¹⁴⁰ In recalling the young hero's social debut, his black suit at two-thirty in the afternoon, his ready display of emotion, his involuntary invitations to Vautrin to "plonge[r] un regard divinateur dans l'âme du jeune homme"¹⁴¹ around the dinner table at the Maison Vauquer, Rastignac must reverse the order of things as a tactic to his survival on the Parisian battlefield. He will therefore shed his provincial skin only to wear it again as a disguise. Like the image of the dandy, his candid persona will be falsely mimetic, but exceedingly more disarming in the pursuit of his social ambitions.

Ultimately determined to succeed in society with the help of a rich protectress, Rastignac makes use of his adolescent mask to seduce Delphine de Nucingen and

¹³⁹ *PG* III, 147.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 151.

¹⁴¹ "De moment en moment, il lui semblait que ce singulier personnage pénétrait ses passions et lisait dans son cœur, tandis que chez lui tout était si bien clos qu'il semblait avoir la profondeur immobile d'un sphinx qui sait, voit tout, et ne dit rien" (*ibid.*, 133)

Victorine Taillefer. At the Théâtre des Variétés, Rastignac's first attempt at Delphine's seduction consists of a sentimental outpouring of clichés about love and fidelity:

[C]royez-moi, ce cœur dévoué, toujours ardent, ne peut se rencontrer que chez un homme jeune, plein d'illusions, qui peut mourir sur un seul de vos signes, qui ne sait rien encore du monde et n'en veut rien savoir, parce que vous devenez le monde pour lui. Moi, voyez-vous, vous allez rire de ma naïveté, j'arrive du fond d'une province, entièrement neuf, n'ayant connu que de belles âmes, et je comptais rester sans amour. Il m'est arrivé de voir ma cousine, qui m'a mis trop près de son cœur; elle m'a fait deviner les milles trésors de la passion; je suis, comme Chérubin, l'amant de toutes les femmes en attendant que je puisse me dévouer à quelqu'une d'entre elles.¹⁴²

The ironic transposition of the young hero's *être* and *paraître* allows him to speak with the intent to manipulate his female interlocutor. Nevertheless, Balzac's use of irony does identify what it means to be a “jeune homme, plein d'illusions”: ardent, morally uncorrupted, sincere, naïve in love, a Cherubino in the manner of Beaumarchais. It is not until Delphine calls upon Rastignac to do her bidding at the gaming house that he is allowed an opportunity to exchange his youth for a material reward, which in the episode in question, amounts to 1000 francs.¹⁴³ When the youth then gives the money to Delphine's father, Goriot, he justifies his actions as if they were motivated by goodwill: “Par ma foi, se dit Eugène en se couchant, je crois que je serai honnête homme toute ma vie. Il y a du plaisir à suivre les inspirations de sa conscience.”¹⁴⁴ However, it is complicity and self-interest that will serve as the necessary ingredients for maintaining the couple: Delphine's invitation to Mme de Beauséant's ball and the privileges associated with a lover's status in the case of Rastignac.

¹⁴² *ibid.*, 156-157.

¹⁴³ See again our page 31.

¹⁴⁴ *PG III*, 177.

It is then in the absence of an amorous conquest of Delphine, that Rastignac becomes desperate and flirts with the idea of marrying Victorine and of taking Vautrin's advice in all things.¹⁴⁵ Again, hoping to "convertir l'amour en instrument de fortune," he uses the mask of the young *naïf* as an agent for his desires.¹⁴⁶ In speaking to Victorine alone in the dining room of the Maison Vauquer, Rastignac exclaims: "Quoi! si demain vous étiez riche et heureuse, si une immense fortune vous tombait des nues, vous aimeriez encore le jeune homme pauvre qui vous aurait plu durant vos jours de détresse?"¹⁴⁷ Later, after being drugged by Vautrin (in order that the youth not interfere with his plans to have young Taillefer killed), Rastignac sleeps peacefully in the dining room of the boarding house where he falls under the admiring gaze of both Victorine and Vautrin. In this scene, unlike that in the theater with Delphine, Balzac reunites form and content in order to saturate his narrative with youth's most poetic attributes, revealing its essence in a textual *genre* scene, the portrait of sleeping Rastignac:

En ce moment Vautrin entra tout doucement, et regarda le tableau formé par ces deux enfants que la lueur de la lampe semblait caresser.
– Eh bien, dit-il en se croisant les bras, voilà de ces scènes qui auraient inspiré de belles pages à ce bon Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, l'auteur de *Paul et Virginie*. La jeunesse est bien belle [. . .] ce qui m'émeut, c'est de savoir la beauté de son âme en harmonie avec celle de sa figure. Voyez, n'est-ce pas un chérubin posé sur l'épaule d'un ange? Il est digne d'être aimé, celui-là!¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Vautrin offers to have Père Taillefer's son killed in a duel so that he would be forced to recognize his disinherited daughter, Victorine. Rastignac could then make a profitable marriage with the heiress. Vautrin's fee for such a service, 20% of Victorine's dowry, would buy him a plantation in the southern United States and a ready-made family of slaves (ibid., 141).

¹⁴⁶ ibid., 180.

¹⁴⁷ ibid., 183. In both *Eugénie Grandet* and *Le Père Goriot*, the scenes where the young couple (Charles and Eugénie, Rastignac and Victorine) share a passionate embrace, constitutes another kind of narrative genre scene. Each of these scenes occurs within a domestic setting (with a servant in the background, La grande Nanon or La grosse Sylvie), and signifies an act of betrothal.

¹⁴⁸ ibid., 206.

In the context of the role that art plays in the "macrotext"¹⁴⁹ of *La Comédie humaine*, and the importance of works such as Girodet's *Endymion Sleeping* (1791) (the relationship between text and image will be more fully explored in chapter three of our study), this scene expands our reading of Rastignac's character, where he serves, yet again, as an intratextual connector to other Balzacian youth: Luigi Porta in *La Vendetta* (1830), and La Zambinella in *Sarrasine* (1830).¹⁵⁰ While the possible ties one could draw between Rastignac, Girodet's painting, an outlawed soldier, and a castrato, linger in the reader's imagination, the intertext of *Paul et Virginie* (1787), a story of young love on the remote, tropical island off the coast of Africa, adds another layer of meaning to the scene. Recalling the myth of Endymion, a young shepherd made immortal in eternal sleep by Zeus, (at the request of the moon goddess Selene), this "still-moment" both suspends Rastignac's social quest, in an homage to eternal youth, while, at the same time, it recreates his social dilemma on another narrative plane.¹⁵¹ Should he continue his fight to the top in society, a venture that will require that he further compromise himself morally? Or should he live according to the dictates natural to youth such as pure sentiment and unselfish love?

Rastignac's efforts to reverse the social hierarchy under which he has been operating have led him to transgress the father's law, feign the role of a social *ingénu* in

¹⁴⁹ I have borrowed this term from Eric Le Calvez who, in his article "From Text to Macrotext," uses terms such as "text," "macrotext," and "hors-texte" to discuss the ways in which Balzac creates connections within his own *œuvre*, between his work and the works of others, as well as those he establishes between his text and reality (LeCalvez, 31).

¹⁵⁰ Luigi Porta is an exiled soldier from the Imperial army, who, after Napoleon's second abdication in 1815, lives a fugitive's existence in Paris. He finds refuge in an artist's studio, that of Servin, whereupon he is discovered asleep by Ginevra di Piombo, one of Servin's art students (*Ven I*, 1052). In *Sarrasine*, the narrator states that La Zambinella, the castrato opera singer, was Girodet's inspiration for the work (*S VI*, 1075).

¹⁵¹ According to Maurice Samuels, one of Walter Scott's innovations in the historical novel was the use of *Ekphrasis*, a "still moment" in the text, where narrative is suspended in order to indulge in description. This use of description allows architecture, and the personality traits of characters, to liken the novel to a "painted canvas" (Samuels 2, 165, 167).

order to act with the calculation of a De Trailles, and assume the role of an accomplice in Goriot's demise. Previously, we have seen how the image of the father, representative of the Family, is presented as a barometer for Rastignac's conscience. Rastignac constructs his dandy identity to the detriment of natural paternity and then repents his acts of transgression by evoking memories of his role as the eldest son of a noble family or in acting as a son to Goriot. However, when Delphine (and Goriot) offer Rastignac "l'entrée de la vie," the apartment on Rue d'Artois, where the couple consequently consummate their relationship, the young hero no longer hesitates before the path of ambition:

Jusqu'alors il n'avait même pas complètement secoué le charme des fraîches et suaves idées qui enveloppent comme d'un feuillage la jeunesse des enfants élevés en province. Il avait continuellement hésité à franchir le Rubicon parisien. Malgré ses ardentes curiosités, il avait toujours conservé quelques arrière-pensées de la vie heureuse que mène le vrai gentilhomme dans son château. Néanmoins ses derniers scrupules avaient disparu la veille, quand il s'était vu dans son appartement. En jouissant des avantages matériels de la fortune, comme il jouissait depuis longtemps des avantages moraux que donne la naissance, il avait dépouillé sa peau d'homme de province, il s'était doucement établi dans une position d'où il découvrait un bel avenir. Aussi, en attendant Delphine, mollement assis dans ce joli boudoir qui devenait un peu le sien, se voyait-il si loin du Rastignac venu l'année dernière à Paris, qu'en le lorgnant par un effet d'optique morale, il se demandait s'il se ressemblait en ce moment à lui-même.¹⁵²

When Rastignac elects to shed definitively his provincial skin, the narrative dynamism produced by the intermittence of his desires reaches a point of stasis. Not only does his lounging posture in Mme de Nucingen's boudoir depict him in an effeminate light, it also reveals the degree to which his desires are sated.¹⁵³ Rastignac's own half-hearted effort at introspection, marks the separation that exists between the young student of the Maison

¹⁵² *PG III*, 237.

¹⁵³ In contrast, we recall the phallic power associated with the money Rastignac receives from his mother and sisters: "A l'instant où l'argent se glisse dans la poche d'un étudiant, il se dresse en lui-même une colonne fantastique sur laquelle il s'appuie [. . .] Il se passe en lui des phénomènes inouïs: il veut tout et peut tout, il désire à tort et à travers, il est gai, généreux, expansif" (*PG III*, 131).

Vauquer and the dandy of the Rue d'Artois. In contrast to the scene underscoring the young hero's transitional status, his admiration of his image in his new clothes, that of the opera glass provides only a retrospective view. Rastignac, the adolescent, can be appreciated as a portrait “d'écailé,” produced by the memory of, or the point of conception for, the young man's social transformation.¹⁵⁴

The Fall of the Father and the Rise of the Son

Before continuing on to the last section of this discussion on the operative category of youth and its narrative construction in *La Comédie humaine*, it is necessary to make a few remarks regarding the concluding images of paternity in *Le Père Goriot*. Specifically, we will concentrate on the namesake of the novel, Goriot, and his relationship with his "adopted" son Rastignac. Although paternity has not been the focus of this chapter, it is an underlying theme of immense importance in Balzac's *Comédie*; this topic will merit consideration over the course of our study. However, the social pursuits of Balzac's young hero are not conceived in a vacuum, but are intimately linked with paternity in both its literal and figurative forms. In order to appreciate the contribution of *Le Père Goriot* in this debate, it is essential that we draw attention to the historical context in which Goriot's decline and death are loosely framed.

When Madame Vauquer laments the loss in business produced by Vautrin's arrest, she frames her misfortune in a historical context: “Car, vois-tu, nous avons vu Louis XVI avoir son accident, nous avons vu tomber l'Empereur, nous l'avons vu revenir et retomber, tout cela c'était dans l'ordre des choses possibles; tandis qu'il n'y a point de chances contre des pensions bourgeoises.”¹⁵⁵ Mme Vauquer's historical point of

¹⁵⁴ Borderie 1, 199.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 233.

reference reflects the common citizen's understanding that her existence is conditioned by history, a concept recently formed by the Revolution of 1789; that is, the period marking the beginning of history in that it did away with feudal privileges, the aristocracy, and the nation's father. From this point forward, history is seen as influencing the life of the individual.¹⁵⁶ When we consider then the primary figure of paternity in the novel, Goriot, (a discussion of Vautrin's brand of paternity will be discussed in chapter four), it is interesting to note the way this father's death parallels historical example, namely that of the Martyr-King, Louis XVI.¹⁵⁷

Throughout the novel, the primary example of natural paternity, Goriot's relationship with his daughters, is defined in monetary terms: the immense dowries given to each of his daughters, the liquidation of the remainder of his retirement account in order to pay the expenses associated with Rastignac's installation in his new apartment. As Goriot laments this fact near the end of the novel: "Je me meurs, mes enfants! La crâne me cuit intérieurement comme s'il avait du feu. Soyez donc gentilles, aimez-vous bien! Vous me feriez mourir . . . Oui, je ne suis plus bon à rien, je ne suis plus père!"¹⁵⁸ Later when his daughters delay in visiting him on his deathbed, he concludes: "L'argent

¹⁵⁶ Lukács 2, 24.

¹⁵⁷ One could argue that the link is more specific, associating the Terror of 1793, the year of the Louis XVI's death, and Goriot. Goriot is referred to by his sons-in law as the "old '93 man" ("les deux gendres ne se sont pas trop formalisés d'avoir ce vieux Quatre-vingt-treize chez eux") (*PG* III, 114). On Goriot's deathbed, he complains of a migraine. As his pain steadily increases, the images he uses to describe its sensations are those of his head burning, being torn from his body, until finally he calls out in agony for the doctors to relieve his pain and cut his head off: "Ma tête est une plaie! . . . Je souffre horriblement, mon Dieu! Les médecins! Les médecins! Si l'on m'ouvrait la tête, je souffrirais moins" (*PG* III, 274-75). Although not as compelling a parallel as that between Louis XVI and Goriot, Ruth Amossy notes that Goriot's decline mirrors Napoleon's downfall: "Goriot leaves his business in 1813, the year of Napoleon's first important defeat, at Leipzig; moves from the first to the second floor of the Vauquer boardinghouse in 1815, the fatal date of Waterloo; and dies in 1821, the year of Napoleon's death" (Amossy, 50). The novel is set in November of 1819, and Goriot's agony takes place in February of 1820.

¹⁵⁸ *PG* III, 250-51.

donne tout, même les filles.”¹⁵⁹ The first sign of Goriot's agony accompanies his financial ruin. Sandy Petrey iterates this point: "As the supreme vehicle for collective sanctions, money invigorates paternity with the same demonstrativeness that poverty displays in evacuating it."¹⁶⁰ Therefore the admission of poverty as it is tied to the symbol of Fatherhood in the novel, becomes an abdication of the father's place as head of the Family. When the narrator calls Goriot "ce Christ de la Paternité," Balzac draws yet another parallel between Goriot and Louis XVI.¹⁶¹ The death of Louis XVI, the representation of God on earth, ruler by divine right, serves as a critical commentary of the Revolution of 1789, that which single-handedly put to death society's symbol of fatherhood.¹⁶² For Goriot, his castigation constitutes an "oedipal punishment of beheading."¹⁶³ Therefore, in looking through the "lens of regicide," Balzac comments upon France's persistent inability to rehabilitate paternity;¹⁶⁴ the father's head is irreparably severed from its limbs, and irreversibly cut off from his family.

Considering then the son's complicit role in the father's parricide, we can appreciate how, in gambling away his place in the Family for a chance at individual glory, the son has misjudged the price he will have to pay for his social ambitions. Bersani observes on this point that, "desire is the dangerous condition for enormous gains, a risky willingness to spend which may end in a ruinous obligation to pay."¹⁶⁵ However, when Rastignac accepts the apartment from Delphine and Goriot, saying "Je

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 273.

¹⁶⁰ Petrey 2, 102.

¹⁶¹ *PG* III., 231.

¹⁶² See Dorothy Kelly's article "Between Bodies and Texts: A Psychoanalytic Reading of *Le Père Goriot*." See also Susan Dunn's study *The Deaths of Louis XVI: Regicide and the French Political Imagination*.

¹⁶³ Kelly 2, 143.

¹⁶⁴ Dunn 1, 6.

¹⁶⁵ Bersani, 74.

serai digne de tout cela,”¹⁶⁶ he justifies his new situation by the assertion that his acts are made in good faith:

Un tel amour est mon ancre de salut, se dit-il. Ce pauvre vieillard a bien souffert par le cœur. [. . .]. Eh bien, j'aurai soin de lui comme un père, je lui donnerai mille jouissances [. . .] Delphine! Elle est meilleure pour le bonhomme, elle est digne d'être aimée. [. . .]. Tout m'a réussi! Quand on s'aime bien pour toujours, l'on peut s'aider, je puis recevoir cela.¹⁶⁷

In what has become Rastignac's practice of calling things by other names, he betrays his social inclinations. Delphine becomes a more valuable social ally because of the additional assets (Goriot) she can dispose of on his behalf. In electing to act *as would a* good son toward Goriot, Rastignac justifies the cultivation of his individualism:

Malgré ses bonnes pensées, il ne se sentit pas le courage de venir confesser la foi des âmes pures à Delphine, en lui ordonnant la Vertu au nom de l'Amour. Déjà son éducation commencée avait porté ses fruits. Il aimait égoïstement déjà. Son tact lui avait permis de reconnaître la nature du cœur de Delphine. Il présentait qu'elle était capable de marcher sur le corps de son père pour aller au bal, et il n'avait ni la force de jouer le rôle d'un raisonneur, ni le courage de lui déplaire, ni la vertu de la quitter . . . Eugène voulait se tromper lui-même, il était prêt à faire à sa maîtresse le sacrifice de sa conscience.¹⁶⁸

When Goriot is no longer able to give, or rather Rastignac has accepted all Goriot can offer him, the apartment and Delphine, he ultimately stands by helpless to restore this father to his rightful place in his family; he takes his place, along with Goriot's daughters in the camp of ungrateful children. The father's tomb therefore becomes a marker on the son's path to social conquest.

Youth and the Ideal in *La Femme abandonnée*

Madame de Beauséant's parting words to Rastignac near the end of *Le Père*

Goriot serve as an apt transition to the final section of this chapter, where we now turn to

¹⁶⁶ *PG* III, 231.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 215-216.

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 262.

La Femme abandonnée (1832). Although written before *Eugénie Grandet* and *Le Père Goriot*, this short story serving as both the conclusion to Mme de Beauséant's departure from society and a prequel, if you will, to Grandet's and Rastignac's tales of social integration.¹⁶⁹ Therefore, when the Vicomtesse gravely declares to Rastignac, “Je penserai souvent à vous, qui m'avez paru bon et noble, jeune et candide au milieu de ce monde où ces qualités sont si rares [. . .] vous êtes [heureux], vous êtes jeune, vous pouvez croire à quelque chose,”¹⁷⁰ we are connected with another portrait of youth, that of Gaston de Nueil. In his short story, Balzac explores the theme of adolescent development, transposing the metaphorical liminality of the adolescent's social position to a geographically peripheral space in which the young hero ceases to participate in the historical moment in which he lives. In the absence of contact with modern civilization, De Nueil's youthful qualities will draw this queen of Parisian society from her mournful life of reclusion, as well as prolong the young hero's adolescent stage.

Gaston de Nueil's social *parcours* is somewhat unique in that his immigration from the provinces to Paris is quickly deflected by his return: “les médecins de Paris envoyèrent en Basse-Normandie un jeune homme qui relevait alors d'une maladie inflammatoire causée par quelque excès d'étude, ou de vie peut-être. Sa convalescence exigeait un repos complet, une nourriture douce, un air froid et l'absence totale de sensations extrêmes.”¹⁷¹ As we have previously observed in the examples of Charles Grandet and Eugène de Rastignac, Paris is a breeding ground for social ambitions; to borrow Laforgue's term, this is to say that desire conceived of in its social context elicits

¹⁶⁹ After her painful break-up with the Marquis d'Ajuda-Pinto, Mme de Beauséant vows to live a cloistered life in Normandy, retreating from society in February of 1820. The sequel begins in the spring of 1822.

¹⁷⁰ *PG* III, 265, 267.

¹⁷¹ *FA* II, 463.

social transformation.¹⁷² Both Grandet and Rastignac are capable of adapting themselves, becoming social chameleons, in order to meet the demands their environment places upon them. Consequently, this requires them to regulate their ambitions by expansive and contractive measures. Whereas Grandet's geographical displacements dictate this course, Rastignac's conscience (his memories of his family) evokes a similar outcome. Turning then to De Nueil, his illness, the result of an "excès" of some sort, emphasizes the youth's inability to normalize his response to a social environment electrified by the current of desire. Therefore, the distance placed between him and the capital serves as the remedy capable of countering his troubled state: "La ville de Paris, avec ses passions, ses orages et ses plaisirs, n'était déjà plus dans son esprit que comme un souvenir d'enfance."¹⁷³ In other words, while De Nueil's detour in Paris awakens his desires, his rapid return to the provinces suspends his ability to translate his desires into actions, thus preserving him in a socially static position.

As we observed in *Eugénie Grandet*, the provincial setting is falsely sedentary; it is a space of "maternage," capable of inducing metamorphoses in Balzac's young hero.¹⁷⁴ At the same time, the insistence upon the distance that separates De Nueil from Paris (representing the space of corruption corrosive to the "belles qualités du jeune âge") correlates to a delayed process by which the young hero will reach his maturity.¹⁷⁵ Unlike Rastignac's rapid social ascension, occurring in the few short months between November of 1819 to February of 1820, De Nueil's adolescent phase extends the period

¹⁷² Laforgue, 13.

¹⁷³ *FA* II., 468.

¹⁷⁴ Mozet 1, 113.

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 481. As the narrator notes, speaking from Mme de Beauséant's point of view: "Elle ne put s'empêcher de regarder la figure expressive de monsieur de Nueil, et d'admirer en lui cette belle confiance de l'âme qui n'a encore été ni déchirée par les cruels enseignements de la vie du monde, ni dévorée par les perpétuels calculs de l'ambition ou de la vanité. Gaston était le jeune homme dans sa fleur" (*ibid.*, 481).

between 1822-1831, spanning the course of his love affair with Mme de Beauséant. It is she who comes to represent a society to discover and conquer:

La vicomtesse de Beauséant avait surgi devant lui tout à coup, accompagnée d'une foule d'images gracieuses : elle était un monde nouveau; près d'elle sans doute il y avait à craindre, à espérer, à combattre, à vaincre [. . .]. Madame de Beauséant réveillait en son âme le souvenir de ses rêves de jeune homme et ses plus vivaces passions, un moment endormies.¹⁷⁶

As we have observed in other works, "l'éros féminin" translates the young hero's social aspirations.¹⁷⁷ However, Mme de Beauséant gives new dimension to the protectress's role when she acts as a conduit through which the young hero may experience *la grande société* in measured doses, effectively transplanting Parisian civilization in the provincial setting, and enabling the young hero to enact his social desires on a reduced social playing field.¹⁷⁸

Gaston de Nueil's first bloom can best be appreciated in the context of his interaction with a mature woman. The couple's difference in age places Gaston's youth in relief, along with the qualities characteristic of Balzac's most socially candid young men: erratic displays of emotion; fits of madness (agitation, fear, hope, illness); mood swings between moments of happiness and despair. The young hero's contact with the mature woman as social domain has a destabilizing effect on his ability to form rational thought: "Il tomba dans une de ces meditations vagabondes pendant lesquelles les pensées les plus lucides se combattent, se brisent les unes contre les autres, et jettent l'âme dans un court accès de folie."¹⁷⁹ Therefore, one can hardly be surprised at the impetuosity with which the youth communicates his desire to become Mme de Beauséant's lover at their

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 470-471.

¹⁷⁷ Laforgue, 150.

¹⁷⁸ Félicité des Touches occupies a similar role in *Béatrix*.

¹⁷⁹ *FA II*, 485.

very first meeting: “Permettez-moi, madame, de me livrer à une des plus grandes émotions de ma vie, en vous avouant ce que vous me faites éprouver. Vous m'agrandissez le cœur! Je sens en moi le désir d'occuper ma vie à vous faire oublier vos chagrins, à vous aimer pour tous ceux qui vous ont haïe ou blessée.”¹⁸⁰ Love is justified as Gaston's reason to forge an alternative path to the one he is expected to follow as a son issued from aristocratic family.

Given this fact, Gaston's social progression from adolescence to adulthood, and the negative consequences associated therein, is nonetheless considered to be an inevitability. When the youth pledges to her his eternal love and fidelity, Mme de Beauséant accurately observes in her letter to the youth:

J'ai bientôt trente ans, monsieur, et vous en avez vingt-deux à peine. Vous ignorez vous-même ce que seront vos pensées quand vous arriverez à mon âge. Les serments que vous jurez si facilement aujourd'hui pourront alors vous paraître bien lourds. Aujourd'hui, je veux bien le croire, vous me donneriez sans regret votre vie entière, vous sauriez mourir même pour un plaisir éphémère; mais à trente ans, l'expérience vous ôterait la force de me faire chaque jour des sacrifices . . .¹⁸¹

Instead of describing youth's intermittent course (that which is integral to understanding Rastignac's ambitious trajectory), or the young hero's preoccupation with his mistress's social prophecies as they weigh upon his ambitions, the narrative will delimit the slice of life in question by presenting Gaston's adolescence in a condensed narrative suited to the short story genre. This is to say, that Gaston's youth is not rendered in a self-conscious manner; he does not comment upon his adolescence nor does he provide an account of the time preceding his *entrée dans la vie*. Rather, youth's essence is summated as a sort

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 484.

¹⁸¹ *ibid.*, 489.

of paradise lost, as surmised by the narrator, as well as by the lovers *via* their epistolary exchange.

Just as the romantic couple consists in the pairing of youth and maturity, this relationship is reproduced between the narrator and the young hero. Speaking with the authority of a man in his maturity, the narrator counterbalances Gaston's words and actions while also grounding them in generalizations,: "Il faut être jeune pour . . . ," "A l'âge de vingt-trois ans, l'homme est presque toujours," or "il dut passer une de ces nuits orageuses pendant lesquelles les jeunes gens vont du bonheur au suicide, du suicide au bonheur . . .".¹⁸² The hero's experiences are contextualized in terms of his youth. And it is because of this single factor that the narrator establishes a series of inherent "truths." The narrator further insists that one must either be young, or have a vivid memory of one's youth, in order to accept the veracity of the young hero's circumstances. In this way, the narrator betrays his own experience when pairing youth's passion with death and addressing the ephemeral nature of youth: "Souvent cette passion hâtive, morte dans un jeune cœur, y reste brillante d'illusions. Quel homme n'a pas plusieurs de ces vierges souvenirs semblables à ces enfants perdus à la fleur de l'âge, et dont les parents n'ont connu que les sourires."¹⁸³ This suggestive phrase establishes a dialectical relationship between youth and adulthood in that the passion that characterizes youth is an illusion.

The epistolary exchange between the lovers at the beginning of their relationship, and then at its end, becomes the narrative device that both activates youth's passion, as well as synthesizes its illusion. At the couple's first meeting, the narrator explains how the mere portrait of youth flatters both of the lovers' interests:

¹⁸² *FA* II, 485.

¹⁸³ *ibid.*, 486.

[Gaston] peignit l'état d'un jeune homme dont les feux brûlaient sans aliment, en faisant penser qu'il était digne d'être aimé tendrement, et néanmoins n'avait jamais connu les délices d'un amour inspiré par une femme jeune, belle, pleine de goût, de délicatesse. Il expliqua son manque de convenance sans vouloir le justifier. Il flatta madame de Beauséant en lui prouvant qu'elle réalisait pour lui le type de la maîtresse incessamment mais vainement appelée par la plupart des jeunes gens.¹⁸⁴

In his first letter that the youth promptly addresses to the great lady following their interview, De Nueil extends the portrait of his own youth by the use of expressions such as, "A mon âge, madame, je ne sais qu'aimer," accompanied by pleas of ignorance in the ways of seduction.¹⁸⁵ De Nueil manipulates his youthful persona with skillful intuition. Much like Rastignac writing to his mother, De Nueil hopes to seduce his reader by introducing an ultimatum into his request: "Vous êtes pour moi la seule femme qu'il y ait dans le monde. Ne concevant point la vie sans vous, j'ai pris la résolution de quitter la France et d'aller jouer mon existence jusqu'à ce que je la perde dans quelque entreprise impossible, aux Indes, en Afrique, je ne sais où."¹⁸⁶ It is interesting to note the way in which De Nueil unconsciously ransoms his youth, a tactic practiced by others, in response to the awakening of his adolescent self. As we have observed with the example of Charles Grandet, *l'étranger* represents a space of lawlessness, excess, and limitless aspiration. Therefore, when Mme de Beauséant acknowledges De Nueil's ploy, as a "ruse d'enfant," motivated by "instinct," I would argue that she seeks to invent her own strategy

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.*, 480.

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 487.

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.*, 487. The image of the young man going abroad (where he can lose his identity), to the Indies, to Africa, and beyond, appears in all three of the novels considered in this chapter. Grandet departs from France in order to rebuild his fortune, and De Nueil's fatalistic threat of exile is posed if he proves unable to win Mme de Beauséant's heart. While Rastignac's adventure takes place in Paris, it is his intention to navigate the Parisian ocean and enter into the "traite des femmes." This image reappears in *La Duchesse de Langeais* where Armand de Montriveau, returns to France from Africa where he was robbed, put into slavery, and barely escaped with his life (*DL V*, 942). Preserved from his perilous adventures by his strength of character, Montriveau is referred to as being uncharacteristically "simple comme un enfant" (*PG III*, 77).

for seduction in order to stunt the social advancement of this precocious youth given to flights of excess.¹⁸⁷ Quitting Courcelles after the couple's initial epistolary exchange, Mme de Beauséant draws De Nueil further from the capital, to a villa on Lake Geneva where they are known to no one. It is within this controlled (and isolated) social setting that she will serve as the unique stimulant to the young man's desire, as well as the sole instrument for its satisfaction.¹⁸⁸

After a few years in Geneva where "les choses semblaient rêver pour [le couple], et tout [lui] souriait," De Nueil is called back to France, to Valleroy, to assume the place in his family left vacant by the successive deaths of his father and elder brother.¹⁸⁹ This geographic displacement operates a critical step in the young man's development, shifting his place in society from its periphery to its center. Recognizing the difficulty of De Nueil's social position and his newfound responsibilities, Mme de Beauséant suspects his need to marry "une héritière," and establish a family of his own. She therefore grants him his freedom. However, in what appears to be a generous gesture, De Nueil's mistress charges him with a veritable death sentence. Her farewell letter to her lover becomes a form of sentimental blackmail, an ultimatum that could be crudely summarized as: "If you leave me, you will cease to live according to the Ideal." Addressing her lover in mystical terms, as "mon ange," "Cher époux du ciel," and referring to herself as "[s]on Eve," Claire de Beauséant equates the couple's nine year relationship with a symbiotic

¹⁸⁷ *FA* II, 490. At their first meeting, the narrator calls her assessment of the young man's sincerity "prémédité" whereas De Nueil's speech and actions are described as "involontaire" (*FA* II, 481).

¹⁸⁸ The youth might have been able to quell the disorganizing effects of desire (also referred to as thought or *la pensée*) through other means. As the narrator explains: "S'il avait eu trente ans, il se serait enivré; mais ce jeune homme encore naïf ne connaissait ni les ressources de l'opium, ni les expédients de l'extrême civilisation" (*ibid.*, 488).

¹⁸⁹ *ibid.*, 492.

state, that once corrupted, can never regain its former integrity.¹⁹⁰ The necessary element to maintaining this Eden was the flower of youth:

N'aurais-je pas possédé de toi l'être *jeune* et pudique, toute grâce, toute beauté, toute délicatesse, un Gaston que nulle femme ne peut plus connaître et de qui j'ai délicieusement joui . . . Non, tu n'aimeras plus comme tu m'as aimée . . . je ne saurais avoir de rivale . . . N'est-il pas hors de ton pouvoir d'enchanter désormais une femme par les agaceries *enfantines*, par les *jeunes* gentillesse d'un cœur *jeune*, par ces coquetteries d'âme, ces grâces du corps et ces rapides ententes de volupté, enfin par l'adorable cortège qui suit l'amour *adolescent*? Ah, tu es homme! maintenant, tu obéiras à ta destinée en calculant tout . . . Oui, l'homme, le cœur, l'âme que j'aurai connus n'existeront plus; je les ensevelirai dans mon souvenir pour en jouir encore, et vivre heureuse de cette belle vie passée . . .¹⁹¹

The letter, marking De Nueil's exile from paradise, distills the adolescent's qualities while it also becomes a sort of funeral oration to youth. The use of the simple past tense semantically resurrects and buries youth's most glowing attributes; the future tense condemns youth's path in society, where, in order to succeed, one is forced to embrace "cette philosophie matérielle, égoïste, froide."¹⁹² Upon reading his mistress's letter, De Nueil declares, "Il faut être homme dans la vie!"¹⁹³ This phrase has a performative effect on the youth, instantly maturing him so that he may assume his social obligations.

¹⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 494, 497.

¹⁹¹ *ibid.*, 496-497, my emphasis.

¹⁹² In *La Femme de trente ans*, Charles de Vandenesse has already adopted the calculating philosophy in question: "Ainsi, Charles, quoique jeune (à peine avait-il trente ans), s'était déjà philosophiquement accoutumé à voir des idées, des résultats, des moyens, là où les hommes de son âge aperçoivent des sentiments, des plaisirs et des illusions. Il refoulait la chaleur et l'exaltation naturelle aux jeunes gens dans les profondeurs de son âme que la nature avait créée généreuse. Il travaillait à se faire froid, calculateur ; à mettre en manières, en formes aimables, en artifices de séduction, les richesses morales qu'il tenait du hasard ; véritable tâche d'ambitieux ; rôle triste, entrepris dans le but d'atteindre à ce que nous nommons aujourd'hui une *belle position*" (*F30* II, 1122). However, when Charles meets Julie d'Aiglemont ("la femme de trente ans"), he is able to love in accordance with the inclinations of his character. His love affair also serves as a farewell to youth.

¹⁹³ *FA* II, 498. Mme de Beauséant writes "Monsieur, vous êtes libre," at the end of De Nueil's letter where, nine years previous, he promised his eternal love and fidelity: "Madame, si je cessais de vous aimer en acceptant les chances que vous m'offrez d'être un homme ordinaire, je mériterais bien mon sort, avouez-le? Non, je ne vous obéirai pas, et je vous jure une fidélité qui ne se déliera que par la mort. Oh! Prenez ma vie, à moins cependant que vous ne craigniez de mettre un remords dans la vôtre . . ." (*ibid.*, 499). In a way, this act is comparable to a request of a debt to be paid in full.

(Seven months later, he is married with a child on the way). However, shortly after his marriage, De Nueil makes a first and final attempt to reconcile with his mistress where he addresses her a desperate letter upon which he stakes his life. When Mme de Beauséant returns his letter unread, she symbolically deals youth its fatal blow, a fact that De Nueil physically accomplishes with his hunting rifle.

The violent conclusion to this short story reflects De Nueil's inability to adapt his Ideal to reality. As his name suggests, De Nueil (or *nue* + *œil*, one who has his eyes in the clouds or is given over to reverie) meets an end that is "naturel" but "si contraire à toutes les habitudes de la jeune France" who are apt to conform to the limits of their reality.¹⁹⁴ As the narrator explains: "s'il a encore sur les lèvres le goût d'un amour céleste, et qu'il ait blessé mortellement sa véritable épouse au profit d'une chimère sociale, alors il lui faut mourir ou avoir cette philosophie [. . .] qui fait horreur aux âmes passionnées."¹⁹⁵ While this denouement recalls the fate of other Balzacian *suicidés* in *La Comédie humaine*, (Lucien de Rubempré, Athanase Granson), it also evokes other youthful figures whose untimely ends constitute youth as a failing social entity.

This chapter has offered a preliminary exploration of the ways in which Balzac narratively categorizes his youth. Bundling this narrative population into its respective generations and according to their shared characteristics, the author transforms his young hero "type" into a composite image: a character type that helps create unity within the metatext of *La Comédie humaine*. While we have examined only three specific portraits of the young hero, those of Grandet, Rastignac, and De Nueil, we observe how Balzac's

¹⁹⁴ Sussman refers to three types of Balzacian adolescents: those who are ambitious and able to merge their dreams with their surroundings; those who are revolutionaries; and those who seek transcendence (Sussman, 49).

¹⁹⁵ *FA* II, 503.

play with semantic terms (*le dandy, le parvenu, le jeune homme*, among others) establish youth's social boundaries, while at the same time they define the poetic ramifications for the young hero's social and psychological development (or growth into his adult skin).

The young hero circulates within an environment where social and geographical displacements transform the youthful subject, therefore representing adolescence as "un brusque éveil à la vie."¹⁹⁶ We can also appreciate that the young hero's response to his desires and the desires placed upon him by his milieu create a corollary relationship: one's social viability becomes dependent on one's mutative ability. In order to succeed, the young hero will hazard his youth; this is to say, pursue a social position steeped in illegitimacy and marked by paternal transgressions. Is this not the role carved out for him in post-revolutionary France? The young hero's social trajectory, which is characteristically intermittent, risks destabilizing the constitution of the adolescent's identity. However, Balzac purposefully stabilizes this turbulent order by the use of narrative "still-moments" where he captures youth's essence (as integrity, sincerity, fragility, beauty) while also divesting it of its permeable disguise. These narrative moments allow youth to be appreciated *in absentia*, or after the season when the young man *was* in bloom.

Returning then to Thibaudet's definition of adolescent literature where adolescence is presented as "une vision puérile," not as a period of transition but as a state of revolt, one could argue that Balzac's adolescent seems to demonstrate a counter-example; he appears to be socially dynamic (barring the example of the *suicidé*) because his social education allows him to assume an adult existence. However, let us temporarily suspend drawing any definitive conclusions in this regard for, in the

¹⁹⁶ Sussman, 34.

following chapter, we will analyze how the young hero's increasingly problematic relationship with history and historical example further contributes to this discussion. As it has been suggested in this chapter, the young hero's relationship to history is largely determined by the father's absence, understood in both its symbolic and historical terms as the backdrop for the son's social formation, as well as the organizing principle for his economic, legal, and social status. What then will be the fate of this *filis sans père* (foundling, bastard, orphan or otherwise), stepping out on his own?

As Balzac writes: "[i]l est en quelque sorte deux jeunesses, la jeunesse durant laquelle on *croit*, la jeunesse pendant laquelle on *agit*; souvent elles se confondent chez les hommes que la nature a favorisés, et qui sont, comme César, Newton et Bonaparte, les plus grands parmi les grands hommes."¹⁹⁷ Napoleon filled the void left by the father and served as a new father-figure to the nation (especially to his troops), symbolically bridging the historical abyss created by 1789. At the same time, he is a *filis* who usurped the father's place, thus dictating his own place in society, politics, and history. It is because of this fact that Napoleon will occupy a privileged place in the imagination of Restoration and July Monarchy youth. Circulating in what has become an increasingly static social environment, Balzac's young hero encounters historical barriers that inhibit his ability to act: "he is not a simple unified self, but must live up to, or decline from an inherited heroic ideal."¹⁹⁸ Therefore, as we continue our discussion of France's revolutionary heritage, including the imprint left on society by Napoleon Bonaparte, we will seek to demonstrate how history and historical example form a symbolic double-bind for Balzac's post-revolutionary vision of youth in the nineteenth century.

¹⁹⁷ *Dr. X*, 1159, my emphasis.

¹⁹⁸ Walter, 55.

CHAPTER II

Napoleon and the Legacy of his *rêve fatal*¹

Qui pourra jamais expliquer, peindre ou comprendre Napoléon? Un homme qu'on représente les bras croisés, et qui a tout fait! Qui a été le plus beau pouvoir connu, le pouvoir le plus concentré, le plus mordant, le plus acide de tous les pouvoirs; singulier génie qui a promené partout la civilisation armée sans la fixer nulle part; un homme qui pouvait tout faire parce qu'il voulait tout; prodigieux phénomène de volonté [. . .], un homme qui avait dans la tête un code et une épée, la parole et l'action; esprit perspicace qui a tout deviné, excepté sa chute [. . .]. Et, après nous avoir fait peser sur la terre de manière à changer les lois de la gravitation, il nous a laissés plus pauvres que le jour où il avait mis la main sur nous.¹¹

When Rastignac looks out upon Paris from the Père Lachaise cemetery and utters his famous battle cry, “A nous deux maintenant!”¹⁹⁹ to the city below, Balzac initiates his reader into his vision of the modern hero. Capable of embracing the panoramic field before him, he sets forth to navigate Society and conquer a place for himself in the father's absence²⁰⁰: “Ses yeux s'attachèrent presque avidement entre la colonne de la place Vendôme et le dôme des Invalides, là où vivait ce beau monde dans lequel il avait voulu pénétrer [. . .].”²⁰¹ While the youth's gaze of Napoleonic scope should be taken with a caveat of irony (especially considering that Rastignac's first challenge to Society is to dine with Mme de Nucingen), it is suggestive of the limitations placed on the young hero's quest. The Individual's path to social dominance (dictated by Napoleon's

¹ As Balzac writes in *Illusions perdues*: “L'exemple de Napoléon, si fatal au dix-neuvième siècle par les prétentions qu'il inspire à tant de gens médiocres, apparut à Lucien qui jeta ses calculs au vent en se les reprochant” (*IP V*, 178).

¹¹ *AEF III*, 700-01.

¹⁹⁹ *PG III*, 290.

²⁰⁰ Pold, 51. In his article, “Panoramic Realism,” Soren Pold discusses man's relationship to his urban surroundings, and how, in *Le Père Goriot*, Balzac dramatizes the failure of pursuing a linear perspective; modern society dictates a more encompassing view. Therefore, when Rastignac looks upon Paris from Père Lachaise, he indicates his ability to navigate society effectively. As Pold comments: “Balzac's *Comédie* is indeed constructed as a panoramic work, in which characters, places and topics constantly reappear and are put into new contexts and assigned new roles in and between different novels [. . .]” (57).

²⁰¹ *PG III*, 290. The Faubourg Saint-Germain comprises the old nobility, dating from the period of Louis XIV, whereas the Chaussée-d'Antin congregates nobles recently conferred with a title of nobility.

example), has already been historically traced, and all that remains for him is to follow in another's footsteps.²⁰²

It would be an understatement to say that Napoleon Bonaparte, who appears in 32 of Balzac's novels, occupies a dominant role in *La Comédie humaine*.²⁰³ As Jean Tulard observes: "Il n'est guère en effet de roman de Balzac qui ne contienne au moins une référence à Napoléon [. . .]. On finit par se demander si Napoléon n'est pas le héros central de cette fresque dont les autres personnages ne seraient que les comparses."²⁰⁴ In this chapter dedicated to the vast narrative space that Napoleon occupies in Balzac's *Comédie*, we will explore Napoleon's legacy and the role it plays in shaping Balzacian youth. Our approach to this discussion, while diverse, will consider how Napoleon's historical model, as well as his role in the Romantic, Realist, and political enterprises of the period, contributes to the creation of a national (and international) myth, while also serving as an important personal myth for Balzac. Writing in the genre of the historical novel, or what Lukács refers to as Balzac's "consciously historical conception of the present," Balzac represents France's history in close proximity to his present-day reality.²⁰⁵ This approach allows the author to cite the Emperor as an historical personage in his own right, while at the same time Napoleon becomes a polyvalent metaphor to whom the mere allusion (by a gesture, an expression, a physical description, an evocation

²⁰² As Christiane Bénardeau notes, Paris is Napoleon's construction. He installed the Obélisque at the site of the Place de la Concorde, he erected the Arc de l'étoile (completed in 1836), the Chamber of Deputies, the Arc du carrousel, the Madeleine, among other monuments (Bénardeau, 121). As Balzac writes in reference to Napoleon's statue atop the Vendôme column: "LA VILLE DE PARIS a son grand mât tout de bronze, sculpté de victoires, et pour vigie Napoléon." (*FYO* V, 1052). Pierre Laubriet assimilates this image to Christ watching over Paris (Laubriet 3, 294).

²⁰³ *ibid.*, 298.

²⁰⁴ Tulard, 77.

²⁰⁵ Lukács 2, 81.

of an imperial officer or a military exploit) allows Balzac to layer history, and its mythical associations, into his contemporary vision.

Napoleon's Place in History

While Balzac's personal fascination with Napoleon, and the extent to which historical example contributes to the portrait of Balzacian youth, is the subject of this chapter, we must first consider why Napoleon Bonaparte captivated the literary and artistic imagination of the Restoration and July Monarchy societies. Born in 1769, Napoleon Buonaparte was the first Corsican to attend the Ecole militaire at age 15. He graduated as an artillery officer and rapidly rose through the ranks becoming Brigadier General in 1793. At age 26, he was named general and began a series of military campaigns in Europe (Italy, Poland, Spain, Germany, and Russia), that earned him wide acclaim as a military mastermind, as well as the position of First Consul in the Consulate government (1799-1804). In December 1804, Napoleon, *sous les yeux du Pape*, crowned himself France's first Emperor (figure 2). The ensuing imperial reign, a period of prosperity, stirred nationalist sentiments within France's borders; the growing scale of France's empire became "a measure of patriotic legacy, which effectively meant that patriotism became rolled into reverence for the emperor himself."²⁰⁶ This sense of national pride was further strengthened by Napoleon's deliberate efforts to reward and advance men of talent and energy for outstanding public, military, and administration service: the Legion of Honor (1802); the Imperial nobility (1808).²⁰⁷ (The Hapsburg

²⁰⁶ Pilbeam, 30. Napoleon's army conquered more lands in Europe than any ruler since Charlemagne.

²⁰⁷ The creation of the Imperial nobility is often viewed by historians as the first mark of the Empire's decline because the imperial aristocracy resembled a hereditary régime. Stephen Bann explains in his study *Romanticism and the Rise of History*, that Napoleon's desire to make a clean break from the past through the borrowing of Egyptian mannerisms, stimulated a "nostalgic reversion" to the national past, and made the Ancien Régime "irresistible" to the French imagination" (67-68).

marriage in 1810 and the transition from a Republic to a hereditary Empire seemed to put an end to this reward-based system for social advancement).²⁰⁸ The Emperor's abdication at Fontainebleau in 1814 marked the First Bourbon Restoration. In spite of his escape from exile on the island of Elba and return to power during the One Hundred Days, Napoleon definitively abdicated his position (in favor of his son) after his defeat at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. He died in exile on the island of Sainte-Hélène, May 5, 1821.²⁰⁹

Aside from the momentous events that comprised his reign, Napoleon equally fulfilled an important ideological role in nineteenth-century France, serving both as "heir" and "executor" of the Revolution of 1789.²¹⁰ As Napoleon once commented regarding his place in the course of human history: "After me, the Revolution – or, rather, the ideas which formed it – will resume their course. It will be like a book from which the marker is removed, and one starts to read again at the page where one left off."²¹¹ While this statement perspicaciously predicted the Bourbons' return, in the wake of his Empire Napoleon underestimated the struggle the Restoration and July monarchies would face in asserting their own legitimacy.²¹² Acting as a *turannos*,²¹³ or a usurper, Napoleon derived his power not from the sacred order (from a royal birthright) or the past, but from

²⁰⁸ Petiteau, 299. Napoleon divorces Joséphine de Beauharnais after she is unable to produce an heir and in 1810, marries Marie-Louise of Austria (the great grand niece of Marie-Antoinette, guillotined in 1793) heiress to the Hapsbourg Empire. She gives him a son, Napoleon II, the *roi de Rome*, in 1811.

²⁰⁹ For a more in depth treatment of Napoleon's life and career see Martyn Lyon's *Napoleon Bonaparte and the Legacy of the French Revolution* (1994); Louis Bergeron's *France Under Napoleon* (1981); Léon Gédéon's *Napoléon et son époque* (1943).

²¹⁰ Lyons, 1.

²¹¹ Quoted in Furet, p. 265-66.

²¹² Victor Hugo echoes this point in *Les Misérables*: "[La monarchie de la Restauration] crut qu'elle avait des racines parce qu'elle était le passé" (Quoted in Barbéris 4, 49).

²¹³ Laforgue, 22.

the present, and the accomplishments of his own person alone.²¹⁴ Furthermore, his rule was considered legitimate to the degree to which it distanced him from the former ruling power of the Ancien Régime; given that Napoleon held no position in the Jacobin government, nor did he partake in voting for the Louis XVI's death in 1793, he was viewed as an untainted source of authority, rather than a constant reminder to the nation of its patricidal guilt.²¹⁵ Therefore, Napoleon's leadership did not act further to alienate France from its severed history, but established a reparative link between past and present.

Given the three revolutionary slogans, liberty, equality, and fraternity, Napoleon's revolutionary heritage was evidenced by his desire to reorganize French society in the absence of feudal privileges, and therefore translate revolutionary ideals into law. In Lynn Hunt's discussion of the "[t]he literal effacement of the political father," she explains how revolutionary equality was part of a systematic campaign to destroy images of royalty, aristocracy, and feudalism during the revolutionary period and led to the near dismantlement of the Family, where social hierarchy gave way to social agenda.²¹⁶ Napoleon, taking over the reins of French society after the 18 Brumaire (by the *coup d'état* over the Directory government on November 18, 1799), continued the campaign for equality. During the Consulate (1799-1804), Napoleon, acting as *Consul à vie*, allowed bourgeois to buy confiscated noble land (*biens nationaux*), and established a secondary education system that prepared their children for entry into the professional

²¹⁴ As Chateaubriand attests: "[Napoléon] est grand surtout pour être né de lui seul, pour avoir su, sans autre autorité que celle de son génie, se faire obéir par trente-six millions de sujets à l'époque où aucune illusion n'environne les trônes; il est grand pour avoir [. . .] rempli dix années de tels prodiges qu'on a peine aujourd'hui à les comprendre" (Chateaubriand, 653).

²¹⁵ Robert, 239.

²¹⁶ Hunt 1, 53.

and administrative elite.²¹⁷ However, his *Concordat* (1801), his *Code Civil* (1804), and the creation of the imperial nobility re-established certain hierarchical divisions within society.²¹⁸ While the *Code Civil* sought to embody equality before the law, it reinstated inequality within the family unit. The father was restored to his place at the head of the family, and the wife's legal rights and status were diminished. She was deprived of control over her dowry and her children;²¹⁹ divorce was difficult to obtain; the equal distribution of property between husband and wife was abolished.²²⁰ Other laws affecting the family pertained to establishing the rights of legitimate children, namely their eligibility for inheritance.²²¹ Under Napoleon's Code primogeniture was not reinstated but there were *majorats*, and rights for illegitimate children were discouraged.²²² Finally, the creation of the Imperial nobility could be viewed as an attempt to reformulate society's hierarchy, supplanting the old with the new, or fusing the

²¹⁷ Lyons, 298.

²¹⁸ During the Revolution, the National Assembly made the Church a department of the State, confiscated its properties, and removed the authority of the Pope. Napoleon's *Concordat* reestablished ties between France and Rome, reaffirming the Catholic Church as the major religion in France, while also restoring some of its civil status (Forrest, 108).

²¹⁹ Pilbeam, 35.

²²⁰ Forrest, 108.

²²¹ Balzac was against the Code Civil's abolition of primogeniture and argued in favor of its reinstatement. As he writes in *La Fausse maîtresse*: "Aujourd'hui, les familles riches sont entre le danger de ruiner leurs enfants si elles en ont trop, ou celui de s'éteindre en s'en tenant à un ou deux, un singulier effet du Code civil auquel Napoléon n'a pas songé" (*FM II*, 195). Speaking also against woman's inferior social position, Balzac denounces a family's ability to favor one child's succession over another's by forcing daughters to enter into religion: "Voilà comment les familles nobles de la Provence éludent l'infâme Code civil du sieur de Buonaparte, qui fera mettre au couvent autant de filles nobles qu'il en a fait marier. La noblesse française est, d'après le peu que j'ai entendu dire à ce sujet, très-divisée sur ces graves matières" (*MJM I*, 219).

²²² Hunt refers to the revolutionary legislatures' practice of extending equal status to illegitimate children as one important example of the how the campaign for equality sought to ruin the Family (Hunt 1, 53).

two into a "new" aristocracy,²²³ in order that social distinction be associated with wealth, personal talent, and service to the state.²²⁴

Whether he acted as a usurper or as the guarantor of revolutionary ideals, the single most important aspect of Napoleon's legacy in post-revolutionary France was his legitimating of social mobility or "legalized usurpation,"²²⁵ a fact that Bonaparte effectively epitomized when he crowned himself emperor.²²⁶ Given the large number of recruits necessary to fuel Napoleon's military campaigns abroad, there were many positions open in society, both administrative and military, and advancements were awarded according to individual ability. As Alan Forrest explains: "What the Empire had done was not to revoke the social mobility of the Revolution but to confirm the promotion of an entire generation of men from middling origins and to include them among the elite of the land."²²⁷ During the Bourbon reinstatement that followed, a gerontocratic government, comprised of the generation of Louis XVIII and France's *émigré* population, thwarted the imperial model for social mobility while enacting a symbolic reversion to a former period in history: restoring the Gregorian calendar; holding a national funeral for Louis XVI 20 years after his execution; purging Napoleon's personnel from their appointed positions.²²⁸ The newly restored regime's deliberate exclusion of the youthful *intelligentsia* mobilized under Napoleon effectively destabilized

²²³ Given the social structure of surrounding European countries, including France prior to 1789, the imperial aristocracy was seen as being symbolically necessary. This is why the imperial nobility carried titles without privileges. See Abel Hugo's *Histoire de l'Empereur Napoléon* (1883) pages 289-303.

²²⁴ Lyons, 298. In *Le Colonel Chabert*, Mme Chabert's *parvenu* marriage to the Count Ferraud, a descendant of the *Vieille Noblesse*, responded to Napoleon's idea of "fusion" between the old and new aristocracies (*Chabert*, 86).

²²⁵ Brooks 6, 351.

²²⁶ Pasco 5, 236.

²²⁷ Forrest, 107. In *La Rabouilleuse* we see examples of the purging of Napoleon's personnel when divisions of Imperial troops are exported from France to fulfill bogus missions abroad. There are also countless portraits of ex-imperial soldiers living in scabrous conditions because the Restoration government has denied them their pensions and a role in Restoration France.

²²⁸ Furet, 275.

the monarchy they were trying to preserve, for Balzac a lamentable fact that he will not let us forget in the aftermath of 1830.²²⁹

Napoleon: A Literary Myth²³⁰

The mythical component seems to have been built into Napoleon's reign from the very beginning. Whether it existed as a propagandist measure constructed by royalist opposition or created by the Emperor himself, Napoleon was intently aware of the power of manipulating the historical record in order to invent his own larger-than-life persona. For instance, he personally contributed to the publication of *Bulletins de la Grande Armée*; he practiced censorship (suppressing the details of a failed campaign [Egypt], or withholding news of a victory) in order to reveal the events at a later time deemed to be more favorable to his image. He even commissioned painters such as Jacques Louis David and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, to portray the hyperbolic qualities he sought to attach to his person; one has but to observe David's romanticized image of *Napoleon at Saint-Bernard* (1800), his finger extended toward heaven, in order to envision a commander not only of men, but of Destiny itself (figure 3);²³¹ Ingres's (1780-1867) *Portrait of Napoleon I on his Imperial Throne* (1806) depicts Napoleon in a regal manner reminiscent of a Roman Emperor (figure 5): "Napoleon, as conceived by Ingres, is really a fictional god and emperor, interchangeable with dreams of Byzantium or

²²⁹ Brooks 2, 34.

²³⁰ Many sources on the Napoleonic myth are anthologies that examine different aspects of Napoleon's mythic persona, divided between the *légende rose* (as messiah, *demi-dieu*), and the *légende noire* (tyrant, ogre, condottiere), as it relates to thinkers from the nineteenth century to present day. Other studies, considering Balzac and the use of the Napoleonic myth in his *Comédie* follow a similar model, providing brief explanations alongside numerous primary text citations. This approach is disappointing because it is demonstrative, rather than explicative. Therefore, in an effort to do otherwise, I will attempt to consider the Napoleonic myth within the framework of historical and political events, as well as show how myth functions within Balzac's system.

²³¹ In his discussion of *Napoleon at Saint-Bernard*, Robert Rosenblum explains how David's portrait captures the way Napoleon turned contemporary events into new historical myths. Napoleon really crossed the Saint-Bernard on a "valiant" ass rather than the white steed portrayed in David's painting. (Rosenblum 2, 161). See Paul Delaroche's (1797-1856) painting *Bonaparte Crossing the Alps* (1848), figure 4.

Olympus [. . .], an extreme idealization of timeless authority."²³²

While the Napoleonic myth began to take shape at the Empire's fall in 1815, Napoleon's death in 1821 was the serendipitous event that validated his legacy for the literary world; he ceased to be a mere mortal with an extraordinary destiny and was transformed into a Romantic symbol *par excellence* who bequeathed the Romantic generation a solitary genius and "a master of literary energy."²³³ As Marthe Robert explains it, the nineteenth-century novel is inconceivable without Napoleon's rise to power because his *roman* is effectively that of the Bastard incarnate:

L'aventurier sans naissance ni fortune, qui, en rien de temps, se couronne lui-même, installe ses frères sur tous les trônes d'Europe qu'il a rendus vacants, et se taille un empire dans une république toute neuve dont il est à peine citoyen, appartient au roman par toutes les fibres de sa personnalité, il est roman de bout en bout, un roman qui se fait à mesure qu'il influence les événements de l'histoire et qui, pour la première fois à l'époque moderne, s'imprime en lettres de chair et de sang dans le tissu même de la réalité. Le petit homme insignifiant qui se révèle assez fort pour changer son «roman familial» en instrument de puissance historique [. . .].²³⁴

At a time when such works as Lamartine's *Méditations poétiques* (1821) were received with great enthusiasm, the publication of the *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène* in 1823 by the Count de Las Casas (a biographical account of Napoleon's life and last days in exile) struck a chord with the Romantic generation, igniting popular interest in Napoleon, and

²³² *ibid.*, 65.

²³³ Thibaudet, 96. In Girodet's painting, *Ossian Receiving Napoleonic Officers* (1802 [figure 6]) a strange painting where a spirit world receive Napoleonic officers who lost their lives for their country, we see the collision of the literary and historical domains.

²³⁴ Robert, 237-38. Robert states that like any hero of myth, his birth cannot be seen as ordinary (239). In Napoleon's case, myth maintains that his mother, Laetitia Buonaparte, dreamt that the world was on fire the day that she gave birth to the future emperor of France. Therefore, in order to spare him from the dangers of his youth, she promised her son to God. In *Le Médecin de Campagne*, Goguelat alludes to the fantastic circumstances surrounding Napoleon's birth, including his pact with God, in order to explain how he encountered danger on the battlefield, but always remained unscathed (*MC IX*, 521). Historians like Martyn Lyons deflate certain aspects of this myth, namely those relating to Napoleon's low social origins. Lyons explains that, as the son of a Corsican aristocratic family, Napoleon was brought up in a privileged environment. Furthermore, given that Corsica was annexed to France in 1768, Napoleon was technically a French citizen when he entered into the *Ecole militaire* (Lyons, 6-9).

contributing to the creation of his symbolic legacy. In the light of the Revolution and the rise and fall of the Empire, events that transformed history into a "mass experience,"²³⁵ the *Mémorial* fueled interest in the Romantic historical novel because of its prime national example: Napoleon as a Prometheus chained to his rock;²³⁶ Napoleon as an "agent of providence."²³⁷ The obverse side of this equation defines the son's transgression of the Oedipal pact enabling him to materialize individual desires and command history itself: "[Napoléon] fortifie le romancier virtuel dans l'idée que tout est possible; que l'Histoire elle-même s'incline devant le mythe de toute-puissance infantile [. . .]."²³⁸ Given the Romantics' poetic and political agenda of desymbolization, and its emphasis on the creation of new "imaginatively accessible symbols through which the concrete experience of history could be interpreted and revised,"²³⁹ the Napoleonic myth epitomized the Romantic conception of a rhetorical *au-delà* possible. It valorized the Individual, thus exponentially expanding the limits of the nineteenth-century literary imagination, as well as the conception of history beginning anew.²⁴⁰ It inspired countless writings of Bonapartiana (biographies, poems, short stories) from writers of whom many were adolescents at the time of the Napoleon's fall:²⁴¹ Walter Scott wrote *The Life of*

²³⁵ Lukács 2, 23. According to Lukács, the historical novel arose at the beginning of the nineteenth century around the time of the Empire's collapse, (Scott's *Waverly* appeared in 1814), and waned in popularity by the early 1830s (Lukács 2, 19).

²³⁶ Balzac employs this image specifically in *La Peau de chagrin* when he qualifies the state to which Raphaël de Valentin has been reduced at the expense of his desires: "C'était le coup d'œil profond de l'impuissant qui refoule ses désirs au fond de son cœur [. . .] ou le regard du Prométhée enchaîné, de Napoléon déchu [. . .] Véritable regard de conquérant et de damné!" (*PCh.* X, 217).

²³⁷ Petiteau, 60. One could even argue that Las Casas' *Mémorial* was Napoleon's last attempt to impose his own version of history through another's hand (Lyons, 279).

²³⁸ Robert, 238.

²³⁹ Bann, 88.

²⁴⁰ Bishop, 18; Barbéris 5, 1031. While Romanticism is referred to here within the context of a literary movement, it cannot be understood apart from its political context, as a reaction or response to the political atmosphere of the period.

²⁴¹ In 1821 alone, there were 108 books published about Napoleon (Samuels 2, 119). Aside from Las Casas' account, other influential biographies include: *Le Manuscrit venu de Sainte-Hélène*, edited by Lullin

Napoleon (1827) in 10 volumes; Victor Hugo composed his *L'Ode à la colonne* (1827); Stendhal, who admired Napoleon greatly, attempted to write his *Vie de Napoléon* (1817-1818) and *Mémoires sur Napoléon* (1837), both of which he abandoned.²⁴² Given the Restoration's dogmatic opposition to revolutionary equality and liberty, and its attempt to revert to the ways of the Ancien Régime, it is not difficult to imagine why Napoleon's legacy spoke to his century.

The Cult of Napoleon under the July Monarchy

The creation of myth as a means by which to authorize the past or circumvent the present is by no means a novelty in the history of politics. However, it is interesting to consider the evolution of the Napoleonic myth during the July Monarchy, paying particular attention to the time period leading up to the revolution of 1830 until December of 1840 when Napoleon's ashes were returned to France from Sainte-Hélène. As mentioned above, the Romantic generation claimed Napoleon as one of its symbols, baptizing him, in the words of Chateaubriand, "un poète en action" who, in his promise of social progress, filled the void left in the sacred order by the father.²⁴³ The social and

de Châteauevieux (1817), *Histoire de Napoléon et de la Grande Armée pendant l'année 1812* (1824) by the Count Ségur (Petiteau, 60). Although these accounts are not necessarily factual, they were important contributors to the ever-growing myth of Napoleon. Apart from Napoleon's own writings, his works of imagination from his youth, his love letters to Joséphine, and his correspondence, the memorialist accounts reflect an interest in Napoleon the man or *la petite histoire* (his love affairs, Joséphine's infidelities), as well as that of the military genius and Emperor of the French. In addition, a multitude of other writings by various authors, poets, and playwrights of French and international origins have been devoted to the subject of Napoleon and include works by: Stendhal, Nodier, Hugo, Balzac, Chateaubriand, Taine, Lamartine, Sainte Beuve, Byron, Scott, Goethe, and Tolstoy. Jean Tulard's *Le mythe de Napoléon* (1971) mentions 41 movies and two ballets about Napoleon. As recently as 2003, Antoine de Caunes released his film, *Monsieur N.*, treating Napoleon's last years in exile on the island of Sainte-Hélène. This stands as a testimony that even in the twenty-first century, the Napoleonic myth continues to be a source of artistic inspiration.

²⁴² Petiteau, 53. Stendhal wrote his own epitaph to read: "Il aima Cimarosa . . . Il respecta un seul homme, Napoléon" (Quoted in Bénardeau, 57).

²⁴³ While Napoleon's paternal role, as *le père du peuple*, is most commonly emphasized in reference to his troops, he held the symbolic role of the father left vacant in the sacred order after Louis XVI's execution. In Gros's *Bonaparte Visiting the Victims of the Plague at Jaffa* (1804), Bonaparte is shown, in the manner of Jesus, visiting those living in pestilence and disease (figure 7). Portrayed in a Christ-like role, Napoleon

political unrest stemming from a general desire to remake the social hierarchy (reclaim the rights and liberties forged by the Revolution of 1789 and written into law during the Empire), finally erupted in July of 1830 when Charles X's increasingly rigid and ultra royalist regime came to an end. When Louis-Philippe and his *Charte* did not fulfill the broad-based reforms that had been anticipated by the Republicans, 1830 came to represent a disappointment commingled with nostalgia for the fallen Emperor.²⁴⁴

Once considered to be a chimera, 1830 has also been referred to as the moment when history began again.²⁴⁵ The opposite might be said: given the "torrent" of Napoleonic images that flooded the arts (painting, literature, theater) during the first 10 years of the July Monarchy, it would appear that French society embraced a retrograde approach to history, showing less interest in the present than in its ability to represent its past.²⁴⁶ In his perspicacious study, *The Spectacular Past*, Maurice Samuels addresses this phenomenon, calling it the "dislodgement" of the present from the past, as being motivated by a desire to envision the past (particularly the Revolution and Empire) in a new way. The July Monarchy society's use of visual representations of history and visual forms of entertainment, the means chosen to master the past and ground the nation's identity in a "stable vision" of history, gave rise to the popularity of the diorama, the

translates Christian imagery into modern experiences. Pierre Laubriet recounts that Napoleon's Christ-like role was also supported by the Church; for a period, his name was used in the catholic prayer of the rosary (Laubriet 3, 294).

²⁴⁴ Balzac comments on the *Charte* in *La Duchesse de Langeais*: "Si vous êtes un jour atteints et convaincus de ne plus vouloir de la Charte, qui n'est qu'un gage donné au maintien des intérêts révolutionnaires, la Révolution se relèvera terrible, et ne vous donnera qu'un seul coup; ce n'est pas elle qui sortira de France; elle y est le sol même" (*DL V*, 971). In other words, revolution is the foundation for modern society, and the *Charte* is only a token reminder. France's youth thought that their dreams had been fulfilled by the July Monarchy, but were soon disillusioned by the impossibility to remake their place in society. It is because of this that revolutionary energies continued to stir below society's surface.

²⁴⁵ Laforgue, 13. Debating the close relationship between political and literary history, Nicole Mozet writes: "Tout se passe comme si 1830, remettant l'Histoire en marche, avait permis au Roman de s'écrire [. . .]" (Mozet 1, 9).

²⁴⁶ Marrinan, 146.

panorama, and history plays.²⁴⁷ In 1831 there was a Diorama to view Daguerre's latest installation, "Le Tombeau de Napoléon; à Sainte-Hélène."²⁴⁸ In the 1830-1831 theater season alone, there were 29 plays performed about Napoleon, the first of which was entitled *La prise de la Bastille et le passage du Mont Saint-Bernard*; Alexandre Dumas's play, focusing on certain aspects of Napoleon's *legende noire*, *N. Bonaparte ou Trente ans de l'histoire de France*, was performed in 1831.²⁴⁹ First, artists, spurred by the idea that history had become a product for consumption, profited from the relaxation of the censors, enabling them to benefit materially from the Cult of Napoleon without fear of suffering negative repercussions. Second, the sheer abundance of Napoleonic imagery points to a deeper political investment on the part of the July Monarchy government.

The collective national identity forged through the identification of national heroes and their images was sanctioned by the July Monarchy as a means to legitimize its own authority; this is to say, that just as Napoleon's reign was a political and economic "orchestration" to bury Bourbon tradition, his myth equally allowed the July Monarchy to prescribe its particular version of history.²⁵⁰ In the face of Bonapartist opposition, and in the interest of presenting national history according to a propagandistic ideology favorable to the regime, the July Monarchy chose to acknowledge the nationalistic cult of

²⁴⁷ Samuels 2, 6, 8. On a side note, Samuels, remarking upon the extent to which history became a visual form of consumption, makes mention of the sale of wall paper depicting the Battle of Austerlitz, the July Revolution, and other such historical episodes (ibid., 7). Jean Adhémar's article on "Balzac et la peinture," corroborates this claim, and indicates that Balzac's reference to the wall paper in the Maison Vauquer (depicting scenes from Homer's *Iliad*) was a product that actually existed during the period and was sold in a shop near the Balzac family residence (Adhémar 1, 153).

²⁴⁸ Marrinan, 146.

²⁴⁹ Samuels 2, 113. Not only is it amusing to think that the success of a given play depended on an actor's ability to imitate Napoleon's looks (the way he took his tobacco, placed his hand in his vest, his manner of pacing), it is comical to conjure the image of several Napoleons roaming the streets of nineteenth-century Paris to advertise their respective history plays: "Indeed, savvy producers encouraged the slippage between art and life for publicity purposes by having their actors walk the streets of Paris [where] Napoleons were a common sight [wearing the redingote grise and the bicorne hat]" (ibid., 121).

²⁵⁰ Tulard, 43.

Napoleon, sponsoring numerous art competitions in his honor.²⁵¹ In his fascinating study, *Painting Politics for Louis-Philippe: Art and Ideology in Orleanist France 1830-1848*, Michael Marrinan explores this question in detail while paying particular attention to the visual representation of Napoleon Bonaparte.²⁵²

When Louis-Philippe transformed Versailles into a museum in 1834, the *Salle du Sacre* dedicated to Napoleon portrayed him as a military leader, but not a legitimate ruler of France. Paintings such as Raffet's (1804-1860) *The Master's Eye* (1833) and Bouchot's (1800-1842) *The Battle of Zurich* (1837) are but two examples demonstrating the politically dictated scope of Napoleon's historical role; he is shown on the battlefield directing his troops rather than in his imperial garb as Emperor of France (figures 9 and 10). The Napoleonic gallery therefore served the King's own political agenda:

By relegating the petit caporal to the confines of historical anecdote, the image obtained a public appeal yet managed to remain politically safe [. . .]. Napoleon's familiar and awe-inspiring figure [remained locked] into an anecdotal narrative elaborated with an accessible style of everyday naturalism.²⁵³

Finally, in 1840 when Louis-Philippe ordered the return of Napoleon's ashes from Sainte-Hélène, holding a national funeral in his honor on December 15th before delivering his remains to their final resting place under the dome of the Hôtel des Invalides, the July Monarchy's political balancing act came to a close. As Marrinan comments: "[. . . T]he Emperor's zealots were doomed to contemplate his bones without poetic flights of imagination. From that day forward, the pilgrimage was banalized and would require no

²⁵¹ Marrinan, 160.

²⁵² During the Restoration, the statue of Napoleon atop the Vendôme Column was replaced by a statue of Henri IV. It was Louis-Philippe who commissioned the replacement of Napoleon's statue. Seurre's (1798-1858) figure of Napoleon was considered to be a politically conservative representation of the former emperor because it relies on well-established clichés: his *petit chapeau* and *redingote grise* (figure 8). It is from one of Seurre's competitors that Balzac obtained the plaster statue of Napoleon that sat on his writing desk (Adhémar 1, 154).

²⁵³ Marrinan, 164.

more than a simple walk across town."²⁵⁴ In other words, the return of Napoleon's ashes neutralized the political charge associated with his mythic legacy.

Napoleon and Balzac

For Balzac, as for many of his contemporaries, Napoleon represented an important source of literary inspiration as well as a personal myth – *le père retrouvé; l'homme nécessaire appelé par l'histoire*.²⁵⁵ Balzac also identified the Emperor as a kindred will, inscribing him into his literary ambitions to become the *Napoléon des lettres*. Given his century's new approach to history, as well as its attachment to the Napoleonic myth, how might we begin to form a context for understanding Napoleon's presence in *La Comédie humaine*?²⁵⁶ First of all, Balzac appears to have been well-versed in the romanticized accounts about Napoleon's life and military career that were in circulation. Critics such as Jean-Hervé Donnard and Maurice Descotes note that Balzac,

²⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 199 Alphonse Karr aptly reiterates this assessment regarding the ideological impact the return of Napoleon's ashes had on his Cult in France: "As a poet and philosopher, I liked to imagine a tomb of Napoleon on Saint-Helena; this solitary tomb upon a rock beaten by the wind and sea had a grandeur that we will be unable to give it in Paris. All poetry is a regret or a desire: remorse over this exile after death and pity for a man of such great destiny mingled something of tenderness and affection with his memory. Napoleon on Saint-Helena was as far from us as deified as if he had been in heaven" (*ibid.*, 199). Napoleon remained a subject of artistic study even after his death. We see an example of this in Jean Alaux's (1786-1864) *The Apotheosis of Napoleon* (1837 [figure 11]), where Napoleon's tomb at Sainte-Hélène is framed by a cluster of Weeping Willow trees.

²⁵⁵ Laubriet 3, 293. As we touched on in the last chapter, "la figure colossale du Père," representing the primary source of Power and Creation, is a recurrent theme in Balzac's *Comédie*. As Nicole Mozet explains, in spite of Napoleon's usurper status, he represents for Balzac the only political power that still translates in terms of paternity (Mozet 2, 174).

²⁵⁶ Laubriet 3, 300. In his article "La légende et le mythe Napoléoniens chez Balzac," Pierre Laubriet further elucidates the "personal" nature of the Napoleonic myth and its influence over Balzac's life. For instance, Balzac's "vie prénatale" or conception occurred during the Egyptian campaign, the time at which Napoleon began to constitute himself before French Society as a mythical entity. Additionally, Balzac's adolescence coincides with Napoleon's exile and death, followed by the circulation of literature and memoirs on Napoleon's subject (*ibid.*, 285). In other words, Balzac saw himself as having been born and raised on the Napoleonic myth. Balzac's correspondence with Mme Hanska further reveals that he often compared himself to Napoleon saying that "[s]es luttes avec la matière littéraire, ce sont [s]es batailles" (*ibid.*, 299). He wrote of his activity of recording anecdotes or quotes by the Emperor onto a kitchen tablet that did not leave his office. For seven years he did this, often inventing quotes of his own that he then attributed to the Emperor (Donnard 2, 126). He sold his *Maximes et pensées de Napoléon* to "a hatter of his arrondissement," calling it "une des plus belles choses de ce temps-ci: la pensée, l'âme de ce grand homme" (Besser 1, 79-80).

composing the bulk of his *Comédie* after 1830, often used these sources for his own creative license.²⁵⁷ It is also evident that Balzac drew inspiration from the new visual technologies of the period. As suggested at the beginning of this chapter, Balzac reproduces modern perspectives in his *Comédie* allowing his young hero to withdraw from the metropolis to assume an alternative view. Additionally, in two novellas treating the theme of social reintegration of Napoleon's imperial guard in Restoration society, we see examples of how Balzac combines Napoleonic themes with the spectacular historical format: his treatment of the battlefield in *Adieu* (1830); the portrait of the imperial officer in *Le Colonel Chabert* (1832). In *Adieu*, Philippe de Sucey, a former colonel and survivor of the Bérésina crossing recreates the traumatic historical event in an effort to restore the memory of his amnesic mistress, Stéphanie de Vandières: "[I]l n'oublia rien de ce qui pouvait reproduire la plus horrible de toutes les scènes, et il atteignit à son but [. . .] Monsieur de Sucey garda le secret de cette représentation tragique, de laquelle, à cette époque, plusieurs sociétés parisiennes s'entretinrent comme d'une folie."²⁵⁸ In *Le Colonel Chabert*, Balzac presents a series of military still-life images or *tableaux* documenting the homecoming of a soldier buried in a common grave following the battle at Eylau. Chabert's colorful description of the battle scene is often believed to have been inspired by Gros's (1771-1835) *Napoleon Visiting the Battlefield of Eylau* (1808 [figure

²⁵⁷ Donnard 2, 126.

²⁵⁸ *Ad. X*, 1011. The Bérésina river crossing was part of Napoleon's plan to cross into Poland. However, he and his troops had to devise a way to cross the partially thawed river in the absence of bridges, destroyed by Russian troops in an effort to trap Napoleon and decimate his army. By dramatic feats of engineering, a rudimentary crossing was devised. However, out of the 49,000 French troops, 20,000 perished in the freezing water, while 10,000 others were massacred by the Russians. In *Adieu*, Balzac attempts to recreate this traumatic event by images of men drowning in the freezing water of the Bérésina river. Stéphanie de Vandières witnesses the death of her husband, who falls off their raft: "Au moment où il y tombait, un glaçon lui coupa la tête, et la lança au loin, comme un boulet" (*Ad. X*, 1001). Philippe de Sucey's recreation of the Bérésina crossing also proves that the memory of the traumatic event has an equally fatal outcome.

12]).²⁵⁹ Apart from the consideration of romanticized biographies and spectacular forms of entertainment, this discussion invites speculation as to the contribution that visual images may have made in shaping Balzac's portrayal of Napoleon in his *Comédie* as well.

While I am not proposing the projection of certain images onto Balzac's text, let us consider briefly how images of the Emperor, both contemporary and posterior to Balzac's literary production, invite comparison between text and image. Research on Balzac's relationship to the visual arts indicates that 1830 was a time when his artistic knowledge expanded significantly.²⁶⁰ This is attributed not to Balzac's ability to go to the Salon, but to the commercialization of art that permitted him to purchase images readily (engravings, newspapers, and woodcuts).²⁶¹ Making specific reference to Balzac's familiarity with images of Napoleon, Jean Adhémar claims: "[Balzac] often preferred the life of the image to that of reality; he asserted that a diorama provided him with an impression of relief that landscape itself did not give him."²⁶² For instance, when viewing several engravings by Bellangé (1800-1866 [figures 13, 14, and 15]), Balzac's novel *Le Médecin de campagne* comes to mind. In *Look Here Father* (1835), the artist captures the divine and paternal status that Napoleon held among much of the peasant, artisan, and bourgeois population, an important theme in Balzac's novel. In the section subtitled, "Napoléon, son histoire racontée par un vieux soldat dans une grange," an imperial veteran named Goguelat recounts the Emperor's life and legacy to a group of peasants in a barn; he reinforces Napoleon's role as "le père du peuple," as well as the

²⁵⁹ Bonard asserts that the idea for *Le Colonel Chabert* came from Gros's painting. The right arm of the half-buried man in the center forefront of the painting creates a converging line that leads the spectator's eye to the painting's focal point: Napoleon on his white horse greeting his troops (Bonard, 94).

²⁶⁰ While there are images with which we know Balzac was familiar, much of our argument relies on the role of speculation, that is, those images from which Balzac may have drawn inspiration.

²⁶¹ Adhémar 1, 153.

²⁶² Quoted in Kanes 2, 119.

view that he was seen as the "firmest guarantee" of the gains made from the revolution.²⁶³ One could also draw parallels between Charlet's (1792-1845) *Napoleon in Bivouac* (1822 [figure 16]) and a scene from *Une Ténébreuse affaire* where Laurence de Cinq-Cigne encounters Napoleon. Expecting to meet Napoleon the tyrant, the Countess comes upon "l'homme de fer" in his bivouac on the eve of the battle of Iéna; he wears his muddy boots (proof of his activity on the battlefield) and his "fameuse redingote."²⁶⁴

From these examples, we observe how Balzac's *Comédie* draws from contemporary historical images, while at the same time producing something new.²⁶⁵ In his animation of Napoleon, the real historical figure or the mythical personage, the author relies on clichés, while at the same time grouping together the historical, the mythical, and the fictive. Balzac employs a similar technique in his treatment of fictive characters bearing Napoleonic traits; he superimposes, juxtaposes and confuses the portrait of Napoleon with his portrait of the young hero in order that a gesture, word, or expression may serve as a synecdoche to evoke Napoleon's person and myth. It is therefore remarkable to consider the detail with which Balzac, in the opening scene of *La Femme de trente ans*, describes the last parade of the imperial guard in Paris:

Cet immense tableau, miniature d'un champ de bataille avant le combat, était poétiquement encadré, avec tous les accessoires et ses accidents bizarres, par les hauts bâtiments majestueux dont l'immobilité semblait imitée par les chefs et les soldats. Le spectateur comparait involontairement ces murs d'hommes à ces murs de pierres [. . .] Un petit homme assez gras, vêtu d'un uniforme vert, d'une culotte blanche, et chaussé de bottes à l'écuycère, parut tout à coup en gardant sur sa tête un chapeau à trois cornes aussi prestigieux que l'homme lui-même; le large

²⁶³ Butler 1, 77. Balzac's affinity for Ségur's *La Campagne russe de Napoléon* and Las Casas's *Mémorial* are readily apparent in this passage from Balzac's novel (Donnard 2, 126). One could call it an abbreviated, romanticized account of the Napoleonic myth improvised by Balzac's pen.

²⁶⁴ *TA VIII*, 680. Napoleon's portrait in *Une Ténébreuse affaire* is a synthesis of images from etchings and paintings and illustrates Balzac's interest in mixing realism and idealization (Laubriet 3, 287).

²⁶⁵ As Maurice Samuels explains, Balzac viewed the proliferation of historical images as cheapening the past and alienating the viewer from crucial moments of modern history (Samuels 2, 216).

ruban rouge de la Légion d'honneur flottait sur sa poitrine, une petite épée était à son côté [. . .]. Des mots de commandements commencèrent de rang en rang comme des échos. Des cris de: Vive l'Empereur! furent poussées par la multitude enthousiasmée [. . .] Les murs des hautes galeries de ce vieux palais semblaient crier aussi: Vive l'Empereur! Ce ne fut pas quelque chose d'humain, ce fut une magie, un simulacre de la puissance divine, ou mieux une fugitive image de ce règne si fugitif. L'homme entouré de tant d'amour, d'enthousiasme, de dévouement, de vœux, pour qui le soleil avait chassé les nuages du ciel, resta sur son cheval, à trois pas en avant du petit escadron doré qui le suivait, ayant le grand maréchal à sa gauche, le maréchal de service à sa droite. Au sein de tant d'émotions excitées par lui, aucun trait de son visage ne parut s'émouvoir.²⁶⁶

First, this descriptive scene acts as a vast historical painting, or history play where the actors create a "magnifique spectacle" for the surrounding spectators.²⁶⁷ Painted in a manner reminiscent of Robert Lefèvre (1755-1830), Napoleon is the central figure in this *tableau vivant* (figure 17). Second, this scene, taken as an immense funeral *cortège*, also announces the death of the Empire. This cohesive vision of the past, bringing together Emperor, troops, and citizens, commensurate with Napoleon's stabilizing role in nineteenth-century French society, is captured by Balzac at its apex. However, in the world of *La Comédie humaine*, Napoleon's portrait cannot be reduced to a stable vision of the past, and this textual instance remains unique.

Returning to our question of the relationship between visual imagery and its role in Balzac's *Comédie*, it is likely that the author's creative sensibilities were stimulated by his century's new approach to history, with special interest paid to popularized representations of the Napoleonic myth. While it is not difficult to imagine why Napoleon was considered to be a compelling literary and artistic subject, it remains to be explored why he acts as a focal point in Balzac's historical assessment; more importantly,

²⁶⁶ *F30* II, 1044-1046.

²⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 1043. Taunay's (1755-1830) *Entry of the Imperial Guard into Paris* (1810 [figure 18]) seems to conjure a similar scene to that described by Balzac.

how does Napoleon's presence in Balzac's *Comédie* provide an important ideological framework for the construction of the author's modern realist vision? Already, we can surmise certain aspects of Balzac's technique, including the various ways in which Napoleon and Napoleonic themes are layered into Balzac's text, as well as how, in dispersing or scattering his portrait of Napoleon throughout his *Comédie*, Balzac allows him to become "le héros d'une gigantesque aventure dont l'ombre s'étend sur toute *La Comédie humaine*."²⁶⁸

Realism, the Historical Novel, and the Post-revolutionary Lens

Given that Balzac wrote about a world not far removed from his contemporary reality, his use of "realism" functions according to his ability to pair the real (that which exists), and the fictive (that which *could* exist).²⁶⁹ While the critical debate has identified several troubling aspects of the realist text relating to the reader's acceptance or refusal of the text's diegesis (as well as provocative responses to them), for the purposes of our study, we will limit our definition of realism to that which depends on "mimetic illusion"; this is to say, the reader's participation in the act of reading constructs a certain diegetic reality that while not "real," gives the illusion of a plausible reality; or produces, in the words of Roland Barthes, "l'effet du réel."²⁷⁰ In other words, Balzac's realism depends

²⁶⁸ Descotes, 228.

²⁶⁹ "Realism," a term first coined for painting before it migrated to literary criticism in the 1840s, poses a bit of an anachronism in a discussion of Balzac; as Balzac states at the beginning of *Le Père Goriot* "All is true," not "All is real" (PG III, 50). While we recognize that "realism" as a literary term has been more tardively associated with Flaubert before it was developed as a literary movement in the twentieth century, we use the term here with a caveat, recognizing the difficulties associated with it (especially with regard to the plethora of conflicting definitions surrounding the term), as a way to distinguish, in a preliminary way, between the two "paradigms" of Balzac's writing: the real or the scientific (described as observation, calculation, and materialism) and the ideal or the poetic (described as pure thought, second vision, mysticism, intuition) (Beizer 1, 140). Furthermore, given the author's interest in the creation of "mimetic illusion," the import of Balzac's "realism" is determined, in part, by the relationship the author forms between the narrator and the narratee.

²⁷⁰ See Barthes' article, "L'Effet du réel." For several excellent summaries of the realist debate, and explanations of the literary terms therein, see Armine Kotin Mortimer's introduction to her study *Writing*

not on reproducing the real, but rather on its reconception with imaginative intercessions, thus presenting nature in a concentrated form.²⁷¹ It is this imaginative quality that lends an element of the extreme to Balzac's reality and transforms the mundane into something curiously poetic (the Parisian "bourbier"; the miserable conditions of a young student's social habitat; the suicide of a notorious courtesan). The role of imagination is integral to a discussion of Balzac's historical approach and his use of real historical figures.

The Goncourt brothers defined the historical novel in the following manner:

“L'Histoire est un roman qui a été, le roman de l'Histoire qui aurait pu être.”²⁷² In

Balzac's contemporary adaptation of the historical novel, he attempts to do just this: to bridge the "gaps" left in history by combining the real and the imaginary (including the mythical) in order to create an alternative to "l'histoire officielle,"²⁷³ as well as give the illusion that "tout se tient, tout s'enchaîne dans l'espace comme dans le temps."²⁷⁴

Balzac's mixture of the real and the fictive is particularly striking in his use of “real historical figures.” While real historical figures are shown to be peripheral to the novel's focus, they aid in setting the scene and in lending authenticity to the historical atmosphere created in the text. In his article "Balzac et la réalité," Michel Butor explains that the limited use of real historical figures stems from Balzac's inability to take creative license with them. However, the author's use of fictive cognates for real historical

Realism and Lillian Furst's study *The Claims and Strategies of Realist Fiction*. See also Christopher Prendergast's study, *The Order of Mimesis*, where he dissects the "authoritarian gesture" of mimesis; this is to say, the ways in which mimesis creates a closed textual world where the 'prescriptive' and the 'normative' insure that the 'descriptive' remains on the level of the undiscussed, thus glossing over the arbitrary quality of symbolic forms (Prendergast, 6).

²⁷¹ Eigeldinger, 67.

²⁷² Quoted in Bernard 3, 60.

²⁷³ “Il y a deux Histoires: l’Histoire officielle, menteuse qu’on enseigne, l’Histoire *ad usum delphini*; puis l’Histoire secrète, où sont les véritables causes des événements, une Histoire honteuse” (*IP V*, 695). We see an example of this in the conclusion of *Une Ténébreuse affaire* when De Marsay says: “[I]l faut éclaircir ce coin obscur de notre histoire [. . .]” (*TA VIII*, 692).

²⁷⁴ Courteix, 396.

figures, like Camille Maupin (a fictional character *d'après* George Sand who constitutes a possibility of a *femme auteur* not existing in reality), fills the historical opening "disclosed" in reality.²⁷⁵ Gretchen Rous Besser, also commenting upon the use of real historical figures, clarifies that in lending an historical framework to Balzac's fiction, they provide "a shorthand way of endowing the [fictional] character with certain well-known traits": Nucingen is referred to as "le Napoléon de la Finance," Benassis, as "le Napoléon de notre vallée," and Vautrin, as the "le Napoléon du bague."²⁷⁶

Of all the real historical figures in Balzac's *Comédie*, Napoleon appears with the greatest frequency, and he assumes a unique narrative space and purpose. His portrayal is diverse, making possible a unified reading of *La Comédie humaine* and metonymically expanding the already plural reading of Balzac's ambitious youth. As Descotes writes: "L'Empereur paraît peu en personne mais il est partout, on le retrouve dans l'évolution des destins individuels aussi bien que dans l'orientation générale des esprits du pays."²⁷⁷ When, in works such as *La Vendetta*, *Une Ténébreuse affaire*, and *La Femme de trente ans*, Napoleon enters directly into the storyline as an historical personage (respectively as First Consul and Emperor), his time in the spotlight is brief but poignant. However, when he is evoked indirectly, through narrative description and the dialogue of fictive

²⁷⁵ Butor, 52.

²⁷⁶ Besser 1, 80. Another way that Balzac blends the two worlds is by listing real persons alongside fictional ones. In *Modeste Mignon*, he lists his poet Canalis among his "contemporaries," like Hugo, Gautier, and Vigny (*MM I*, 517). Or, in *Une Ténébreuse affaire*, he cites Malin among statesmen like Talleyrand, Fouché, and Napoleon. In his subsequent revisions of his novels, it was commonplace for Balzac to replace the real historical figure named by his fictional equivalent; in this way, recurring characters eventually fulfilled the function of historical figures (Besser 1, 81).

²⁷⁷ Descotes, 266.

characters, we see how Balzac consciously imbeds in his text with both historical and mythical elements, layering together official and “true” histories.²⁷⁸

While Balzac's use of real historical figures, primarily Napoleon, reflects a desire to uncover or poetically reconstruct the "social and human motives which led men to think and act just as they did in historical reality," it is only partial in determining his approach to history.²⁷⁹ As the "secretary" of his society, Balzac's representation of France's history (spanning from the Revolution of 1789 to the time right before the Revolution of 1848²⁸⁰) provides a retrospective examination of the Restoration and the society of the July Monarchy, and underscores the role of history, understood synchronically, as a simile for the dynamism of change.²⁸¹ The Revolution of 1830, figuring into this assessment of social evolution, poses several ideological difficulties for Balzac. In his *Avant-Propos* Balzac explains that he writes "à la lueur de deux Vérités éternelles: la Religion, et la Monarchie," however his devotion to Church and King is not without contradiction.²⁸² He states that the shift from a Catholic monarchy to a democratic government "nous donne le gouvernement par les masses, le seul qui ne soit point responsable, et où la tyrannie est sans bornes, car elle s'appelle la loi. Aussi regardé-je la Famille et non l'Individu comme le véritable élément social."²⁸³ In order to maintain a strong society, Balzac argues in favor of subjugating personal liberties to the

²⁷⁸ We see an example of this in *Le Colonel Chabert* when Chabert, recounting his death at Eylau, captures Napoleon's speech: "[L'Empereur] envoya, pour me reconnaître et me rapporter aux ambulances [. . .]. –Allez donc voir si, par hasard, mon pauvre Chabert vit encore?" (*Chabert*, 45).

²⁷⁹ Lukács 2, 42

²⁸⁰ There are a few titles in *La Comédie* where the story takes place during what is termed "la pré-histoire," the Middle Ages or early seventeenth century. Several of these titles include: *Les Proscrits* in 1308, *Sur Catherine de Médicis* in 1560, and *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* in 1612.

²⁸¹ "Le hasard est le plus grand romancier du monde: pour être fécond, il n'y a qu'à l'étudier. La Société française allait être l'historien, je ne devais être que le secrétaire" (*A-P I*, 7).

²⁸² *ibid.*, 9.

²⁸³ *ibid.*, 9.

strong leadership of an absolute monarchy or of an imperial dictatorship. From Balzac's point of view, the revolutionary purging of Charles X from the throne enacted a similar symbolic effect on society as did the death of Louis XVI. As he writes in *Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées*: "Tout pays qui ne prend pas sa base dans le pouvoir paternel est sans existence assurée. Là commence l'échelle des responsabilités et la subordination qui monte jusqu'au roi. Le roi, c'est nous tous."²⁸⁴ Charles X's exile in 1830 sapped France of the foundation of its only legitimate and effective power, barring it from "tout espoir de retour en arrière."²⁸⁵ The Revolution of 1830 therefore becomes an important "lens" through which Balzac judges the past.²⁸⁶

In December of 1792, when Robespierre declared that Louis must die so that the *patrie* could live, execution was written into law and "regicide was regarded as the essential founding act and founding myth of the new French nation."²⁸⁷ According to Balzac, France, in the post-revolutionary age, was doubly severed from its past, and in need of a new founding myth to supplant the vacant throne, seconded by the sterile promises of the July Monarchy government. Napoleon, and his memory animated by the nineteenth-century imagination, seemed to respond to this rift created in France's history; he acted as a father-figure while at the same time traced the path of social advancement for the nation's youth. However, his abdication, exile, and death demonstrated his ultimate lack of authority to guarantee either historical continuity or social progress.

²⁸⁴ *MJM I*, 243.

²⁸⁵ Mozet 3, 234. Drawing from one of Balzac's lesser-known texts *Le Départ*, Mozet explains how Balzac saw a direct correlation between an absolutist government and the liberty of each of the king's subjects, as opposed to a regime where liberty is in its laws, but despotism is in society's mores (ibid., 235). We also see this idea expressed in *La Peau de chagrin*: "— Oh! oh! . . . s'écria un vaudevilliste, alors, Messieurs, je porte un toast à — Charles X, père de la liberté . . . — Pourquoi pas? dit un journaliste. Quand le despotisme est dans les lois, la liberté se trouve dans les mœurs et vice versa . . . Buvons donc à l'imbécillité du pouvoir qui nous donne tant de pouvoir sur les imbéciles! . . ." (*PCh. X*, 101).

²⁸⁶ Barbéris 3, 115.

²⁸⁷ Dunn, 15.

Enter Balzac's young hero who, in the world of *La Comédie humaine*, encapsulates modern society's desire to remake social hierarchies and pursue individual glory because of *and* in spite of historical example.

The *rêve brutal* forged by Napoleon's symbolic legacy contributes to the displacement of the "véritable élément social," or the family, in favor of Individualism.²⁸⁸ Figuratively disconnected from the past represented by the father, the young hero configures filial fantasies that allow him, as a *fils de la Révolution*, to become equally the *fils de ses propres œuvres* and devise his own family romance or bastard myth where "tout enfant [devient] le chef d'une nouvelle famille."²⁸⁹ At the same time, this does not divorce the Individual from his historical inheritance. Although the young hero remains ideologically severed from his historical past, he imagines himself acting out an inherited heroic ideal. In this way, Balzac poses the youthful figure as an agent of history who acts with the potential to bridge the historical gap left by revolution and Empire. However, how will Balzac's post-revolutionary optic affect the young hero's social and historical viability?²⁹⁰ In the next section of our study, we will consider this question in conjunction with the ways in which the Napoleonic legacy infiltrates the social and political atmosphere of Balzac's youth, as well as the youthful portrait. Will historical example only lead to historical limitation and repetition? Or will it allow the Balzacian

²⁸⁸ A-P I, 9.

²⁸⁹ CV IX, 722.

²⁹⁰ Although much of Balzac's fiction is set during the Restoration period, we must remain conscious of the political circumstances surrounding Balzac's composition; this is to say, that his work should be read as post-revolutionary. In her study *Trauma and Its Representations*, Deborah Jenson argues that a post-revolutionary reading is necessary because Balzac's texts "often reveal the mimetic wound of the social under the poorly sutured scars of the rupture between reality and representation" (Jenson, 17-18). Therefore, in Balzac's case, it is important to consider both the internal chronology of the text, as well as its date of publication.

youth to adapt to the historical past in order to found its own myths and impose its own version(s) of history in the present?

Balzac's Napoleonic Youth: *Les hommes d'action déçus*

Napoleon is the supreme point of comparison for Balzac's fictive characters. Whether one of Napoleon's battles is evoked as a metaphor for individual success or failure, or whether the Emperor's personality is conjured up in order to translate a character's *volonté*, allusions to Napoleon abound in our reading of *La Comédie humaine*. As Maurice Descotes explains: "Tout revient à Napoléon, que ce soit sur le mode ironique ou sur le mode grave."²⁹¹ Balzac unmasks Napoleon in unexpected ways: behind the portraits of other characters; behind the anger of a young girl; the mesmeric gaze of a notorious criminal; or the monomaniacal efforts of a chemist. However, in a discussion of the role of the Napoleonic myth and its connection with Balzac's vision of post-revolutionary France, these examples, while amusing, demonstrate Balzac's technique on a superficial level.²⁹² Napoleon is cited directly in *La Comédie humaine* more frequently than any other real historical figure. He is also evoked indirectly by a series of keywords referring to both his historical and mythical roles. Consider the occurrence of certain keywords within Balzac's *Comédie*: *bataille*, 276 occurrences; Waterloo, 37; *Sainte-Hélène*, 16; *demi-solde*, 20; *Corse* and *corse*, 67 total occurrences; Joséphine, 72; *Empereur*, 466; *Premier Consul*, 145; Napoléon, 564; and Bonaparte, 122 occurrences.

²⁹¹ Descotes, 228; 234-35.

²⁹² In *Le Lys dans la vallée*, Madeleine de Mortsauf's contempt for Félix de Vandenesse for causing her mother's death is assimilated to that of a Corsican: "Son accent trahissait une haine réfléchie comme celle d'un Corse" (*Lys IX*, 1208). While the name Joséphine refers to the Empress in her historical role, it is also the name of two of Balzac's female characters: a servant in *Ferragus*; the crippled wife of Balthazar Claës in *La Recherche de l'absolu*, a chemist whose singular will cannot help but call to mind the reputed character of the Emperor himself.

As with our discussion of paternity in the previous chapter, the father's tomb informs our reading of Balzac's Napoleonic youth. Napoleon enacted a reparative role in bridging the historical void left by the revolution, but it was the insistence on the tomb or the burial of the past that allowed him to establish himself on the ruins of the Bourbon throne.²⁹³ Furthermore, one could argue that his political agenda, fueled by his military campaigns, depended on the perpetual replenishment of France's sons, pairing youth and burial in the name of individual and national glory. Balzac echoes this point in *Une Ténébreuse affaire* when Napoleon explains his ideal of the State:

Voici trois cent mille hommes, ils sont innocents . . . Eh bien, demain, trente mille hommes seront morts, morts pour leur pays! . . . De notre côté, nous perdrons certainement de grands hommes inconnus. Enfin, peut-être verrai-je mourir mon meilleur ami! Accuserai-je Dieu? Non. Je me tairai. Sachez [. . .] qu'on doit mourir pour les lois de son pays, comme on meurt pour sa gloire [. . .].²⁹⁴

When Napoleon met with his own exile and death, it was the tomb that energized his legacy, while at the same time imbuing the Cult of Individualism with a sense of historical fatality. It is my view that Balzac writes these historically symbolic tombs into his myth of Napoleon, and, that in metonymically extending Napoleon's omnipresent shadow over *La Comédie humaine*, he seeks to express the weighty social and historical baggage forged by his legacy. Turning to his story of youth, Balzac's system produces haunting effects, suggesting that the young hero is limited by the ghost of the past.

Le Colonel Chabert: The Plot of the Tomb

The most compelling narrative demonstrating both Balzac's use of the tomb, as well as the metonymical application of the Napoleonic myth to evoke the ghost of the

²⁹³ As Emile Blondet states in *Une Fille d'Eve*: "Napoléon l'a dit, on ne fait pas de jeunes républiques avec de vieilles monarchies" (*FE* II, 322).

²⁹⁴ *TA* VIII, 681-682.

past, appears in *Le Colonel Chabert*. The example of *Chabert* is foundational to this discussion not only because it serves to foreground the historical terrain (the period between 1818-1840) upon which Balzac's youth must tread, but because it tells the story of a *parvenu* of the Empire who finds himself without a place in Restoration France. My approach to this work seeks to examine the metonymic and metaphoric development of death and rebirth produced by successive *tableaux* documenting the return of a soldier buried in a common grave following the battle at Eylau (1807).²⁹⁵ Colonel Chabert is at once a physical persona incarnating Balzac's metaphor for the tomb and a narrative device that underlines the "plot of the tomb" permeating the textual atmosphere of *La Comédie humaine*.²⁹⁶ Finally, our meditation on Chabert's story serves as a way to articulate the material influence of the past, perceived on the level of the immaterial through the conscious and unconscious ways in which the young hero internalizes history.

The opening line of the novella reads: "Allons! Encore notre vieux carrick!"²⁹⁷ This is our first introduction to Chabert, a former imperial colonel assimilated to a weathered, outmoded overcoat comprised of several overlapping cloaks. However, what is more striking about this image is the way in which it allows Balzac to oppose the past, a literal "déterré" returning to Paris after a ten-year absence, to the Restoration's political agenda to keep the past (including its national heroes) buried. This is accomplished in a two-fold manner: by the physical description of the scene and by the various levels of discourse produced by its actors. The atmosphere in Derville's study is suffocating;

²⁹⁵ *Chabert*, 35. The battle of Eylau, led by Napoleon against the Russians in the winter of 1807, could not really be considered a victory for either side; the French lost 18,000 men, whereas the Russians lost 25,000 (ibid., 34).

²⁹⁶ This expression is attributed to Janet Beizer's work *Family Plots*.

²⁹⁷ *Chabert*, 21.

Chabert is confronted by a hodge-podge of legal forms, putrid odors, and filthy windows that obscure any view of the exterior world from within. Aside from the mocking jabs directed at his person by the young law clerks who call the colonel “vieux carrick,” “le concierge,” and “brasseur,” the narrative interweaving of legal, military, and royal discourses is suggestive of the workings of Restoration society: where legal acts supersede action²⁹⁸ and where royal authority has been contaminated by legal practice and rhetoric. In spite of this, military terms used in reference to legal proceedings, like “*Portez-arme! de la Basoche*,” indicate that the Empire continues to cast its shadow over the Restoration society;²⁹⁹ the face of politics may appear changed, but is in fact still operating according to a battle plan devised by the individual and his hidden desires. In order to reclaim his past identity, Chabert, this former *homme d'action* under the Empire, must learn to fight a different kind of battle from that to which he was accustomed, or otherwise submit to a burial in paper.³⁰⁰

In his article "Freud's Masterplot," Peter Brooks claims that the reader is always seeking closure, and that plot, operating according to Freud's death drive, reveals a desire for the end. In *Le Colonel Chabert*, the end is already present in the beginning and thus the plot functions as a means to return Chabert to the grave. This idea is further reinforced by the use of metonymy, the trace of the metaphor (the end) throughout the text. In dividing the text into "fixed points of interpretation," or narrative *tableaux*, metonymy allows for the constant building and breaking of illusions, as reduced to the opposition between life and death.³⁰¹ Departing from Derville's study, Chabert's legal

²⁹⁸ Good, 857.

²⁹⁹ *Chabert*, 25.

³⁰⁰ Good, 851.

³⁰¹ Iser, 62.

inexistence is determined when one of the clerks asks, "Est-ce le colonel mort à Eylau?"³⁰² This question is swiftly followed by the conclusion that the Chabert in question is "bien mort"; Chabert's death was a recorded fact in *Victoires et conquêtes*, and his widow has since remarried to Count Ferraud.³⁰³

In the second scene, the narrative of death is also shown to be authoritative, but in a way divergent from the law or from history. During his nocturnal interview with Derville, the colonel provides his own account of the events following his death on the battlefield. Brooks maintains that novelistic beginnings, initiated by the "I tell," show the birth of desire (for the end), thus establishing narrative tension within the text.³⁰⁴

Le colonel Chabert était aussi parfaitement immobile que peut l'être une figure en cire [. . .]. Cette immobilité n'aurait peut-être pas été un sujet d'étonnement, s'il n'eût complété le spectacle surnaturel que présentait l'ensemble du personnage [. . .] Le visage pâle, livide, et en lame de couteau, s'il est permis d'emprunter cette expression vulgaire, semblait mort [. . .]. L'ombre cachait si bien le corps à partir de la ligne brune que décrivait ce haillon, qu'un homme d'imagination aurait pu prendre cette vieille tête pour quelque silhouette du hasard, ou pour un portrait de Rembrandt, sans cadre.³⁰⁵

Therefore, in this *tableau*, Chabert, who is compared to a wax figure, a cadaver, an actor in a history play, as well as to a work of art, enacts his textual resurrection in the recounting of his death – an act that invalidates both historical and judicial documentation surrounding the event.³⁰⁶ Struck on the head by the saber of a Russian soldier, the colonel is pronounced dead shortly thereafter, and his body is placed into a mass grave. He remains buried until he regains consciousness, calls for help, and is miraculously rescued by a peasant couple. As he exclaims: "J'étais sorti du ventre de la

³⁰² *Chabert*, 34.

³⁰³ *ibid.*, 44.

³⁰⁴ Brooks 3, 290, 293.

³⁰⁵ *Chabert*, 40-41.

³⁰⁶ Eades, 332. Derville refers to Chabert as "le plus habile comédien de notre époque" (*Chabert*, 63).

fosse aussi nu que de celui de ma mère.”³⁰⁷ The image of rebirth initiates the reader into the theme of new beginnings. However, pending the arrival of documented proof that would corroborate his return from the dead, the *demi-solde* is asked to vacillate, or to dwell in a sort of suspended moment, between life and death.³⁰⁸ The plot functions in kind: “— Transiger, répéta le colonel Chabert. “Suis-je mort ou vivant?”³⁰⁹

The opposition between death and life finds its repetition in the construction and dissolution of images, thereby rendering a fuller existence to the text or allowing its metaphor to become more "readable."³¹⁰ The first image is that of Paris itself. As Derville sets off to inform Chabert of the impossibility of his case going to trial, the reader is given access to a physical description of the colonel's surroundings: "Quoique récemment construite, cette maison semblait près de tomber dans la ruine. Aucun des matériaux n'y avait eu sa vraie destination, ils provenaient tous des démolitions qui se font journellement à Paris."³¹¹ Given the political atmosphere, the house where Chabert resides, constructed from remnants of former structures, reaffirms the theme of dismantling or displacing the past in order to render it unrecognizable – much like Chabert's claim to his own identity. We assume that the remnants come from structures that existed during the Empire, such as Chabert's own home, which no longer exists. As

³⁰⁷ *Chabert*, 49.

³⁰⁸ The desire for proof becomes the "motor" for what Brooks calls a "narrative of an attempted homecoming" (Brooks 3, 288, 297). In what has been deemed an ironic modernization of Homer's *Odyssey*, Chabert left France during the Empire and returned during the Restoration. He is essentially a stranger in a strange land in that his *patrie* is unrecognizable to him, as is he to society. Identity then, as a function of time, risks effacement (Good, 846).

³⁰⁹ *Chabert*, 50, 61.

³¹⁰ Iser, 59.

³¹¹ *Chabert*, 68.

he discovers: "Mont-Blanc où ma femme devait être logée dans un hôtel à moi . . . était devenue la rue de la Chaussée d'Antin."³¹²

The theme of ruin is further developed by the structure's interior: the bulletins of the *Grande Armée* cover the table, a respectful silence reigns, announcing "l'empire" exercised by the colonel over his subordinates: the proprietor, his wife, and their two sons.³¹³ The ramshackle domicile restages the Empire's fall – failed military exploits met with "le vrai silence du tombeau."³¹⁴ With the arrival of Derville, the representative of the judicial world that seeks to "anéantir les gens de l'Empire," the imperial imagery disappears.³¹⁵ As Derville departs, he remarks to Chabert: "[V]ous vous abandonnez à moi comme un homme qui marche à la mort."³¹⁶ This second encounter between the lawyer and his client metonymically insinuates the theme of death into the narrative (the fall of the Empire). At the same time, it suggests a certain degree of atemporality, the fragile coexistence of Restoration France and Imperial France corresponding to an edifice's internal and external construction, thus allowing past and present to be held together in an architectural metaphor.³¹⁷

The use of metonymy, as a source of narrative tension, is resolved in the fourth *tableau* of the novella, where a showdown of sorts ensues between the Empire (Chabert), and the Restoration (Countess Ferraud), reunited in Derville's study. Colonel Chabert

³¹² *ibid.*, 59.

³¹³ *ibid.*, 70.

³¹⁴ *ibid.*, 47.

³¹⁵ *ibid.*, 79. It must be qualified that Derville admires Napoleon and would not be in his profession if it had not been for Napoleon's example, namely his policy of promoting men of talent over men belonging to a given class. Furthermore, he believes in justice and in Chabert's case to the degree that he is willing to provide Chabert with a small stipend on which to live.

³¹⁶ *ibid.*, 81.

³¹⁷ Brooks 3, 288.

appears as would a grand officer of the Legion of Honor, tucking one hand into his vest in a Napoleonic gesture.³¹⁸

A le voir les passants eussent facilement reconnu en lui l'un de ces beaux débris de notre ancienne armée, un de ces hommes héroïques sur lesquels se reflète notre gloire nationale, et qui la représentent comme un éclat de glace illuminé par le soleil semble en réfléchir tous les rayons. Ces vieux soldats sont tout ensemble des tableaux et des livres.³¹⁹

This passage demonstrates the manner in which Colonel Chabert, dressed in his military garb, becomes a recognizable image of France's glorious past to the readership of the July monarchy. At the same time, in what is otherwise a somber tale, this colorful illusion, this flash of Chabert's former glory, may only exist on the level of myth because figures like Chabert have no place in post-imperial society; they are subjects of art and heroes in historical volumes like *Victoires et Conquêtes*. Therefore, Chabert is an "unwelcomed ghost in this new society that refuses to recognize the elevated status attained by a child of the Revolution [. . .]."³²⁰ Acting for herself but also, as it were, on behalf of society, Countess Ferraud ensures this fate for Chabert.

Unlike the colonel's first recounting of the past that performed a sort of textual resurrection, invalidating official history recounting his death at Eylau, Chabert's trip to the Countess Ferraud's estate at Groslay operates the reverse effect, and acts as the conclusion to the history play commenced in Derville's study. In her carriage, the countess recognizes Chabert, but shames him for having taken suit against her: “— Les morts ont donc bien tort de revenir? [. . .]. Je ne suis pas assez peu délicat pour exiger des semblants de l'amour chez une femme qui ne m'aime plus. La comtesse lui lança un

³¹⁸ *Chabert*, 104. This gesture is often repeated in *La Comédie humaine* to evoke the Emperor. It is also a posture commonly reproduced in history paintings dedicated to Napoleon's image (figure 19).

³¹⁹ *ibid.*, 100.

³²⁰ Amossy, 47.

empreint d'une telle reconnaissance, que le pauvre Chabert aurait voulu rentrer dans sa fosse d'Eylau."³²¹ This act of gratitude but also of *recognition* allows the couple to spend the remainder of the trip indulging in memories of the Empire and their past life together. According to Brooks, the act of remembering is a way of replaying time "so that it may not be lost."³²² However, Balzac indicates that the contrary is true; reenactment of the past does not permit one to return there, nor will it achieve the homecoming desired by Chabert: "Un soir, en voyant cette mère au milieu de ses enfants, le soldat [. . .] prit la résolution de rester mort."³²³ Therefore, the potential for resurrecting the social status of the *demi-solde* ultimately becomes a simulacrum offering a commentary on the shift in the historical and political climate of nineteenth-century France.³²⁴

This point is further elaborated in the comparison that Balzac draws between the *parvenu* status of Chabert and that of Countess Ferraud. As an orphan who found a family in the military and a father in the Emperor, Chabert rose through the ranks to the grade of colonel, and was given a title and fortune. However, in the last scene of the novella, he is in the *Hospice de la Vieillesse* where he no longer thinks of himself as Chabert, let alone as a human being: "Pas Chabert, pas Chabert! Je me nomme Hyacinthe . . . Je ne suis plus un homme, je suis le numéro 164, septième salle."³²⁵ In contrast, the Countess Ferraud, an ex-prostitute who married into the Imperial aristocracy and inherited Chabert's fortune at the time of his alleged death, enticed an aristocrat of meager fortune seeking to fulfill his own political ambitions. In marrying Chabert's

³²¹ *Chabert*, 110.

³²² Brooks 3, 298.

³²³ *Chabert*, 117. Brooks defines homecoming as the assertion of origin (Brooks 3, 297).

³²⁴ *Chabert*, 104.

³²⁵ *ibid.*, 130.

widow, Count Ferraud admits his wife into the upper echelons of the Restoration aristocracy where she becomes *une femme comme il faut*.³²⁶

By comparison, Chabert's precarious legal position prevents him from reclaiming his former identity or constructing a new social identity, whereas Countess Ferraud (referred to as a talented *comédienne*) is able to use marriage as a means to transform herself from the "comtesse de l'Empire" to the "comtesse de la Restauration." Chabert, bound to his past, perpetually remains "le colonel," "le vieux soldat," "un débris de l'Empire," who lacks the proper tools to *parvenir* in modern society where the authentic document controls the successive validation and invalidation of one's identity. As Sandy Petrey explains it: "[T]he dialectic of presence and absence ridicules every concept of existence in itself and affirms the supreme reality of existence as socially represented."³²⁷ Therefore, Chabert cannot impose an alternative version of history or diverge from the historical dead-end that awaits the imperial officer in Restoration France. Ironically, it is because of his heroic actions in the battles of Iéna (1806) and of Eylau that he has a place in *la grande histoire*. However, it is his narrative of desire that fuels his return to the tomb.

Many of the portraits of the ex-imperial soldier or *demi-solde* in *La Comédie humaine* are assigned a similar fate. After the fall of the Empire, they lack the ability to convert their actions into more valuable forms of social currency and seek an alternative to the tomb. In *Le Médecin de campagne*, Benassis's community charitably supports Gondrin, the sole *pontonniér* to survive the Bérésina crossing, who after 22 years of

³²⁶ *ibid.*, 86.

³²⁷ Petrey 4, 463.

military service was repudiated and then forgotten by the Restoration government.³²⁸ In *Le Père Goriot*, we see a minor allusion to the ex-soldier's marginal social existence in the scene where Rastignac enters the gaming house and is asked to reward the helpful tip of an "ancien préfet de Napoléon qui se trouve dans le dernier besoin."³²⁹ Finally, in *La Rabouilleuse* (1842), a story dedicated to "les effets de la diminution de la puissance paternelle," we observe two youthful examples of the *demi-solde*, Philippe Bridau, an *ex-chef d'escadron aux Dragons de la Garde*, and Maxence Gilet, an ex-captain with the rank of *chef de bataillon de la Garde*.³³⁰ Bridau's lack of social purpose in Restoration society leads him to embrace a criminal lifestyle, becoming a "*chenapan*."³³¹ Likewise Gilet, the leader of a band of hoodlums (known as the *Chevaliers de la Désœuvrance*) in the provincial town of Issoudun, occupies a parasitic existence. In spite of Gilet's talents, which could have been better served in society, he is killed in a duel: "Ainsi périt un de ces hommes destinés à faire de grandes choses, s'il était resté dans le milieu qui lui était propice [. . .]. Mais l'éducation ne lui avait pas communiqué cette noblesse d'idées et de conduite, sans laquelle rien n'est possible dans aucune carrière."³³² We note that with each of these examples, *l'homme d'action* is marked by his Napoleonic ties. He has ceased to be a generative social force, a fact that is reflected on the level of the narrative by the polyvalent metaphor of the tomb. The *demi-solde* therefore becomes a source of social disorder or social contamination that must be suppressed and forgotten. As

³²⁸ *MC IX*, 455.

³²⁹ *PG III*, 171.

³³⁰ *R IV*, 271.

³³¹ *ibid.*, 304. Bridau meets a brutal death in Algeria, beheaded in a military maneuver against the yatagans (*ibid.*, 540).

³³² *ibid.*, 510.

Chabert exclaims: "Que voulez-vous! Notre Soleil s'est couché, nous avons tous froid maintenant."³³³

Napoleonic youth: *les hommes d'esprit*

In spite of the failed example of *l'homme d'action*, attempting to construct himself historically in a society devoid of the Emperor's model for social mobility, Napoleon remains a synthesizing element in *La Comédie humaine* and continues to play a critical role in Balzac's portrait of the young hero. In the second part of our discussion on Balzac's Napoleonic youth, let us consider the role of *l'homme d'esprit* and his efforts to construct a historically viable position in society. As opposed to the lot of the *demi-solde*, representing first-hand historical memory and physical commerce with Napoleon's régime, the role of *l'homme d'esprit* is complicated by the fact that his ability to adapt the historical past and to found his own myths in the present depends upon an act of creative genius, a manifestation of *la pensée* or *la parole*. Departing from our initial premise that the Napoleonic legacy infiltrates the social and political atmosphere of Balzac's youth, we will now consider how *l'homme d'esprit* serves as an equal inheritor along with the *homme d'action* of Napoleon's *rêve fatal*.³³⁴

In her study *Trauma and Its Representations* (2001), Deborah Jenson discusses how a post-revolutionary reading of the Romantic text is informed by "traumatic mimesis." Defining traumatic mimesis as "the trauma of experiencing one's own era as a secondary text," Jenson goes on to suggest that Romantic cultural production "superimposes" the problem of mimesis (the gap between the real and its representation)

³³³ Chabert, 58.

³³⁴ To reiterate, Napoleon's *rêve fatal* refers not just to the fall of the Empire, but to the chain of burials that precede it: the burial of France's military and civil youth (on the battlefield or due to the termination of class mobility) that leads metonymically back to revolutionary terror.

onto historical chronology.³³⁵ In other words, Revolution is replaced by "successive and unsatisfactory sequelae," like the Empire, the Restoration, and the July Monarchy.³³⁶ In applying Jenson's argument to our reading of *l'homme d'esprit*, it is interesting to note that while Balzac derives his general vision of youth from the traumatic mimetic experience of the Revolution or the loss of the father. Understood at once as a reparative link *and* an historical fracture, Napoleon's legacy acts as a secondary text to revolution. Whereas the revolution produces a *filis sans père*, Napoleon's régime transforms the *filis sans père* into a *turannos* capable of usurping the father's place. However, at the Empire's fall, the *filis* is defined again by his bastard condition. The impact of the son's social regression can be understood both in terms of the revolution and the memory of the father's loss, as well as by the son's recent loss of his second father and role model, Napoleon. One could argue that in layering the Napoleonic myth into Balzac's portrait of the young hero, myth serves as a way to account for political regime change and individual ambition while augmenting the author's traumatic vision. Furthermore, with each successive regime change, historical sequelae – defined as the increasing gap between the real (trauma) and its representations – exaggerates the young hero's limitations and prevents him from leaving his mark on history. To express this idea in Romantic terms: youth continually strives for a creative *au-delà*, but falters in the historical *en deça*.

In *La Vieille Fille* (1836), a tale principally regarding the growing force of the provincial bourgeoisie, Balzac provides a peripheral sketch of his *homme d'esprit*, Athanase Granson, a youth of 23. Setting the scene in provincial Alençon, the author

³³⁵ Jenson, 15.

³³⁶ *ibid.*, 15.

depicts the diminishing in social opportunity experienced by France's youth in the immediate aftermath of Napoleon's régime (1816). The political atmosphere of the period is limiting in many respects for Granson. First, he has already experienced the loss of his own father, a lieutenant-colonel of artillery, who perished at the battle of Iéna. Secondly, the recent removal from power of France's spiritual father takes with him the possibility of social advancement for young men of humble origins. The provincial setting, described as a kind of prison, further compounds Granson's dismal position: “La vie de province, sans issue, sans approbation, sans encouragement, décrivait un cercle où se mourait cette pensée qui n'en était même pas encore à l'aube de son jour.”³³⁷

However, the major limiting factor is history itself: “Athanasé était un fruit de l'éducation impériale. La fatalité, cette religion de l'empereur, descendit du trône jusque dans les derniers rangs de l'armée, jusque sur les bancs du collège.”³³⁸ Granson is a product of his times, and his experience of recent historical events is informed by traumatic mimesis; his “histoire individuelle minuscule” is inseparable from “l'Histoire majuscule en train de s'accomplir.”³³⁹

In his lopsided portrait of the youth, Balzac further insists upon the young hero's problematic relationship with history. Granson possesses a certain *force d'esprit* held in disaccord with his weak physical constitution: “[C'] était un jeune homme maigre et pâle, de moyenne taille, à figure creuse où ses yeux noirs, pétillants de pensée, faisaient comme deux taches de charbon [. . . Tout chez lui] indiqu[ait] un homme de talent emprisonné.”³⁴⁰ Unlike his *confrère* Louis Lambert, Granson's physical and mental

³³⁷ VF IV, 839.

³³⁸ *ibid.*, 911.

³³⁹ Guichardet 1, 160.

³⁴⁰ VF IV, 839.

disequilibrium stems not from a philosophical conflict, but from his creative ambitions, reflected in the intensity of his gaze, and conceived in the shadow cast by history:

Le génie procède de deux manières: ou il prend son bien comme ont fait Napoléon et Molière aussitôt qu'il le voit, ou il attend qu'on le vienne chercher quand il s'est patiemment révélé. Le jeune Granson [. . .] était contemplative, il vivait plus par la pensée que par l'action.³⁴¹

In Balzac's categorization of genius, Granson's inability to materialize his creative ambitions is contrasted with Napoleon's genius, thus instituting a disparity between the two personalities and marking him as a Napoleonic youth. Furthermore, in referring to the youth as "cet aigle enfermé dans une cage," an iconic image prized by the imperial régime and commonly used in reference to its military guard, Balzac introduces an element of *déjà vu* into his portrait of *l'homme d'esprit*.³⁴² As opposed to Rastignac's firm avowal to succeed, Granson's "Je ne réussirai jamais," considered from his socially marginal position, communicates a sense of historical burden and carries with it the gravity of a death sentence; this young eagle will expire without ever having set foot on the battlefield of Restoration society.³⁴³ In other words, in confounding the youth's poetic ambitions with historical production, Granson has succumbed to failure without ever having attempted to translate his creative ideal into a material reality. In essence, the young hero's relationship to history reveals his own empty position, and leads him to experience his "pensées de gloire" as a stillborn version of history appropriately terminated by Granson's suicide in the Sarthe river.

In *Albert Savarus* (1842), the young hero's ambitious quest, contingent on his efforts to translate thoughts into actions, equally claims him as a Napoleonic youth. Like

³⁴¹ *ibid.*, 839.

³⁴² *ibid.*, 839.

³⁴³ *ibid.*, 916; *PG III*, 122.

Granson, Savarus, the illegitimate son of a Belgian lord, is without a place to inherit in society. Prior to the July Revolution, Savarus undertakes the monumental endeavor to attain an elected legislative position in provincial Besançon, a post that would also allow him to marry the Duchesse d'Argaiolo, his long time mistress. However, once the July Revolution erupts, Savarus's efforts are shown to be but vain attempts to claim his place in society: "[. . .] une place éminente était promise à son zèle [. . .] quand éclata l'orage de juillet 1830, et sa barque sombra de nouveau."³⁴⁴ As we observed with the example of Athanase Granson, it is in tracing the parameters of his youth's failures that Balzac metonymically introduces the Napoleonic layer into his text:

Que doivent souffrir les aigles en cage, les lions emprisonnés?³⁴⁵ . . . Ils souffrent tout ce que souffrait Napoléon, non pas à Sainte-Hélène, mais sur le quai des Tuileries, au 10 août, quand il voyait Louis XVI se défendant si mal, lui qui pouvait dompter la sédition comme il le fit plus tard sur les mêmes lieux, en vendémiaire! Eh bien, ma vie a été cette souffrance d'un jour, étendue sur quatre ans.³⁴⁶

In this passage, Balzac presents a metaphor juxtaposing Napoleon's and Louis XVI's roles in revolutionary history as the historical text or backdrop onto which Savarus projects his own woes.³⁴⁷ The young hero's suffering, likened to Napoleon's on August 10, 1792 when he witnessed Louis XVI being taken prisoner by the *Commune de Paris* (the event that announced the imminent fall of the Ancien Régime), assigns the young hero a similar operative role in post-revolutionary France as that assigned to Napoleon by history

³⁴⁴ ASI, 967.

³⁴⁵ Just as the image of the eagle serves as a symbol for Napoleon's imperial troops, the synonymously employed image of the lion is also fitting for Balzac's Napoleonic youth because, as the author explains in *Le Médecin de campagne*, "Napoléon veut dire le lion du désert" (MC IX, 536).

³⁴⁶ ASI, 973.

³⁴⁷ In *Les Mémoires de Sanson*, his collaborative work with L'Héritier de l'Ain, Balzac imagines an encounter between Napoleon and Sanson, executioner of Louis XVI. A fragment taken from this story later becomes *Un Episode sous la Terreur* and appears in t. VIII of *La Comédie humaine* (Descotes, 229). While *Un Episode* is constructed around Sanson, and his guilt and atonement for executing the King, it is interesting to note that the original text paired revolutionary violence, the execution of Louis XVI, and Napoleon's subsequent role in history as *le père du peuple*.

itself – to fill the father's vacant position. However, unlike Napoleon, Savarus lacks the proper historical forum in which to display his talents. Savarus does not suffer as did Napoleon on Sainte-Hélène (where exile served as retribution commensurate with the role Napoleon played in history), because Savarus is not poised to enact a commanding revolutionary sequel. If revolution is the necessary condition for making history a mass experience, Savarus's example demonstrates how, in the aftermath of 1830, youth is repelled from appropriating history in his own terms: "Chaque jour fut une défaite pour Albert, quoique chaque jour fût une bataille dirigée par lui, mais jouée par ses lieutenants, une bataille de mots, de discours, de démarches."³⁴⁸ This point is reinforced when Savarus borrows from an already written historical text in order to communicate the hopelessness of his situation. Finally, Savarus's defeat condemns him to a protracted suicide. He retreats from society in order to enter into the monastic life of the Trappist order.³⁴⁹

The portrait of Raoul Nathan in *Une Fille d'Eve* (1833) completes our discussion of Balzac's *homme d'esprit*. As a *littérateur* and aspiring politician, Nathan appears to possess the necessary combination of traits to adapt the historical past and achieve success: the creative genius of a Byron and the *volonté* of a Napoleon with "des yeux napoléoniens, des yeux bleus dont le regard traverse l'âme."³⁵⁰ However, when considered within the framework of the July Monarchy society, the domain in which Nathan attempts to exercise his artistic talents appears to be dictated by historical factors:

³⁴⁸ AS I, 999.

³⁴⁹ Savarus's composure in retreating from society is compared to "cet air sublime que doivent avoir les généraux en entendant le premier coup de canon de la bataille (ibid., 997)." Given that Savarus's battle in society was fought with words, it is interesting to note that he retreats to a Trappist monastery, a religious order of monks who take a vow of silence (ibid., 1015-16).

³⁵⁰ FE II, 300. "Ce Byron mal peigné [. . .]." Nathan's posture can be compared to that of Chateaubriand in the famous painting by Girodet (figure 20). See above, page 15 for information regarding Nathan's origins.

Nathan ressemblait à un homme de génie; et s'il eût marché à l'échafaud, comme l'envie lui en prit, il aurait pu se frapper le front à la manière d'André Chénier. Saisi d'une ambition politique en voyant l'irruption au pouvoir d'une douzaine d'auteurs [. . .] qui s'incrustèrent dans la machine pendant les tourmentes de 1830 à 1833, il regretta de ne pas avoir fait des articles politiques au lieu d'articles littéraires. Il se croyait supérieur à ces parvenus dont la fortune lui inspirait alors une dévorante jalousie. Il appartenait à ces esprits jaloux de tout, capables de tout, à qui l'on vole tous les succès, et qui vont se heurtant à mille endroits lumineux sans se fixer à un seul [. . .].³⁵¹

In her article "Temps historique et écriture romanesque," Nicole Mozet discusses the post-revolutionary perception of historical time as tied to the idea of progress and the exclusion of historical repetition.³⁵² As alluded to above, the lens of 1830 allows Balzac to establish a link between chronology and social evolution; the fall of the Ancien Régime repeated by the fall of the Restoration monarchy designates revolution as an emblem of historical repetition ending in cliché. Balzac implicitly demonstrates this point in comparing Nathan to the guillotined poet, Chénier. In Nathan's acknowledgment of the gap that exists between the revolutionary moment capable of elevating his literary status to that of a martyred genius and that imposed by his current reality, Balzac reveals the "mimetic wound of the social" acting in opposition to the young hero's desires to make history.³⁵³

This argument also holds true in an evaluation of Nathan's political pursuits. He borrows from the prescription for success established by those in power, "des de Marsay, des Rastignac, des La Roche-Hugon," he forms an alliance with an aristocratic woman,

³⁵¹ *ibid.*, 303. Guillotined in July of 1794, André Chénier is said to have touched his head before his execution, so as to indicate that he left his genius to posterity, if nothing else. The first edition of his poetry was published in 1819.

³⁵² Mozet 3, 234.

³⁵³ Jenson, 17.

and he adopts the philosophy of using others for his own profit.³⁵⁴ However, at the dissolution of the Chamber at the end of the session in 1834, he, along with every other *jeune ambitieux*, hopes that political disorder will afford him the occasion to secure a place in society: "Quand tant de jeunes ambitions sont parties à pied et se sont toutes donné rendez-vous au même point, il y a concurrence de volontés, misères inouïes, luttes acharnées. Dans cette bataille horrible, l'égoïsme le plus violent ou le plus adroit gagne la victoire."³⁵⁵ In response to the social mediocrity forged by egalitarianism or social leveling, Nathan adopts the Napoleonic model, and elects journalism as the path that will launch him in his political career. In spite of the abundance of political newspapers already in circulation, Nathan's desire to become "le héros," "le maître absolu," "le créateur du centre gauche de la future chambre," underscores the redundant and thus absurd nature of his quest, while also prefiguring certain defeat.³⁵⁶ Therefore, in a society teeming with aspiring Napoleons, Nathan's conscious adaptation of the Napoleonic myth affords him a mere illusion of rising to social dominance. Realizing this fact before attempting suicide, Nathan, this "lion pris dans des toiles" (or the narrator speaking from Nathan's point of view), concludes: "Tout le monde n'a pas le piédestal de Sainte-Hélène [. . .] Le désespoir est en raison des espérances, et celui de Raoul n'avait pas d'autre issue que la tombe."³⁵⁷

The Dialectic of *Parole* and *Action*: The Example of Armand de Montriveau

We have just examined how the Napoleonic legacy seems to exert an almost gravitational effect on Balzac's youth: as an heroic ideal, a model for social mobility, an

³⁵⁴ *FE* II, 306.

³⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 305.

³⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 322-323.

³⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 354. Nathan's suicide attempt fails, curing him of "la mort volontaire." However the young hero's reality is presented as being more "horrible" than that from which he wanted to escape (*ibid.*, 381).

executor of revolutionary ideals, and a commander of destiny. At the same time, myth stands to reveal the historical shortcomings or the historical lopsidedness of Balzac's youth, bifurcated, so to speak, between men of action and men of thought. Unlike Napoleon, who is referred to in a synthesized manner as "la parole *et* l'action,"³⁵⁸ Balzac's young hero is unable to strike a balance between the two, thus putting into question his viability as a generative, and more importantly, self-generative source of history.³⁵⁹ However, it is because of these deficiencies in the young hero that the full force of the Napoleonic myth can be appreciated: "Le mythe Napoléonien, chez Balzac, [. . .] ne prend tout son sens que dans un contexte de gaspillage, de creux et de sous-emploi."³⁶⁰ We have examined how the actions and thoughts of Balzac's youth are bound by their sense of history, be it their ability to act in historical time and accommodate social progress or their capacity to exercise creative genius in order to accomplish the same ends. In both cases, the young hero's experience is contaminated by the past because his actions and thoughts are conceived in connection with Napoleon's person and historical legacy. In other words, the Napoleonic myth in Balzac's story of the young hero serves as a narrative marker to highlight the problematic relationship youth maintains with history, where the young hero falls victim to the past. Nevertheless, this picture of historical intractability is not the final pronouncement on Balzac's Napoleonic youth, or

³⁵⁸ *AEF* III, 700-01.

³⁵⁹ Aside from Louis Lambert who is compared to Napoleon in that he *could have* "gouverner le monde par la Parole ou par l'Action," the quasi-exception to this rule is Daniel D'Arthez, a literary genius and social recluse who bears the greatest resemblance to Napoleon among Balzac's youth (*LL* XI, 646). (In *Illusions perdues*, D'Arthez is compared to young Bonaparte painted by Robert Lefèvre [*IP* V, 308]). He is "par un rare privilège, homme d'action et homme de pensée tout à la fois" (*SPC* VI, 963). However, as a function of his success, along with the satisfaction of his sexual desires by the Princesse de Cadigan, D'Arthez's Napoleonic force dwindles: "Très jeune, [D'Arthez] avait offert une vague ressemblance avec Bonaparte général. Cette ressemblance se continuait encore, autant qu'un homme aux yeux noirs, à la chevelure épaisse et brune, peut ressembler à ce souverain aux yeux bleus, aux cheveux châtain; mais tout ce qu'il y eut jadis d'ambition ardente et noble dans les yeux de D'Arthez avait été attendri par le succès" (*ibid.*, 978).

³⁶⁰ Barbéris 4, 232.

Balzacian youth in general. In the final section of this chapter, let us consider how Balzac attempts to synthesize thought and action in his Napoleonic youth, Armand de Montriveau. In lending the young hero the greatest potential for engendering history examined thus far, Balzac presents a powerful sociopolitical critique of Restoration France.

Like *Le Colonel Chabert*, Balzac's *La Duchesse de Langeais* (1834) relies on the plot of the tomb. In choosing to recount his novel *à l'envers*, beginning with the *avant-dernière scène*, and working his way backward to the beginning, the author injects an element of fatalism and foretells the novel's conclusion. Breaking the novel up into the following sections, Balzac frames the primary tale, the love affair between Montriveau and the Duchesse de Langeais in 1818-1819, with its conclusion in 1823:

- 1) The interview between Sœur Thérèse (Antoinette de Langeais) and Montriveau in 1823.
- 2) A formal criticism made from the narrator's point of view concerning the state of affairs of the aristocracy.
- 3) The first meeting between Montriveau and the Duchesse de Langeais in Parisian society, followed by the story of their tumultuous love affair.
- 4) The Duchesse de Langeais's exit from society, and secret retreat into a Carmelite convent in Spain.
- 5) Montriveau, aided by Les Treize, kidnaps the duchess from her Spanish convent.³⁶¹

However, it is Balzac's post-revolutionary criticism of the Restoration aristocracy, preceding sections three and four, that conditions the novel's central meaning and serves as the filter through which the past should be viewed and judged.

Balzac's post-revolutionary critique of Restoration France, and in particular its ruling class of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, departs from the point of view that the Restoration aristocracy did not take proper measures to combat its headless condition:

³⁶¹ Rogers remarks that Balzac's framing of the novel parallels Marie-Antoinette's trial (section one), and execution (section four) (Rogers, 66).

"Dans toutes les créations, la tête a sa place marquée. Si par hasard une nation fait tomber son chef à ses pieds, elle s'aperçoit tôt ou tard qu'elle s'est suicidée."³⁶² Instead of working to "refaire sa tête," this is to say, to impose a strong ruling power on society and, in turn, win the respect of France's diverse social stratosphere, the social *élite* shirked its inherited responsibility and left itself, and the nation, to flounder in its complacency.³⁶³

Une aristocratie mésestimée est comme un roi fainéant, un mari en jupon; elle est nulle avant de n'être rien [. . .] en un mot, le costume général des castes patriciennes est tout à la fois le symbole d'une puissance réelle, et les raisons de leur mort quand elles ont perdu la puissance.³⁶⁴

In the absence of a ruling class willing to assume its leadership role, France in the Restoration period ceases to be virile, and acts without any real base from which to draw its power.³⁶⁵

Balzac attributes the aristocracy's *impuissance* to its jealousy of authority, which is responsible for fostering a break with aristocratic tradition and exiling future generations from investing psychologically in France's future: "La jeunesse, exclue des affaires, dansait chez Madame, au lieu de continuer à Paris, par l'influence de talents jeunes, consciencieux, innocents de l'Empire et de la République, l'œuvre que les chefs de chaque famille auraient commencée dans les départements [. . .]."³⁶⁶ In putting an end to class mobility (except for the very wealthy), the Restoration doubly excluded the nation's

³⁶² *DL V*, 926.

³⁶³ Balzac has a very clear understanding of the nobility's role and function in society. The fault in the Restoration nobility lies in the education of its youth, allowing the nobility to conduct itself as would a class of *parvenus*: "[. . .] de là sa défaite en 1830" (*ibid.*, 929-930). It is not sufficient to put Louis XVI's brothers on the throne; the noble youth must understand that with inherited privileges also come inherited responsibilities. Therefore, without asserting a leadership role in France's future, monarchy is succeeded by oligarchy (*ibid.*, 932).

³⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 927.

³⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 929. According to Balzac, this fact is further compounded by revolutionary equality, ruining families by the equal division of fortunes while at the same time instilling in its *gentilhommes* the desire to be emperor: "en se croyant tous égaux par leur faiblesse, ils se crurent tous supérieurs" (*ibid.*, 929). Instead of thinking of themselves as *la grande famille aristocratique*, the Restoration nobility has sold its lands in search of individual wealth accrued by playing the stock market (*ibid.*, 930-31).

³⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 932

youth: it censored the cultivation of talent and energy within the social élite; in closing its ranks to bourgeois "hommes d'action et de talent dont l'ambition minait le pouvoir," the Faubourg Saint-Germain further weakened its position.³⁶⁷ Balzac concludes his critique by a call for revolution, specifically an act of terrorism that would subjugate this privileged class to "un chef et un système."³⁶⁸ In his symbolic translation of the Restoration aristocracy's social precariousness into an erotic power struggle between the sexes, the author seeks to demonstrate how the taming of France, this "femme capricieuse," requires a Napoleon *fleurdalisé*.³⁶⁹

Armand de Montriveau, a "modern Napoleonic figure," assumes both an exceptional and ephemeral role among Balzac's youth.³⁷⁰ Unlike his fellow eagles, literally and metaphorically buried by Restoration government politics, Montriveau is a man of action of a different breed, possessing an intellect which allows him to adapt in Restoration France without exploiting the path known to the social *parvenu*.³⁷¹ Preceded by his reputation as "un homme original," the general integrates himself into the Royal Guard and gains access to the salons of the *le petit château*, thus facilitating the symbolic encounter between France's revolutionary past and the Bourbon Restoration nobility. Montriveau's seductive pursuit of Antoinette, Duchesse de Langeais and "reine" to this

³⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 932.

³⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 932. The name Armand is significant because it means both, *l'homme de l'armée* and *lion de Dieu*.

³⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 930. Balzac indicates in *Les Marana* that the "le général de l'Empire [est une] variation de l'espèce humaine dont bientôt aucun type n'existera pas" (*Ma*. X, 1075). In his article "Terrorism and Terror in Balzac's *Histoire des Treize*," Richard Grant asserts that Montriveau represents a more modern Napoleonic figure whose value, based on intellectual genius rather than the martial genius of Bonaparte, would be the perfect leader for the nation, and "feminine" France would eagerly respond (Grant, 236).

³⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 236.

³⁷¹ The son, and then orphan, to a *ci-devant* republican general, Montriveau was taken under the charge of the Imperial government, given a military education, and eventually awarded the rank of general in the artillery division. After Waterloo and the 100 days, Montriveau was reduced to the status of a *demi-solde*. See above, pages 14 and 46 for additional background information on Montriveau.

society, inaugurates his figurative mission to rehabilitate the nobility *en lui donnant un maître*.

The central problematic surrounding the union of Montriveau and Antoinette Langeais – a union that, by extension, would assure the viability of Restoration France – regards the issue of materiality: the sapping of a virile political body by an impotent social élite. In her provocative article, "De 93 à L'Histoire des Treize: La Terreur de (Marie-)Antoinette de Langeais," Nathalie Buchet Rogers discusses the feminine role in Balzac's novel as an allegory for the nobility's emasculated position in Restoration France. Furthermore, her examination of Balzac's symbolic recreation of the trial and execution of Marie-Antoinette, and the extent to which the novel draws parallels between the guillotined queen and Antoinette de Langeais, (a woman who is described as being "tout [sic] tête"³⁷²), poses the aristocratic woman as "la tête coupable de la nation."³⁷³ In order to rehabilitate post-revolutionary France, the feminine order must be tamed or purged from society.³⁷⁴ For the Duchesse de Langeais, her "crime" consists in her unyielding opposition to *l'homme d'action*.³⁷⁵ The dissimulative display of feminine sexuality acts as a perverting force, and results in the wasted expenditure of masculine desire.³⁷⁶ Considered within the larger political context of the novel, *l'érotique féminin*

³⁷² *DL V*, 982.

³⁷³ Rogers, 53.

³⁷⁴ Rogers refers to this as the elimination of the "créature féminine érotique" from the political domain, replaced by "l'allégorie féminine de la République" (*ibid.*, 66).

³⁷⁵ "[La Duchesse] avait jugé que l'instant était venu de faire sentir à ce soldat impérial que les Duchesses pouvaient bien se prêter à l'amour mais ne s'y donnaient pas, et que leur conquête était plus difficile à faire que ne l'avait été celle de l'Europe" (*DL V*, 985).

³⁷⁶ Rogers, 59.

(at the head of the government) emasculates the political body and is seen as an impediment to social progress.³⁷⁷

To counter his socially impotent condition and rehabilitate Restoration France, so to speak, Montriveau must perform an act of terror in order to form a new moral order from which the nobility can draw its authority. Noted by critics, the multiple images of decapitation and violence that abound in the text (a novella originally entitled *Ne touchez pas à la hache*) establish a clear link between the Terror of 1793 and the revolutionary violence that gave rise to the Republic. However, the first textual reference to the Terror appears as an intertext in Montriveau's recounting of another martyred king, Charles I, and ends by drawing an explicit comparison between Marie-Antoinette and Antoinette de Langeais:³⁷⁸

- En vérité, monsieur le marquis, dit la duchesse de Langeais, vous regardez mon cou d'un air si mélodramatique en répétant cette vieille histoire, connue de tous ceux qui vont à Londres, qu'il me semble vous voir une hache à la main. [. . .]
- Mais cette histoire est, par circonstance, très neuve, répondit-il.
- Comment cela? je vous prie, de grâce, en quoi?
- En ce que, madame, vous avez touché à la hache, lui dit Montriveau à voix basse.
- Quelle ravissante prophétie! reprit-elle [. . .] Et quand doit tomber ma tête?
- Je ne souhaite pas de voir tomber votre jolie tête, madame. Je crains seulement pour vous quelque grand malheur.³⁷⁹

In repeating "une vieille histoire" and adapting it to his reality, Montriveau affects a critical move; he evokes terror in his *interlocuteur* while also asserting a generative

³⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 59-60. Rogers argues that, like Marie-Antoinette, who was accused at her trial of emasculating the political body, the Duchesse de Langeais is also accused of using her dissimulative feminine sexuality as a "mask" to confound mimetic representation embodied in the virile masculine order (*ibid.*, 62).

³⁷⁸ Charles I (1625-1649), King of England beheaded in January of 1649, adopted an absolutist rule, dismissed the Parliament, and created civil war in seventeenth-century England. His example serves to highlight Balzac's view of Restoration politics, and reinforces the idea that historical progress must exclude historical repetition.

³⁷⁹ *DL V*, 989.

position as the *raconteur de l'histoire*. Anticipating the conclusion of Montriveau's tale, Antoinette ironically asks when she will lose her head. Montriveau's ominous reply suggests that he has yet to make history.

In spite of the assertion of his dominance, culminating in the kidnapping of the Duchesse de Langeais following the couple's verbal exchange, the momentum necessary to improvise a new history is strangely lacking. While the terror inflicted upon Antoinette achieves its desired effects, revealing to Montriveau "la femme vraie" who acts without artifice and at his command, the general prevails over his mistress but refuses to carry out his plans. Realizing the extent to which she has wronged Montriveau, Antoinette willingly submits to his desires, saying: "Mais je t'aime! mais je suis à toi![. . .] A toi! à toi! mon unique, mon seul maître!"³⁸⁰ In response, Montriveau insists that his failure to act (to take by force that which was not given freely) reflects a desire *not* to abuse his power.³⁸¹ Consequently, he also abandons his plan to brand the Duchesse de Langeais, "comme [ses] frères les forçats," by pressing a hot iron cross against her forehead. According to Rogers's argument, one could explain Montriveau's restraint as a strategy to quell the eruption of *l'érotique féminin* within the masculine political body.³⁸² When considered within the context of the Duchesse de Langeais's social fate and ultimate exile from society, this view is justified. However, in isolating (both narratively and spatially) this curious scene, it appears that Balzac leaves room for ambiguity. When Antoinette exclaims: "Ce monde horrible, il ne m'a pas corrompue.

³⁸⁰ *DL V*, 997.

³⁸¹ *ibid.*, 996.

³⁸² Rogers, 63. Following this incident, Montriveau indicates as much: " Seulement, à deux heures, au bois de Boulogne, monsieur de Ronquerolles passant à côté de Montriveau dans une allée déserte, lui dit en souriant : – Elle va bien, ta Duchesse ! – Encore et toujours, ajouta-t-il en appliquant un coup de cravache significatif à sa jument qui fila comme un boulet" (*DL V*, 1023).

Va, je suis jeune et viens de me rajeunir encore. Oui, je suis une enfant, ton enfant, tu viens de me créer. Oh! ne me bannis pas de mon Eden!” Balzac posits a space for historical improvisation including the feminine order and the procreative element therein.³⁸³ In his retreat from society following the couple's private interview, Montriveau denies this option. Furthermore, in demonstrating the utmost severity with the duchess (refusing to go into society, visit her, or respond to her letters), he ensures a negative outcome. Perhaps, too, his harshness is a reflection of the young hero's fallibility, and expresses the inherent flaw or faulty symbolic base upon which the Restoration society conceives its new moral order. In the same way that the memory of terror cannot act as a substitute for a strong ruling power, terror, as an underpinning for social progress, cannot engender new social history.

When the Duchesse de Langeais attempts to retract her heady ideological position and act in Montriveau's absence, she discovers the difficulty of her position: “[Elle] comprit l'horreur de la destinée des femmes, qui, privées de tous les moyens d'action que possèdent les hommes, doivent attendre quand elles aiment [. . .]. – Eh bien, j'irai, se dit-elle, j'irai vers lui [. . .].”³⁸⁴ Like Montriveau before her, Antoinette stakes her seductive energies on the ability to produce a material outcome: to become Montriveau's mistress, and bear his children.³⁸⁵ While this latter point remains implicit in the text, the fact that the Duchesse de Langeais is without children later becomes a source of repentance for

³⁸³ *ibid.*, 999.

³⁸⁴ *ibid.*, 1007.

³⁸⁵ Pursuing these ends in the face of social decorum, Antoinette creates the illusion that she and Montriveau are already lovers when she orders that her carriage remain parked outside of her lover's residence; this act is interpreted by the Restoration nobility as a “nauffrage de cette aristocratique vertu,” and more significantly, as a “coup de tête” (*ibid.*, 1010).

Sœur Thérèse.³⁸⁶ Before quitting society for the convent, Antoinette is counseled by her elderly aunt, the Princesse de Chauvry, to pursue her romantic interests, but not to do so at the expense of her material interests: her fortune, title, and place at Court. Speaking in practical terms, the Princess explains that should any offspring result from the couple's union, they would be "des ducs de Langeais" and inherit the privileges associated with their position.³⁸⁷ Given the implications to the Princess's advice, it is possible that Balzac's vision for resurrecting the Restoration nobility lies not in terror, but in assuring a new paternity for the next generation of the social élite; the offspring fathered by a neo-Napoleon would form the material basis from which to derive a new social order and further propagate a noble and virile breed of individual.

In the conclusion to her article on the *Duchesse de Langeais*, Rogers argues that Antoinette's retreat from society, followed by her death in the convent of Carmelite nuns, levels the symbolic playing field of the masculine order: "La paternité de l'œuvre s'affirme à travers la réécriture fantasmatique du meurtre de Marie-Antoinette dont la signification vient compléter celle du meurtre du père de la nation."³⁸⁸ In turn, this gives rise to the formation of an ideal Republic founded on a model of fraternity exhibited by Montriveau and Les Treize when they set off to rescue Antoinette in 1823. Attesting to the efficacy of the homosocial model when Balzac refers to Montriveau's expedition as "[une] petite Restauration insulaire," Rogers argues that *la bande* produces a Restoration of miniature scale on the Spanish island, understood as the fusion of royal authority and

³⁸⁶ "D'ailleurs vous méprisez une religieuse devenue femme, qu'aucun sentiment, même l'amour maternel n'absoudrait" (ibid., 922).

³⁸⁷ ibid., 1021.

³⁸⁸ Rogers, 69. Rogers's conclusion relies heavily on Lynn Hunt's views on fraternity and the band of brothers as developed in her study *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*. We will address this point further in Chapter 3.

the Catholic religion. In my view, this conclusion is too far-reaching, and I would maintain that Balzac's assessment exists on the level of the ironic. In the first place, Montriveau, acting under the auspices of royal authority, leverages his position as general in the Royal Guard in order that his mission on the Spanish island coincide with his own interests – to find the Duchesse de Langeais. The military significance of his mission is therefore overstated and its outcome is rather lackluster; the French meet no opposition: “Il n’y eut donc là ni résistance ni réaction.”³⁸⁹ Finally, having discovered that Antoinette is indeed a nun in the Carmelite convent on the island, Montriveau feigns illness, abandons his military mission, and returns to Paris where he organizes a covert operation with *la bande* to kidnap the duchess from the Spanish convent.³⁹⁰

Returning then to the assumption that *la bande* is somehow reflective of the ideal Republic founded on a model of fraternity, there are several problematic implications to the claim that Balzac endorses the post-revolutionary fraternal social model in his *Comédie*. First, if we consider the history of *la bande* or the formation of secret societies, viewed as a reaction to the Bourbon reinstatement, and organized in anticipation of Napoleon's return to power, it is interesting how Balzac both maintains the band's Napoleonic ties, while designating a marginal category of energetic youth.³⁹¹ As Pierre Barbéris explains: "Balzac a été hanté par le mythe de la bande, la bande unie par un pacte et tournée vers l'affirmation de soi, vers l'action, la bande qui retrouve la morale et

³⁸⁹ The full citation reads: "Une heure après que le général eut abordé cet îlot, l'autorité royale y fut rétablie. Quelques Espagnols constitutionnels, qui s'y étaient nuitamment réfugiés après la prise de Cadix, s'embarquèrent sur un bâtiment que le général leur permit de fréter pour s'en aller à Londres. Il n'y eut donc là ni résistance ni réaction. Cette petite Restauration insulaire n'allait pas sans une messe [. . .]." (*DL V*, 909-909).

³⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 923.

³⁹¹ Marceau, 384. See above page 10.

refait en mineur, la société."³⁹² For Montriveau and *Les Treize*, their efforts to "remake" society on a smaller scale upon the Spanish island reflect their own self-interests.³⁹³

However, their society cannot be considered self-sustaining. In spite of the exceptional natures of its members, *la bande* is at once a social construction that depends on filling an historical void and a tear in the social fabric through which youth's talents escape. As within society at large, does not the Band of Brothers reproduce the same desire to assert individual superiority in the absence of a strong leader? It gives the illusion of a collectivity. However, with no clear figure of authority, the social terrain inhabited by *la bande* continues to shift, owing to the continued struggle for power in the pursuit of its selfish and competing interests. As a result, extraordinary youth lacks both a clear and a stable social position.

Given that Balzac's skeptical vision of restoration appears to be uncorrective to the homosocial order, Montriveau shows himself to be incapable of reuniting the base ingredients – *la pensée* and *l'action* – that would transform him into a modern Napoleon and facilitate the production of a material base from which to revitalize the nobility.

Arriving at the Sœur Thérèse's deathbed only minutes after her death, Montriveau steals her corpse and places it aboard his ship:

– Ah ! ça, dit Ronquerolles à Montriveau quand celui-ci reparut sur le tillac, c'était une femme, maintenant ce n'est rien. Attachons un boulet à chacun de ses pieds, jetons-la dans la mer, et n'y pense plus que comme nous pensons à un livre lu pendant notre enfance.

– Oui, dit Montriveau, car ce n'est plus qu'un poème.

³⁹² Barberis 3, 441.

³⁹³ Pasco 1, 96. Pasco explains that secret societies encourage the reader to conceive of an "orphan society," cut off from its traditional and institutional roots, that is helpless before the violations of exceptional, unexploited, and uncontrolled youth (ibid., 96).

– Te voilà sage. Désormais aie des passions ; mais de l'amour, il faut savoir le bien placer, et il n'y a que le dernier amour d'une femme qui satisfasse le premier amour d'un homme.³⁹⁴

At last, the general succeeds in possessing Antoinette de Langeais. However, he becomes master of her body only after it has been drained of erotic value. Could we argue that the duchess's burial at sea allows Montriveau to rid himself of a dominant emasculating force in order to forge a procreative masculine order? I would assert the contrary, that the image of the feminine corpse cannot be considered as a legitimate base for such an endeavor. Rather, it serves as an example of historical repetition, the death of nobility, tradition and social hierarchy, thus pointing to the impossibility of historical production in the emptiness of Montriveau's new social order (a fact further reflected by his limited role in *La Comédie humaine*). While I maintain that Montriveau bears the greatest potential for making history among Balzac's Napoleonic youth, his actions reflect an error in judgment, if not a miscalculation in historical timing. As with his tardy arrival at his residence, the event which precipitated Antoinette's death in society, his final attempt to rescue her from the convent comes when it is already too late.

The purpose of this chapter has been two-fold: to examine Napoleon's role in *La Comédie humaine*, and in doing so, to expand the context in which we might read Balzac's youth. In an effort to situate both Napoleon's historical legacy, along with the social and political events that gave rise to his mythic persona, we recognize Napoleon's ideological role in French history, as well as the ways in which his story, defined in terms of individual desires to succeed in the father's absence, encapsulates the story of nineteenth-century youth. For Balzac, Napoleon serves as a key element in the development of his modern vision, and becomes the pivot upon which he spins his views

³⁹⁴ *DL V*, 1037.

on revolution,³⁹⁵ paternity, and social hierarchy, as well as his sense of historical destiny: “[C]haque fois [Napoléon] intervient d'une manière plus ou moins importante dans la vie d'un ou de plusieurs personnages, et bien souvent il est pour eux, comme il le fut dans la réalité, le Destin . . .”³⁹⁶ In his direct or indirect evocation of Napoleon both as a real historical figure and as a mythical persona, Balzac metonymically connects his contemporary fictional universe to the historical past, and in the process creates an overriding historical verity: he who made History becomes a key element of history in *La Comédie humaine*.³⁹⁷ This equation produces two key results. First, it serves as a political commentary to bring into focus the absence of a strong ruling power in post-revolutionary France. Second, the imbedding of Napoleon's portrait within Balzac's narrative, and fictional characters, including the youthful portrait, allows the author to use myth as a source of narrative unity that he frames in opposition to youth seeking definition in reference to the tomb.

In dividing my discussion of Balzac's Napoleonic youth between *l'homme d'action* and *l'homme d'esprit*, I have shown how the Napoleonic legacy casts a shadow over the young hero, acting as a ghost from the past that limits his actions; the *demi-solde* is a physical manifestation of such. As a remnant of the imperial period unable to remake himself in Restoration and July Monarchy societies, the *demi-solde* represents a source of social disorder: in society's efforts to construct a stable vision of the past and its heroes, the *demi-solde* serves as a reminder of society's historical porousness. For *l'homme d'esprit*, Napoleon influences the young hero's psychology and reveals his limitations as he tries to live up to (or recede from) an inherited ideal, pairing thought and action in a

³⁹⁵ Butler 1, 53.

³⁹⁶ Laubriet 3, 298.

³⁹⁷ *ibid.*, 298.

historically procreative manner. In other words, the quest of Balzac's young hero underscores a mimetic dilemma: to bridge the gap (or historical void) disclosed (in reality) between the real and its representations, appropriately titled, Napoleon's *rêve fatal*. As Alfred de Musset defined it: "Un seul homme était en vie alors en Europe; le reste des êtres tâchait de se remplir les poumons de l'air qu'il avait respiré."³⁹⁸ Napoleon ignited the nineteenth-century imagination, but did so in a way that mobilized the nation's youth in their efforts to reconcile revolutionary promises and social ambitions, to configure their own bastard myth, and thus rewrite the "gravestone text" of history.³⁹⁹ At the same time, Balzac's text testifies that Napoleon's legacy acts as an historical stumbling block for the young hero.

In his merging of the Napoleonic with his portrait of youth, Balzac attempts to elevate the status of his youth, and lend modern society an air of social topography, an *au-delà possible*, if you will, understood as an opportunity for superiority among general mediocrity. However, instead of producing a viable agent of history, Balzac exposes a headless, emasculated, and terrorized society riddled with unchecked individualism and over-determined by little Napoleons who are but *des pasticheurs* of history.⁴⁰⁰ This is further emphasized by the fact that, regardless of their various permutations, Balzac's youth do not sire a legacy (physical offspring or social renown), but submit to physical and social suicide. At best, they create a miniature version of society that only serves to magnify society's general deficiencies. Balzac leaves us then with a troubling vision;

³⁹⁸ Quoted from *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* in Petiteau p. 20.

³⁹⁹ Beizer 1, 181.

⁴⁰⁰ "The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honored disguise and this borrowed language" (Quoted from Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* in Petrey 4, p. 466).

society is in continual search of a new father, but the *fils de Révolution* or the *fils sans père* is not shown to be a self-generative force of history capable of imitating Napoleon's model.⁴⁰¹ In the next chapter of our study, we will explore this question further, examining the revalorization of the procreative masculine authority. We will also pay particular attention to the more troubling aspects of the image of the young hero. Considered within the framework of Balzac's views on revolutionary equality, as well as the gender debate (including the representation of gender in the arts), we will examine the evolution in the portrayal of the masculine, specifically the effeminization of the masculine, as part of the period's changing aesthetic, reflected within Balzac's *Comédie humaine*.

⁴⁰¹ This term is understood in Napoleon's case as the fusion of *parole* and *action*, resulting in a procreative model of historical self-sufficiency .

CHAPTER III

Inscriptive Masculinity: The Aesthetic Configuration of Balzac's Young Hero

– Le siècle est mou.¹

– Comment si jeune savez-vous ces choses? Avez-vous donc été femme?^{II}

Balzac's narrative description of the male youth is often expressed in terms of "gender inversion comparisons," where the young hero exhibits a mixture of masculine and feminine qualities⁴⁰²: Raphaël de Valentin has "des mains de femme"; Calyste Du Guénic could be taken for a "fille déguisée en homme"; Lucien de Rubempré has "les hanches conformées comme celles d'une femme"; Albert Savarus has "un cou blanc et rond comme celui d'une femme."⁴⁰³ Whether it is the pale hue of the skin, a delicate foot, or "une voix douce,"⁴⁰⁴ Balzac's textual *recyclage* of feminine traits, assigned to his male youth, becomes a central point of interest in a discussion of gender representation and the political climate of Restoration France.⁴⁰⁵ In the light of our discussions in the two preceding chapters, one could argue that the effeminate portrait of the male youth is a distinctive characteristic of the adolescent because it translates the vulnerability of a being ill-assured of its own integrity.⁴⁰⁶ Napoleon's model for historical procreativity reunites thought and action. For his part, Balzac institutes the correlative relationship

¹ *PG* III, 186. In the English translation, this statement reads: "'Tis an effeminate age" (*Goriot*, 135).

^{II} *Lys* IX, 1020.

⁴⁰² I have borrowed this term from Richard Berrong's article "Vautrin and Same-sex Desire in *Le Père Goriot*" (57).

⁴⁰³ *PCh*. X, 62; *B* II, 681; *IPV*, 145; *AS* I, 928.

⁴⁰⁴ In *Modeste Mignon*, Balzac elegantly combines these feminine attributes in his portrait of Ernest de La Brière: "De taille ordinaire, il se recommande par une figure fine et douce, d'un ton chaud quoique sans coloration, et qu'il relevait alors par de petites moustaches et par une virgule à la Mazarin. Sans cette attestation virile, il eût trop ressemblé peut-être à une jeune fille déguisée [. . .]. Joignez à ces qualités féminines un parler doux comme la physionomie, doux comme des yeux bleus à paupières turques, et vous concevrez très bien que le ministre eût surnommé son jeune secrétaire particulier Mlle de La Brière" (*MM* I, 575).

⁴⁰⁵ This chapter initiates what will be a two part consideration of Balzac's inscription of masculinity. Chapter 3 will treat the period leading up to and including the Restoration régime, whereas Chapter 4 will consider this theme against the historical backdrop of the July Revolution.

⁴⁰⁶ Sussman, 29.

between the Napoleonic legacy and a textual ambiance imbued with historical fatality whereby the feminization of the youthful portrait may serve to literalize Balzac's premise regarding the breakdown in the patriarchal order.⁴⁰⁷ However, it is in the author's decision to represent youthful emasculation on a physiological plane (as opposed to a uniquely historical one) that Balzac assigns it an aesthetic value. In this chapter dedicated to the inscription of masculinity within the Balzacian text, we will examine how Balzac's historical objective – to recover the father's procreative authority – occupies a central role in the development of his aesthetic vision.

Dismantling Hierarchy: The Inheritance of Revolutionary Equality and Fraternity

Our discussion of gender and its representations begins with an examination of nineteenth century society's ideological foundations, namely its revolutionary heritage conceived in terms of individual rights, and the interpretation and application of revolutionary equality and fraternity. First, when Napoleon acted in the role of usurper, he staged the imperial rehabilitation of the father. Second, with his *Code Civil* (translating revolutionary equality into law), he instituted the path for rapid social advancement to all young men of talent and energy. However, during the Restoration, the Emperor's brand of equality (understood as part and parcel of his *rêve fatal*) led to the fragmentation of hierarchy and social distinctions. At the same time it fueled for some a myriad of desires, ambitions, and a need for social hierarchies. When left unfulfilled, "le Spectre de l'Egalité nivelante"⁴⁰⁸ served again to remind society of its revolutionary foundation, qualified in terms of an historical void.⁴⁰⁹ Consequently, in the absence of a

⁴⁰⁷ See above, page 88.

⁴⁰⁸ This expression is borrowed from Nicole Mozet (Mozet 1, 151).

⁴⁰⁹ Balzac states in *Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées*: "En détail la Révolution continue, elle est implantée dans la loi, elle est écrite sur le sol, elle est toujours dans les esprits [. . .]" (*MJM I*, 242).

strong ruling power, this lack was articulated by the so-called feminization of the political domain, incarnated by the nation's youth who, in their shared political and historical mediocrity, formed a symbolic impasse to historical progress.

In her study *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (1992), Lynn Hunt explains the collapse in social hierarchy and its aftermath. In citing the role that revolutionary equality played in the feminization of the political domain, Hunt suggests a counter-measure to this effect induced by the tenet of revolutionary fraternity:

The killing of the political father enacted a ritual sacrifice and opened the way to the band of brothers. Between 1792 and the middle of 1794, radical iconography instantiated a new family romance of fraternity [. . .]. The literal effacement of the political father was the subject of a systematic, official campaign in which images of the king of France, as well as images of royalty, aristocracy, and feudalism, were destroyed.⁴¹⁰

In other words, Hunt asserts that the masculine banding-together of post-revolutionary society functions according to a fraternal model of solidarity where "brothers," in their shared patricidal guilt, unite in the father's absence to take his place.⁴¹¹ However, as a reading of post-revolutionary literature, this is overstated. Fathers do not disappear, but continue to propagate, disempowered though they may often be.⁴¹² Furthermore, the band of brothers, and the notion of revolutionary fraternity, is not realized outside of the realm of rhetoric. For instance, Balzac's representation of *la bande*, a distinctly masculine social order, functions under the auspices of fraternity. However, the banding together of opportunistic individuals serves not the desires of the group but, ironically, those of the Individual, in order that he may reduce the social playing field and improve his chances to secure a place in society.

⁴¹⁰ Hunt 1, 53.

⁴¹¹ *ibid.*, 58, 69.

⁴¹² Pasco 4, 61.

Balzac demonstrates a two-fold understanding of revolutionary equality and its legacy. First, in mobilizing the nation's talented youth, Balzac pays justice to revolutionary equality's dynamism. Second, revolutionary equality unleashed certain "poisons" within the social body: individualism, ambition, and envy.⁴¹³ In *Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées*, the Duke de Chaulieu serves as a mouthpiece for Balzac's views:

En proclamant l'égalité des droits à la succession paternelle, ils ont tué l'esprit de famille, ils ont créé le fisc! Mais ils ont préparé la faiblesse des supériorités et la force aveugle de la masse, l'extinction des arts, le règne de l'intérêt personnel et frayé les chemins à la Conquête. Nous sommes entre deux systèmes: ou constituer l'Etat par la Famille, ou le constituer par l'intérêt personnel: la démocratie ou l'aristocratie, la discussion ou l'obéissance, le catholicisme ou l'indifférence religieuse, voilà la question en peu de mots.

It is at the end of the same page that Balzac also writes:

Nous allons à un état de choses horribles, en cas d'insuccès. Il n'y aura plus que des lois pénales ou fiscales, la bourse ou la vie. Le pays le plus généreux de la terre ne sera plus conduit par les sentiments. On y aura développé, soigné des plaies incurables. D'abord une jalousie universelle: les classes supérieures seront confondues, *on prendra l'égalité des désirs pour l'égalité des forces*; les vraies supériorités reconnues, constatées, seront envahies par les flots de la bourgeoisie. On pouvait choisir un homme entre mille, on ne peut rien trouver entre trois millions d'ambitions pareilles, vêtues de la même livrée, celle de la médiocrité.⁴¹⁴

In essence, equality distorts Nature: the natural inequality existing between men; the natural hierarchy represented by the Family. To a large extent, equality is responsible for the advent of modern individualism.

Referring to the writings of Rousseau in his *Avant-Propos*, Balzac elaborates upon the social ills sown by Individualism. Whereas Rousseau blamed society for its

⁴¹³ As Balzac writes in *Béatrix*: "En proclamant l'égalité de tous, on a promulgué la *déclaration des droits de l'Envie*" (B II, 906). Equality is also one of the subjects of discussion in the orgy scene from *La Peau de Chagrin*: "Messieurs, buvons à la puissance de l'or. M. de Valentin devenu six fois millionnaire arrive au pouvoir. Il est roi, il peut tout, il est au-dessus de tout, comme sont tous les riches. Pour lui désormais, LES FRANCAIS SONT EGAUX DEVANT LA LOI est un mensonge inscrit en tête de la Charte" (PCh. X, 210).

⁴¹⁴ *MJM* I, 243, my emphasis.

institutionalization of the *loi du plus fort*, and its corruption of natural man, Balzac counters that society is beneficial to man.⁴¹⁵ He states: "L'homme n'est ni bon ni méchant, il naît avec des instincts et des aptitudes; la Société, loin de le dépraver, comme l'a prétendu Rousseau, le perfectionne, le rend meilleur; mais l'intérêt développe aussi ses penchants mauvais."⁴¹⁶ Balzac views society as being capable of perfecting man, but in the absence of the necessary checks and balances of power (also referred to in the *Avant-Propos* as the two "Vérités," religion and monarchy), society becomes a breeding-ground for unfettered individualism.⁴¹⁷ The Duke de Chaulieu names the negative impact that the revolutionary legacy of equality *will* effect in society's future, namely, the rise to power of the bourgeoisie. This question, sparking critical interest in what could be called the "endgame" of individual rights, has often been examined in Marxist terms as heralding the dawn of capitalism (an approach endorsed by Pierre Barbéris).⁴¹⁸ However, it is my view that this approach glosses over other important aspects of the question, specifically "how" Balzac's understanding of revolutionary equality, translated by the ideological softening of the sociopolitical sphere, initiates a discussion of sexual politics (bound to questions of representing masculinity and the masculine order), as they figure into the author's creative objectives.

Recuperating Equality in Socially Positive Terms

⁴¹⁵ As Rousseau writes in his *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*: "C'est ainsi que [. . .] l'égalité rompue fut suivie du plus affreux désordre; c'est ainsi que les usurpations des riches, les brigandages des pauvres, les passions effrénées de tous, étouffant la pitié naturelle et la voix encore faible de la justice, rendirent les hommes avides, ambitieux et méchants. Il s'élevait entre le droit du plus fort et le droit du premier occupant un conflit perpétuel qui ne se terminait que par des combats et des meurtres. La société naissante fit place au plus horrible état de guerre: le genre humain, avili et désolé, ne pouvant plus retourner sur ses pas, ni renoncer aux acquisitions malheureuses qu'il avait faites, et ne travaillant qu'à sa honte, par l'abus des facultés qui l'honorent, se mit lui-même à la veille de sa ruine" (Quoted in Crocker, 540).

⁴¹⁶ *A-P I*, 8.

⁴¹⁷ In vowing his allegiance to the two "Vérités," Balzac makes an argument in favor of giving up some of the individual's personal liberty in order to live under the rule of certain hierarchical institutions named to direct and interpret the general will.

⁴¹⁸ See for instance Barbéris's *Mythes Balzaciens* (1972).

While the doctrine of revolutionary equality had been useful in dismantling the foundation of social hierarchies, many of the century's thinkers shared Balzac's view that revolutionary equality served as an obstacle to social progress. In the 1830s, Auguste Comte, in his development of a new system for social classification that he called "sociologie," sought to reunite society under his theory of positive philosophy or positivism⁴¹⁹: a system that would resolve the social inheritance of revolutionary equality, and conceive of a unifying social force to connect past and future.⁴²⁰ One of the specific ways in which Comte applied his theories was through the reformulation of the masculine social model of citizenship. In responding to questions such as "who" is the nineteenth-century citizen? and "what" are his individual rights, Comte endorsed the division of social spheres: woman was relegated to the domestic or private sphere, whereas man occupied the political sphere (also referred to variously as the public and the masculine sphere). In spite of the public sphere's exclusion of the feminine order, woman was assigned an integral role in the formation of the male citizen.⁴²¹ In other words, feminine sympathies were regarded as being essential to masculine sociability. As Comte writes in the fiftieth lesson of his *Cours de philosophie positive*:

Il est incontestable, en effet, quoique [le sexe féminin] participe inévitablement, à cet égard comme à l'autre, au type commun de l'humanité, que les femmes sont, en général, aussi supérieures aux hommes par un plus grand essor spontané de la sympathie et de la sociabilité qu'elles leur sont inférieures quant à l'intelligence et à la raison. Ainsi, leur fonction propre et essentielle, dans l'économie fondamentale de la famille et par suite de la société, doit être spontanément de modifier sans cesse, par une plus énergique et plus

⁴¹⁹ In his *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830-1842), Comte pursues the idea that order and progress are inseparable. Comte, who coined the term sociology, the "positive study of all the fundamental laws pertaining to social phenomena," envisioned harmony in social ideas, and sought connections among all aspects of contemporary society (Pickering, 611, 615).

⁴²⁰ Furet 1, 320.

⁴²¹ Pickering, 628.

touchante excitation immédiate de l'instinct social, la direction générale toujours primitivement émanée, de toute nécessité, de la raison trop froide ou trop grossière qui caractérise habituellement le sexe prépondérant.⁴²²

Therefore, it could be stated that Comte's vision to reorganize society along gender lines embraced an androgynous model of citizenship.

In her study *Gender and Citizenship* (2000), Claudia Moscovici traces the conceptual and cultural transformation from the masculine to an inherently androgynous model of nineteenth-century citizenship. Touching upon the dialectical models proposed by social theorists such as Rousseau, Hegel, Comte, and Foucault, Moscovici underscores the critical role that gender plays in the constitution of the citizen, and interprets shifts in models of citizenship according to an "ambisexual 'social' model of citizenship."⁴²³ As she suggests: "The phenomenon of androgyny, or the dialectical combination of male and female sexual characteristics, offers a key to understanding this cultural and political transition in models of subject-citizenship."⁴²⁴ While it is not necessary to enter into the many nuances of Moscovici's argument here, a brief consideration of the dialectical models upon which models of nineteenth-century citizenship are based is critical to understanding patterns in gender formation, as well as shifts in gender representation common to the period. Additionally, this approach aids in developing a terminology or a language for discussing the gender encoding of the male youth privileged in *La Comédie humaine*.

For Moscovici, there are two models of male subject-citizenship to consider, the single and double dialectical models. She begins with the masculine republican model, where citizen subjectivity operates according to a single dialectical or androcentric

⁴²² Comte 2, 187.

⁴²³ Moscovici, ix

⁴²⁴ *ibid.*, ix.

pattern: the subject (male) + the nonsubject (woman) = the democratic citizen-subject. By the operation of a single-dialectic, man is defined by the fact that he is not woman; "women are described as the negation of the male positive term, such that the dialectical process begins and ends with an emphasis on maleness."⁴²⁵ As Moscovici observes, the single dialectical model, derived from Rousseau's *Emile ou l'éducation* (1762), reveals itself to be fundamentally androgynous.⁴²⁶ When Rousseau names woman as the "helpmate" of man, he acknowledges the role that female reason plays in the constitution of male citizen-subjectivity; he bestows woman with a critical role in the construction of male citizenship while at the same time revealing the fundamental androgyny of the citizen-subject (a point moderately revised by Comte in the nineteenth century).⁴²⁷

In contrast, the double dialectical or ambisexual pattern understands men and women in both positive and negative terms:

[T]he dialectical process of forming an androgynous identity illustrates that even a fusion of two beings does not eliminate their differences, as an erroneous understanding of the dialectic as a process of thesis-antithesis-synthesis would suggest. Sexual categories are not erased, but undergo sublation or a process of selective incorporation and negation of both masculine and feminine traits into two new androgynous beings. Consequently, by incorporating and negating select qualities of male and female subjects, the androgynous simultaneously preserves and cancels the difference between them.⁴²⁸

In a discussion of Balzac where both men and women are taken as "points of departure" for definitions of subjectivity, and where gender is often expressed in terms of androgyny (the "feminized masculine," and even the virilized feminine), the dialectic aids in our definition of gender categories, while also underscoring the mutability of gender identity

⁴²⁵ *ibid.*, xii.

⁴²⁶ *ibid.*, x-xi.

⁴²⁷ Pickering, 628.

⁴²⁸ Moscovici, xiii.

in the nineteenth century.⁴²⁹ Therefore, having considered how gender dialectics permeate social theory of the period, we will next examine how the softening of the social sphere influenced cultural production, primarily in literature and the arts. In our aim to outline an aesthetic context in which to approach Balzac's recurrent illustration of youthful masculinity, and more importantly, to give primacy to the figure of youth in the construction of Balzac's literary aesthetic, we will briefly consider early portraits of masculinity forged during the pre-Romantic and early Romantic periods in literature, followed by an examination of the visual organization of gender in post-revolutionary painting. In doing so, we will show how Balzac shared a notion of his construction of masculinity with his contemporaries in literature and the arts. Furthermore, we will consider Balzac's assimilation of the pictorial model within the literary text.

Early Notions of Masculinity: Precursors to Gender Identity in the Nineteenth Century

While laying the foundation for modern notions of gender, the eighteenth-century cult of *sensibilité*, embodied by "l'homme sensible," established a new masculine ideal. However, it was the Romantic movement that elaborated a certain type of *homme gracile* whose portrait of masculinity was defined in terms of his *mal du siècle*.⁴³⁰ In her study *The Male Malady* (1993), Margaret Waller observes that René and other *mal de siècle* young heroes (such as Richardson's Lovelace, Rousseau's Saint-Preux, Goethe's Werther,

⁴²⁹ Solomon-Godeau uses these terms to designate the two different types of masculinity portrayed in post-revolutionary art (Solomon-Godeau 2, 23; I will hereafter employ the shorthand S-G to cite this author). We see examples of the masculinized feminine in works such as Balzac's *La Cousine Bette* and *Béatrix*. For the purposes of our study, we will adopt Doris Kadish's definitions of *female*, *male*, and *sex*, terms used to emphasize biologically determined differences, as opposed to *femininity*, *masculinity*, and *gender*, terms used to refer to nineteenth-century culturally defined categories (Kadish, 2-3). However, we will also take into consideration Claudia Moscovici's view that the binary organization of sexual difference depends on "relational combinations" of these historically/culturally defined terms – man and woman; Moscovici asserts that sexual identity already implies a mixture (Moscovici, xvi).

⁴³⁰ In essence, Balzac tries to reconfigure the *mal du siècle* or revise the image of male impotence attached to the conception of historical fatality.

and Constant's Adolphe) depict male sensitivity according to both the virtues and weaknesses traditionally linked with women⁴³¹; the Romantic hero lingers on the edge of illness, madness, impotence, inactivity, silence, and death, and, as such, is accused of being effeminate.

When considered along an historical continuum, we observe that this "softened" image of masculinity develops out of a generalized sense of ambivalence towards patriarchal authority – the fall of the Ancien Régime, and the rise of subsequent post-revolutionary régimes. To refer to the Romantic literary model *par excellence*, René's *mal du siècle* condition is determined by a vastly different historical instance from that occupied by his pre-Romantic predecessors. Historian Dorinda Outram, commenting on this difference within the literary models available to both men and women living under the Ancien Régime, explains: "Men and women had sighed and wept together over the novels of Rousseau, Richardson, and Goethe."⁴³² Modeling an emotive capacity, *l'homme sensible* served as a symbol to unify the sexes. However, at the installation of the Republic, *sensibilité* was identified exclusively with the feminine and subsequently purged from the public sphere.⁴³³ We see examples of this in early nineteenth-century novels such as Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe* (1816), where, according to a single-dialectical pattern, man is defined by what he is not (woman), and thus the excising of the feminine from the masculine sphere gives rise to the "defensive construction of gender."⁴³⁴ Therefore, the expression of natural empathy encouraged in both sexes under the Ancien Régime is "gendered out" of man in the post-revolutionary age. The new

⁴³¹ Waller, 32.

⁴³² Quoted Outram's *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class and Political Culture* in S-G 2, p. 171.

⁴³³ *ibid.*, 171.

⁴³⁴ Creech, 305.

terms of masculinity deny men access to what is considered a "bisexual capacity," the capacity to feel and to empathize with the "other."⁴³⁵ In essence, this becomes yet another of the defining aspects of the Romantic hero's social inheritance.

Passing to the visual arts, we trace a similar shift in the representation of masculinity. Alex Potts comments that the official exclusion of the feminine from the public sphere reflects a "hysterical monism," or the flight from sexual difference, recuperated in the arts by the appearance of the *éphèbe*.⁴³⁶ As we consider the visual organization of masculinity in paintings from the post-revolutionary period, the *éphèbe*, defined as a "pre-sexual" male or "castrated man" who effaces the difference between masculinity and femininity, will be of particular interest and significance. As informed by the critical framework for gender formation prefigured by the cult of *sensibilité*, along with the single and double dialectical models for nineteenth-century male citizen-subjectivity outlined above, we seek to examine variances in the visual portrayal of masculinity. In departing from its so-called "traditional" models we may consider the emergence, and import, of a new masculine *beau idéal*. In the process, we will attempt to respond not only to the uncertainty surrounding the nature and terms of masculinity itself, but consider how masculinity, when translated aesthetically, exposes an ideological rift in the nineteenth-century consciousness.

Visualizing Gender Dialectics

As one might well expect, the artistic terrain upon which late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century painters constructed their vision of masculinity was intimately linked with the sexual politics of the public sphere. Jean-Baptiste Greuze

⁴³⁵ *ibid.*, 314.

⁴³⁶ Potts, 16.

(1725-1805) was one such artist who internalized the growing ambivalence toward established authority in his simultaneous attack on and defense of the traditional father.⁴³⁷ In *The Father's Curse* (1777 [figure 21]), Greuze depicts the first episode in a two-part family drama. The father, represented as an angry old man, is challenged outright by the son's defiant flight from the paternal homestead. In the second episode, appropriately entitled *The Punished Son* (1778 [figure 22]), Greuze draws upon the theme of the prodigal son. However, unlike the biblical tale, the son's return to his father's house is met not with joy and festivity, but rather with the haunting spectacle of his father's corpse. In Greuze's *Return of a Drunkard* (1782 [figure 23]), attention is paid again to the paternal figure. Returning home, the inebriated father is greeted by the pitiful faces of his hungry, barefoot children; his drunkenness is testament to having squandered the family's meager resources, and thus demonstrates the father's failure to guarantee his family's well-being.

Mirrored on a grander scale, this negative view of paternity carried over to the revolutionary period (and beyond) in representations of the royal family. In the anonymous *Engraving of the Royal Family as Pigs* (1791 [figure 24]), the nation's father and family are portrayed in a less than flattering light as swine in a sty among other livestock animals. Finally, in Villeneuve's "Food for Thought for the Crowned Jugglers," (1793 [figure, 25]), the image of the king's severed and bloody head held by the executioner's hand graphically portrays the death and symbolic eradication of France's paternal figure *par excellence*. As we will see, King Louis XVI's execution was a

⁴³⁷ Duncan, 186. Carol Duncan's article "Fallen Fathers," discusses how Salon painters during the latter part of the eighteenth century became increasingly preoccupied with figures of old men (fathers, generals, and kings). While these figures had been historically viewed as time-honored symbols of patriarchal authority, a shift in representation portrays them as having trouble holding onto their physical, political, and mental powers (ibid., 186).

catalyst for change, putting patriarchy to death along with the traditional manner in which it was represented.⁴³⁸

In addition to depictions of family dissonance, showcasing the enfeebled father, appear those paintings where the father is portrayed in the manner of *l'homme viril*. Informed by the single-dialectical pattern for subjectivity, *The Oath of the Horatii* (1784 [figure 26]) and *Lictors Returning to Brutus the Bodies of his Sons* (1789 [figure 27]) constitute two important examples of republican civic virtue. In his division of the canvas between the masculine and the feminine spheres, Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825) produces images of duty-bound masculinity, counterbalanced by the presence of the emotive femininity. In *The Oath*, the father and his sons perpetuate traditional images of masculinity associated with physical strength and potency. The display of masculine dominance is measured spatially in that the oath comprises two-thirds of the scene (measured against the architectural feature of the arches connecting the columns). In pledging their loyalty to the patriarchy, the men's gestures exhibit the active male role; the erect position of their raised hands and swords act as the painting's focal point.

In *Lictors Returning*, we note several important differences from *The Oath*. In the left foreground of the painting sits Lucius Junius Brutus, who aided in overthrowing Rome's corrupt monarchy and ridding it of the last of its kings, Tarquin the Proud. Behind Brutus, in the background, we see the dead bodies of Brutus's two sons, condemned to death by their father for treasonous acts against the Republic.⁴³⁹ When considering *Lictors Returning* and *The Oath* together, we notice that although both

⁴³⁸ The context for this passage is understood in the light of Hunt's discussion regarding the destruction of traditional patriarchal symbols. See our pages 113 and 129.

⁴³⁹ S-G 2, 58.

paintings share a similar theme, *Lictors* suggests a breakdown in the patriarchal order.⁴⁴⁰ First of all, given the spatial constructs of the canvas, the masculine sphere, occupied by Brutus's taut yet passive posture, is outweighed by the feminine sphere (whereas the reverse is true in *The Oath*). One could argue that in the extermination of his hereditary bloodline, Brutus asserts the primacy of the homosocial order (the republic's exclusive ensemble of male citizens) over family ties.⁴⁴¹ However, in doing so, authority is separated from the patriarchal body and is "rationalized as an abstract principle and identified with the state."⁴⁴² In other words, in a state where patriarchy is put to death, one could also posit that Brutus is feminized by his paternal sacrifice; the death of his progeny allows him to assume his new role in the Republic, and yet, deprived of his offspring, can this Republic function in perpetuity?⁴⁴³ Although there is little evidence to suggest that David intended to comment directly on questions of gender representation within these two compositions, or to place into question the traditional authority of the patriarch, the spatial and dialectical organization of the canvases nonetheless present an unstable vision of masculinity, thus leading us to illustrate the connection between the arts and the sexual politics of the period.

Reshaping the Masculine *beau idéal*

⁴⁴⁰ Carol Duncan makes an interesting point in her discussion of David's revolutionary art when she states: "[David's] works celebrated the noble virtue of patriotism and revolution ideals – inherent rights of individuals to shape their own destinies" (Duncan, 199). Pursuing this argument in relationship to the *Oath* and *Lictors*, authority is no longer defined by the will of the father, but by the individual's (the son's) ability to assert his own will (ibid., 199).

⁴⁴¹ S-G 2., 59.

⁴⁴² Duncan, 200.

⁴⁴³ This reading supports Lynn Hunt's view that images such as David's *Oath* (1785) or *Lictors Returning* (1789) reflect the uncertainty of the father's authority and the fragility of the family unit (Hunt 1, 37-39). Commenting on representations of *l'homme viril* in general, Hunt notes that the iconography of the radical period portrays the man of the people as a Herculean figure, often representing him among his two sisters, liberty and equality (ibid., 69-70). Hunt concludes: "This is an iconographic family without parentage and without lineage" (ibid., 84).

In her study *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation* (1997), Abigail Solomon-Godeau, analyzing changes in the "psychosexual economy" of revolutionary and post-revolutionary culture, considers the profound visual reorganization of sexuality and desire in representations of masculinity. Drawing from Alex Potts's assertion that the homogenization of the public sphere also translates as the marginalization of femininity in art, and from Shoshana Felman's premise that the appearance of the feminized masculine may promote sexual difference in a same-sex system (or sexual difference without women), Solomon-Godeau examines the privileging of the male body in the art from the period, as well as its erotic investment.⁴⁴⁴ In applying Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's definition of homosocial desire (woman as intermediary between two trajectories of male desire), Solomon-Godeau suggests that a similar dynamic can be recognized in representations of the male nude. She posits that within the organization of homosociality, idealized masculinity is neither "fixed" nor "stable," and can be perceived both by the presence of the "masculinized masculine" and the "feminized masculine."⁴⁴⁵ Identified as the virile warrior type and the *éphèbe*, these two models of masculinity characterize the "uneven development of gender ideologies in historical transition."⁴⁴⁶ In addition, when normalized by the artistic conventions of the homosocial sphere, they contribute to the formation of an ephobic version of the masculine *beau idéal*.⁴⁴⁷

As we observed in *The Oath* and *Lictors Returning*, David's vision of masculinity, although limited to the virile warrior model, comments directly upon the role

⁴⁴⁴ Solomon-Godeau reformulates Felman's premise that femininity is "inside the masculine, its uncanny difference from itself" (S-G 2, 141). This relates to the ambisexual pattern for male citizen-subjectivity defined by Moscovici, where sexual categories are sublated in order to form two new androgynous beings that both preserve and cancel difference (Moscovici, xiii).

⁴⁴⁵ S-G 2, 23.

⁴⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 56, 83. Historically, the aesthetic and philosophical origin of the *beau idéal* relate to the definition of female beauty (*ibid.*, 122).

of the traditional patriarch as considered within the overarching theme of historical transition. In Blondel's (1781-1853) *Aeneas Carrying his Father Anchises* (1803 [figure 28]), this theme is evidenced in the artist's simultaneous presentation of both masculine types; we may consider the traditional virile type in the figure of the warrior, as well as the nascent model of ideal masculinity in the figure of the *éphèbe*. As a function of age and familial lineage, these two masculine figures are portrayed in a complementary light, in the role of father and son. However when taken in the context of David's *Leonidas and Thermopylae* (1814 [figure 29]), the variation in the masculine is suggestive of "a whole panorama of ideal selfhood," ranging from the masculinized masculine to the feminized masculine.⁴⁴⁸ From the left forefront of David's canvas, an ephobic youth ties his sandal. At the painting's center, a muscular warrior (Leonidas) directs his penetrating gaze in the viewer's direction. Finally, next to the tree in the right foreground of the painting, David represents a mature male holding a male youth in his embrace. Does the couple represent a father and his son? A mentor and his *protégé*? It is difficult to determine with any certainty.

As a sanctioned form of male subjectivity prior to the Revolution, the resurgence of the feminized masculine, in the figure of the *éphèbe* in post-revolutionary art, exacts the place traditionally held by *l'homme viril*, and endorses an alternative standard for the masculine *beau idéal*. Often appearing alone, alongside the feminine, or in the company of another masculine figure, the *éphèbe* embodies a passive and unheroic image of masculinity.⁴⁴⁹ As we observe in paintings such as Pierre-Paul Prud'hon's (1758-1823) *The Union of Love and Friendship* (1793 [figure 30]), or François Delorme's (1783-1859)

⁴⁴⁸ Potts, 16.

⁴⁴⁹ S-G 2, 124.

Sappho and Phaon (1833 [figure 31]), the male figure bears a smooth and fair complexion, a delicate build, rounded hips; his genitals are deemphasized or absent from view. Prud'hon pays particular attention to the male nude's dainty facial features and stylized hair, tempting the viewer to confuse the *éphèbe* with a pre-adolescent girl. Through the play of light and shade, Delorme shadows the youth's genitals, and creates the illusion of a female breast.

While these examples underscore some of the inherent feminine qualities assigned to the *éphèbe*, it is when the youth appears alone (replacing the feminine altogether) that the male body assumes a more intense erotic function. In the history of the male nude, Girodet's (1767-1824) *The Sleep of Endymion* (1793 [figure 32]) is considered a pivotal figure, presaging "a new archetype of desirable masculinity" marked by an erotic of male disempowerment.⁴⁵⁰ Endymion's androgynous features reflect the physical combination of male and female characteristics: his head resembles that of a woman with its long flowing curls; his "serpentine"⁴⁵¹ body is positioned toward the viewer in a "languorous swoon of sleep."⁴⁵² Although Endymion exhibits distinctly "masculine" features, a muscular upper torso and enlarged neck, Girodet combines visible male genitalia with the rounded abdomen of pregnancy.⁴⁵³ This decision to represent the masculine as a veritable "elision" with the feminine (suggested also by the elimination of the goddess Selene who is replaced by a beam of moonlight) creates two remarkable effects: it generates a "single-sex dynamic" of male desire between the Zephyr figure (a "proxy"⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 66.

⁴⁵¹ Wettlaufer 1, 405.

⁴⁵² S-G 2, 82. Endymion's pose is a traditional pose used in the presentation of the female body (*ibid.*, 82).

⁴⁵³ Wettlaufer 1, 405.

⁴⁵⁴ Wettlaufer 2, 44.

for the lustful goddess) and the sleeping male youth⁴⁵⁵; at the same time, the feminine order is implicated in the creation of a new procreative "masculine universe."⁴⁵⁶

Androgyny, Homoeroticism, and the Limits of the Homosocial

While Girodet's *Endymion* incarnates a new aesthetic ideal, the appearance of other *ephèbes*, like David's Bara in *The Death of Joseph Bara* (1794 [figure 36]), served more blatant political agendas. Initially commissioned by Robespierre on behalf of the Convention for Public Safety after a 13 year-old boy was killed in a counterrevolutionary conflict in the Vendée, David's *Bara*, though never completed or displayed publicly, remains a powerful symbol of Jacobin propaganda.⁴⁵⁷ However, to consider the *Bara* as a model of ideal male subjectivity reveals several troubling aspects of the question.⁴⁵⁸ First of all, the male body is presented in an awkward and unnatural fashion; the youth's thighs hide his genitals from view. Secondly, in what is perhaps the most striking feature of the work, the male nude is shown to blend visually the pathetic and the erotic. In this pairing of the politics of heroic freedom and the aesthetics of ideal virtue, David produces a "highly sexualized"⁴⁵⁹ vision of republican martyrdom.⁴⁶⁰ It has been observed by Lynn Hunt that the republic's flight from representing the feminine order, associated with

⁴⁵⁵ Over the twenty years following Girodet's masterpiece, several versions of *Endymion* were produced by his students. Louis-Edouard Rioult's (1790-1855) *Endymion* (1822) borrows from the moonlight motif to substitute for the presence of the invisible goddess (S-G 2, 72-74). Guérin's (1774-1833) *Aurora and Cephalus* (1810), and his *Iris and Morpheus* (1811 [figures, 33 and 34]), as well as Delorme's *Cephalus and Aurora* (1822), also attest to the vogue of ephêbic debility *d'après* Girodet (figure, 35).

⁴⁵⁶ Wettlaufer 1, 405.

⁴⁵⁷ This painting was commissioned only months before Robespierre was overthrown in July of 1794. In spite of the fact that the painting was never completed, Bara was considered to be a figure of importance to the propaganda of the Convention of Public Safety. Robespierre himself is said to have "invented" Bara as a national hero when he said: "Ici, c'est la vertu toute entière, simple et modeste comme elle est sortie des mains de la Nature" (Quoted from *La Mort de Bara* in Potts, p. 14).

⁴⁵⁸ Potts, 4-8.

⁴⁵⁹ S-G 2, 134.

⁴⁶⁰ Potts, 6.

the aristocratic ideal and the decadence of the Ancien Régime, is in large part responsible for the success of an image like David's *Bara*⁴⁶¹:

The founding of the republic required not only the destruction of every institution associated with monarchy but also a system of signs that was as distant as possible from monarchy. Since only men could rule directly in France [. . .] there was an obvious virtue in representing the republic by a female allegory; she could not be confused with the father/king.⁴⁶²

Therefore, the *éphèbe*'s recuperation of the erotic feminine dispels the "fantasmic threat of castration," while at the same time provides a trope favorable to republican gender politics⁴⁶³; the image of male passivity, intensified by male pathos, affirms a dominant male position (assumed by the male spectator).⁴⁶⁴ In other words, the numerous examples of helpless, debilitated, passive, effeminate, wounded, expiring, and dead *éphèbes* available in post-revolutionary French painting testify to the masculine order's already monistic political agenda.

In her study *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes homosociality (patterns in which male power is secured and perpetuated) in terms of a triangulated model of desire⁴⁶⁵: the desires of two "active" members of society (men) converge upon a "passive" member (woman), in order that the

⁴⁶¹ Rococo painting was the art form most intimately linked with the Ancien Régime. It symbolized artifice, corruption, luxury, frivolity, sexual licentiousness, overindulgence, sensuality. Furthermore, the aesthetic focused on the female body, often nude, or engaged in amorous situations. Therefore, the Republic's elimination of the feminine in favor of a new aesthetic order based on the masculine ideal, was seen as a way to negate "the political and aesthetic specter of the Ancien Régime and the Rococo as connoted by the feminine." (Wettlaufer 2, 48-49).

⁴⁶² Hunt 1, 83. In her chapter entitled "The Bad Mother," Hunt discusses the negative connotations of female sexuality and maternity, and how they were directly attributable to Marie-Antoinette who, at the time of her trial, was held responsible for feminizing the patriarchal order. As we noted in Chapter 2, this theme, prevalent in *La Duchesse de Langeais*, links feminine influence within the public sphere to male impotence.

⁴⁶³ S-G 2, 84

⁴⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 121, 139. Margaret Waller, citing Nancy Miller, explains that the exemplification of the feminine order is often seen as way to "underwrite" androcentrism (Waller, 13).

⁴⁶⁵ Homosocial relations are understood by Sedgwick within the context of "patriarchy" as defined by Heidi Hartmann: "relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create independence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women" (Sedgwick, 3).

woman “between men” operates as a conduit amid trajectories of male desire.⁴⁶⁶ (The argument could be made that Girodet's *The Burial of Atala* demonstrates this concept visually (1808 [figure 37]). Consequently, the “homosocial” or the consolidation of masculine bonds is understood as the at times more intense bond created between two rivals than that which links either of the rivals to the “beloved.”⁴⁶⁷ In restating the so-called mechanism of desire within the erotic triangle, and its capacity to bond men “between” women, we seek to then address how artistic convention, sanctioned within the homosocial order, achieves the erotic in its exclusion of the feminine order. In other words, in presenting the *ephèbe* alone, or alongside another male figure, it could be argued that relations between men are doubly charged.

Returning again to the example of Girodet's *Endymion*, we note that trajectories of male desire, as they converge upon the image of idealized masculinity, place the male nude in the intermediary position, or passive role, within the erotic triangle consisting of the implied male viewer, the Zephyr, and the sleeping *ephèbe*. In contrast, David's *Bara* provides a more intense rendering of the erotic dynamic because, in presenting the male body alone, the trajectories of male desire are short-circuited, unfiltered, and unidirectional; the male body becomes a site of pleasure, or a receptacle of desires. Furthermore, the blatantly homoerotic aspects of the "erotic invitation" are neutralized, or averted by the lifeless ephebic corpse.⁴⁶⁸ Given these examples, how may we then

⁴⁶⁶ This model is derived both from Freud's Oedipal triangle, (where “homo – and heterosexual outcomes in adults [. . .] result [from] a complicated play of desire and identification with the parent of each gender: the child routes its desire/identification through the mother to arrive at the role like the father's, or vice versa”), as well as René Girard's triangulated model of desire proposed in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, where relationships of power are negotiated through this conduit, the woman. (Sedgwick, 4; 23).

⁴⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 11.

⁴⁶⁸ I borrow this term from Janet Beizer (Beizer 1, 132).

consider images featuring the *ephèbe* within the male couple, as well as within the overarching theme of love between men?

In Jean Broc's (1771-1850) *The Death of Hyacinthus* (1801), Jean-Pierre Granger's (1779-1840) *Apollo and Cyparissus* (1817), and Claude-Marie Dubufe's (1790-1864) *Apollo and Cyparissus* (1821 [figures 38, 39, 40]), the obvious homoerotic theme is veiled not only in male pathos but in mythological narrative.⁴⁶⁹ In *The Death of Hyacinthus*, Apollo holds the youth, mortally wounded by the god's discus, in his tender embrace.⁴⁷⁰ Dubufe's painting presents a similar vision of male love. Cyparissus expires in Apollo's arms after having accidentally killed the sacred stag (upon which his body rests), a token of the god's love for the youth. Aside from the subject matter, these images of ephobic masculinity uphold certain artistic conventions: the elided genitals (the lack of pubic hair, or the use of a ribbon to deemphasize or hide the male sex); the unnatural torsion of the youth's body. Like Girodet's *Endymion*, Dubufe positions Cyparissus in a manner intended for "desirous looking" between the male lovers *and* the implied male spectator.⁴⁷¹ Additionally, we observe variations in the representation of the masculine form, an idea reminiscent of the masculine universe presented in David's *Leonidas*. In the three paintings, Apollo is shown as being taller, more muscular, and, in effect, more virile than the *ephèbe*. Perhaps Apollo's role articulates that of a liminal masculine figure, *between* the virile warrior type and the *ephèbe*, and serves to reiterate

⁴⁶⁹ Solomon-Godeau notes that one of the mythic narratives, harkening back to Anacreontic art (rediscovered in the nineteenth century), featured the motif of an aged poet in the company of a youthful object of his desire (S-G 2, 112-113). According to this dynamic, homosexuality is displayed as having an educational function, an erotic component, and a "bond of mentorship" (Cited from K.J. Dover's *Greek Homosexuality* in Sedgwick, p. 4). See Berthel Thorvaldsen's (1770-1844) *Anacreon and Amor* (1823 [figure 41]).

⁴⁷⁰ The story is also told that Zephyr (the West wind), who also loved the fair youth, was jealous of Apollo and therefore caused Hyacinthus's accident (Hamilton, 115-116).

⁴⁷¹ S-G 2, 82.

the sexual politics of a public sphere, hinging on the formation and preservation of a homosocial order. At the same time, the highly charged homoerotic nature of this vision may also indicate the “untenability of an overly patriarchal ideal of masculinity.”⁴⁷²

Therefore, given the complex social, political, and cultural backdrop against which male subjectivity was considered and forged in the early nineteenth century, we now turn our attention to Balzac, and to his feminized portrait of male youth.

Masculinity and the Terms of Historical Transition

Unlike many studies dedicated to the role and representation of gender in Balzac’s *Comédie*, our discussion of Balzac’s effeminate youth will not address the themes of mixture, monstrosity, and hybridity from its outset, but will consider the aesthetic dimensions of a masculine figure bearing androgynous features.⁴⁷³ Given the template of nineteenth-century painting (as it is considered above), certain trends in representation, including the manner in which gender is configured (alone, or within the couple), it is not surprising to find that similar masculine models circulate within Balzac’s literary world. First of all, one could argue that Greuze’s representation of the father (and the family) announces the fault line along which many of Balzac’s “doddering paternities.”⁴⁷⁴ will later congregate (the Père Goriot, the Count de Mortsauf, and the Baron Du Guénic, to

⁴⁷² *ibid.*, 124.

⁴⁷³ It would be premature at this stage in the analysis to consider the appearance of so-called “hybrid genders,” (principally that of the virilized feminine), where the hybrid, distinguishable from the androgyne, constitutes a disharmonious union of the traits of the two sexes. According to Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, the androgynous figure posits the eventual resolution of its polarity, whereas the hybrid, a physical monster of sorts, juxtaposes traits belonging to both sexes without any resolution of their polarity (Frappier-Mazur 2, 25-26). While these aspects of the question are not without their merits, particularly in a feminist debate regarding the changing civic status of women in the nineteenth century, (one of Moscovici’s major points of inquiry), we view Balzac’s predominant interest in the feminized male youth not so much as a testament to Balzac’s androcentrism, but rather as another way to acknowledge the notion of historical transition.

⁴⁷⁴ Borrowed from Allan Pasco, this expression is the title of a chapter appearing in his study *Sick Heroes*.

name a few).⁴⁷⁵ Secondly, the Davidian model, or the steely masculine figure, is also valorized; there are both physically virile paternal specimens (Vautrin and Ferragus), as well as fathers whose *force de caractère* corresponds to a mentally virile type (Bartholoméo di Piombo, the Père Grandet, and Pierre Cambremer). However, what reunites the *pères faibles* with the *hommes de fer* is in their common flair for excess translated by their capacity for desire. For instance, Ferragus's irrational jealousy of his daughter's affections for her own husband leads Clémence Jules to an untimely end. Similarly, Old Grandet's exaggerated greed prepares a sterile existence for his only heir, Eugénie. Although not every example of paternity can be qualified in terms of the extreme – "l'éclatement" produced from the "développement excessif des énergies" – the paternal model, paralleling artistic example, carries with it a stipulation, an imperfection, a lack (manifested even by senility, illness, or an unlucky hand dealt by fate).⁴⁷⁶ In this way, Balzac reiterates the father's decentered (and therefore devirilized) historical position in post-revolutionary France. It is upon the ruins of the traditional patriarchal model that the son must configure his social, historical, and sexual identity (as translated by the narrative representation of gender), wherein lies the principal interest of this chapter.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁵ In his study *La peinture dans la création balzacienne*, Olivier Bonard demonstrates how, in the textual composition of his old men, as well as the *décor* available to their view, Balzac borrows from Dutch painting. Also taking into account the role of caricature, (primarily that of Gavarni and Daumier), Bonard considers caricature not as an illustration of Balzac's *Comédie*, but as work of complementary merit (Bonard, 94; 125).

⁴⁷⁶ Eigeldinger, 142.

⁴⁷⁷ This premise coincides with James Creech's view that the son's gender identity is configured by his psychological relationship with the father (Creech, 304). Similarly, Richard Klein states that "a positive effeminized subordination to the father [is] a condition [for] finding a model of [the son's] own heterosexual role" (Quoted in Sedgwick from Klein's review of *Homosexualities*, p. 23). In Balzac, this psychological relationship is, to a large degree, dictated by history or the father's role understood against an historical (and revolutionary backdrop). When left unfulfilled, the father's archetype leaves the son as just that, a *fils sans père*.

In our initial discussion of youth as an emerging social category, we focused on how this social group assumed a space that, while liminal, was previously undisclosed within society. Balzac's young hero occupies society's margins (sometimes in an extreme fashion as with the example of *la bande*). The space of liminality holds for him an imaginative function; it constitutes a space of desire where the symbolic rewriting of one's origins is fantasized as a Bastard myth *à la Napoléon*.⁴⁷⁸ As Raphaël de Valentin exclaims in *La Peau de chagrin* (1831):

N'avons-nous pas tous, plus ou moins, pris nos désirs pour des réalités?
Ah! je ne voudrais point pour ami d'un jeune homme qui dans ses rêves ne se serait pas tressé des couronnes, construit quelque piédestal ou donné de complaisantes maîtresses. Moi! j'ai souvent été général, empereur; j'ai été Byron, puis rien.⁴⁷⁹

In other words, desire in and of itself does not will into existence the coveted material outcome: access to the father (expressed in terms of money, power, and women); entry into society through marriage and the establishment of one's own family. The expression of the son's social and material privations produces intermittent periods of intense desire followed by spells of social paralysis, thus reinstating one of the obsessional currents running throughout Balzac's *Comédie* – the reinstatement of male procreativity or paternal creation.⁴⁸⁰ That is, in order for the young hero to overcome the fate dealt him by social equality, he must find a way to script the space of desire in terms of his social, historical, and material ambitions. Yet, if the path of Napoleon is barred to him, what means are left at his disposal? In the author's aesthetic reformulation of the question, the

⁴⁷⁸ See above, page 27.

⁴⁷⁹ *PCh*. X, 131.

⁴⁸⁰ As explained by Pierre Laforgue, the motif of castration and decapitation in the literature of 1830 reflects the young man's deception with respect to history. The young hero's inability to realize his desires in reality impede the constitution of male subjectivity (Laforgue, 13).

male body is posed as a possible site for encoding desire. We will develop this idea below.

Feminizing the Masculine

Influenced by naturalists like Buffon, Saint-Hilaire, and Lavater, Balzac's character portraits often combine various physiognomies (ethnographical, anatomical, and zoological), while also serving to disclose the author's own scientific ambitions to document society, including its assortment of physical "types."⁴⁸¹ We note that one of the fundamental laws directing the universe of the *La Comédie humaine* is derived from the theories and practices of observation established by Lavater and pertains to understanding the relationship established between physical appearance and internal characteristics.⁴⁸² How do physiology and psychology influence one another?⁴⁸³ For instance, given the example of Balzac's blonds, we note that blond hair is most commonly a trait associated with physical and, by extension, mental weakness.⁴⁸⁴

[L]'innocence florissaient par vestiges dans ces formes grêles et fines, dans ces cheveux blonds et rares, naturellement bouclés. Cette figure avait encore vingt-cinq ans, et le vice paraissait n'y être qu'un accident.

⁴⁸¹ In *Z. Marcas*, the narrator declares that "Selon un système assez populaire, chaque face humaine a de la ressemblance avec un animal," and goes on to compare Marcas to a lion (*ZM VIII*, 834). Régine Borderie suggests that Moreau's illustrated edition of Lavater's theories served as a powerful visual source of inspiration for Balzac (Borderie, 28).

⁴⁸² Borderie sums up Lavater's method in the following steps: 1) Pay attention to your surroundings; 2) Judge what you see; 3) Be capable of recalling in detail in order to classify the traits observed; 4) Go from the exterior to the interior of the subject (*ibid.*, 39).

⁴⁸³ *A-P I*, 4-5. Balzac will later place this law into question. In his attempt to comment on the dawn of the modern age (marked by the July Revolution), Balzac will dissociate the relationship between *le beau et le laid* in both his portraits of the upper and lower classes. As he writes: "Nous ne pouvons aujourd'hui que nous moquer. La raillerie est toute la littérature des sociétés expirantes." (*Pré.PCh. X*, 55). In other words, angelic figures are often portrayed as being physically ugly, while physically attractive specimens may possess a low moral character. However, in a discussion of "hybrids" like Henri de Marsay or Ferdinand Du Tillet, the dissociation of *le beau et le laid* will prove itself to be more problematic.

⁴⁸⁴ Borderie explains how Balzac nuances the portrait of his blond, a "blonde céleste" versus a "blonde méridionale," for example. In doing so, Balzac refines the category of the blond without diverging from the clichés associated with the social type (Borderie, 102-103).

La verte vie de la jeunesse y luttait encore avec des ravages d'une impuissante lubricité.⁴⁸⁵

This introduction to Raphaël de Valentin in the opening pages of *La Peau de chagrin* provides us with a rare portrait of Balzac's youth. First, Raphaël's features accentuate his delicate constitution, rendered physically by a certain degree of "coquetterie recherchée" in his thin blond curls. Apart from his physical attributes, Balzac underscores Raphaël's "impuissance" by his taste for luxury; this weakness lends the youth a sensual quality more commonly identified with the novel's portrait of the courtesan.⁴⁸⁶ The narrator, speaking from the point of view of the onlookers in the gaming house where Raphaël has gone to wager his last napoleon, draws a similar conclusion: "Aussi tous ces professeurs émérites de vice et d'infamie, semblables à une vieille femme édentée, prise de pitié à l'aspect d'une belle fille qui s'offr[ait] à la corruption, furent-ils prêts à crier au novice : – Sortez !"⁴⁸⁷ In the physical "mésalliance" of the feminine and the masculine, Balzac speaks to the moral pairing of the pure and the impure.⁴⁸⁸

Often times, the feminization of the young hero's portrait is achieved through the use of simile, or the gender inversion comparison, conveyed through constructions such as "comme une femme," "comme une jeune fille," or even "comme une fille déguisée en homme." We also see variations of this structure in expressions like "des mains de femme," "un pied de femme," "une voix de femme," used to indicate, with specificity,

⁴⁸⁵ *PCh.* X, 62. Balzac returns to Raphaël's physical description at the story's close in order to demonstrate how the initial portrait of Raphaël foretold his fate. His effeminate qualities are further embellished: his white, soft hands resembling those of "une fille jolie"; his body possesses a general "faiblesse"; he is referred to as "*l'impuissant* qui refoule ses désirs au fond de son cœur" (*ibid.*, 216-217, my emphasis).

⁴⁸⁶ As the courtesan Euphrasie exclaims during the orgy at Taillefer's: "J'aime mieux mourir de plaisir que de maladie. Je n'ai ni la manie de la perpétuité ni grand respect pour l'espèce humaine à voir ce que Dieu en fait ! Donnez-moi des millions, je les mangerai ; je ne voudrais pas garder un centime pour l'année prochaine. Vivre pour plaire et régner, tel est l'arrêt que prononce chaque battement de mon cœur" (*PCh.* X, 115).

⁴⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 62.

⁴⁸⁸ *Borderie*, 114.

what part of the male body resembles that of the opposite sex. In *Le Père Goriot*, we note that the frequent use of the comparative structure often leads to the inappropriate assignment of the young hero's gender. At various stages in his social education, Eugène de Rastignac is compared to a young girl. As Vautrin observes: "Vous êtes un beau jeune homme, délicat, fier comme un lion et doux comme une jeune fille."⁴⁸⁹ At Eugène's first meeting with Maxime de Trailles (the encounter that determines his quest in society), the student aims to rival the beauty and elegance of this dandy who, consequently, is compared to "une jolie femme."⁴⁹⁰ After making his first appearance among *la grande société* at the Duchesse de Carigliano's ball, the narrator refers to the event as "un brillant début": "[Rastignac] devait s'en souvenir jusque dans ses vieux jours, comme *une jeune fille* se souvient du bal où elle a eu des triomphes."⁴⁹¹ Finally, as Rastignac prepares to take up residence in his elegant new bachelor pad on the Rue d'Artois (and embark upon a new social existence), he is again cast in the feminine role; he is referred to as a sort of *femme entretenue* or new "bride" for whom Delphine de Nucingen has made many painstaking arrangements.⁴⁹² Therefore, at each stage of the youth's social development, Rastignac is feminized. As Vautrin says: "Le siècle est mou."⁴⁹³ Perhaps this would make Rastignac a true *homme de son siècle*.

In his study *L'inscription du corps: pour une sémiotique du portrait balzacien* (1972), Bernard Vannier addresses the frequent use of the comparative structure in Balzac's narrative description of his pretty young men. In doing so, he concludes (rather

⁴⁸⁹ *PG* III, 185.

⁴⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 97.

⁴⁹¹ *ibid.*, 178, my emphasis.

⁴⁹² It is Goriot who compares Rastignac to a bride: "– Ah ! nous y voilà, répondit-il. Quand je t'ai eu décidée à le mettre près de toi, que je t'ai vue achetant des choses comme pour une mariée, je me suis dit : Elle va se trouver dans l'embarras ! L'avoué prétend que le procès à intenter à ton mari, pour lui faire rendre ta fortune, durera plus de six mois. Bon. J'ai vendu mes treize cent cinquante livres de rente" (*PG* III, 230).

⁴⁹³ *ibid.*, 186.

superficially) that Balzac's effeminate youth reflect the author's *sens du détail*, and thus conform to the demands of his realist technique:

Afficher la comparaison revient à innocenter le référent. C'est donc pour éviter le piège sémantique, qui charge la beauté de féminité, sous la protection du *comme*. Il se prête alors aux erreurs de lectures qui prennent cette féminité au pied de la lettre, brodent sur l'ambiguïté sexuelle des personnages, quand elles n'accusent pas Balzac d'un goût insistant pour les ephèbes, avec le rappel de Jules Sandeau, etc. Peu important les goûts de Balzac [. . .] Nous marquons seulement l'illusion d'une lecture «réaliste» qui se croit fondée à viser le «fond» au-delà d'une «forme» accessoire, alors qu'elle risque d'échafauder une personne sur la base fragile d'un mot (femme, féminin, efféminé) précisément requis pour éviter cette erreur.⁴⁹⁴

In his prescriptive reading of the comparative structure, Vannier produces an argument that nonetheless favors the notion of simile he seeks to discount. First, his semiotic reading, hinging on the overburdened function of *comme*, oversimplifies, if not wholly discounts, the symbolic importance Balzac assigns to *ephèbes* and sexually ambiguous figures within his *Comédie*. Second, he advises that to do otherwise would constitute a misinterpretation of the text: a literal reading of the feminized masculine; the conflation of the text with the life of the author. These two questions are not mutually exclusive. The author's deliberate and consistent efforts to feminize the masculine depend on the "semiotic collaboration" of the sign, as established between the text *and* the real.⁴⁹⁵ Balzac's *Comédie* has both been called a document that is in its minutiae "impur, ambigu, contestable," and praised as a powerful *and* irreplaceable historical document.⁴⁹⁶ As Pierre Laubriet explains: "[Balzac] veut, non reproduire le réel, mais vérifier ses idées à son contact."⁴⁹⁷ Therefore, while the feminized masculine should, of course, not be taken

⁴⁹⁴ Vannier, 143-144.

⁴⁹⁵ Le Huenen and Perron 1, 214.

⁴⁹⁶ Quoted from Nicole Mozet in Castex's general introduction to *La Comédie humaine* (I, xxiii).

⁴⁹⁷ Laubriet 2, 577.

“au pied de la lettre,” Balzac’s portrait of masculinity, depending upon an imaginative component, facilitates the semiotic “encounter” between the real and the ideal; one of the ways this encounter is simulated is by the union of the masculine and the feminine, transposed on an artistic plane. However, in order that we may envision the role of the androgyne in Balzac, we must first address Balzac’s “sensibilité picturale.”⁴⁹⁸

Text to Image/Image to Text

Balzac’s use of narrative description allows for the semiotic pairing of the real and the ideal, while also calling upon the mediation provided by the image.⁴⁹⁹ As with the Lavaterian portrait founded upon certain observational theories that presented the visible world as a “system of signs somewhat akin to language,” the pictorialization of the text, achieved in part by borrowing from a critical “metalanguage” of art, provides yet another manner in which to decipher the physical and moral portrait assigned to Balzac’s characters, including that of the young hero.⁵⁰⁰ The artistic portrait has both an explicative and a demonstrative function. It is explicative to the degree that it announces the pictorial: “Ce fut pour lui comme un tableau.”⁵⁰¹ In his *Avant-Propos*, Balzac refers to his *Comédie* as “cette vaste peinture de la société” where “les ravages de la pensée sont peints . . . [et] où la Vie elle-même est peinte aux prises avec le Désir [. . .].”⁵⁰² The reverse scenario is also presented when Balzac constructs a descriptive sequence or metonymical chain allowing him to *show* rather than merely *tell*. In *Sarrasine*, La Zambinella’s features, described in terms of line, color, and contour, are described as

⁴⁹⁸ Bonard, 11.

⁴⁹⁹ Artistic references include: artists (painters, sculptors, musicians); artistic mediums (primarily painting); artistic schools (the Dutch School, the Italian School, etc.).

⁵⁰⁰ Wettlaufer 2, 150.

⁵⁰¹ *Ch. VIII*, 1000.

⁵⁰² *A-P I*, 14-15.

those that “eussent ravi un peintre”;⁵⁰³ Louis Lambert’s body is called “une merveille digne de la sculpture.”⁵⁰⁴ Therefore, in accounting for the image within the text, Balzac implicates the compatibility of artistic and literary languages, as well as the admissibility of their “mutual transcoding.”⁵⁰⁵

One of the most obvious ways in which this is achieved is through the citation of real artists: Raphaël, Titian, Rembrandt, Rubens, Girodet, Guérin, and Prud’hon, among others. As Balzac writes in *Eugénie Grandet*:

Le peintre qui cherche ici-bas un type à la céleste pureté de Marie, qui demande à toute la nature féminine ces yeux modestement fiers devinés par Raphaël, eût retrouvé tout à coup dans le visage d’Eugénie la noblesse innée qui s’ignore.⁵⁰⁶

In *La Rabouilleuse*, Maxence Gilet is described in a similar manner:

Max avait une physionomie très douce qui tirait son charme d’une coupe semblable à celle que Raphaël donne à ses figures de vierge [. . .].⁵⁰⁷

Finally, in *La Vieille Fille*, we note that certain aspects of Suzanne’s beauty are compared with works of two different Renaissance artists, Titian and Rubens. First, she is “belle comme la plus belle courtisane que jamais Titien ait conviée à poser sur un velours noir pour aider son pinceau à faire une Vénus.”⁵⁰⁸ Second, her *chair à la Rubens*, associated with “la beauté normande, fraîche, éclatante, rebondie,” is indicative of Suzanne’s *mode*

⁵⁰³ “La Zambinella lui montrait réunies, bien vivantes et délicates, ces exquis proportions de la nature féminine si ardemment désirées, desquelles un sculpteur est, tout à la fois, le juge le plus sévère et le plus passionné. C’était une bouche expressive, des yeux d’amour, un teint d’une blancheur éblouissante. Et joignez à ces détails, qui eussent ravi un peintre, toutes les merveilles des Vénus. révérees et rendues par le ciseau des Grecs. L’artiste ne se lassait pas d’admirer la grâce inimitable avec laquelle les bras étaient attachés au buste, la rondeur prestigieuse du cou, les lignes harmonieusement décrites par les sourcils, par le nez, puis l’ovale parfait du visage, la pureté de ses contours vifs, et l’effet de cils fournis, recourbés qui terminaient de larges et voluptueuses paupières” (*S VI*, 1060-1061).

⁵⁰⁴ *S VI*, 1060; *LL XI*, 638.

⁵⁰⁵ Le Huenen and Perron 1, 214.

⁵⁰⁶ *EG III*, 1076.

⁵⁰⁷ *R IV*, 381.

⁵⁰⁸ *VF IV*, 822.

de vie.⁵⁰⁹ Often critics have understood this trend in artist citation as another way in which Balzac imbeds real historical figures within the text, further lending it an *effet du réel*.⁵¹⁰ Others suggest that this practice contributes to the notion of narrative “déjà vu” established in large part by the *retour des personnages*.⁵¹¹ However, to return again to the semiotic question and the function of the comparative structure, when Balzac names an artist in particular, he departs from the semantic field ARTISTS, and, in doing so, constructs smaller units of meaning. In turn, these units or “lexia,” to employ the term privileged by Roland Barthes, generate aesthetic correspondences within the text.⁵¹² If we consider the respective artistic sensibilities of the two Italian Renaissance painters cited previously, Raphaël and Titian, they represent two distinct visions of ideal beauty (and contribute to the refinement of Balzac’s own definition of beauty⁵¹³); Raphaël’s art is associated with the angelic, the sublime, the virginal, whereas Titian’s is linked to “seraphic candor” or “thoughtful integrity.”⁵¹⁴ The pictorial qualification of character description, as connected to the activity of the sign (the artist’s name), constructs a *réseau sémantique* within the text, while at the same time lends it artistic contour or a “qualité plastique.”⁵¹⁵ Given the aesthetic value attached to the portrait of ex-captain Maxence Gilet, one could argue that the use of the artistic reference to Raphaël’s virgins allows for a moment of transcendence in the otherwise grim story of a provincial hoodlum

⁵⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 822-823.

⁵¹⁰ Girodet’s name is cited directly 17 times within Balzac’s *Comédie*. Girodet, appearing briefly as himself in *La Maison du chat-qui-pelote* (1829), poses as a friend to the budding (and fictive) artist, Théodore de Sommervieux. However, as Alexandra Wettlaufer has demonstrated in her study *Pen vs. Paintbrush* (2001), Balzac, although relying on contemporary clichés, recalls Girodet’s own physique in the portrait of Sommervieux (Wettlaufer 2, 158). Furthermore, the surname Sommervieux resembles Sommariva, the name of Girodet’s patron (*ibid.*, 189).

⁵¹¹ Pitt-Rivers, 20.

⁵¹² Barthes 3, 133.

⁵¹³ Borderie, 107.

⁵¹⁴ Le Huenen and Perron 1, 215.

⁵¹⁵ Bonard, 10.

condemned to *desoeuvrance* and historical *oubli*.⁵¹⁶ Therefore, does artistic citation, understood as the activity of the sign in as much as it enhances physical description, urge the reader to substitute the pictorial to the detriment of the written?⁵¹⁷ Or, in his pluralization of pictorial models, does Balzac seek to demonstrate the superiority of written language?

The use of an artistic language, the evocation of an artist by name, the citation of a specific work of art – all of these narrative elements contribute to the development of an aesthetic atmosphere within Balzac’s text, and, in turn, further aid in establishing explicit and implicit comparisons between *La Comédie humaine* and the visual arts – between text and image. However, given that it is the reader who facilitates the mimetic illusion, how may we understand the relationship Balzac constructs between his text and the image? In the previous chapter, we stated that the inscription of the real, upon which the notion of mimesis depends, reproduces a vision of reality similar to our own. Pursuing this principle with respect to the role Balzac assigns to the work of art in his text, how does the author’s use of aesthetic citation play into his mimetic vision, and by extension, into the production of diegetic reality?

In his discussion of mimetic illusion, Wolfgang Iser explains that representation is both “performance” and “semblance” because it calls to the reader’s mind an image of the unseeable, while also denying it the status of a copy of reality: “The aesthetic semblance can only take on its form by way of the recipient’s ideational, performative activity, and so representation can only come to full fruition in the recipient’s

⁵¹⁶ Considering the artistic imagery evoked in *Eugénie Grandet*, the pictorial references announce Eugénie’s narrative destiny, fulfilled at the novel’s close when she determines to remain “libre” (a virgin) in marriage.

⁵¹⁷ Le Huenen and Perron 1, 215.

imagination; it is the recipient's performance that endows the semblance with its sense of reality."⁵¹⁸ Granted this approach, we note that something slightly different occurs within

Balzac's text. As Françoise Pitt-Rivers writes:

[Balzac] cite un peintre, un tableau et le ton est donné. Le lecteur sait où il va. Faut-il voir là un clin d'oeil de l'auteur qui attend de son lecteur une connaissance de l'art équivalente à la sienne ou reconnaître dans cet appel à l'art [. . . un] chevalet au «tableau littéraire»? Les deux, sans doute.⁵¹⁹

Instead of calling to mind an image that is unseeable, to use again Iser's term, the reality evoked is often itself "seeable"; however "il faut, pour saisir le référent, passer par la peinture."⁵²⁰ In calling upon the visual (or the reader's memory of a famous painting or artistic genre), Balzac anchors the written portrait in a recognizable material reality.⁵²¹

At the same time, this premise is complicated by the fact that the reality evoked (the canvas) is often itself a semblance functioning according to a similar mimetic principle which differs only in its medium. In spite of this fact, or perhaps because of it, Balzac's use of mimetic illusion poses a kind of equivalence between text and image, where "mimesis *is* diegesis," and represented story comes to resemble a known "extralinguistic reality."⁵²² We will pursue this idea further in our consideration of Balzac's ephêbic youth.

The ephêbe in *La Comédie humaine*

In our attempt to provide a multidisciplinary framework in which to reflect on gender and its representations in the post-revolutionary age, we have sought to lay the groundwork for a discussion of the role of gender in Balzac, and the gender identity of

⁵¹⁸ Quoted from Iser's "Representation: A Performative Act" by Mortimer, p. 5.

⁵¹⁹ Pitt-Rivers, 20.

⁵²⁰ Schuerewegen 1, 21.

⁵²¹ Le Huenen and Perron 1, 214.

⁵²² Quoted from Gérard Genette's "Frontières du récit" by Mortimer, p. 7.

his young hero in particular. The gender identity of the young hero, projected as a figure of androgyny, is of critical interest to our study because we view gender and its representations as belonging to an overarching system of social codification connected to, and determined by, the flaccidity of the social sphere. We have just identified, at least thematically, how this trend is evidenced in Balzac's use of certain descriptive patterns, thus contributing to the feminization of the youthful male figure. Framed against Balzac's historical assessment of the traditional masculine role (the inherited gender identity of the nation's youth as it is connected to the loss of paternal creativity),⁵²³ we now turn our focus to the ways in which critical artistic language, when used in its connection to Balzac's softened vision of masculinity, invites overt comparisons between the portrait of his young hero and the ephebic model of ideal masculine beauty. Resuming again Potts's definition of the *éphèbe* (a "pre-sexual" male or a "castrated man"), who effaces the gender difference between the feminine and the masculine, we posit that, on a symbolic level, the *éphèbe* distills the "drame social" of Balzac's nineteenth-century youth, but does so in purely symbolic terms.⁵²⁴ In contrast to the vision of youth *dans sa fleur* (he whose display of feminine and masculine qualities is a function of his adolescence, and is connected to his social and sentimental *naïveté*), the *éphèbe* appears on the opposite side of spectrum. He is considered a figure of castration, as well as a symbol of the *mal du siècle*. Balzac's text fills the gap disclosed between these two extremes. Therefore, the *éphèbe* is an apt symbol to announce and sum up the *drame* of Balzac's youth. Furthermore, as informed by a semiotic reading of the text, we wish to consider the referential purpose of the textually reconstructed image of the

⁵²³ Mozet 2, 175.

⁵²⁴ A-P I, 14.

ephèbe; this is to say, the ways in which the real (posited by the canvas) informs the text (the copy of a copy of the real).⁵²⁵

In his study *La peinture dans la création balzacienne* (1969), Olivier Bonard discusses Balzac's aesthetic vision relative to the function of the work of art. In Balzac's narrative approximation of descriptive atmospheres (the Baron Gros's *The Battlefield at Eylau* or Girodet's *The Sleep of Endymion*), Bonard demonstrates how the text departs from the image in order to lend it dramatic content.⁵²⁶ As he argues in regard to Girodet's *Endymion*: "Il est vrai que le beau dormeur que Girodet et la légende laissent à son mystérieux sommeil, Balzac le fera s'éveiller sous les yeux de celle qui l'aime. Toute *La Vendetta* est en un sens dans cette réponse que Balzac apporte à un mythe inachevé, elle est le prolongement que le romancier apporte à l'œuvre d'un peintre."⁵²⁷ Upon her first meeting with Lucien de Rubempré, Florine, actress and companion to Raoul Nathan, declares: "Monsieur est gentil comme une figure de Girodet."⁵²⁸ In *La Vendetta* (1830), Luigi Porta is described as "l'image d'une tête d'homme aussi gracieuse que celle de l'Endymion, chef-d'œuvre de Girodet."⁵²⁹ Finally, in *Sarrasine*, the narrator reveals that La Zambinella's youthful portrait served "plus tard pour l'Endymion de Girodet."⁵³⁰ While we acknowledge that explicit references to Girodet's paintings are not as abundant as those made to Raphaël's, we will show how the ephobic *beau idéal* figured in the *Endymion* plays a formative role in the aesthetic configuration of Balzac's male youth.

⁵²⁵ Barthes 2, 56.

⁵²⁶ Bonard, 20. This theory resembles that surrounding Balzac's approach to history: he departs from "official history" in order to reveal historical "truth" (Mozet 1, 50).

⁵²⁷ Bonard, 28.

⁵²⁸ *IP V*, 376.

⁵²⁹ *Ven I*, 1052.

⁵³⁰ *S VI*, 1075.

The Example of *La Vendetta*

While we will reserve our discussion of Lucien de Rubempré for the following chapter, Girodet's masterpiece and its presence in *La Comédie humaine* not only speaks to Balzac's aesthetic intentions, but also serves to link the author's vision of masculinity with a predefined notion of male procreativity reunited in a figure of androgyny.⁵³¹ In *La Vendetta*, a novella that recounts the story of two Corsican families who have declared a vendetta against one another, this idea is nascent in the gender roles Balzac assigns to the amorous couple, Ginevra Piombo and Luigi Porta.⁵³² First, theirs is a tale of tragic love based on Shakespeare's play.⁵³³ Second, as explained by Dorothy Kelly, Ginevra and Luigi's gender roles allow them to share a "gender identity" different from those traditionally assigned to each of the sexes individually.⁵³⁴

Unlike many of Balzac's narratives that treat the figure of the *demi-solde* and his social status in Restoration France, *La Vendetta* addresses this theme indirectly, and the story of the wounded *proscrit* returned to Paris after Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo is subsumed by the story of a young woman endowed with a Napoleonic will:

Sa démarche possédait un caractère de noblesse et de grâce qui commandait le respect. Sa figure empreinte d'intelligence semblait rayonner, tant y respirait cette animation particulière aux Corses, et qui n'exclut point le calme. Ses longs cheveux, ses yeux et ses cils noirs exprimaient la passion. Quoique les coins de sa bouche se dessinassent mollement et que ses lèvres fussent un peu trop fortes, il s'y peignait cette bonté que donne aux êtres forts la conscience de leur force. Par un singulier caprice de la nature, le charme de son visage se trouvait en quelque sorte démenti par un front de marbre où se peignait une fierté presque sauvage, où respiraient les mœurs de la Corse.⁵³⁵

⁵³¹ Wettlaufer 1, 405.

⁵³² After the Porta family destroyed the Piombo family's property, and killed their sons. The Piombos, acting in retaliation, massacred the Porta clan before fleeing Corsica for Paris (*Ven I*, 1077).

⁵³³ As Balzac indicates, the "alliance" of the two Corsicans "offrait toute la poésie consacrée par le génie dans celle de Roméo et Juliette" (*Ven I*, 1089).

⁵³⁴ Kelly 2, 66.

⁵³⁵ *Ven I*, 1046.

In this introduction to Ginevra Piombo, much emphasis is placed on her Corsican heritage. However, what is perhaps the most interesting aspect of her racial profile is the frenetic manner in which “the Corsican” is portrayed. In his appraisal of Ginevra’s character, Balzac poses the young woman’s dignified composure and kind disposition against the Romantic topoi for artistic genius: passion, energy, intensity, an untameable quality classified according to the ethnic determinant that these qualities are particular “aux Corsés.”

In the previous chapter, we focused on the various ways in which Balzac insinuates the portrait of Napoleon Bonaparte into his *Comédie*: Napoleon becomes the pivot upon which Balzac spins his views on revolution, paternity, social hierarchy, including his sense of historical destiny, as well as creates a source of narrative unity. The portrait of Ginevra Piombo serves as yet another narrative instance in support of our argument. However, there are several manifest differences to be noted. First, unlike the *demi-solde* or the ambitious young hero with whom Napoleon’s portrait is most commonly associated, Ginevra is neither a young aspiring type, nor an orphan, let alone a social remnant from a fallen régime. On the contrary, she is both a *fille unique* and a *fille chérie* belonging to a family whose benefactor is the Emperor himself: “Ginevra Piombo aimait Napoléon avec idôlatrie, et comment aurait-elle pu le haïr? l’Empereur était son compatriote et le bienfaiteur de son père.”⁵³⁶ While Ginevra’s Corsican race does serve as a source of metonymy connected to the Napoleonic presence within *La Comédie humaine*, within Balzac’s assessment of history, it is also used as a way to emphasize her

⁵³⁶ *Ven I*, 1045. The Piombos served as allies to the Bonaparte family in Corsica and helped Napoleon’s mother to flee for Marseille (1038). After the First Bourbon Restoration, Piombo was instrumental in organizing Napoleon’s return from exile on the island of Elba (1045).

familial (blood relations) and cultural ties. Of her relationship with her father, it is said that Ginevra is a female version of Bartholoméo Di Piombo (who is, by extension, described as a Napoleonic figure in his own right).⁵³⁷ At the time of Piombo's retirement, his daughter becomes the sole source of his "passion," and "le Corse se complut à développer [des] sentiments sauvages dans le cœur de sa fille, absolument comme un lion apprend à ses lionceaux à fondre sur leur proie."⁵³⁸ However, considering also the filial ties that bind Ginevra to her *compatriote* and benefactor, Napoleon, Ginevra also stands to inherit from the Emperor's paternal example. Given our understanding of the father's symbolic position in Balzac's *Comédie*, Ginevra's paternal inheritance will be critical to the shaping of gender identity and gender roles in *La Vendetta*.

Awakening the *éphèbe*

At the novella's debut, it is July of 1815. Although the Bourbon monarchy has retaken control of France, political sympathies remain divided among the royalist and Bonapartist causes; the *atelier* of Servin, where a portion of the short-story takes place, serves as a microcosm for the political climate. Comprised primarily of young women issued from royalist families, the art studio serves as the forum in which Ginevra Piombo exhibits her artistic talents and her political loyalties: "elle exerçait sur ce petit monde un prestige presque semblable à celui de Bonaparte sur ses soldats."⁵³⁹ For instance, when Ginevra learns that Servin lodges a wounded imperial officer in his studio, it becomes a

⁵³⁷ Piombo resembles Napoleon in the intensity of his stare: "Dans ses fonctions ou devant un étranger, [Piombo] ne déposait jamais la majesté que le temps imprimait à sa personne, et l'habitude de froncer ses gros sourcils, de contracter les rides de son visage, de donner à son regard une fixité napoléonienne, rendait son abord glacial" (*Ven* I, 1066).

⁵³⁸ *ibid.*, 1068.

⁵³⁹ *ibid.*, 1046. In his casting of Ginevra's creative talents in a Napoleonic light, Balzac, perhaps, wishes to emphasize how the creative paternal faculty (now absent from the political sphere), may still be exercised within an artistic domain.

place of intrigue, and Ginevra takes it upon herself to protect Servin and the young *proscrit* from their political enemies. As the narrator describes the effects of Ginevra's discovery: "Elle quitta l'atelier en emportant gravée dans son souvenir l'image d'une tête d'homme aussi gracieuse que celle d'Endymion, chef d'œuvre de Girodet qu'elle avait copié quelques jours auparavant."⁵⁴⁰ In the interim of this artistic citation, the plot development comes to a temporary halt, allowing for a suspended interval in which the portrait of Luigi Porta, oscillating between the copy and the original, will emerge from the confines of his frame.⁵⁴¹

In our efforts to delineate the referential relationship between the text and the image in Balzac, we stated that it is the reader who facilitates the recreation of the textual semblance of the real named by the canvas, however, it is the reader's knowledge of a visual reality external to the text that enacts the text's performance. Reflecting then on Ginevra's position *vis-à-vis* Girodet's *œuvre*, we note that a different kind of referential relationship exists between text and image to that which we had previously considered. Assuming the faculty of the reader, Ginevra uses her memory to "write" the pictorial into the text as the portrait of Luigi Porta, thus affirming a sort of equivalence ("aussi gracieuse que") between the text and the known extralinguistic reality named by the *Endymion*.⁵⁴² As Michael Taussig explains in his description of the mimetic faculty:

⁵⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 1051-1052. Ginevra's first views Luigi while he is asleep. In emphasizing his passivity, the narrator also highlights the element of pathos: "la pâleur de son teint accusait de vives souffrances" (1055).

⁵⁴¹ Schuerewegen 1, 21.

⁵⁴² This equivalence is further maintained in Balzac's attention to lighting (reminiscent of Selene's moonbeam), and Porta's physical features: "En ce moment, une obscurité douce enveloppait l'atelier ; mais un dernier rayon de soleil vint éclairer la place où se trouvait le proscrit, en sorte que sa noble et blanche figure, ses cheveux noirs, ses vêtements, tout fut inondé par le jour. Cet effet si simple, la superstitieuse Italienne le prit pour un heureux présage. L'inconnu ressemblait ainsi à un céleste messenger qui lui faisait entendre le langage de la patrie, et la mettait sous le charme des souvenirs de son enfance, pendant que dans son cœur naissait un sentiment aussi frais, aussi pur que son premier âge d'innocence. Pendant un moment bien court, elle demeura songeuse et comme plongée dans une pensée infinie" (*Ven* I, 1059).

“The wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power.”⁵⁴³ However, given the last segment of the comparison, where it is a question of Ginevra’s own reproduction of Girodet’s masterpiece (“chef d’œuvre de Girodet qu’elle avait copié quelques jours auparavant”), the act of imitation (understood both as the literal imitation, and the recollective imitation) seems to subvert the ideological primacy assigned to the real as defined by the visual model. In turn, this allows the semblance (produced by the text) to convey a proximal value to the reader, that is, a more vital version of the real than that which is limited to the confines of the *tableau*. Therefore, as Franc Schuerewegen observes: “On trouve non pas la séquence narrative promise mais une nouvelle toile «textualisée» [. . .].”⁵⁴⁴

As with *La Maison du chat-qui-pelote* (1829), *Sarrasine* (1830), and *Le Chef d’œuvre inconnu* (1832), the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea also serves as an important intertext in *La Vendetta*.⁵⁴⁵

[Ginevra] prit une feuille de papier et se mit à *croquer* à la sépia la tête du pauvre reclus. Une œuvre conçue avec passion porte toujours un cachet particulier. La faculté d'imprimer aux traductions de la nature ou de la pensée des couleurs vraies constitue le génie, et souvent la passion en tient lieu. Aussi, dans la circonstance où se trouvait Ginevra, l'intuition qu'elle devait à sa mémoire vivement frappée, ou la nécessité peut-être, cette mère des grandes choses, lui prêta-t-elle un talent surnaturel. La tête de l'officier fut jetée sur le papier au milieu d'un tressaillement intérieur qu'elle attribuait à la crainte, et dans lequel un physiologiste aurait reconnu la fièvre de l'inspiration.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴³ Taussig, xiii.

⁵⁴⁴ Schuerewegen 1, 20.

⁵⁴⁵ While the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea is well-known, the history of their descendants is perhaps less so, and Pygmalion’s virile myth results in the emasculation of future generations: his grandson is seduced by his daughter and their offspring, Adonis, dies miserably: he is gored, then bitten in the groin by a wild boar (Wettlaufer 2, 11).

⁵⁴⁶ *Ven* I, 1052-1053.

Like the sculptor who fell in love with his ivory statue, Ginevra's masterpiece also serves as the "literal embodiment" of the artist's desire.⁵⁴⁷ As though endowed with the power of the Divine, Ginevra's ability to imitate nature in all of its "couleurs vraies" produces Luigi in the flesh. Falling in love with the product of her imagination, the artistic fantasy *à la Pygmalion* is translated back into reality in order that Ginevra view a living man as a work of art, instead of the reverse.⁵⁴⁸ Gazing upon her animated creation for the first time, "elle se plut à mettre l'âme de l'inconnu en harmonie avec la beauté distinguée de ses traits, avec les heureuses proportions de sa taille qu'elle admirait en artiste."⁵⁴⁹ If we consider Ginevra's procreative act in the light of her gender identity (formed by her relationship with the father), the argument could be made that Ginevra's "art" combines elements of narcissism with a latent dose of incestuous desire. Like the passion that binds Piombo to his daughter, Ginevra's attraction to Luigi also consists in the recognition of her own double in order that *his* desire serves to mirror her own: he is Corsican, he shares her devotion for Napoleon. At the same time, is Luigi not, in the most marvelous sense, the fruit of Ginevra's imaginative labors?

The Androgynous Couple

In her discussion of gender representation in the nineteenth century, Dorothy Kelly discusses woman's role as the "incomplete double" of man. Drawing from Freud's definition of bisexuality, defined as the recognizable "trace" of the male and the female in the opposite sex, Kelly demonstrates how the similarity between the sexes degenerates

⁵⁴⁷ Wettlaufer, 9. Like Pygmalion who had rejected relations with the opposite sex, creating his ideal mate out of stone, Ginevra, who had always been opposed to marriage, vowing to remain with her parents until their death, changes her opinion when she lays her eyes on Luigi Porta for the first time: "Pour la première fois, un homme lui faisait éprouver un sentiment si vif" (*Ven I*, 1057).

⁵⁴⁸ Wettlaufer, 2, 163. Although Wettlaufer does not address this short-story directly in her work, her observations on *La Maison du chat-qui-pelote* offer some insightful perspectives in my reading of this particular scene in *La Vendetta*.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ven I*, 1057-1058.

into the recognition of difference and the denigration of femininity.⁵⁵⁰ Considering the example of Ginevra and Luigi under this rubric, it would appear that Balzac assigns the couple bisexual qualities as a way to pose the possibility of alternative gender identities, and thereby to compensate for the young hero's social shortcomings. Ginevra's "phallic power"⁵⁵¹ and Luigi's passivity are subsumed in a harmonious vision of androgyny; they are a "couple androgyne,"⁵⁵² "une même personne," "deux perles dans leur nacre, au sein des profondes mers," images that are reminiscent of other couples in Romantic literature (Chateaubriand's René and Amélie; Bernardin's Paul and Virginie).⁵⁵³ However, it is interesting to note to what degree the couple's symbiotic existence, epitomized by an androgynous model of subjectivity, is not sustainable. When the couple decides to marry, the gender roles, connected to Ginevra and Luigi's civic status, undergo revision: Ginevra retreats from the public sphere whereas Luigi seeks an active role in this domain.

If we consider again the theme of androgyny according to the proposed dialectical models for male citizen-subjectivity, Ginevra, acting as the "helpmate" to Luigi, allows him to participate actively in the public sphere:

Les actives sollicitations que Ginevra faisait auprès du duc de Fletre, alors ministre de la Guerre, avaient été couronnées d'un plein succès. Louis venait d'être réintégré sur le contrôle des officiers en disponibilité. C'était un bien grand pas vers un meilleur avenir.⁵⁵⁴

However, in obtaining Luigi's pardon from the Restoration government, Ginevra relinquishes some of her own virile authority derived from her commerce with the masculine sphere. This is further evidenced when Ginevra and Luigi learn of the

⁵⁵⁰ Kelly 2, 4-5.

⁵⁵¹ *ibid.*, 66.

⁵⁵² Frappier-Mazur 1, 263.

⁵⁵³ *Ven I*, 1087, 1091.

⁵⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 1075.

vendetta dividing their two families, and Ginevra is forced to choose between her parents and her lover. In spite of the Piombos' vehement opposition to the union, and threat of disownment, Ginevra, recognized under the law as a legal adult, proceeds with the marriage. As Piombo comments: "Il y a donc en France des lois qui détruisent le pouvoir paternel."⁵⁵⁵ Given the story's finale, this statement proves itself to be particularly prophetic.⁵⁵⁶

An Example of Paternity

Before advancing to the last section of this chapter, where we will treat *Sarrasine* within the context of our discussion of the role of the *éphèbe* in the aesthetic configuration of Balzac's effeminized portrait of male youth, it is necessary to make some final remarks regarding the *La Vendetta* and its conclusion. First, when considered among Balzac's many short stories that examine the role of the artist and his ability to produce a "traduction matérielle de la pensée," *La Vendetta* plants many of the seeds regarding the author's theories on creative production (that Balzac will later cultivate in, for example *Massimilla Doni* (1839), *Gambara* (1837), *La Recherche de l'Absolu* (1834), *Le Chef d'œuvre inconnu*, and *Sarrasine*).⁵⁵⁷ However, *La Vendetta* stops short of a sustained exposition of Balzac's views on the role of the artist, artistic creation, and its

⁵⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 1083.

⁵⁵⁶ Schuerewegen comments that Piombo has already condemned Ginevra and Luigi's union before the scene of introduction occurs within the story (Schuerewegen 1, 22). As Piombo says: "Il paraît que la peinture passe avant nous" (*Ven I*, 1070). Schuerewegen understands Piombo's comment in the light of the artist's (Servin's) blessing of the young couple ("– Soyez heureux, je vous unis, dit le peintre avec une onction comique en imposant ses mains sur la tête des deux amants" (*ibid.*, 1064). However, I would argue that Piombo's jealousy is associated less with another's paternal influence over his daughter, and more with the fact that Ginevra is able to cultivate her "passion" (for art) in her father's absence.

⁵⁵⁷ Eigeldinger, 146.

dialectic function: the dualism of mind and matter, of cause and effect, of idea and form.⁵⁵⁸

In spite of this fact, the example of *La Vendetta* does support Balzac's theory of the expenditure of sexual energy as counter to artistic production. Following the couple's union, Ginevra's capacity to produce an original work of art is considerably impaired; she produces a remarkable self-portrait for Luigi, but supports "le fardeau" of the couple's existence by reproducing the works of old masters.⁵⁵⁹ In the end, Ginevra's creative faculties are relegated to the biological plane exclusively when she gives birth to the couple's son, Barthélemy. When compared to the privileged moment where Ginevra assumed a demiurgic role, thus enabling her to reconcile the real and the ideal and produce Luigi Porta in the flesh, the diminishment in her creative energy can be, in part, attributed to her sentimental and physical attachment to her husband and child. We might therefore conclude that Ginevra's artistic abilities prior to her marriage are a function not only of her identification with her father, but of her virginity as well.⁵⁶⁰

One could posit, with Kelly, that Ginevra's maternity serves to reinstate gender difference (in terms of the biological differences existing between the sexes) within the novella; "woman seems to be castrated in physical fact" because female sexuality, understood in its bisexuality, is seen as a threat to the masculine order.⁵⁶¹ While I do not wholly endorse the view that maternity acts as a narrative construct to stifle the "threat" of female sexuality (at least not when compared with feminine models like Antoinette de

⁵⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 64.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ven I*, 1093.

⁵⁶⁰ According to Pierre Citron, Balzac's famous theory on the conservation of energy (founded on la *Traité de la Volonté* forming the foundation of *La Comédie humaine* in its ensemble), is attributable to Balzac's father, who believed that the conservation of one's actions, including the expenditure of sexual energy, was a way to guarantee a long life (Citron 2, 84). In his rendering of Bette in *La Cousine Bette*, Balzac draws a direct correlation between Bette's cerebral faculties (her capacity for diabolical schemes) and her virginity.

⁵⁶¹ Kelly 2, 6.

Langeais), this argument does provide insight into questions of gender and the role of the patriarch at the story's close. Barthélemy's birth, coming at a time when the couple begins to appreciate the precariousness of their social and financial situation, prevents Ginevra from seeking employment outside of the home. As a result, the family is reduced to poverty, starvation, and eventually death. First, the tragic fate of the young family could be interpreted in a judgmental light, as the ultimate punishment for the daughter's decision to act against paternal authority. Secondly, in renouncing his own paternity, (justified by the *vendetta* and motivated by jealousy of his daughter's affections for "un autre que [son] père"), Piombo is also to blame; the final image of fatherhood in the novella, much like that of David's Brutus, is one of a lonely father who has extinguished his hereditary bloodline.⁵⁶² So, if paternity is threatened on each side of the family equation, where does this leave us with respect to the young hero?

While the role assigned to the young hero in *La Vendetta* is secondary to the plot, it is nonetheless integral to our reading of Balzac's "softened" portrait of masculinity, projected in the manner of a work of art. The narrative demonstrates most poignantly this assimilation when Luigi Porta is compared to the masculine *beau idéal* named by Girodet's incomparable *éphèbe*; within the novella, Porta is the manifestation of the procreative masculine faculty. However, the quasi-fantastic manner in which he is called to exist within the text implicates the feminine order in the production of a generative masculine universe, thereby acknowledging that the gender role of the young hero is inherently androgynous. Because of this, he receives a second chance under the Restoration régime; he actively pursues employment and establishes his own family (two

⁵⁶² Spoken in a delirious state shortly following Barthélemy's death, Ginevra's dying wish is that her father take care of her son: "Mon père! Prenez soin de mon fils qui porte votre nom!" (*Ven I*, 1099).

ways, according to Balzac, that the son can gain access to the father's domain). However, Porta, who is compromised by his *proscrit* status and by the Corsican *vendetta*, also participates in the castration of paternal authority within the novella. Assuming the role of Oedipus, he unknowingly usurps the father's position and marries his "mother." As a result, Porta's own offspring is not viable; his son dies in infancy, followed by his wife, and then by Porta himself. From an aesthetic perspective, the young hero's position establishes a complex referential relationship between the real and the text and announces, on a fundamental level, the power of the *verbe* in the construction of Balzac's art. In making the image word, and the word flesh, not only does the text produce a copy of the "real" more real than the extradiegetic reality evoked, but it is shown to be procreative in its own right. Therefore, in spite of the young hero's tragic fate, the text, testifying first to Porta's aesthetic existence, and secondly to his own paternity, remains an important example of the reconceptualization of the creative masculine role.

The Example of *Sarrasine: Le tableau réuni*

More commonly dubbed a tale devoted to the underlying theme of male impotence, Balzac's *Sarrasine* (1830) considers the role of masculine procreativity.⁵⁶³ While our approach to the novella is by no means exhaustive (and is limited to the role of the pictorial), the figure of the *ephèbe* will again serve as a touchstone in our aesthetic reading of Balzac's masculine youth. Provided that the narrative is constructed as a frame story or a story within a story – the tale of *Sarrasine* and *La Zambinella* (Rome, 1758) within the tale of the narrator's seduction of *Mme de Rochefide* (Paris, 1830) – we

⁵⁶³ Jean Reboul's 1967 article "Sarrasine ou la castration personnifiée," fueled Roland Barthes's discussion of the Freudian motif of castration in his well-known study *S/Z* (Nykrog, 437). In response to Barthes's study, met with over a dozen articles and book chapters, the critical focus shifted away from *Sarrasine* as a literary text in and of itself (ibid., 437). While we acknowledge Barthes's insightful and groundbreaking reading, we hope here to valorize alternative readings of the novella as well.

will consider how the work of art, taken in its various mediums or permutations, develops a complex referential relationship within the text. We will first treat the scene in which La Zambinella's portrait is viewed by the narrator and Mme de Rochefide in the Lanty salon. Next, we will reflect on the painting's origins circa 1758, and the circumstances that motivated Sarrasine to commit his artistic vision to sculpture (the *chef d'œuvre* from which the painting of La Zambinella was later modeled). In the third section, we will rejoin our scene of departure in order to demonstrate how the image, facilitating an intratextual link between 1758 and 1830, unveils the original masterpiece behind its many replications; it calls upon the function of the *hors-texte* or the "real," as well as the role of history. Finally, given certain peculiar aspects of *Sarrasine*, namely the treatment of individual gender and gender roles assigned to the couple, we will attempt to demonstrate the unusual ties into the story's underlying aesthetic theme; that is, how the form dictates the content and vice versa.

"Ainsi à ma droite, la sombre et silencieuse image de la mort; à ma gauche, les décentes bacchantes de la vie: ici la nature froide, morne, en deuil; là les hommes en joie. Moi, sur la frontière de ces deux tableaux si disparates, qui, mille fois répétés de diverses manières rendent Paris la ville la plus amusante du monde [. . .]."⁵⁶⁴ What at first appears to be the narrator's imagistic introduction to the 1830 scene at the Lanty ball is in fact Balzac's presentation of the narrator who, like a work of art, is framed in the overlapping of two separate "paintings" representing life and death.⁵⁶⁵ However, when "ces deux côtés de la médaille humaine" are identified with the individual portraits of

⁵⁶⁴ S VI, 1044.

⁵⁶⁵ *Sarrasine* was originally published in the *Revue de Paris* as two chapters, of which the first was entitled, "Les Deux Portraits," and the second, "Une passion d'artiste." These chapter titles were later deleted from the 1844 Furne edition (Wettlaufer 2, 184).

Mme de Rochefide, whom the narrator escorted to the ball, and the aged La Zambinella, the “spectre” mingling among the Lanty’s guests, the narrator ceases to occupy the neutral position of the *embrasure*:

Je restai stupéfait à l’aspect de l’image qui s’offrait à mes regards. Par un des plus rares caprices de la nature, la pensée de demi-deuil qui se roulait dans ma cervelle en était sortie, elle se trouvait devant moi, personnifiée, vivante, elle avait jailli comme Minerve de la tête de Jupiter, grande et forte, elle avait à la fois cent ans et vingt-deux ans, elle était vivante et morte.⁵⁶⁶

Throughout *La Comédie humaine*, Balzac will expose his theories on *la volonté*, showing that ideas are sources of concrete energy acting interior and exterior to man.⁵⁶⁷ Taken in the context of the passage in *Sarrasine* cited above, *l’idée*, the generic name for any creation originating from *la pensée* (a product of human will), has metamorphic power, a faculty that has come to be identified with the artist. The narrator’s thought, materialized (personified) by the gothic image of a *danse macabre*, lends the narrator a vision *entre-deux*, shortly followed by the narrative introduction to the *éphèbe* in the painting of the Adonis.

From a purely descriptive point of view, the formal features of the painting of La Zambinella (although presented in sparse detail), recall Girodet’s *Endymion*; Balzac calls our attention to the Adonis’s reclined posture, and to the feature of the lion skin upon which the male nude is displayed (see again figure 32).⁵⁶⁸ Balzac compensates for his

⁵⁶⁶ S VI, 1050.

⁵⁶⁷ Eigeldinger, 15-17. To a large degree, the theories surrounding the role of the artist and artistic creation are traceable to Balzac’s 1830 novel, *La Peau de chagrin*. In this work, Balzac exposes his theories on *la volonté*, discussing the detrimental effects of thought (a material product of human will or desire). He explains that the unchecked use of thought will destroy life and artistic creation if one is without the ability to reconcile the duality of reality and ideality. However, the conservation of one’s energies will allow the artist to project them in a concentrated and extraordinary form (Murata, 262). This theory is later summed up in novels such as *Séraphîta* and *Louis Lambert* where a figure of androgyny, a being displaying physical duality, or a blending of the masculine and the feminine, embodies this philosophical question.

⁵⁶⁸ S VI, 1054.

limited description of the painting itself in his rendering of the viewers' response to the painting, so "leaving the written 'portrait' more vivid and 'visual,' than the painted one."⁵⁶⁹ In their mutual admiration of the figure's beauty, executed by a "pinceau surnaturel," Mme de Rochefide *and* the narrator separately identify with the Adonis; it serves both as their common rival and a shared object of desire.⁵⁷⁰ Mme de Rochefide's unconcealed admiration of the masterpiece excites jealousy in the narrator:

Oh ! comme je ressentis alors les atteintes de cette jalousie à laquelle un poète avait essayé vainement de me faire croire ! la jalousie des gravures, des tableaux, des statues, où les artistes exagèrent la beauté humaine, par suite de la doctrine qui les porte à tout idéaliser.⁵⁷¹

In an effort to divert attention away from the painting and arouse the young woman's interest in his person, the narrator attaches an enigma, a text, if you will, to the image: "Il est dû au talent de Vien. Mais ce grand peintre n'a jamais vu l'original, et votre admiration sera moins vive peut-être quand vous saurez que cette académie a été faite d'après une statue de femme."⁵⁷² In other words, the narrator's proposition to uncover the mystery surrounding the portrait, including the identity of its subject, has the equal purpose of scripting the male body in terms of his own desires. As Roland Barthes so aptly summarizes the amorous bargain at hand: the narrator aspires to exchange "[u]ne nuit d'amour contre une belle histoire."⁵⁷³ The "belle histoire" in question will center on both the nature and the exercise of the artist's thought with regard to his ideal.

S. and Z.

⁵⁶⁹ Wettlaufer 2, 193.

⁵⁷⁰ S VI, 1054-1055. Similarly in *Séraphîta*, we see how Séraphîta-Séraphüs, another figure of androgynous beauty, is capable of attracting both men and women.

⁵⁷¹ *ibid.*, 1054.

⁵⁷² *ibid.*, 1054.

⁵⁷³ Barthes 2, 95.

Through the example of Louis Lambert, and others, Balzac addresses the androgyny of genius, or the challenge posed to the artist by his “double existence.”⁵⁷⁴ However, the author warns that an artist who indulges in the unregulated use of his thought will become an incomplete genius, and the price for having abused his demiurgic power in cerebral speculation (the failure to reconcile reality and ideality), is insanity, suicide, and death.⁵⁷⁵ Hence, the uncontrolled use of thought destroys life and annihilates any effort for artistic creation.⁵⁷⁶ For Ernest-Jean Sarrasine, an artist possessing a passionate if not violent temperament, the artist’s conflict announces a predictable course. Though his thought is masterfully dominated under Bouchardon’s instruction (Sarrasine’s mentor and substitute father in Paris), the young artist’s arrival in Rome places him under the spell of Roman ruins, and inflates his desire to “s’inscrire son nom entre les noms de Michel-Ange et de M. Bouchardon,” if not surpass their creative achievements.⁵⁷⁷ However, what is not foretold by this scenario is how the unregulated exercise of the artist’s thought will result in a sort of aesthetic aporia.

In her study *Pen vs. Paintbrush: Girodet, Balzac, and the Myth of Pygmalion in Postrevolutionary France* (2001), Alexandra Wettlaufer examines the role of the artist and the function of his thought in relationship to the Pygmalion intertext in Balzac’s *Comédie humaine*. She states that the author repeatedly denies the fictional artist the triumph of artistic animation enjoyed in the Ovidian myth because Balzac viewed the painter and his craft as representing “a threatening alternative vision of mimesis.”⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁴ *LL* XI, 617. Influenced by Swedenborg’s theories surrounding the nature of man’s duality (his spiritual and physical being), Balzac develops his own theories on the androgyny of the genius explored most notably in *Louis Lambert* and *Séraphîta*.

⁵⁷⁵ Eigeldinger, 21; 23.

⁵⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 26.

⁵⁷⁷ *S* VI, 1059.

⁵⁷⁸ Wettlaufer 2, 3.

Therefore, in positing the visual artist as the supreme creator, Balzac wishes to challenge the “hegemony of vision,” often portraying the artist as a deluded and “fetishizing failure” who submits to the idolatrous worship of his own creation.⁵⁷⁹ In other words, Balzac does not reward the artist’s tendency toward an extreme, expressed as the inability to reconcile the real and the ideal. Rather, he disrupts the association between the masterpiece and mimetic realism so that to see is not necessarily to know.⁵⁸⁰ The first example of this in *Sarrasine* occurs when the young artist beholds La Zambinella on the stage of the opera house:

Il admirait en ce moment la beauté idéale de laquelle il avait jusqu'alors cherché çà et là les perfections dans la nature, sans rencontrer jamais sous le ciel froid de Paris les riches et suaves créations de la Grèce antique [. . .] La Zambinella lui montrait réunies, bien vivantes et délicates, ces exquis proportions de la nature féminine si ardemment désirées, desquelles un sculpteur est, tout à la fois, le juge le plus sévère et le plus passionné [. . .] C'était plus qu'une femme, c'était un chef-d'œuvre ! [. . .]. Sarrasine dévorait des yeux la statue de Pygmalion, pour lui descendue de son piédestal.⁵⁸¹

While there are several interesting aspects of this passage to consider, perhaps the most poignant feature concerns Sarrasine’s aesthetic interpretation of the scene; regardless of the artifice of his surroundings, he recognizes La Zambinella as the superlative incarnation of the ideal feminine form. According to Helen Borowitz, Sarrasine’s confusion lies in his failure to adopt the artist’s “second sight,” that which would allow him to see beyond Zambinella’s deceptive physical beauty, and discover the truth – that his ideal woman is really a man.⁵⁸² Furthermore, given the artistic assessment that La Zambinella constitutes a living masterpiece, divorced, so to speak, from a creative act

⁵⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 3-4; 9.

⁵⁸⁰ Balzac also seeks to subvert the contemporary conflation between knowledge and power of which Galatea’s animation is the direct realization of the formula *voir = savoir = pouvoir* (*ibid.*, 26).

⁵⁸¹ *S VI*, 1061.

⁵⁸² Borowitz, 178.

orchestrated by the artist's thought, Sarrasine will reenact the Pygmalion myth in reverse in order to fill in the proverbial gap in the creative process: "the real person is turned into an inanimate object only to be animated again by the miraculous powers of imagination and desire."⁵⁸³ In essence, Sarrasine's creative ambition determines him to reveal the "real" woman behind the semblance, all the while assuming that Zambinella is indeed a woman.⁵⁸⁴

As stated previously, one of the ways in which Balzac simulates the semiotic "encounter" between the real and the ideal is in his feminized portrait of the young hero, not interpreted literally, but as translated on an artistic plane. In *Sarrasine*, we note the opposite to be true. First, Balzac's portrait of the feminized masculine, in the person of La Zambinella, serves as a source of confusion and leads Sarrasine to inappropriately interpret the ideal as the real, and therefore disrupt the intrinsic relationship between sign and referent that is the basis of aesthetic value. In the artist's scripting of La Zambinella's beauty, taken as an object of his desire, the castrato represents an absolute. As Ross Chambers explains, "[this] adds an additional veil of illusion to the distance separating signs from their supposed referent, [and] stresses no less dramatically the autonomy and ultimate baselessness of the signs which constitute the beautiful."⁵⁸⁵ In short, what Sarrasine interprets to be the embodiment of ideal feminine beauty is, in fact, perpetually lacking. Therefore, when Sarrasine, calling upon the procreative faculty of

⁵⁸³ Wettlaufer 2, 200.

⁵⁸⁴ Sarrasine's artistic goal is defined by his desire to undress la Zambinella, to reveal her beneath her robes, veils, her theatrical costumes: "Pendant une huitaine de jours, il vécut toute une vie, occupé le matin à pétrir la glaise à l'aide de laquelle il réussissait à copier la Zambinella, malgré les voiles, les jupes, les corssets et les noeuds de rubans qui la lui dérobaient" (*S* VI, 1062). What is interesting about this scenario, and differs from that which we observed in *La Vendetta*, is that mimetic illusion, facilitated by the recipient's imagination (performance) endows the semblance with a sense of reality. However for Sarrasine, this "reality" continues to be a semblance because he has not yet discovered that Zambinella is really a castrated man.

⁵⁸⁵ Chambers, 222.

his thought, uses his memory to sketch his muse in poses favored by masters like Raphaël, along with every other pose conceivable to his imagination, he does so in error: “Ce fut une sorte de méditation matérielle [. . .]. Mais sa pensée furieuse alla plus loin que le dessin.”⁵⁸⁶ In this way, artistic creation ceases to be procreative (translatable in terms of the real or the material), and tends toward a sterile essence, a “hallucination” derived from mimetic distortion.⁵⁸⁷

In spite of signs that would lead him to discover his error, Sarrasine persists in cultivating his artistic illusion. Even when La Zambinella hints at the truth, Sarrasine counters, “Crois-tu pouvoir tromper l'œil d'un artiste ? N'ai-je pas, depuis dix jours, dévoré, scruté, admiré tes perfections ? Une femme seule peut avoir [. . .] ces contours élégants.”⁵⁸⁸ While La Zambinella's position affords the castrato the ability to recognize the differences between art and reality (rendered quite literally by his transvestism), Sarrasine's persistent fantasy, perceived on the level of the descriptive, coincides with the artist's own feminization. Apart from his name, Sarrasine is often posited in the feminine role.⁵⁸⁹ His initial encounter with Zambinella in the opera house elicits an enthusiastic reaction in Sarrasine, thus placing the male artist in a passive role (as the observer) with respect to the “active female voice.”⁵⁹⁰ In addition, we note the return of the comparative structure; in preparation for Sarrasine's first *rendez-vous* with his mistress at Frascati, the artist “se para comme une jeune fille qui doit se promener devant son premier amant.”⁵⁹¹

However, when Sarrasine discovers Zambinella dressed as a man, he recognizes his error

⁵⁸⁶ S VI, 1062.

⁵⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 1062.

⁵⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 1069.

⁵⁸⁹ As Barthes observes: “Le mot Sarrasine emporte une autre connotation: celle de féminité, perceptible à tout Français qui reçoit le e final comme le morphème spécifique du féminin” (Barthes 2, 21).

⁵⁹⁰ Wettlaufer 2, 200.

⁵⁹¹ S VI, 1064.

(“Une affreuse vérité avait pénétré son âme”), and the artist’s feminine qualities then connote male impotence (and by extension, the failure of art), culminating in his precipitous death.⁵⁹² Furthermore, Sarrasine’s masterpiece, originating from a *faute d’interprétation*, is thereafter eternalized. Therefore, returning again to the role of the Pygmalion intertext in the narrative of Balzac’s novella, the myth of the artist’s idolatrous creation prefigures Sarrasine’s end, and serves to demonstrate the “radical disjunction” between appearance and reality, as well as Balzac’s denial of the visual artist’s claim to representational authority.⁵⁹³

Mimetic Illusion and the Role of the Narrator

In the words of Ross Chambers, both narratives in *Sarrasine* address “the power of art and the problem of its reception,”⁵⁹⁴ thus implicating each story in the creation of illusion where the deceptive qualities are later rejected.⁵⁹⁵ Having already considered the dramatic impact of Sarrasine’s illusion, let us now turn our attention to the role of the narrator whose creative ambition is dictated by his desire to rival the image of the Adonis with his words. Using his privileged position to speak from a place of authority, the narrator knowingly cultivates an illusion in his manner of telling.⁵⁹⁶ However, what he does not anticipate is how his imagistic language will be interpreted by his interlocutor, Mme de Rochefide. She, indicating her clear understanding of the distinction between the text and reality, asks the narrator: “Mais [. . .] quel rapport existe-t-il entre cette

⁵⁹² *ibid.*, 1072.

⁵⁹³ Wettlaufer 2, 200.

⁵⁹⁴ Chambers, 220.

⁵⁹⁵ *ibid.*, 225.

⁵⁹⁶ For instance, at the story’s debut he expresses his impatience with his interlocutor saying: “— Vous ne voyez que [l’Adonis], m’écriai-je impatienté comme un auteur auquel on fait manquer l’effet d’un coup de théâtre” (*S VI*, 1063).

histoire et le petit vieillard que nous avons vu chez les Lanty?”⁵⁹⁷ To which the narrator replies:

Madame, le cardinal Cicognara se rendit maître de la statue de Zambinella et la fit exécuter en marbre, elle est aujourd'hui dans le musée Albani. C'est là qu'en 1791 la famille Lanty la retrouva, et pria Vien de la copier. Le portrait qui vous a montré Zambinella à vingt ans, un instant après l'avoir vu centenaire, a servi plus tard pour l'*Endymion* de Girodet, vous avez pu en reconnaître le type dans l'Adonis.⁵⁹⁸

While the narrator's response provides the information necessary to reconnect the text with reality, it is, after all, the narratee who enacts the text's performance. First, in assuming the ideological position of the reader, Béatrice (Béatrix) de Rochefide validates the narrator's art, asserting the text's mimetic authority over the image, and its capacity to unveil artifice (posed by the image) placed at several removes from the real. Second, this acknowledgement also leads Mme de Rochefide to reject the illusion created by the text in her ultimate refusal of the narrator's advances: “Vous m'avez dégoûtée de la vie et des passions pour longtemps.”⁵⁹⁹

Returning again to the opening scene of the novella, and specifically to the metaphor of the “médaille humaine,” we could argue that the form dictates the content in Balzac's *Sarrasine*? While the pictorial narrative of the *tableaux* posits the artistic theme, including the association between narrator and artist, it also prefigures the gender question permeating the narrative, upon which the creation of illusion will largely depend. The coin with its two discrete sides, generative of meaning both together and in their opposition, serves as a powerful, multifaceted image to summarize the relationship between creator and creation, between artist (narrator) and receiver of art (narratee), and

⁵⁹⁷ *ibid.*, 1075.

⁵⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 1075.

⁵⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 1075.

finally between text and image. Ultimately, the image will bow before the text. Unlike the image, concocting artifice in a series of different masterpieces, the text will set the record straight, serving to reconnect the proverbial dots between marble and canvas, between Sarrasine and Girodet, and finally between old age and eternal youth. As Barthes explains: “Quant au dernier avatar, qui est le passage de la toile à la «représentation» écrite, il récupère toutes les copies précédentes.”⁶⁰⁰ Therefore, in turning the enigma back upon itself, the text dispels illusion. However, the irony in this conclusion lies in the casting off of one final illusion held by the narrator. As the face of the coin spins alternatively between Zambinella’s feminine and masculine portraits, we too witness variability in the narrator’s phallic power. Like Sarrasine, the narrator also scripts the male body in terms of his own desires. However, when desire fails to produce the material outcome envisioned (the consummation of his relationship with Mme de Rochefide), we note, once again, that desire is not commensurate with reality. Rather, like the permutation in artistic media from statue to canvas, desire too has a shifting value, and finally serves to destabilize the ideological position of authority held by the young hero.

Throughout this chapter, we have attempted to explore the ideological intersection between gender and politics in the nineteenth century leading up to July 1830. Taken in the context of the vacuum of power left by revolution and the subsequent loss of patriarchal authority, our reading of gender identity takes into account political and social upheaval. Additionally, for social theorists, artists, and novelists alike, the gender question, including the unstable organization of masculinity, provides a perspective from which to view this period of transition. Balzac’s treatment of gender is multiform. In a

⁶⁰⁰ Barthes 2, 197.

preliminary sense, the author's *portrait physiologique* of the feminized male youth can be understood in scientific terms, playing on the Lavaterian theory that one's exterior dictates one's interior, and that there are certain physical traits that announce one's moral predisposition to *mollesse*, *impuissance*, and other characteristics that have come to be associated with the female sex. Therefore, when Raphaël de Valentin comments upon his role as an unsuccessful suitor saying, "Peut-être veulent-elles un peu d'hypocrisie ? Moi qui suis tour à tour, dans la même heure, homme et enfant, futile et penseur, sans préjugés et plein de superstitions, souvent *femme comme elles*," he identifies himself with woman's moral attributes.⁶⁰¹ Upon closer examination however, we note that Balzac transitions from the naturalist mode to an aesthetic one. How and why this is so have proven to be challenging in their response.

As we have noted at several turns, one of the major undercurrents in Balzac's *Comédie humaine* is the role of paternity, and specifically the recovery of paternal creation. However, given the exhausted example of Napoleon Bonaparte, the rehabilitation of the father appears to be an historically defunct issue. Balzac repeatedly emphasizes this point in the portrait of his young hero who is emasculated by the blow dealt him by social leveling. Therefore, it is interesting that despite this fatalistic pronouncement, Balzac's historical objective (intimately bound to the figure of youth), remains narratively intact; the adoption of an aesthetic approach, fostered by the semiotic collaboration of the *tableau* or *œuvre d'art*, provides an alternative perspective in which to consider this same question. In other words, Balzac's reaction to the ideological softening of society, connected to the masculine portrait and the reinstatement of

⁶⁰¹ *PCh.* X, 131, my emphasis.

masculine procreativity, will be literally inscribed within the context of creative production or *les arts plastiques*.

Looking to the painting of the period, the portrait of masculinity is varied. It includes the traditional model of male virility exhibited by the heroic type or the warrior (the masculinized masculine), as well as an alternative version of the masculine *beau idéal* captured by the unheroic and passive figure of the *éphèbe* (the feminized masculine). In part, this trend in representation, determined by the political agenda of the masculine order and its desire to break free from the aesthetic tradition privileged under the Ancien Régime, is defined by the elimination (*and* the elision) of the feminine, thereby establishing a new aesthetic order based on the masculine ideal. However, as explained by Abigail Solomon-Godeau, this masculine vision is unstable. Though maleness is often “leavened with femininity,” Godeau argues that the *éphèbe* is not a harmonious integration of the feminine and the masculine, as we might be tempted to believe. Rather, it reflects the masculine order’s agenda to produce a masculine universe in which maleness occupies every ideological position, including that of the Other.⁶⁰² As a result, this generates a particularly “troubling” vision of the masculine in that the figure of the *éphèbe* is sexualized; serving both as object and subject of desire, the masculine order promotes an erotic dynamic between men. Balzac’s feminized portrait of the young hero reflects many of these trends in literary and artistic representation.

One could argue that Balzac’s portrait of male youth purposefully mirrors the model he found in art: his use of physical description; the dialectical arrangement of his youth within the couple acknowledges the “ambisexual” model for male subjectivity. However, in his assimilation of the young hero with the *éphèbe* (a figure who, in my

⁶⁰² S-G 2, 175.

view, visually epitomizes the inherent *drame* of Balzac's youth), Balzac, like the visual artist, also ambitions to script the masculine in terms of desire. Furthermore, it is not difficult to surmise why Balzac openly endorsed Girodet's androgynous vision of masculinity, constituting both a visual metaphor for creation in a masculine universe, as well as announcing the birth of a new aesthetic and a new nation entirely generated by male genius.⁶⁰³ In other words, this artistic model provides a procreative outlet for the allegorical reinstatement of masculine authority, translated in terms of desire. However, when considered within the context of Balzac's ambitions to take inventory of society, how can we reconcile his portrait of the young hero with the "knowable" reality he sought to record?

Although Balzac's portrait of his effeminate male youth does not consist in a literal translation of the real, it does figure into the mimetic challenge posed by the realist text. As Roland Barthes explains it:

[I]l faut que l'écrivain, par un rite initial, transforme d'abord le «réel» en objet peint (encadré); après quoi il peut décrocher cet sujet: le tirer de sa peinture: en un mot: le dé-peindre [. . .]. Ainsi le réalisme (bien mal nommé, en tout cas souvent mal interprété) consiste, non à copier le réel, mais à copier une copie (peinte) du réel [. . .].⁶⁰⁴

In the context of our discussions of *La Vendetta* and *Sarrasine*, Balzac appears to jump ahead to the final phase in the composition; that is, the so-called "real" that he seeks to transform already exists in a painted form, thus allowing him to pair the text and the image (literary and artistic languages) in such a way that the extradiegetic reality named by the painting constructs the diegetic reality of the text. Conversely, in reproducing a "copie peinte de la copie peinte," the author asserts the two-fold authority of the text over

⁶⁰³ Wettlaufer 1, 405.

⁶⁰⁴ Barthes 2, 56.

the image. In the first place, the production of the image within the text depends on the active participation of the reader to synthesize meaning. (The text traverses the barrier to the real posed by artifice in order to address the possessor of the “main blanche” turning the pages of the novel directly). At the same time, in Balzac’s depiction of the visual artist, who is often prone to pictorial error, the text (and by extension the author) is again placed in a position of superiority with respect to the image (the visual artist) because the text is a necessary corrective to the image and, as such, posits some final truth.⁶⁰⁵ Having established the function of the real in Balzac’s text, how may we ultimately come to appreciate the role of his *ephèbe*?

Balzac’s aesthetic approach, connected to his vision of youth, achieves a point of synthesis in the text. In placing his young hero in various roles such as artist, receiver of art, and *sujet d’art*, the author reveals the text’s power to materialize the written word. In *La Vendetta*, Luigi Porta is called forth from the confines of the *tableau* in order to assume a role in the “couple androgyne” and initiate a procreative role in society. In *Sarrasine*, the young hero’s position (alternatively held by Sarrasine and the narrator) discloses the text’s ability to connect the narrative of Sarrasine and La Zambinella to the portrait of the Adonis, and finally to the mysterious old man in the blond wig at the Lanty ball.⁶⁰⁶ While both stories end on a pessimistic note, endorsing a certain vision of male impotence, *l’idée* remains.⁶⁰⁷ This is to say that, although the figure of youth is

⁶⁰⁵ Wettlaufer 2, 151.

⁶⁰⁶ The final portrait of the castrato is as follows: “Heureusement pour la vue attristée de tant de ruines, son crâne cadavéreux était caché sous une perruque blonde dont les boucles innombrables trahissaient une prétention extraordinaire. Du reste, la coquetterie féminine de ce personnage fantasmagorique était assez énergiquement annoncée par les boucles d’or qui pendaient à ses oreilles, par les anneaux dont les admirables pierreries brillaient à ses doigts ossifiés, et par une chaîne de montre qui scintillait comme les chatons d’une rivière au cou d’une femme” (*S VI*, 1052).

⁶⁰⁷ Ross Chambers concludes that “une histoire de castration” becomes “une narration *castrée*” (Chambers 220). In the same vein, Alexandra Wettlaufer argues that Balzac will ultimately reject the vision of a

feminized by his artistic/procreative limitations, as he was by his historical ones, his presence accords the “traduction matérielle de la pensée” and, by extension, the complementary acts of idealization and incarnation. Therefore, I would argue that the young hero’s role promotes the transformative capacity of the word: the ability to produce a materiality out of an icon for male impotence; the material essence behind a façade of seeming immateriality. In this way, Balzac does not merely borrow from a political aesthetic framework in order to transcribe his social actuality, thus producing a redundant, dead-end historical conclusion. He also revises the image of male impotence attached to his own conception of historical fatality. In doing so, his aesthetic model, hinging on the figure of youth, begets a new aesthetic founded on the mutability of the word and its materiality. In the final chapter of our study, I will enter into a more developed discussion of this new aesthetic, focusing on the role of the *éphèbe* in what I will call the “creative pact,” while also developing upon some of the themes touched upon in this chapter: the role of homosociality and the homoerotic dynamic inscribed within the theme of love between men.

masculine universe proposed by Girodet. In turn, he will reinscribe the “elided Diana” as a way to highlight the failures of his aesthetic rivals and acknowledge his female audience (Wettlaufer 2, 206).

CHAPTER IV

The Creative Pact: Positing the Space of (re)Creation in *La Comédie humaine*

– Il y a là tout un poème à faire qui serait l'avant-scène du *Paradis perdu*, qui n'est que l'apologie de la Révolte.¹

Near the end of Balzac's *Séraphîta* (1833), Minna and Wilfrid witness the death of Séraphîta-Séraphîtüs, an androgynous being who, in a celestial fireworks display, reveals to them man's "qualité d'ange" (his "essence"), before ascending into the Eternal realm:

La communication de la LUMIÈRE qui changeait l'ESPRIT en SERAPHIN, le revêtement de sa forme glorieuse, armure céleste, jetèrent de tels rayonnements, que les deux Voyants en furent foudroyés. Comme les trois apôtres aux yeux desquels Jésus se montra, Wilfrid et Minna ressentirent le poids de leurs corps qui s'opposait à une intuition complète et sans nuages de LA PAROLE et de LA VRAIE VIE. Ils comprirent *la nudité* de leurs âmes et purent en mesurer le peu de clarté par la comparaison qu'ils en firent avec l'auréole du Séraphin dans laquelle ils se trouvaient comme *une tache honteuse*.⁶⁰⁸

In this mystical recreation of the Garden of Eden, the couple figuratively eats from the apple tree, allowing their eyes to be opened to their humanity. It is their glimpse at eternity's splendors that leaves them to contemplate the imperfection of their earthly existence; a reality projected in terms of insufficiency and lost integrity.⁶⁰⁹ Following this event, the narrator concludes: "Au dehors, éclatait dans sa magnificence le premier été du dix-neuvième siècle."⁶¹⁰ Though indicative of Balzac's mysticism, the final images of redemption and rebirth in *Séraphîta* are also consistent with the nineteenth

¹ *IP* V, 708.

⁶⁰⁸ *Sér.* XI, 853, my emphasis.

⁶⁰⁹ "En rentrant dans les liens de la chair, dont leur esprit avait momentanément été dégagé par un sublime sommeil, les deux mortels se sentaient comme au matin d'une nuit remplie par de brillants rêves dont le souvenir voltige en l'âme, mais dont la conscience est refusée au corps, et que le langage humain ne saurait exprimer" (*ibid.*, 858).

⁶¹⁰ *ibid.*, 860. The story takes place in the winter of 1799-1800.

century's notion of history, and its connection with ideas of progress and chronology.⁶¹¹ Furthermore, given that this passage is preceded by a biblical reference to Eden, the argument could be made that the image of regeneration promised by the dawn of a new century carries with it the "tache honteuse" of the past, serving both as a direct reminder of man's original exile from God and as an indirect reference to the dissolution of the sacred order and the void left by the father in the post-revolutionary age. However, what is perhaps more noteworthy to consider is the explicit value that Eden holds within a novel centered around a figure of androgyny, and its philosophical implications regarding man's recognition of, or his reconciliation with, his immaterial Other. If God created Eve from Adam's rib, Eden reminds us of Adam's status not only as the first man, but as the first androgyne – the original matter of human creation.⁶¹²

To a large extent, the previous chapter dedicated to Balzac's feminized portrait of the male youth sought to explore this very connection between the theme of masculine procreativity and the figure of androgyny as considered against the historical backdrop of Restoration France, and projected aesthetically by the passive figure of the *éphèbe*. For Balzac in particular, the assimilation between his portrait of youth and the masculine *beau idéal* privileged in the arts provides one of the key elements to uncovering the author's own aesthetic approach. In his revision of a symbol of male impotence, the softened portrait of masculinity acts as a marker to valorize the word and its inherent

⁶¹¹ The subject of Balzac's religion is a vast topic of discussion. One could define Balzac's mysticism in a two-fold manner. First, as it relates to the conciliation of faith and reason (science). Second, as it pertains to the role of the initiated one who longs to admire God without an intermediary. We see this, in particular, in Balzac's poet and his quest for the absolute. For Balzac's religion, see Arlette Michel's "Le Dieu de Balzac" (1999). For Swedenborg's influence see Sjöden's article "Balzac et Swedenborg" (1963); and Régis Boyer's "Balzac et l'illumination, notamment Swedenborgien" (1999).

⁶¹² Busst, 4.

power; the author's assertion of the word's superiority over the visual image defines *l'idée* as a synesthetic source of material energy.⁶¹³

Returning then to the conclusion of *Séraphîta*, how might we understand Balzac's aesthetic in relationship to the text's announcement of a new age in history, especially when this new age is foreshadowed by images of symbiotic failure (the death of the androgyne, the exile from Eden)? While these questions are not exclusive to *Séraphîta*, being posed to varying degrees throughout *La Comédie humaine*, it is my view that this passage in particular establishes a critical opening within the narrative, and identifies an interrogative space in which Balzac's *Comédie* will posit its own creative authority. In assuming the function of "fictive substitute" for the loss of historical authority and tradition, the text will attempt to rewrite origins.⁶¹⁴ As Marc Eigeldinger so aptly explains it: "Le verbe humain, miroir obscurci de la Parole divine, fonde un univers de relations [. . .] Il assume alors une fonction démiurgique [. . .] apte à redécouvrir la clef de l'unité perdue et à traduire [l'Absolu]."⁶¹⁵

Many critics have argued that the demiurgic function of the word in Balzac's *Comédie* is incarnated by the character of Vautrin, a diabolical and criminal genius whose poetic enterprise of revolt seeks to imitate God the Father (a latent theme within *La Comédie humaine*).⁶¹⁶ Maurice Shroder's observation that "[t]he true poet, as Balzac thought of him, was a demiurge, a man who shaped or changed and so ruled the world"⁶¹⁷ quickly calls to mind Vautrin's famous declaration in *Le Père Goriot*: "Je suis un grand

⁶¹³ Eigeldinger, 17.

⁶¹⁴ Beizer 1, 10.

⁶¹⁵ Eigeldinger, 146.

⁶¹⁶ Thibaudet, 197.

⁶¹⁷ Shroder, 93.

poète. Mes poésies, je ne les écris pas: elles consistent en actions et en sentiments."⁶¹⁸

The ability to translate one's thoughts into actions, as did Napoleon, not only replaces the function of God, but names the individual as commander of his own destiny. Other critics, such as Alfred Glauser and Priscilla Clark, take this argument one step further in their common assertion that Vautrin's position in Balzac's fiction reflects that of the implied author himself; Vautrin is the image of this *écriture* in that he knows all.⁶¹⁹

However, given Vautrin's intense attachment to the young hero (Eugène de Rastignac and Lucien de Rubempré), I would contend that he represents only half of the proverbial equation. In other words, before we may consider him to be an incarnation of the demiurgic function of the word, and by extension extrapolate Balzac's views on the identity of the 'true' poet and the significance of his position, we first must trace the origins of creative power in general. Our query will lead us to explore the recurrence of the male – male relationship in Balzac (as defined between protector and *protégé*, between mentor and pupil, between "father" and "son"), in order that we may then reflect on the text's implied creative objective (named in *Séraphîta*) to reconfigure the father's place; this is to say, historical space.

A Preface to the "Creative Pact" in *La Comédie humaine*

In her recent study *Les Métamorphoses du pacte diabolique dans l'œuvre de Balzac* (2003), Kyoko Murata examines several different kinds of pacts appearing within *La Comédie humaine*: the "pacte diabolique," the "pacte angélique," and the transfiguration of the diabolical pact into what could also be called the feminized pact.

⁶¹⁸ *PG* III, 141.

⁶¹⁹ Glauser, 585. During the composition of his *Comédie*, Balzac often confined himself to his desk for long periods of time, wearing only a monk's cloak as an outward sign of the physical and mental discipline required for such a task. Commenting upon this fact, Glauser remarks that Vautrin/Herrera is the image of the author at work (*ibid.*, 594).

Whereas the diabolical pact consists essentially of the possession of the soul and body of another in order to dispose of them at will and with the intent to dominate still others, the angelic pact, also understood in terms of one's desire to live vicariously through another, is associated with self-sacrifice and maternity. The feminized pact involves the merging of the diabolical and angelical pacts. Murata's reading is useful not only because it allows us to trace the evolution of the pact in Balzac's *Comédie*, but because it relates this progression to key historical and socio-political developments in France from the Revolution to the Restoration. Drawing initially from certain features of the diabolical pact, I wish to explore the contractual terms of creative production in Balzac's *Comédie*. Encompassing the development of Balzac's aesthetic and its creative objectives within this discussion, we will continue to define the role of the young hero both as a figure capable of activating the procreative capacity of the word and as a key agent to the enactment, and underlying success, of the creative pact.

Dante and Godefroid

An often overlooked tale within Balzac's *Comédie*, *Les Proscrits* (1831) provides a foundation for a discussion of the creative pact as it will later come to be defined. Published at the end of the same year as Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris*, Balzac's medieval tale set in a lodging house "derrière l'église de Notre Dame," echoes the enterprise of desymbolisation that characterizes the literature of this period.⁶²⁰ As Pierre Laforgue explains it: "Désymboliser [. . .] c'est faire circuler le sens, libérer la signification, avec au bout du compte une nouvelle mythologie où la Révolution, l'Histoire et le Progrès se

⁶²⁰ *Pro.* XI, 525. Hugo's novel was published in January of 1831. *Les Proscrits* was first published in the *Revue de Paris* in May of that same year (Prévost, 89). In 1836 Balzac makes *Les Proscrits* the first story in his triptique *Livre mystique*, followed by *Louis Lambert* (1832) and *Séraphîta* (1833), appearing within his *Etudes philosophiques* section of *La Comédie humaine*.

conjuguent pour mettre au jour l'Homme, nouveau Prométhée, sous la direction duquel s'édifiera une nouvelle Babel."⁶²¹ For Hugo, whose novel centers around Notre Dame cathedral, the edifice not only recalls the shattered sacred order and the stage upon which Napoleon staked the legitimacy of his empire, but also indicates the symbolic and metaphorical passage from the Ancien Régime to the July monarchy, a succession in power founded on the usurpation of legitimacy.⁶²² In situating his narrative in 1308 (perhaps a numerical anagram for 1830?), Balzac too ventures a new mythology in the wake of revolution. As Nicole Mozet explains it: "Toute machinerie romanesque s'articule désormais autour d'une opposition fondamentale directement liée à l'avènement de Louis-Philippe – celle d'un avant et d'un après. Avant: l'ère des contrastes [. . .] Après: une tendance irrépressible au mélange."⁶²³ Whereas Hugo's novel, featuring characters like Quasimodo, animates this "mélange" quite literally, Balzac's *Les Proscrits* serves as a precursor to Babel's curse.

Without extensive plot development or peripeteia, *Les Proscrits* explores the notion of stark contrasts, a theme embodied by the two occupants of the lodging house. Many critics have argued that the contrastive element stems from the author's desire to collapse contrarities and produce an overarching vision of unity defined in terms of the Absolute.⁶²⁴ However, I would argue that the contrasts formulated by the two medieval lodgers have additional purport within the novella, as well as within the larger context of Balzac's *Comédie*. The two "étrangers" as they are dubbed, a "vieillard" and a "jeune homme" (also referred to as the devil and his page), form a couple of whom we will see

⁶²¹ Laforgue, 32.

⁶²² *ibid.*, 28.

⁶²³ Mozet 3, 241.

⁶²⁴ Pasco 3, 91.

several avatars within the fictional universe of *La Comédie humaine*.⁶²⁵ Although, as the narrator informs us, never was an opposition more “brusque” or “vive” as that offered by the reunion of these two figures, the pair shares a mysterious bond.⁶²⁶ Judged by onlookers to have a menacing appearance connotative of the occult, the old man is described as having tanned skin “cuite et hâlée par le feu de l’enfer,” eyes “comme ceux des serpents,” and the hands of a “guerrier.”⁶²⁷ Godefroid, a youth of 20, exhibits everything to the contrary. With his delicate blond curls and fragile constitution, he not only epitomizes the portrait of Balzac’s feminized male youth but conjures up a certain image of the angelic:

Ses yeux bleus, plein de vie et limpides, semblaient réfléchir le ciel. Les traits de son visage, la coupe de son front étaient d'un fini, d'une délicatesse à ravir un peintre. La fleur de beauté qui, dans les figures de femmes, nous cause d'interminables émotions, cette exquise pureté des lignes, cette lumineuse auréole posée sur des traits adorés, se mariaient, à des teintes mâles, à une puissance encore adolescente, qui formaient de délicieux contrastes. C'était enfin un de ces visages mélodieux qui, muets, nous parlent et nous attirent; néanmoins, en le contemplant avec un peu d'attention, peut-être y aurait-on reconnu l'espèce de flétrissure qu'imprime une grande pensée ou la passion, dans une verdure mate qui le faisait ressembler à une jeune feuille se dépliant au soleil.⁶²⁸

In spite of the differences offered by their respective portraits, the two male figures resemble one another in the degree to which their physical appearances evoke the supernatural; the old man because of his dark features and magnetic gaze, and the youth because of his bewitching beauty, attributable to “les artifices du démon.”⁶²⁹ At the story’s end, Balzac will reveal that Dante and Godefroid, Count of Gand (as they will

⁶²⁵ *Pro.* XI, 534.

⁶²⁶ *ibid.*, 534.

⁶²⁷ *ibid.*, 529; 533.

⁶²⁸ *ibid.*, 534.

⁶²⁹ *ibid.*, 530.

come to be known), represent the two faces of the poet.⁶³⁰ However, without being privy to this detail at the story's debut, the contrastive element hints at the possibility of a contractual agreement between the two men.

The proprietor of the lodging house seeks an explanation for the pairing of the aged-diabolical and the youthful-angelic, presuming a factual accord between the two men:

L'un et l'autre ont l'air de ne point hanter les chrétiens, ils ne vivent certes pas comme nous vivons; le petit regarde toujours la lune, les étoiles et les nuages, en sorcier qui guette l'heure de monter sur son balai; l'autre sournois *se sert bien certainement de ce pauvre enfant pour quelque sortilège.*⁶³¹

Tirechair's attempt to dispel the mystery surrounding the relationship between the male couple (naming the youth as an instrument for the old man's ambitions) points to a question of hidden desire manifested in nefarious terms. However, given the notion of an aesthetic attached to Balzac's portrait of youth, it is interesting to consider how Tirechair's observation posits the youth in a disempowered if not ephebic role. Godefroid, whose androgynous traits would "ravir un peintre," recreates the aesthetic scenario in which the figure of youth acts as a conduit for male desire. We will return to this point later in our discussion.

In addition to positing the youth as a surrogate to the old man's infernal machinations, the theme of perversion serves as a literary ruse to create intrigue in so brief a narrative. At the same time, it affords Balzac an occasion to introduce the theme of alterity in connection to the mystical function of the poet. On the unique occasion

⁶³⁰ It is not until the last page that Balzac reveals the identity of the old man to be that of Dante Alighieri, the Italian author of the *Commedia*, whose work served as an important literary source upon which Balzac modeled his own *Comédie humaine*.

⁶³¹ *Pro.* XI, 530, my emphasis.

when Dante and Godefroid are shown leaving their residence in each other's company, they do so to attend the lectures of the Doctor Sigier.⁶³² The narrator summarizes the first part of Sigier's discourse in the following way:

[Sigier] rendait compte des ressemblances animales inscrites sur les figures humaines, par des analogies primordiales et par le mouvement ascendant de la création. Il vous faisait assister au jeu de la nature, assignait une mission, un avenir aux minéraux, à la plante, à l'animal. La Bible à la main, après avoir spiritualisé la Matière et matérialisé l'Esprit, après avoir fait entrer la volonté de Dieu en tout, et imprimé du respect pour ses moindres œuvres, il admettait la possibilité de parvenir par la foi d'une sphère à une autre.⁶³³

In revealing "l'échelle" between man and God, Sigier finishes by exposing nature as "une et compacte."⁶³⁴ However, in his criticism of man's earthly desire to imitate God, to know "la plus élevée de toutes les idées, l'idée de l'idée," the theologian counsels his followers to cultivate the imperishable side of their nature.⁶³⁵ On a symbolic level, the scene's concluding image of a boat traversing the Seine (to return Dante and Godefroid to their lodging house on the île de la Cité) appears to confirm this link between the terrestrial realm and that of the eternal.⁶³⁶

Propelling the narrative forward, Sigier's lecture provides a framework in which to understand the poet's mystical vocation. Whereas Godefroid interprets Sigier's words quite literally to mean that he must shed his earthly existence altogether (leading him to attempt suicide), Dante maintains a diligent approach, expressing his willingness to translate man's dual quality within the body of his poetic enterprise. As the narrator explains: "L'un était un Dieu, l'autre était un ange; celui-ci le poète qui sent, celui-là le

⁶³² According to Allan Pasco's article "*Les Proscrits, et l'unité du Livre mystique*," Sigier de Brabant, a medieval theologian, had already been dead for a quarter of a century in 1308, and is therefore an anachronism within Balzac's tale (Pasco 3, 80).

⁶³³ *Pro.* XI, 541.

⁶³⁴ *ibid.*, 541-542.

⁶³⁵ *ibid.*, 544.

⁶³⁶ See also Delacroix's (1798-1863) *The Barque of Dante* (1822), figure 42.

poète qui traduit.”⁶³⁷ In other words, Dante is capable of giving his poetic vision a form because he is willing to submit his *idée* to the “terrible démon du travail”; Godefroid, a *rêveur*, shows himself to be incapable of directing his poetic vision beyond the sentimental realm.⁶³⁸ However, we note that the image of disunity offered by the male couple is ultimately reconciled in a vision of androgyny: emotive femininity (Godefroid) and procreative masculinity (Dante). Bound together under the auspices of a diabolical pact, the two faces of the poet are revealed, and the terms of creative production are conceptualized as reunion or as the material conversion of the visionary’s thought. In the sections that follow, we will trace the evolution of the male couple departing from the model figured by Dante and Godefroid. In his exposition of the poet and his position, Balzac presents two contrastive portraits: the poet who lacks volition as opposed to the poet capable of translating his poetic enterprise. However, what are to be the effects of poetic translation? In other words, will the poet “qui traduit” be tempted, as warns Sigier, to discover “Si la vie, arrivée à Dieu à travers les mondes et les étoiles, à travers la matière et l’esprit, redescend vers un autre but?”⁶³⁹ And if so, what will be the consequences?

Raphaël de Valentin: A Portrait of 1830

As we work toward a definition of the creative pact, we consider the terms under which creative authority is established within the *La Comédie humaine*, in particular, and the place of Balzac’s *La Peau de chagrin* (1830-31). A work contemporary with *Les Proscrits*, *La Peau de chagrin* is set in the present day of its composition. Offering a

⁶³⁷ *Pro.* XI, 534.

⁶³⁸ *ibid.*, 547. As Dante says to Godefroid following the latter’s suicide attempt: “Tu es poète, tu sais monter intrépidement sur l’ourgan! Ta poésie, a toi, ne sort pas de ton cœur!” (*ibid.*, 549).

⁶³⁹ *ibid.*, 543.

profound examination of the question of devising a creative authority in order to supplement or to compensate for the loss of its traditional and historical sources, the novel takes a compelling look at the figure of youth in 1830. In doing so, it magnifies the historical (and ideological) dead-end posed by revolution. Moreover, the novel's view of history considered *in extremis* acts to delineate (in part) the narrative space coveted by the creative authority within Balzac's *Comédie*. Considering first the novel within a discussion of 1830, we will then explore the operative capacity of the pact defined in its connection to the wild ass's skin.

When Balzac writes that "1830 a consommé l'œuvre de 1793,"⁶⁴⁰ he intimates how the events of 1830 repeat the revolutionary past, while at the same time institute a new beginning; designating between a clear *before* and *after*, 1830 consummates a series in historical time.⁶⁴¹ Charles X's abdication from the throne, succeeded by his cousin Louis-Philippe d'Orléans, marks the end of the monarchy's legitimate reign and underscores that royalty can never again be "restored." In the opening scene of *La Peau de chagrin*, this idea is conveyed in connection to the *status quo* of the "jeune homme" circulating in 1830 society. The young hero of the novel, Raphaël de Valentin, is never named, nor are the details of his life readily revealed. Identified simply as "le jeune homme," "le poète," as well as "l'inconnu," Valentin assumes a generic role. Upon entering into a gaming house where he will gamble away his last napoléon before contemplating suicide in the Seine, Raphaël represents the face of youthful disillusionment, amplified by the explicit association Balzac draws between the gaming house and royal authority, between the figure of youth and one condemned to death on

⁶⁴⁰ *Be.* VII, 151.

⁶⁴¹ *Mozet* 3, 236.

the Place de Grève. Of the onlookers at the gaming house who are witnesses to the youth's fate, the author writes: "[Ils] étaient là, silencieux, immobiles, attentifs comme l'est le peuple à la Grève, quand le bourreau tranche une tête."⁶⁴² Several pages later, this image is repeated.⁶⁴³

[Raphaël] se trouva bientôt sous les galeries du Palais-Royal, alla jusqu'à la rue Saint-Honoré, prit le chemin des Tuileries et traversa le jardin d'un pas irrésolu. Il marchait comme au milieu d'un désert, coudoyé par des hommes qu'il ne voyait pas, n'écoulant à travers les clameurs populaires qu'une seule voix, celle de la mort ; enfin perdu dans une engourdissante méditation, semblable à celle dont jadis étaient saisis les criminels qu'une charrette conduisait du Palais à la Grève, vers cet échafaud, rouge de tout le sang versé depuis 1793.⁶⁴⁴

As though in a "désert," Raphaël's walk through the Tuileries reiterates the theme of an absent royal authority. Additionally, the temporal aspect of this passage, the notion of a past as opposed to a here and now, defines the young hero's position in contemporary society against the historical frame of the Terror.

According to Pierre Laforgue, the motif of decapitation (and castration) in the literature of 1830 reflects the young hero's disappointment with respect to history (understood as the inability to realize his desires in reality), thus impeding the constitution of male subjectivity. Addressing this question in her discussion of the second generation of *mal du siècle* heroes in nineteenth-century literature, Margaret Waller reaches a similar conclusion. She relates the troubling vision of gender, typified by the representation of androgynes and castrati, to the young hero's failure to appropriate history in his own terms.⁶⁴⁵ Endorsing a similar vision of an ailing young generation, Balzac repeatedly shows how both extraordinary *and* mediocre youth are

⁶⁴² *PCh.* X, 60.

⁶⁴³ In fact, this image is repeated at four separate instances in the novel's beginning.

⁶⁴⁴ *PCh.* X, 64.

⁶⁴⁵ Waller 2, 177.

repelled from appropriating history in their own terms because society deprives them of a social objective. Furthermore, with the fall of the Bourbon régime, the author criticizes the July monarchy's failure to remake the social hierarchy (in denying a place for men of talent and energy favored under Napoleon), and reclaim the gains of revolution. As a result, the young hero is reduced to "un véritable zéro social, inutile à l'Etat, qui n'en avait aucun souci."⁶⁴⁶ Therefore, without fortune or connections, the youth of 1830 has limited recourse in the alleviation of his social, as well as historical *ennui*:

Combien de jeunes talents confinés dans une mansarde s'étiolent et périssent faute d'un ami, faute d'une femme consolatrice, au sein d'un million d'êtres, en présence d'une foule lassée d'or et qui s'ennuie. A cette pensée, le suicide prend des proportions gigantesques. Entre une mort volontaire et la féconde espérance dont la voix appelait un jeune homme à Paris, Dieu seul sait combien se heurtent de conceptions, de poésies abandonnées, de désespoirs et de cris étouffés, de tentatives inutiles et de chefs-d'œuvre avortés. *Chaque suicide est un poème sublime de mélancolie.*⁶⁴⁷

In this passage Balzac sums up the social disparity of the period. The grim portrait of the young hero's material condition (he is poor and abandoned by all), prefiguring Baudelaire, encapsulates the political as well as metaphysical woe of the nation's youth in a "poésie du Mal."⁶⁴⁸ This is to say, *l'idée* and *l'incarnation*, here construed as suicidal reverie and the act of suicide, constitute a source for the sublime. In this way, 1830 consummates the historical past, and also prefigures the installation of a new poetic system founded on despair, dissipation and loss. This point is conveyed ironically when, under the influence of his "punch," Raphaël de Valentin initiates a first person telling of his life.⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁶ *PCh.* X., 66.

⁶⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 64, my emphasis.

⁶⁴⁸ *SetM* VI, 790.

⁶⁴⁹ *PCh.* X, 120.

Raphaël – Rastignac: The Introduction of a New Poetic System

A poetics of despair contributes to a certain Balzacian “type de jeune homme” who, as we remarked in Chapter 1, is recognizable in both his adolescent innocence (the expression of tender sentiment, purity of conscience, etc.), and in his wretchedness after having prostituted himself to *la grande société*.⁶⁵⁰ Valentin’s situation is no different:

J'étais la proie d'une excessive ambition, je me croyais destiné à de grandes choses, et me sentais dans le néant. J'avais besoin des hommes, et je me trouvais sans amis; je devais me frayer une route dans le monde, et j'y restais seul, moins craintif que honteux. Pendant l'année où je fus jeté par mon père dans le tourbillon de la haute société, j'y vins avec un cœur neuf, avec une âme fraîche [. . .]. Je trouvai donc les troubles de mon cœur, mes sentiments, mes cultes en désaccord avec les maximes de la société.⁶⁵¹

Although he is of aristocratic descent, the loss of parents, social connections, and fortune leave Raphaël a penniless orphan at the tender age of 22. Driven by the force of his will alone, Valentin maintains the hope that he will rectify his disadvantaged position.

Cloistering himself in a mansard, Raphaël stakes his future in society on the composition of a philosophical treatise, entitled *Théorie de la volonté*.⁶⁵² As he explains it: “[J]e me bâtissais une tombe pour renaître brillant et glorieux.”⁶⁵³ Considering this passage in the context of the novel’s poetics, the projection of the young hero’s fate, set against the phoenix-like image of rebirth, will prove to be fundamental to our reading of Balzac’s portrait of 1830. However, the generic historical portrait of the young hero in Raphaël is unique because it is consistently informed by *le néant*. That is, his historical situation is

⁶⁵⁰ Like Rastignac who half-heartedly reflects on his beginnings in Parisian society from his mistress’s boudoir at the end of *Le Père Goriot*, Raphaël will adopt a similar perspective: “Aujourd’hui je ris de moi, de ce *moi* peut-être saint et sublime qui n’existe plus. La société, le monde, nos usages, nos mœurs, vus de près, m’ont révélé le danger de mes fervents travaux [. . .] inutiles à l’ambitieux” (*PCh.* X, 134).

⁶⁵¹ *ibid.*, 128-129.

⁶⁵² *ibid.*, 129-131.

⁶⁵³ *ibid.*, 133.

related in existential terms: *le néant = la non-existence = le non-être*.⁶⁵⁴ We show how Balzac traces absence in its vastness in order to posit a narrative plenitude of another order, thus contributing to a series of narrative “openings” within the text.⁶⁵⁵ While these openings or gaps result partially from the non-chronological organization of the plot, they are also produced by the frequent use of antinomies, marking ideological shifts within the text between a given idea and its obverse.⁶⁵⁶

The meeting between Raphaël and Rastignac in December of 1829 constitutes the first developed illustration of the antinomic model. Unlike Raphaël who envisions a place for himself in society due to his genius, Rastignac has already come to terms with the position held by the nation’s youth.⁶⁵⁷ Furthermore, as a reactive measure, he has devised his own system, in the “système dissipationnel” which is based on the underlying premise that if society will not acknowledge his place, then he will make a mockery of society:

– Toi, tu travailles: eh ! bien, tu ne feras jamais rien. Moi, je suis propre à tout et bon à rien, paresseux comme un homard: eh ! bien, j'arriverai à tout. Je me répands, je me pousse, l'on me fait place: je me vante ? l'on me croit. La dissipation, mon cher, est un système politique. La vie d'un homme occupé à manger sa fortune devient souvent une spéculation ; il place ses capitaux en amis, en plaisirs, en protecteurs, en connaissances.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁴ The term *le néant* is used here in the Baudelairien sense of the word (see our page 197), and should not be confused with the terms “void” and “abyss,” which are used interchangeably to designate the unregulated space of authority bequeathed to the son in the father’s absence.

⁶⁵⁵ These openings are posed within the larger narrative framework of *La Comédie humaine*, and regard the circumscription of an interrogative space in which the text will posit its own creative authority.

⁶⁵⁶ As Balzac writes in his preface to *Les Parents Pauvres*, the diptique comprised of *Le Cousin Pons* and *La Cousine Bette*, “Tout est double même la vertu” (*Pré.CP VII*, 54).

⁶⁵⁷ In his article “Naissance d’un héros: Rastignac,” Jean Pommier analyzes the Rastignac of *La Peau de chagrin* (Rastignac #1), his anachronistic role *vis-à-vis* the Rastignac of *Le Père Goriot* (Rastignac #2), as well as successive or recurring Rastignacs (Rastignac #3, #4, etc.) appearing throughout *La Comédie humaine*. He concludes that while these versions of Rastignac share the same name, they are decidedly different characters.

⁶⁵⁸ *PCh.* X, 145.

In the preliminary exposition of his system, Rastignac poses as a foil to Raphaël. Acting also in the role of tempter, he is identified with the occult; he is referred to as a “diable de gascon,” as opposed to Raphaël, referred to in one instance as an “ange sans rayons.”⁶⁵⁹ As figured within the couple Rastignac – Raphaël, Rastignac prefigures the role of Vautrin in what will be the couple Vautrin – Rastignac in *Le Père Goriot*.⁶⁶⁰ Though decidedly less cynical and profound in the exposition of his system than the escaped convict, Rastignac seeks nonetheless to dispel Raphaël’s *naïveté* with the intent to educate him in the ways of society. The first lesson consists in the revision of the youth’s formula for success; in defying the ready correlation between talent and industry, and substituting for it mediocrity and idleness, Rastignac names the dullard as he who will succeed in society.

Enticed by Rastignac’s system (but not wholly cured of his illusions), Raphaël quits his life of seclusion, and pursues social conquest in the form of an amorous alliance with a wealthy aristocratic woman. Under the guidance of “[s]on providence”⁶⁶¹ (Rastignac), Raphaël is introduced into the salon of the Countess Fœdora. Reflecting abstractly on Fœdora’s name before their first meeting,⁶⁶² “Fœdora” serves as a symbol of “tous [l]es désirs [du poète]”:

J'avais beau me débattre avec cette voix et lui crier qu'elle mentait, elle écrasait tous mes raisonnements avec ce nom: Fœdora. Mais ce nom, cette femme n'étaient-ils pas le symbole de tous mes désirs et le thème de ma

⁶⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 165; 62.

⁶⁶⁰ Pommier, 196. Pommier notes that the Rastignac of *La Peau de chagrin* resembles a character taken from one of Balzac’s *roman de jeunesse*, entitled *Le Corrupteur* (*ibid.*, 196).

⁶⁶¹ *PCh.* X, 176.

⁶⁶² As with the example of Antoinette de Langeais, “la femme sans tête,” Fœdora, “la femme sans cœur” (Antoinette’s precursor), serves as a synecdoche for the mutilated social body. Following Raphaël’s death, Balzac reiterates this point in the epilogue of *La Peau de chagrin* when the narrator engages in a brief conversation with an unnamed interlocutor. The interlocutor inquires as to the whereabouts of Pauline (Raphaël’s fiancée), and Fœdora, to which the narrator responds: “Oh ! Fœdora, vous la rencontrerez. Elle était hier aux Bouffons, elle ira ce soir à l’Opéra, elle est partout” (*PCh.* X, 294).

vie? Le nom réveillait les poésies artificielles du monde, faisait briller les fêtes du haut Paris et les clinquants de la vanité.⁶⁶³

Considering the inherent contradiction posed by this proposition (Raphaël's understanding of desire, versus that defined by social convention), we may note in both cases that desire is posed in terms of an underlying question of materiality. Considering the principal tenet of Raphaël's treatise, we see that desire is defined in terms of man's capacity to exercise "une force matérielle"; this is, the ability to direct, to modify, and to manipulate in the exercise or projection of his will. Citing Descartes, Diderot, and Napoleon, Raphaël argues that their respective roles in shaping the century stand as sufficient proof to support the validity of his theory, and states that: "[R]ien ne résist[e] à cette puissance quand un homme s'habitu[e] à concentrer [sa volonté . . .], même les lois les plus absolues de la nature."⁶⁶⁴ He goes on to clarify: "nos idées [sont] des êtres organisés, complets, qui viv[ent] dans un monde invisible, et influ[ent] sur nos destinées."⁶⁶⁵ In this way, desire is assigned a concrete value; it is an invisible and yet tangible by-product of human will. In the second part of the proposition, where desire relates to the production of poetic artifice, we note that materiality is posited in more unstable terms, which implies a rupture between the idea and its incarnation: desire relates to the outwardly visible (and as we will soon discover, empty) symbol of society projected by the figure of *la femme aristocratique*. Therefore, in order to examine the conflicting material systems developed within the novel, as well as the antinomic basis upon which Balzac mounts the *drame* of 1830, we consider the courtship of Raphaël and Fœdora. In doing so, we will show how it provides a theoretical basis for a new poetical

⁶⁶³ *ibid.*, 146.

⁶⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 149-150.

⁶⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 150.

system founded, in large part, on the distortion, and the negation, of the young hero's historical position.

“Toute la femme et point de femme”; the Courtship of Fœdora⁶⁶⁶

The young hero's relationship with history is akin to climbing a slippery slope: he struggles to get proper footing, often approximating a position of stability, only to return abruptly to his point of departure. In other words, the young hero's ability to trace a viable path for himself in society remains an illusion because of the historical and social limitations placed upon him. In the context of 1830 in particular, this analogy has both a symbolic and a literal application. For Raphaël, whose alliance with the *femme aristocratique* is destined to leverage his lowly social position, his success hinges on his ability to distinguish between the real and its artificial counterpart (between history and spectacle, between theater and society, and by association, between *l'actrice* and *la femme* who is the representative of this society). In comparison to Montriveau's campaign of terror directed against the Duchesse de Langeais, revealing in all her nakedness “la femme vraie” underneath the coquettish mask she wears before society, Raphaël's similar (though less violent) quest seeks to evoke tender sentiment in a woman rumored to possess an “âme aride.”⁶⁶⁷ However, Raphaël's precarious place in society poses several major difficulties to the fulfillment of his ambitions.⁶⁶⁸ Most notably, it is Raphaël who often finds himself in situations where the “truth” of *his* own position is

⁶⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 178.

⁶⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 174.

⁶⁶⁸ Again, we could argue that *La Duchesse de Langeais* (1834) set during the Restoration period, acts as a warning to the ruling class, whereas *La Peau de chagrin* (1830) documents the advent of the July monarchy, and traces the historical point of no return for the restoration monarchy in France. Therefore, Montriveau's desire to unveil the real remains within the realm of possibility (that is, until the novel's close), whereas, in *La Peau*, the real that Raphaël seeks to uncover will remain forever obscured.

openly revealed, and he is shown to be a dandy who lacks the necessary collateral to substantiate his role.

One evening while Raphaël escorts the Countess Fœdora from the theater to her carriage, he accepts the umbrella of a *commissionaire*, and is then obliged to admit that he has no money to tip him: “Je n'avais rien : j'eusse alors vendu dix ans de ma vie pour avoir deux sous. Tout ce qui fait l'homme et ses mille vanités furent écrasés en moi par une douleur infernale. Ces mots : – Je n'ai pas de monnaie, mon cher ! furent dits d'un ton dur qui parut venir de ma passion contrariée.”⁶⁶⁹ Following his avowal, Raphaël perceives a marked change in the Countess's affect toward him: her glacial tone, her diplomatic air.⁶⁷⁰ After having accompanied her to her *hôtel*, Fœdora launches into a brief tirade on the subject of her fortune; as she explains, it has already been a source of interest for several “jeunes gens.” Furthermore, she concludes that she has never been tempted to trade her fortune for “des titres nouveaux,” let alone a new “maître.”⁶⁷¹ Therefore, in the brief instance during which Fœdora divines Raphaël's would-be ambitions, she succeeds in silencing them before they can be openly declared. The wind taken out of his sails, the young hero is demoted from dandy to non-dandy, and from suitor to non-suitor.

In another instance, Raphaël's imagination projects a similar outcome. Envisioning his social humiliation among “les fats” in the Countess's salon, Raphaël's tenuous position is skillfully summed up by the image of his hat:

Je ne possédais pas un denier. Pour comble de malheur, la pluie déformait mon chapeau. Comment pouvoir aborder désormais une femme élégante et me présenter dans un salon sans un chapeau mettable ! Grâce à des soins

⁶⁶⁹ *PCh.* X, 156.

⁶⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 156.

⁶⁷¹ *ibid.*, 189.

extrêmes, et tout en maudissant la mode niaise et sotte qui nous condamne à exhiber la coiffe de nos chapeaux en les gardant constamment à la main, j'avais maintenu le mien jusque-là dans un état douteux. Sans être curieusement neuf ou sèchement vieux, dénué de barbe ou très-soyeux, il pouvait passer pour le chapeau problématique d'un homme soigneux; mais son existence artificielle arrivait à son dernier période: il était blessé, déjeté, fini, véritable haillon, digne représentant de son maître. Faute de trente sous, je perdais mon industrieuse élégance. Ah ! combien de sacrifices ignorés n'avais-je pas faits à Fœdora depuis trois mois ! Souvent je consacrais l'argent nécessaire au pain d'une semaine pour aller la voir un moment. Quitter mes travaux et jeûner, ce n'était rien ! Mais traverser les rues de Paris sans se laisser éclabousser, courir pour éviter la pluie, arriver chez elle aussi bien mis que les fats qui l'entouraient, ah ! pour un poète amoureux et distrait, cette tâche avait d'innombrables difficultés. Mon bonheur, mon amour, dépendait d'une moucheture de fange sur mon seul gilet blanc !⁶⁷²

The image of the tattered hat epitomizes the opposing material systems set forth in *La Peau de chagrin*. In spite of Raphaël's efforts to maintain his dandy image, the misshapen hat (or a spot of mud on his clothing), would expose the truth of his situation to his peers. Conversely, Balzac shows how the painstaking lengths to which Raphaël goes in order to frequent this society fail to garner any positive rewards. Whereas elegance is quantifiable in precise monetary terms, the labors of a "poète amoureux et distrait" bear no material sign in evidence. Therefore sacrifice, as it exists outside of a recognized system of commodification, can be assigned no inherent value.

Passing now to the final episode for our consideration of Raphaël's courtship of the Countess Fœdora, we will examine how in rapid succession from the theater to the salon, and finally to Fœdora's bedroom, Balzac both summarizes the material questions posed by the novel and posits their resolution in a consummatory act. Having many times accompanied Fœdora to the theater since that first evening, Raphaël again finds himself *aux Bouffons* in the company of the Countess:

⁶⁷² *ibid.*, 160.

[J]e la contemplais en me livrant au charme d'écouter la musique, épuisant mon âme dans la double jouissance d'aimer et de retrouver les mouvements de mon cœur bien rendus par les phrases du musicien. Ma passion était dans l'air, sur la scène; elle triomphait partout, excepté chez ma maîtresse. Je prenais alors la main de Fœdora, j'étudiais ses traits et ses yeux en sollicitant une fusion de nos sentiments, une de ces soudaines harmonies qui, réveillées par les notes, font vibrer les âmes à l'unisson ; mais sa main était muette et ses yeux ne disaient rien. Quand le feu de mon cœur émané de tous mes traits la frappait trop fortement au visage, elle me jetait ce sourire cherché, phrase convenue qui se reproduit au salon sur les lèvres de tous les portraits. Elle n'écoutait pas la musique. Les divines pages de Rossini, de Cimarosa, de Zingarelli, ne lui rappelaient aucun sentiment, ne lui traduisaient aucune poésie de sa vie; son âme était aride. Fœdora se produisait là comme un spectacle dans le spectacle.⁶⁷³

The spectacle, an important poetic outlet for Raphaël, acts as a kind of conduit for the youth's unspoken desires, and facilitates their partial realization. We say partial because the correspondence between the idea and the sensation, between idealization and incarnation, are ultimately blocked by the very object of Raphaël's desire. Whereas the youth interprets poetic artifice as that which will allow him to espouse "le mouvement ascendant de la création, de remonter la hiérarchie des effets et des causes," Fœdora's position speaks to the contrary⁶⁷⁴; rather than revealing "la femme vraie," the theater perpetuates artifice ("un spectacle dans le spectacle") in the continuous suspension of the real.

Considering again the organizing tenet of Rastignac's system, where he states that artifice affords the young hero a position in society (as opposed to operating under the now archaic system *d'après Napoléon* dependent upon the fusion of word and action), we see how social artifice, mirrored in Fœdora's lubricious character, renders Raphaël's social transformation difficult, if not impossible; this phoenix has yet to be reborn from his own ashes. Fœdora, who is alternatively described as a demon and an angel, as

⁶⁷³ *ibid.*, 174.

⁶⁷⁴ Eigeldinger, 100.

inhabiting heaven and hell, as being the most gracious woman as well as the most unfeeling one, inhibits Raphaël's ability to define his own social position. In other words, when he thinks himself near to enjoying the fruits of his labors, he promptly discovers that no progress has indeed been made. In the Countess's carriage one evening, Raphaël sums up the ambivalence of his situation in the following way: "Pendant la route, assis près d'elle dans un étroit coupé, je respirais son souffle, je touchais son gant parfumé, je voyais distinctement les trésors de sa beauté, je sentais une vapeur douce comme l'iris: toute la femme et point de femme."⁶⁷⁵ By way of certain sensory cues, what he sees, feels, and smells, Raphaël attempts to separate woman from artifice, for to do so would resolve Fœdora's alterity. However, his conclusion reflects his indecision; she is both all things feminine and nothing feminine. Transposed on an historical plane, one could interpret Raphaël's mental flip-flopping between the idea and its obverse (translated here by the youth's constant need to modify and to recommence his efforts in the courtship of the countess), both as a reflection of his inability to establish a position for himself in society, and, in a larger sense, as a failure to get a handle on history. Seeking a resolution to what he calls "cette lutte affreuse," Raphaël devises an extravagant plan to spend a night *incognito* in Fœdora's bedroom.⁶⁷⁶

In staging the *dénouement* of the courtship period in Fœdora's private chambers, Balzac insinuates that the enigma surrounding the countess's solitary existence will finally be revealed, if not by a physically consummative act, than by one of a visual nature assumed on the part of the voyeur. Concealing himself in his mistress's quarters,

⁶⁷⁵ *PCh.* X, 178.

⁶⁷⁶ "[J]e voyais en elle tour à tour la femme la plus aimante ou la plus insensible de son sexe ; mais ces alternatives de joie et de tristesse devinrent intolérables : je voulus chercher un dénouement à cette lutte affreuse" (ibid., 173).

Raphaël thinks that he has at last gained access to “la femme vraie”: “Elle venait d’ôter un masque; actrice, son rôle était fini [. . .] La voilà vraie, me dis-je.”⁶⁷⁷ However, upon overhearing a conversation that takes place between Fœdora and her chambermaid (where the countess condemns the institutions of marriage and family), Raphaël concedes that perhaps there remains some secret of a physical origin (“un cancer”), that could be the cause for the countess’s negative opinions. Although the youth’s observations confirm that Fœdora is indeed a woman (as opposed to a “monstre” akin to the castrato La Zambinella in *Sarrasine*), Raphaël’s sensory inventory of the countess *again* discloses the social inertia attached to his role. In conceding all and refuting everything, Raphaël quits Fœdora; his courtship of the “femme sans cœur,” taken as a symbol of society and the challenges it poses to the young generation of 1830, serves to define the young hero’s position as null and void.

Erecting a New Tower of Babel

In recognizing the systematic invalidation of the young hero’s position afforded by the courtship period, we may now broach the question of its ultimate significance. This is to say, beyond its reflection of the young hero’s deceptive position *vis-à-vis* history, what purpose does this kind of narrative serve? And how do we define its role in authorizing the space of creativity within the novel? To some extent, this brings us full circle in our discussion regarding the two opposing “systems,” and their final reconciliation; whereas Raphaël’s system posits substance but ends in the disclosure of absence, Rastignac’s acknowledges absence while offering an artificial means to endow it with substance. As he explains:

⁶⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 182.

– Qui de nous, à trente ans, ne s'est pas tué deux ou trois fois ? Je n'ai rien trouvé de mieux que d'user l'existence par le plaisir. Plonge-toi dans une dissolution profonde, ta passion ou toi, vous y périrez. L'intempérance, mon cher ! est la reine de toutes les morts. Ne commande-t-elle pas à l'apoplexie foudroyante ? L'apoplexie est un coup de pistolet qui ne nous manque point. Les orgies nous prodiguent tous les plaisirs physiques, n'est-ce pas l'opium en petite monnaie ? [. . .]. Quand nous tombons noblement sous la table, n'est-ce pas une petite asphyxie périodique ! Si la patrouille nous ramasse, en restant étendus sur les lits froids des corps-de-garde, ne jouissons-nous pas des plaisirs de la Morgue, moins les ventres enflés, turgides, bleus, verts, plus l'intelligence de la crise ? Ah ! reprit-il, ce long suicide n'est pas une mort d'épicier en faillite [. . .]. A ta place, je tâcherais de mourir avec élégance. Si tu veux créer un nouveau genre de mort en te débattant ainsi contre la vie, je suis ton second.⁶⁷⁸

Reiterating Balzac's initial pronouncement that the events of 1830 reduce the figure of youth to a "véritable zéro," Raphaël's position confirms the void. In his affirmation of this social verity, Rastignac proposes that the young hero cultivate his negated position by transforming death into an art form. Though the dissipative life does not divert the young hero from the path dictated for him by fatality (suicide), committing a "long suicide" would procure him a certain degree of pleasure: "le dissipateur a troqué sa mort contre toutes les jouissances de la vie [. . .]. Au lieu de couler longtemps entre deux rives monotones [. . .] l'existence bouillonne et fuit comme un torrent."⁶⁷⁹ To die in small doses, producing certain hallucinatory effects, culminates in what Balzac calls "un nouveau genre de mort," or to employ the term coined by Baudelaire later in the century, in the creation of "des paradis artificiels."⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 191-192.

⁶⁷⁹ The full citation reads: "Réalisant ces fabuleux personnages qui, selon les légendes, ont vendu leur âme au diable pour en obtenir la puissance de mal faire, le dissipateur a troqué sa mort contre toutes les jouissances de la vie, mais abondantes, mais fécondes ! Au lieu de couler long-temps entre deux rives monotones, au fond d'un Comptoir ou d'une Etude, l'existence bouillonne et fuit comme un torrent" (*ibid.*, 197).

⁶⁸⁰ In his *Tableaux Parisiens* (1861), Baudelaire defines "les paradis artificiels" as various dissipative remedies to which the poet has recourse in order to blunt the force of his "ennui" (or his existence). However, in his failure to do so, the "néant," revealed in its intensity, gives some hope of transcendence to the poet; this is to say, transcendence will come through the exploration of "l'abîme" and its depths.

Although it is shown to be of little consequence, Balzac often hints at the existence of a diabolical pact connecting the male couple Rastignac – Raphaël. Above, when Rastignac names himself the “second” to Raphaël, he is reintroduced within the novel in the role of tempter, thus suggesting that the acclimation to a life of debauchery necessitates a proper guide. As a foil or alter-ego to Raphaël, the couple Rastignac – Raphaël, place the portrait of the poet in relief, along with his poetic faculty. However, the previous distinction named in *Les Proscrits* (between the poet “qui sent” and the poet “qui traduit”) is revised, resulting in a *poète du mal*. As Raphaël remarks: “[L]a débauche n’est-elle pas une sorte d’impôt que le génie paie au mal?”⁶⁸¹ Upon Raphaël’s conversion to the dissipative system, Rastignac will cease to play a direct role within the plot (even indirectly: his name is not mentioned thereafter).

Poetic conversion facilitates Raphaël’s visual reconciliation with the world and its duality. We first see evidence of this when he, awaiting Rastignac’s return home from the gaming house, takes a visual inventory of his companion’s bedroom:⁶⁸²

L’opulence et la misère s’accouplaient naïvement dans le lit, sur les murs, partout. Vous eussiez dit les palais de Naples bordés de Lazzaroni [. . .]. Ce tableau ne manquait pas d’ailleurs de poésie. La vie s’y dressait avec ses paillettes et ses haillons, soudaine, incomplète comme elle est réellement, mais vive, mais fantasque comme dans une halte où le maraudeur a pillé tout ce qui fait sa joie. Un Byron auquel manquaient des pages avait allumé la falourde du jeune homme qui risque au jeu cent francs et n’a pas une bûche, qui court en tilbury sans posséder une chemise saine et valide. Le lendemain, une comtesse, une actrice ou l’écarté lui donnent un trousseau de roi [. . .]. Comment un jeune homme naturellement avide d’émotions renoncerait-il aux attraits d’une vie aussi

⁶⁸¹ *PCh.* X., 198.

⁶⁸² As Rastignac exclaims upon his return: “A d’autres cet argent suffirait pour vivre, mais nous suffira-t-il pour mourir? Oh! oui, nous expirerons dans un bain d’or. Hourra!” (ibid., 194-195). With his newfound wealth, Raphaël officially ensconces himself in a fashionable life of debauchery. Acquiring an elegant apartment, furniture, and a carriage, he exclaims: “Je me lançai dans un tourbillon de plaisirs creux et réels tout à la fois” (ibid., 195).

riche d'oppositions et qui lui donne les plaisirs de la guerre en temps de paix ?⁶⁸³

If we compare this scene to that in which Raphaël passes the night in Fœdora's bedroom, we may already recognize a positive shift in the youth's ability to *see*. The narrator, speaking from Raphaël's point of view, evaluates his surroundings in terms of both its elegant attributes (comparable to a Neapolitan palace), and its demonstrable signs of poverty (comparable to the living conditions of a *littérateur* whose editors have ceased to offer him monetary advances). Whereas the courtship period allows Raphaël to experience stark contrasts in irreconcilable terms, this passage reflects the youth's budding ability to accommodate the *mélange*; in the juxtaposition of the proper and the improper, the high and the low, the opulent and the depressed, the narrative underscores Raphaël's capacity to distinguish between the real and its artificial counterpart. On a visual level, the image of the glittering sequins set against tattered articles of clothing skillfully sums up that which, when transposed on the level of *l'idée*, is capable of procuring the sublime – strong emotions expressed as “les plaisirs de la guerre en temps de paix.” In this way, it could be said that Raphaël's quest retains its antithetical point of departure; however in his espousal of a dualistic poetic vision, he accommodates the asymmetry of his former position.

In perceiving certain “vérités invisibles,” Raphaël's problem ceases to be one of seeing and becomes one of endowing his creative vision with an intelligible form.⁶⁸⁴ Qualifying his social evolution in terms of his mastery over the abyss (the methodical negation of his position, countered by the plentitude procured him through dissipative measures), one could argue that the *néant* functions as a source for a new poetic language

⁶⁸³ *ibid.*, 194.

⁶⁸⁴ Prévost, 94.

or mythology in order to liberate meaning. At the same time, the new poetic system attached to the art of *la débauche* has an abstruse value, being accessible only to certain erudite or initiated individuals. As Raphaël intimates:

La débauche est certainement un art comme la poésie, et veut des âmes fortes. Pour en saisir les mystères, pour en savourer les beautés, un homme doit en quelque sorte s'adonner à de consciencieuses études. Comme toutes les sciences, elle est d'abord repoussante, épineuse. D'immenses obstacles environnent les grands plaisirs de l'homme, non ses jouissances de détail, mais les systèmes qui érigent en habitude ses sensations les plus rares, les résumant, les lui fertilisent en lui créant une vie dramatique dans sa vie, en nécessitant une exorbitante, une prompte dissipation de ses forces.⁶⁸⁵

In this passage, the interest of the poetic system of excess is twofold. First, it is through the expenditure of one's vital energies that *une vie intérieure* is created within the poet. Secondly, the poet's cultivation of the sublime requires that he continually seek out deeper precipices or expend his life source with an ever-increasing deficit: "[La puissance des abîmes] nous attire comme Sainte-Hélène appelait Napoléon; elles donnent des vertiges, elles fascinent, et nous voulons en voir le fond [. . .] la pensée de l'infini [y] existe peut-être [. . .]."⁶⁸⁶ However, if the dissipative existence allows the young hero to devise a hereafter from the depths of the abyss, it also points to a flaw in his poetic system; that is, the increasing demand for "les précipices," reflective of the poet's desire for nuances of a progressively rare variety, directly augments the hermetic meaning of the sublime. In this way, the poet's quest for the absolute ("la pensée de l'infini"), is permeated by absence in the form of the inexpressible.⁶⁸⁷ It is this sought for value assigned to Raphaël's poetic system that leads us to consider the pact he forms with himself by way of the *peau de chagrin*.

⁶⁸⁵ *PCh.* X, 196.

⁶⁸⁶ *ibid.*, 196.

⁶⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 196.

Raphaël's Pact with wild ass's skin

Awaiting nightfall, because a suicide in broad daylight “lui parut ignoble,” Raphaël indulges in some idle window shopping along the Seine.⁶⁸⁸ As he steps into the shop of an antiquarian, the youth's sensibilities are struck by the *bric-à-brac* “de cinquante siècles évanouis,” by the visual marriage of past and present displayed “avec une grotesque bonhomie.”⁶⁸⁹

Cet océan de meubles, d'inventions, de modes, d'œuvres, de ruines, lui composait un poème sans fin. Formes, couleurs, pensées, tout revivait là ; mais rien de complet ne s'offrait à l'âme. Le poète devait achever les croquis du grand-peintre qui avait fait cette immense palette où les innombrables accidents de la vie humaine étaient jetés à profusion, avec dédain. Après s'être emparé du monde, après avoir contemplé des pays, des âges, des règnes, le jeune homme revint à des existences individuelles. Il se repersonnifia, s'empara des détails en repoussant la vie des nations comme trop accablante pour un seul homme.⁶⁹⁰

This scene is of particular interest to our treatment of the theme of creation in the novel because it proposes the mythological framework out of which a new tower of Babel will be erected⁶⁹¹; placing the poet in the privileged position of the interpreter of the enigma, or the decipherer of signs, Raphaël, standing amidst this material glut of civilization, assumes the role of visionary who could find a language thereby effecting the synthesis to this “poème sans fin.” However, as is consistent with our reading of the *fils sans père*, he is overwhelmed by the very prospect of so large a task: “Il étouffait sous les débris, il était malade de toutes ces pensées humaines, assassiné par le luxe et les arts, oppressé sous ces formes renaissantes qui, pareilles à des monstres enfantés sous ses pieds par

⁶⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 66.

⁶⁸⁹ *ibid.*, 69.

⁶⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 71-72.

⁶⁹¹ We use the term Babel in the figurative sense to refer to the Romantic campaign of desymbolisation (see our page 178-179). In the same vein, we use the expression the “new” tower of Babel to refer to the poetical system that Balzac discloses within his creative pact. Finally, Babel is used to reference the biblical story of the town and its inhabitants.

quelque malin génie, lui livraient un combat sans fin.”⁶⁹² Serving thus as a keystone to the formation of a new mythological system, the figure of youth is also shown to be a potential impediment to its construction. Therefore, it is at the point of assessing Raphaël’s weakness, or his failure to exercise the procreative faculty attached to the poet’s role, that the “pact” is formally introduced within the narrative.

The pact is initiated by way of the novel’s Faustian intertext.⁶⁹³ Reiterating certain hallmarks of what Charles Dédéyan dubbed the “Faustian pact,” the antiquarian is compared to Méphistophélès;⁶⁹⁴ proposing the *peau de chagrin* and its dark powers to Raphaël, he interjects the notion of transaction within the text.⁶⁹⁵ However, unlike Faust who consents to sign his soul over to the devil, Raphaël does not enter into a contractual agreement with the antiquarian; his is a pact with himself “proposé par je ne sais quelle puissance.”⁶⁹⁶ Furthermore, it is the antiquarian who, in procuring him the wild ass’s skin, provides the necessary conditions for the pact’s consummation.⁶⁹⁷ Translated from the Sanskrit, the skin outlines the terms of the contract into which its possessor will enter:

⁶⁹² *PCh.* X, 74.

⁶⁹³ There are thematic parallels to be drawn between Raphaël’s and Faust’s studious quests and the decision to pursue a life of excess. There are superficial parallels to be made as well. For instance, Valentin is the name of Marguerite’s brother, the young woman who Faust seduces and with whom he fathers a child.

⁶⁹⁴ This term refers to the search for power and fulfillment at great risk and at any cost (Kanes 3, 45).

⁶⁹⁵ “Un peintre aurait fait [. . .] de cette figure une belle image du Père Eternel ou le masque ricaneur du Méphistophélès” (*PCh.* X, 78).

⁶⁹⁶ *ibid.*, 85. Warren Johnson comments that the *peau de chagrin* represents a “pure contract.” Etymologically speaking, it conveys both the idea of “contractus,” the drawing together of two parties, as well as that of “shrinkage and contraction,” the physical evidence of the contract incurred between Raphaël and the wild ass’s skin (Johnson, 549-550).

⁶⁹⁷ Quitting the antiquarian’s shop with the wild ass’s skin in his possession, Raphaël threatens vengeance upon the old man who dares to mock his desires: “Je verrai bien, monsieur, si ma fortune changera pendant le temps que je vais mettre à franchir la largeur du quai. Mais, si vous ne vous moquez pas d’un malheureux, je désire, pour me venger d’un si fatal service, que vous tombiez amoureux d’une danseuse ! Vous comprendrez alors le bonheur d’une débauche, et peut-être deviendrez-vous prodigue de tous les biens que vous avez si philosophiquement ménagés” (*PCh.* X.,88). Later seeing the antiquarian at the opera in the company of Aquilina, a courtesan, we learn that Raphaël’s threat has been fulfilled: “A ce rire, la vive imagination de Raphaël lui montra dans cet homme de frappantes ressemblances avec la tête idéale que les peintres ont donnée au Méphistophélès de Goethe” (*ibid.*, 222).

SI TU ME POSSEDES, TU POSSEDERAS TOUT. MAIS TA VIE
M'APPARTIENDRA. DIEU L'A VOULU AINSI. DESIRE, ET TES DESIRS
SERONT ACCOMPLIS. MAIS REGLE TES SOUHAITS SUR TA VIE. ELLE EST
LA. A CHAQUE VOULOIR JE DECROITRAI COMME TES JOURS. ME VEUX-
TU ? PRENDS. DIEU T'EXAUCERA. SOIT !⁶⁹⁸

Therefore, the pact with the wild ass's skin proposes the greatest and final precipice for the poet; the poet's life is directly measured against the unbridled fulfillment of his desires (an immense fortune, a *hôtel*, the title of marquis, and Pauline).

Considering again the tenets of Raphaël's treatise on human will, the pact with the wild ass's skin acts to synthesize his theories regarding the material quality of desire; incarnating the correlative relationship between *vouloir* and *pouvoir*, the poet's life will reflect his art and vice versa. At the same time, the pact operates according to a self-damning principle in the sense that Raphaël will eventually expire from over-desiring. What then does the pact "create" for the young hero who, in an attempt to dodge fatality and extend his life, tries to live without desire; this is, to deform his perception of reality, and exist in an artificial world cut off from society?⁶⁹⁹ First of all, in his systematic disclosure of the historical space of absence occupied by the young hero within his novel, Balzac expands its aesthetic purpose – to found a new poetical system. And it is by way of the pact that the author secures the depths of the abyss (the source of this poetry). In the previous chapter we stated that the figure of youth is scripted in such a way as to accord the "traduction matérielle de la pensée" (and, by extension, the complementary acts of idealization and incarnation). However, this is given with the caveat that his actions lack a stable or absolute value. In *La Peau de chagrin*, something new emerges

⁶⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 84.

⁶⁹⁹ In order to economize his desires, Raphaël has everything programmed in advance, his wardrobe, his meals, his amusements. At the theater, he wears an eye piece to deform his vision of reality, in order that his desires may not be excited: "[I]l s'était promis de ne jamais regarder attentivement aucune femme, et pour se mettre à l'abri d'une tentation, il portait un lorgnon dont le verre microscopique artistement disposé, détruisait l'harmonie des plus beaux traits, en leur donnant un hideux aspect" (*PCh.* X., 225-226).

in the form of the pact; though it be to his own detriment, Raphaël's pact with the wild ass's skin endows him with creative power, and allows him to will a *permanent* material enactment of thought. In the next section, we will explore this idea further in connection with what we will call Balzac's new creation myth born forth from the abyss – the contractual relationship into which Vautrin (alias Carlos Herrera, alias Jacques Collin, alias Trompe-la-Mort), enters into with Lucien Chardon, *dit* de Rubempré.

L'envers de la création

In her study *Family Plots* (1986), Janet Beizer explains how many of Balzac's texts can be viewed as an attempt to rewrite origins, to replace “the unsatisfactory fragments of a primordial past by a totalizing fiction answering desire and recuperating loss.”⁷⁰⁰ She remarks that because the nineteenth-century imagination is “condemned” to exist in time, it seeks logic in “genealogical tracings,” acting as a “fictive substitute” for authority and tradition.⁷⁰¹ It is then in a world devoid of a regulating power that Balzac's plots “strive to recover the father's place and only his displacement is discovered.”⁷⁰² As we have sought to demonstrate here (and throughout our study), Balzac's young hero translates this increasing inability to fill the void left by the father. Though Napoleon served both as an ideological and historical figure to bridge the father's displaced authority (reinstating what Nicole Mozet calls the “equivalence” between Paternity and Creation), the series of successive regimes, ending with the coming to power of Louis-Philippe, restages the father's demise.⁷⁰³ Therefore, in this vacuum of power, *who* or *what* will act as a new source of creative authority? In our initial response to this

⁷⁰⁰ Beizer 1, 7.

⁷⁰¹ *ibid.*, 9.

⁷⁰² *ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁰³ Mozet 2, 175.

question, we state that it is the establishment of a new poetical system, culminating in the formation of a pact; together they occupy the empty space associated with the father, as well as generate a new outlet for creativity within Balzac's narrative. Considering this point, we will show how the pact modeled in *Illusions perdues* (1835-1843) and *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (1838-1847) in particular, forms the basis upon which Balzac will strive to found a new "totalizing fiction" within his *Comédie*.

Balzac's reconceptualization of the family marks a first step in launching his new creation myth. Given that paternity no longer holds the exclusive rights to procreativity, we explore the role of maternity and the various manners in which filiation is determined and achieved. In both *Les Proscrits* and *La Peau de chagrin*, the narrative concludes with an image of maternity. In the novella, the maternal role holds a symbiotic value; taken into his mother's welcoming embrace, Godefroid learns that he is the son of a noble house and will enjoy thereafter the privileges entitled to him by his birthright: " – Je reconnais la voix du ciel, cria l'enfant ravi. Ce cri réveilla Dante qui regarda le jeune homme enlacé dans les bras de la comtesse; il les salua par un regard et laissa son compagnon d'étude sur le sein maternel."⁷⁰⁴ Conversely, in *La Peau de chagrin*, the picture of maternity, represented by Raphaël's fiancée Pauline, communicates the opposite effect:⁷⁰⁵

Le moribond chercha des paroles pour exprimer le désir qui dévorait toutes ses forces; mais il ne trouva que les sons étranglés du râle dans sa poitrine, dont chaque respiration creusée plus avant, semblait partir de ses entrailles. Enfin, ne pouvant bientôt plus former de sons, il mordit Pauline au sein. Jonathas se présenta tout épouvanté des cris qu'il entendait, et

⁷⁰⁴ *Pro.* XI, 555.

⁷⁰⁵ At an earlier stage in the couple's relationship, Raphaël describes Pauline as being like a sister who cares for him as would a mother: "Quand je fus près de Pauline, elle me jeta un regard presque maternel" (*PCh.* X, 162).

tenta d'arracher à la jeune fille le cadavre sur lequel elle s'était accroupie dans un coin.⁷⁰⁶

In spite of the grotesque aspects of this concluding passage, the picture of Raphaël grasping for Pauline's breast is at once an expression of his sexual desire and an expression of desire for new life and its maternal source. Having established that Raphaël's pact with the wild ass's skin endows him with a creative faculty (translatable in absolute terms), his last desperate moments betray its degenerative quality. As Balzac sums it up: "Raphaël avait pu tout faire, il n'avait rien fait."⁷⁰⁷ Therefore, the image of maternity in each of these narratives posits the theme of renewal and rebirth, while it also underscores the "son's" sterile legacy (yet another testament to the family's downfall). In a similar fashion, *Illusions perdues* also ends with an allusion to maternity. After his first exchange with Lucien *sur la grande route*, the Spanish priest, Carlos Herrera, "[passa] son bras sous celui de Lucien avec un empressement maternel."⁷⁰⁸ However, before pursuing the significance of Herrera's "maternity," let us briefly consider Lucien's place among his narrative "sosies," Godefroid and Raphaël.

As we touched upon in Chapter 1, Balzac often repackages his characters under different names and titles. In doing so, he establishes a recognizable character type and produces a composite portrait of youth to be read discretely, as well as expansively, within a literary universe peopled with recurring characters. Balzac's technique, readily made evident in the character of Lucien de Rubempré, presents the youth as an important progression in a pre-established type of young hero. Though fragile in his constitution, the portrait of a blond of exceedingly good looks ceases to be one of a rapid sketch as in

⁷⁰⁶ *ibid.*, 292.

⁷⁰⁷ *ibid.*, 276.

⁷⁰⁸ *IP V*, 691.

Les Proscrits, or that of youthful despair worn by the generation of 1830 in *La Peau de chagrin*. In maintaining a certain *air de famille* between Lucien and his *confrères*, Balzac's portrait of Rubempré completes, in a manner of speaking, the portraits of the other two youths. Moreover, its embellishment endows Lucien with superlative importance. As the narrator exclaims: "Jamais un plus joli jeune homme ne descendit la montagne du pays latin."⁷⁰⁹ His physical beauty, compared to that of a "dieu grec," is carefully defined: velvety white skin, an elegantly sculpted brow, coral-colored lips, beautiful teeth, dainty hands, and "les hanches conformées comme celles d'une femme."⁷¹⁰ In fact, Lucien possesses the *most* feminine attributes of any of Balzac's young heroes. Considering also the peripeteia of Lucien's *drame social*, his story of monumental failure is of singular distinction⁷¹¹; if Rastignac's example becomes the gold standard against which other young ambitious types measure their success, Lucien's serves as the standard against which to measure one's shortcomings.⁷¹² At the conclusion of *Illusions perdues*, Lucien vows to consummate his failures and "finir poétiquement" in

⁷⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 349.

⁷¹⁰ *ibid.*, 145. At the end of *Illusions perdues*, Lucien's beauty is compared to that of Apollo: "Les hommes dessinaient encore leurs formes au grand désespoir des gens maigres ou mal faits; et celles de Lucien étaient apolloniennes" (*ibid.*, 675).

⁷¹¹ See for instance Charles Affron's study *Patterns of Failure in La Comédie humaine* (1966), or Bernard Schilling's *The Hero as a Failure: Balzac and the Rubempré cycle* (1968).

⁷¹² Lucien's Parisian *debâcle* can be summed up in the following manner. In his pursuit of glory and literary renown, the *ingénu* from Angoulême arrives in the capital where he undertakes the most ready path to success. Quitting the virtuous way of *l'étude* promoted by the *Cénacle*, a literary circle headed by Daniel d'Arthez, Lucien, guided by Etienne Lousteau, becomes a journalist who sells his opinions to the highest bidder. In the meantime, he embraces the dissipative lifestyle; he lives with his mistress Coralie, incurs massive debt (signing *lettres de change* under his brother-in-law's name), and ends up being abandoned by all. Unlike Rastignac, Lucien is without a plan of action, and is unable to meditate one. Later, in the company of Herrera/Vautrin, Lucien draws an explicit comparison between Rastignac's success and his own: "— Voici, dit-il, d'où est parti le jeune Rastignac qui ne me vaut certes pas, et qui a eu plus de bonheur que moi" (*IP V*, 695).

the depths of the Charente river;⁷¹³ it is his encounter with Herrera/Vautrin that offers Lucien a chance for new life.⁷¹⁴

As we observed in *La Peau de chagrin*, the theme of youthful despair, manifesting itself in a project of suicide, discloses a gap within the narrative to be equated in terms of the young hero's historical irrelevance. In Balzac's attempts to bridge these gaps, as spaces of recreation, he introduces the contractual theme; in the form of the pact, an ideological infrastructure is imagined in order to bridge the young hero's position in relationship to *le néant*. In *La Peau de chagrin*, the pact between Raphaël and the wild ass's skin fosters the poetic ability both to think and to act *tout à la fois*, as well as procures the young hero the sublimities associated with a long suicide.⁷¹⁵ A similar scenario is envisioned at the end of *Illusions perdues*; however the ambiguous terms surrounding the pact's formation suggest its greater reaching purpose.⁷¹⁶ For instance, in addition to underscoring the two faces of the poet (an idea reminiscent of *Les Proscrits*), where Lucien feels but lacks the volition to act, as opposed to Herrera who, in using others as instruments to his own ends, is capable of giving his poetic vision a form ("Un diplomate sans argent, c'est ce que tu étais tout à l'heure: un poète sans volonté"⁷¹⁷), Balzac overtly interjects the theme of filiation. As Herrera explains to Lucien: "Je ne sais pas quel nom vous donnez à cette instruction sommaire, mon fils, car je vous adopte et ferai de vous mon héritier."⁷¹⁸ Not only does the pact propose a viable

⁷¹³ *ibid.*, 688.

⁷¹⁴ *ibid.*, 688-89.

⁷¹⁵ See again p. 195-196.

⁷¹⁶ This pact is foretold by D'Arthez who, in a letter to Lucien's sister, Eve Séchard writes: "[Lucien] signerait volontiers demain un pacte avec le démon, si ce pacte lui donnait pour quelques années une vie brillante et luxueuse" (*IP V*, 515).

⁷¹⁷ *ibid.*, 708-709.

⁷¹⁸ *ibid.*, 704.

path for the *filis sans père*, but endows him with a new parental lineage, thus enabling him to *repartir à zéro* in the pursuit of his ambitions.

The Young Hero as Palimpsest

Throughout our study we suggest that the young hero acts as a palimpsest upon which Balzac inscribes his vision of modernity (where the “modern” is established *vis-à-vis* an historical past that can never again be restored). A palimpsest, or manuscript that has been written on, effaced, and used again, is a fitting image as we enter into a discussion of the “creative pact” formed between Rubempré and Herrera. If, as we suggest, Lucien is himself a rewritten character, as is his *parcours* in society, one could argue that the pact’s intent is to rectify failure as defined by the young hero’s text – that provided by (Napoleon’s) historical example.⁷¹⁹ No longer believing in God, society, or good fortune when he refers to himself as an “athée au complet,” Lucien’s story demands to be rewritten.⁷²⁰ Understanding this, the false priest takes advantage of the youth. With his storytelling, he recounts the tale of the Baron de Goertz, a famous minister under Charles XII whose secretary (a silversmith by trade) became a prince, and later regent following the death of Catherine the First.⁷²¹ Identifying the parallels between this little-known slice of history and Lucien’s situation, Herrera retells the youth’s story but concludes it in an open-ended manner: “Eh bien, jeune homme, sachez une chose: c’est que si vous êtes plus beau que Biren, moi je vau beaucoup plus [. . .] que le baron de Goertz. [. . .N]ous vous trouverons un duché de Courlande à Paris, et, à défaut de duché,

⁷¹⁹ Herrera chides Lucien for accepting *les faits* without probing them in their *profondeur*: “Vous êtes bien encore l’enfant qui révèle le récit de votre existence [. . .]. Si vous aviez cherché dans l’histoire les causes humaines des événements, au lieu d’en apprendre par cœur les étiquettes, vous en auriez tiré des préceptes pour votre conduite” (*IP* V, 696).

⁷²⁰ *ibid.*, 691.

⁷²¹ *ibid.*, 692-694.

nous aurons toujours bien la duchesse.”⁷²² In other words, Lucien’s decision to adhere to a new text (provided by Herrera) will allow him the opportunity to tackle Paris a second time.

The introduction of “nous” within Herrera’s speech, “nous aurons toujours bien la duchesse,” is noteworthy. While playing upon certain vagaries afforded by semantics, Herrera betrays his intentions to enter into a contractual relationship with the youth. Introduced in a maternal role, Herrera alternatively places himself in the role of Lucien’s alter-ego (“Allez, confessez-vous hardiment, ce sera absolument comme si vous vous parliez à vous-même.”) and his father.⁷²³ Playing off the double-entendre of the word *père*, as in priest or father of the church, and father in the biological sense, Lucien’s affirmative responses to Herrera’s discourse such as “Oui, mon père!” or “Mon père, je suis à vous,” implicitly establish the parameters of their father-son relationship.⁷²⁴ Leveraging his implied position of authority, Herrera attempts to classify the circulating terms *père* and *fils* outright as such: “[V]ous m’intéressez *comme si* vous étiez mon fils.”⁷²⁵ At the same time, “nous” conveys the ambiguous nature of this relationship, and is reflected in the slippage of names used to identify Herrera’s and Lucien’s respective roles:

– Voulez-vous être soldat, je serai votre capitaine. Obéissez-moi comme une femme obéit à son mari, comme un enfant obéit à sa mère, je vous garantis qu’en moins de trois ans vous serez marquis de Rubempré, vous épouserez une des plus nobles filles du faubourg Saint-Germain, et vous vous assiérez un jour sur les bancs de la pairie. En ce moment, si je ne vous avais pas amusé par ma conversation, que seriez-vous? un cadavre

⁷²² *ibid.*, 694.

⁷²³ *ibid.*, 694.

⁷²⁴ *ibid.*, 697; 709.

⁷²⁵ *ibid.*, 698, my emphasis.

introuvable dans un profond lit de vase; eh bien, faites un effort de poésie?⁷²⁶

Alternatively placing himself in the role of Lucien's mother, father, double, and husband, Herrera assigns a symbiotic value to his relationship with Lucien. In this "over determination" of the familial space (reiterating the vacuum of authority left by the absent father), one could argue that Balzac seeks to guarantee that space's "inviolability" through other means.⁷²⁷

The narrative marks this subtle transition from Herrera's expression of desire to its sudden materialization in a contractual form. Describing the "charme" that Herrera's cynical speech has for Lucien, his words act as a kind of poison to be slowly ingested. At the same time, *la parole* is also given a redemptive value when it rescues Lucien from death: "Lucien se raccrochait d'autant plus volontiers à la vie qu'il se sentait ramené du fond de son suicide à la surface par un bras puissant."⁷²⁸ Making this analogy directly, Herrera qualifies his meeting with Lucien in terms of the youth's rebirth: "[C]e jeune homme [. . .] n'a plus rien de commun avec le poète qui vient de mourir. Je vous ai pêché, je vous ai rendu la vie, et vous m'appartenez comme la créature est au créateur [. . .]."⁷²⁹ Transforming an image of death into one of new life and regeneration, Herrera assumes the role of Lucien's sole progenitor.⁷³⁰ In doing so, he improvises a new

⁷²⁶ *ibid.*, 703.

⁷²⁷ Beizer 1, 132; 136.

⁷²⁸ *IP V*, 699.

⁷²⁹ *ibid.*, 703. This image also appears in *Le Père Goriot*. When Rastignac asks what is required of him in order to receive Vautrin's help, the latter replies: "— Presque rien, répondit cet homme en laissant échapper un mouvement de joie semblable à la sourde expression d'un pêcheur qui sent un poisson au bout de sa ligne" (*PG III*, 142).

⁷³⁰ Beizer 1, 160-161.

creative myth within the narrative, thus providing Lucien with a new text by which to construct his existence. As he states to this effect: “Je suis l’auteur, tu seras le drame.”⁷³¹

Having situated the importance of the conclusion to *Illusions perdues*, and specifically the creative act articulated by Herrera, we turn again to the image of Eden proposed in *Séraphîta*. From an historical point of view, we suggested that the story of Eden discloses a rift in traditional authority and foreshadows the nineteenth century as a new age defined both in terms of rupture and symbiotic failure. A similar view is expressed by Lucien at the end of *Illusions perdues*. However, the pact provides a way to bridge the divide; that is, in drawing authority from what Herrera calls “ce pacte d’homme à démon,” he redefines the liminality of the young hero’s position in supplying him with a new master text.⁷³² Differing from the biblical creation story in which God creates Eve from Adam’s rib, the primary procreative image in Herrera’s adaptation is one of water. Conversely, in posing himself as Lucien’s creator and double, procreativity and symbiosis are mediated in terms of narcissism and homosexuality⁷³³:

– Je veux aimer ma créature, la façonner, la pétrir à mon usage, afin de l’aimer comme un père aime son enfant. Je roulerai dans ton tilbury, mon garçon, je me réjouirai de tes succès auprès des femmes, je dirai: “Ce beau jeune homme, c’est moi! ce marquis de Rubempré, je l’ai créé et mis au monde aristocratique; sa grandeur est mon œuvre” [. . .].⁷³⁴

In this passage, we observe how the new creation myth begins to take shape. First, in assuming every position in the symbolic family, Herrera supposes the role of demiurge and names Lucien as his “créature”; (later acknowledging himself as such in a letter to his sister Eve, Lucien defines his new existence in terms of personal dispossession: “Je ne

⁷³¹ *SetM* VI, 504.

⁷³² *IP* V, 703.

⁷³³ Beizer, 161.

⁷³⁴ *IP* V, 708.

m'appartiens plus, je suis plus que le secrétaire d'un diplomate espagnol, je suis sa créature").⁷³⁵ Second, like the first couple in Eden before their exile, Herrera's text poses a new version of the *rêve androgyne* where Herrera and Lucien "will live a symbiotic existence, each completing the other, each constituting a completed (hermaphroditic) being for the other."⁷³⁶ However, how can the integrity of this creation story be preserved, let alone realized? How can we reconcile the homoerotic element with the pact's reinstatement of masculinity as a procreative source or primordial substance of human creation? Exploring these questions in the following section, we will consider Balzac's definition of male procreativity in order to determine the ramifications of a new creation myth, and specifically its attempts to mount a creative authority in terms of the Absolute.

The Procreative Masculine Faculty and the Triangulated Model of Desire

In Chapters 2 and 3 we touched upon the relevancy of homosociality in a discussion of Balzac, stating that although the author refutes its fraternal implications (in order to underscore the reign of individualism), the homosocial model of desire remains instructive in a discussion of the procreative masculine faculty, portrayed by shifts in the masculine aesthetic in literature and the arts. While not diverging from our primary interest in the creative pact and its purpose, we must first consider how the homosocial model, tracing the mechanism of homosocial desire, leverages the masculine position. Prefiguring the contractual bond between Herrera and Lucien, we will consider how the relationships formed between Rastignac, Goriot, and Vautrin in *Le Père Goriot* both

⁷³⁵ *ibid.*, 724.

⁷³⁶ Beizer 1, 161.

establish filiation between men and, more importantly, endow the masculine position with social momentum.

As the title suggests, paternity is a major theme in *Le Père Goriot*. However, for our purposes, we will limit its discussion to the paternal models formed by the father – son dyads Goriot – Rastignac, and Vautrin – Rastignac. In spite of their antithetical appearance, the traditional father versus its less orthodox model, Balzac reveals that both Goriot and Vautrin belong to the same moral pole, in that each represents a tainted source of paternity⁷³⁷; Goriot transfers his passion for his wife onto his daughters (“le sentiment de la paternité se développa chez Goriot jusqu'à la déraison. Il reporta ses affections trompées par la mort sur ses deux filles, qui, d'abord, satisfirent pleinement tous ses sentiments”⁷³⁸); Vautrin, a homosexual *avant la lettre*, colludes his paternity with homoerotic desire.⁷³⁹ Once Goriot learns that Rastignac frequents his daughters' social circles, he views the youth as a possible liaison between himself and them. When he then liquidates the last of his fortune to arrange Rastignac's elegant bachelor pad, Goriot envisions the creation of a *ménage à trois* where the son would give the father access to his daughter. Letting a mansard on the fifth floor of the same building Goriot states: “Je me fais vieux, je suis trop loin de mes filles. Je ne vous gênerai

⁷³⁷ Diengott, 72.

⁷³⁸ *PG* III, 124.

⁷³⁹ As the police detective Gondureau indicates to this effect: “Apprenez un secret ? [Vautrin] n'aime pas les femmes” (ibid., 192). In his nuanced article “Vautrin and Same-sex Desire in *Le Père Goriot*,” Richard Berrong provides a context for understanding the perception of same-sex desire and relations relative to 1834. He shows repeatedly how Vautrin's gender is not seen to be at odds with his sex. Furthermore, his same-sex desire is shown to be “no stranger than its more familiar parallel” (60). In other words, Balzac's novel, and the character of Vautrin specifically, predate the concept of a distinct “homosexual man,” and in presenting same-sex desire without “homophobic judgment,” Balzac emphasizes the complexities of human nature (55; 62). Sedgwick's definition of homosociality would seem a fitting complement to Berrong's views in order to characterize the relationship between Rastignac and Vautrin. The homoerotic may be subsumed within the homosocial order but is not limited to it. Furthermore, homosociality, unlike current uses of the term homosexuality, does not confuse same-sex desire with gender construction; Vautrin is described as a picture of male virility, whereas Rastignac bears many effeminate traits.

pas. Seulement je serai là [. . . ç]a me mettrait du baume dans le cœur de vous écouter revenir, vous remuer, aller. Il y aura tant de ma fille en vous !”⁷⁴⁰ Later, during an evening the three spend in each other’s company, the narrator, comparing Goriot to a “young lover,” sets him on equal footing with Rastignac:

La soirée tout entière fut employée en enfantillages, et le père Goriot ne se montra pas le moins fou des trois. Il se couchait aux pieds de sa fille pour les baiser; il la regardait long-temps dans les yeux ; il frottait sa tête contre sa robe; enfin il faisait des folies comme en aurait fait l'amant le plus jeune et le plus tendre.⁷⁴¹

In realizing that the father’s sentiments are selfless, and more steadfast than his own, Rastignac begins to consider Goriot as his rival: “[E]n s'entretenant de Delphine avec un croissant enthousiasme, [il se] produisit un curieux combat d'expressions entre ces deux violentes passions. Eugène ne pouvait pas se dissimuler que l'amour du père [. . .] écrasait le sien par sa persistance et par son étendue.”⁷⁴² Stirring feelings of desire in both men for Delphine, the conversation between father and “son” establishes a homosocial bond between them.

Like that of Goriot, Vautrin’s homosociality is also marked by erotic desire. By proposing to eliminate Victorine Taillefer’s brother in a deliberately provoked duel, “Papa Vautrin” seeks to convince Rastignac to become his pupil, or rather his heir:

– Si je n'ai pas d'enfants (cas probable, je ne suis pas curieux de me replanter ici par bouture), eh ! bien, je vous léguerais ma fortune. Est-ce être l'ami d'un homme ? Mais je vous aime, moi. J'ai la passion de me dévouer pour un autre. Je l'ai déjà fait. Voyez-vous, mon petit, je vis dans une sphère plus élevée que celles des autres hommes. Je considère les actions comme des moyens, et ne vois que le but [. . .]. Un sentiment, n'est-ce pas le monde dans une pensée ? avec lequel il se dirige dans la création. Eh ! bien, pour moi qui ai bien creusé la vie, il n'existe qu'un seul sentiment réel, une amitié d'homme à homme. Pierre et Jaffier, voilà ma

⁷⁴⁰ *PG* III, 232.

⁷⁴¹ *ibid.*, 232.

⁷⁴² *ibid.*, 232.

passion. Je sais *Venise sauvée* par cœur [. . .]. Je ne parlerais pas ainsi à tout le monde. Mais vous, vous êtes un homme supérieur, on peut tout vous dire, vous savez tout comprendre. Vous ne patouillerez pas longtemps dans les marécages où vivent les crapoussins qui nous entourent ici. Eh ! bien, voilà qui est dit. Vous épouserez. Poussons chacun nos pointes ! La mienne est en fer et ne mollit jamais, hé, hé !⁷⁴³

In this lengthy passage we clearly see the mixture of paternal and homoerotic discourses. First, Vautrin proffers his paternal model of male comradeship. If Rastignac accepts his proposal, he will marry a significant dowry of which Vautrin will claim a 20% share. With this capital Vautrin will establish himself as a “monsieur Quatre-Millions,” naming Rastignac as his successor.⁷⁴⁴ Second, in alluding to his previous sentimental exploits, the use of the term “passion,” his blatant phallic reference, as well as his mention of Otway’s play,⁷⁴⁵ Vautrin likens his paternity to the “apparently homoerotic friendship of the men in the English drama.”⁷⁴⁶ In doing so, Vautrin too enacts an erotic triangle of desire between Rastignac, Victorine, and himself.⁷⁴⁷

While Rastignac will ultimately dissociate himself from each of these flawed paternal examples (in favor of pursuing a path in society marked by filial transgressions), it is interesting to consider briefly how the homosocial model both leverages the son’s position, providing him ready access to the father’s domain (money and women), as well as reactivates the father’s procreative functions via the son. Goriot, reflecting on his own role as father, draws parity between himself and God (“Eh bien! Quand j’ai été père, j’ai

⁷⁴³ *ibid.*, 186-187.

⁷⁴⁴ An American plantation owner (*ibid.*, 142).

⁷⁴⁵ This allusion to Otway’s play recalls a similar exchange between Herrera and Lucien in *Illusions perdues*: “— Enfant, dit l’Espagnol en prenant Lucien par le bras, as-tu médité la *Venise sauvée* d’Otway? As-tu compris cette amitié profonde, d’homme à homme, qui lie Pierre à Jaffier, qui fait pour eux d’une femme une bagatelle, et qui change entre eux tous les termes sociaux?” (*IP V*, 707).

⁷⁴⁶ Berrong, 55.

⁷⁴⁷ In Rastignac’s drug induced slumber, Vautrin, in the presence of Victorine, kisses the youth “chaleureusement” on the forehead (*PG III*, 203).

compris Dieu”).⁷⁴⁸ However, when he realizes that paternity is no longer equated in terms of flesh and blood but in terms of money, (that which ultimately divests Goriot of his status as father at the story’s end), the son’s place in the triangle serves to temporarily revive the father’s exsanguinating role.⁷⁴⁹ Acting on the father’s behalf, Rastignac is named heir to Goriot’s passionate paternity (“Vous êtes mon fils, Eugène, vous! aimez [Delphine], soyez un père pour elle.”), before the triangle collapses, he resigns himself to his part in the father’s “élégant parricide.”⁷⁵⁰

In the case of Vautrin, the homosocial model posits a more dynamic outcome. Although the intersection of erotic desire and paternal desire contributes to its unstable vision, homosocial desire also implies something further that remains unspoken. That is, the son’s access to the father’s domain, including the procreative masculine faculty, is evoked in relationship to an unspecified obligation, an unclear exchange, as well as an untapped power. Vautrin’s penetrating stare, cynical musings on society, and articulation of the youth’s innermost desires elicit anxiety, as well as fear in young Eugène: “Sa pensée le rejeta pendant un moment dans sa pension bourgeoise; il en eut une si profonde horreur qu’il se jura de la quitter au mois de janvier, autant pour se mettre dans une maison propre que pour fuir Vautrin, dont il sentait la large main sur son épaule.”⁷⁵¹ Unconsciously, the youth understands that by accepting Vautrin’s money, guidance, or choice of wife in Victorine, he will owe Vautrin something beyond his 20% share.⁷⁵²

⁷⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 161.

⁷⁴⁹ “Ce père avait tout donné. Il avait donné, pendant vingt ans, ses entrailles, son amour; il avait donné sa fortune en un jour. Le citron bien pressé, ses filles ont laissé le zeste au coin des rues” (*ibid.*, 115).

⁷⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 277; 261.

⁷⁵¹ *ibid.*, 151-152.

⁷⁵² Mockingly acknowledging this fact when Rastignac hurries to repay Vautrin some money owed him, he inquires: “— On dirait que vous avez peur de me devoir quelque chose? s’écria Vautrin en plongeant un regard divinateur dans l’âme du jeune homme auquel il jeta un de ces sourires goguenards et diogéniques desquels Eugène avait été sur le pont de se fâcher cent fois” (*ibid.*, 133). Later, at Vautrin’s arrest, Mlle

Trying to persuade Rastignac to act in accordance with his plans, Vautrin reiterates his paternal interests: “[J]e vous connais comme si je vous avait [sic] fait, et vais vous le prouver.”⁷⁵³ Later, however, when he exposes the various steps (and pitfalls) already incurred by Rastignac in order to arrive in society, his use of the plural subject pronoun “nous” speaks less to a paternal tie between the two men, and more to an undisclosed contractual agreement awaiting fulfillment:

– Avant peu de jours vous serez à *nous*. Ah! si vous vouliez devenir mon élève, je vous ferais arriver à tout. Vous ne formeriez pas un désir qu’il ne fût à l’instant comblé, quoi que vous puissiez souhaiter: honneur, fortune, femmes. On vous réduirait toute la civilisation en ambroisie. Vous seriez *notre* enfant gâté, *notre* Benjamin, *nous nous* exterminerions tous pour vous avec plaisir [. . .] Vous vous demandez pourquoi ce dévouement? Eh bien, je vous le dirai tout doucement quelque jour, dans le tuyau de l’oreille.⁷⁵⁴

Similar to the passage where Herrera simultaneously attempts to classify his relationship with Lucien as his mother, father, husband, and double, this citation communicates the same idea in more restrained terms. At its beginning, “nous” designates the respective roles of mentor and pupil held by the men in the triangle. However, at the end of the passage (specifically the sentence beginning “Vous seriez notre enfant gâté”), the “nous” postulates Vautrin’s own duality and designates the implicit purpose of a would-be pact formed between Rastignac and himself; drawing emphasis away from the triptique model, the figure of youth would serve as Vautrin’s creation, his “beau moi” within society.⁷⁵⁵ Furthermore, if Vautrin is indeed a great poet whose poems consist of actions

Michonneau confirms Rastignac’s aforementioned fears when she says, alluding to the nature of the relationship between the youth and the criminal: “— Monsieur soutient Collin, [. . .] il n’est pas difficile de savoir pourquoi. A ce mot, Eugène bondit comme pour se ruer sur la vieille fille et l’étrangler. Ce regard, dont il comprit les perfidies, venait de jeter une horrible lumière dans son âme.” (ibid., 222).

⁷⁵³ ibid., 135.

⁷⁵⁴ *PG* III, 185-186, my emphasis.

⁷⁵⁵ *SetM* VI, 501. This term is used to describe the manner in which Vautrin sees himself as Lucien’s double, and as such, is personally vested in his success.

and feelings, when he says to Rastignac, “Mais un homme est un dieu quand il vous ressemble: ce n’est plus une machine couverte en peau; mais un théâtre où s’émeuvent les plus beaux sentiments,” Vautrin determines his need to attach himself to the youth in order to carry out his social designs, designs that are placed on hold at the time of his arrest.⁷⁵⁶ In relating the respective paternal models of the novel to the question of procreative masculine activity, we see that Goriot’s situation (dictated by his daughters who are the “fil avec lequel il dirige dans la création”) underscores the traditional father’s languishing position.⁷⁵⁷ Vautrin’s model, veiled within the bonds of male friendship, similarly relates the father’s disempowerment. While Vautrin’s speech is loaded with statements such as “je me charge du rôle de la Providence, je ferai vouloir le bon Dieu,” and later, “Je suis tout,” Balzac does not wholly endorse his demiurgic station (in the extent to which he alone replaces God and His capacity for Creation).⁷⁵⁸ Rather, he shows that in a world where the divine has been supplanted by a “Dieu social,” Vautrin can exist; however, in order to forge a regulating authority (involving the rewriting of the father’s role), he requires the collaboration of another⁷⁵⁹: “Vautrin [. . . searches] for an angelism to match his own diabolism, a bright beauty with which to illuminate his own dark power.”⁷⁶⁰ Therefore, to generate for Vautrin would be to create another god: he who could reign legitimately over Parisian society.

The Double in *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*

The triangulated model of desire featured in *Le Père Goriot* lends new insight to our reading of the creative pact formed at the conclusion of *Illusions perdues*. In the first

⁷⁵⁶ *PG* III, 186.

⁷⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 186.

⁷⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 144; 212.

⁷⁵⁹ This term is attributed to Michelet (Quoted in Petitier, p. 8).

⁷⁶⁰ *Kanes* 3, 59.

novel we see how the circuit of desire, serving as the basis for establishing a social network of men, partially rehabilitates the father's position. However, in the second novel, Herrera's proposed paternal model attains maturity, manifesting itself in the form of the pact – an active expression of male desire, as well as an affirmation of masculine authority. Reforming his past mistakes, Herrera's meeting with Lucien secures him his desired double: "Là où jadis Rastignac tenté par ce démon avait résisté, Lucien succomba, mieux manœuvré, plus savamment compromis, vaincu surtout par le bonheur d'avoir conquis une éminente position."⁷⁶¹ Ceasing to rely on a third party to lure his prey, so to speak, Herrera does so directly by giving Lucien rapid access to the father's domain (a life of luxury in the capital). For his part, Lucien's susceptibility to Herrera's advances is a reflection of his own pursuit of a double. In fact, Lucien's relationships with both men and women reveal this desire⁷⁶²: "De Séchard à Herrera, en passant par Lousteau and d'Arthez, Lucien recherche en ces figures jumelles le double de lui-même ou la moitié complémentaire susceptible de lui insuffler l'énergie qui lui fait défaut, pour former avec lui le couple idéal de l'androgyné primitif [. . .]."⁷⁶³ Therefore, it is by way of the pact that this mutual lack, experienced by both Herrera and Lucien, is ultimately fulfilled.

Transcribed within the plot of *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, the pact and the dynamic of the double shared by the male couple evolves, in order to form the basis

⁷⁶¹ *SetM* VI, 504.

⁷⁶² In her discussion of Lucien's relationship with his sister, Eve, Janet Beizer explains how the sibling pair form an androgynous couple, "a third sex, an ideal being which, when severed, will yield two incomplete creatures with a lost integrity." Quitting Angoulême for Paris, Lucien's success depends, in large part, on his ability to reproduce the dynamic of the androgynous couple with other actors (Beizer 1, 151).

⁷⁶³ Labouret 1, 211.

for a political agenda.⁷⁶⁴ Among Balzac's most substantial novels, detailing numerous characters, plot twists, and reversals of fortune, the political agenda of the male couple primarily regards Lucien's pursuit of an official place in society. Comprising a reunion of opposites (masculinity and femininity, the diabolical and the angelic, the ability to desire and the ability to act), Herrera and Lucien form a "couple complémentaire, fort et autotélique."⁷⁶⁵ At once serving as the pretext and the subtext for Herrera's efforts, Lucien, "cet homme à moitié femme," acts as the exclusive object upon which male desire converges, and is, in a sense, virilized by Herrera's strength and ambition.⁷⁶⁶ As Herrera explains it: "Tu veux briller, je te dirige dans la voie du pouvoir [. . .] Lucien! Je serai comme une barre de fer dans ton intérêt [. . .]."⁷⁶⁷ In return, Lucien indirectly gains Herrera access to the Parisian elite. However, it is soon revealed that the male pair lack sufficient impetus to mount a creative authority in absolute terms. Therefore, in considering next the reversion to the triangular model, and the role of Esther Van Gobseck (alias la Torpille) in particular, we will determine how the feminine order amends the terms of the creative pact.

Mud Relations

In order to discuss the manner in which Esther's presence modifies the procreative capacity of the contractual duo, we must first consider the symbolic value of *la boue*. The image of *la boue* constructs a creative dichotomy: it posits masculinity both

⁷⁶⁴ *SetM* VI, 473. The political agenda is summarized by Herrera: "Cet enfant, de qui j'ai su faire un homme, deviendra d'abord secrétaire d'ambassade; plus tard, il sera ministre dans quelque petite cour d'Allemagne, et, Dieu ou moi (ce qui vaut mieux) aidant, il ira s'asseoir quelque jour sur les bancs de la pairie..." (ibid., 482). Lucien's amorous correspondences with Clothilde de Grandlieu, Mme de Sérizy and the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, maintained on all fronts by the phallic power of Vautrin's pen, factor into their political strategy as well. At the time of Lucien's arrest and imprisonment, it is this correspondence that, in the hands of Herrera, elevates his case to an affair of the State (ibid., 700).

⁷⁶⁵ Labouret 1, 224.

⁷⁶⁶ *SetM* VI., 505.

⁷⁶⁷ ibid., 477.

as a point of origins (as the fabric [*le tissu*] of creation) and as a symbolic dead-end, marking the cessation of procreative activity. In *Illusions perdues*, this point of origins is defined by Herrera. We recall that in drawing new life from the waters of suicide, Herrera reinstates creation in terms of masculinity and the occult. Commenting on the etymology of Herrera's name(s), Kyoto Murata states that Herrera is suggestive of Vulcan, the god of fire, volcanoes, and iron (as inferred from the similarity between Herrera and "herrero," the word for blacksmith in Spanish), thus insisting on his ties to the working class.⁷⁶⁸ When considered along with his other well-known alias, Vautrin, this name is itself tied to images of impurity, including that of *la boue*. Not only does "Vautrin," evoke the verb, infinitive "se vautrer," but within his speech itself, the *ancien bagnard* explicitly links himself with *la boue*.⁷⁶⁹ In *Le Père Goriot*, he declares that Paris is a "bourbier," and in the same breath offers to soil himself in it on Rastignac's behalf: "je suis un bon homme qui veut se crotter pour que vous soyez à l'abri de la boue pour le reste de vos jours."⁷⁷⁰ This offer proves itself to be doubly true for Lucien: "Quand je t'ouvre les salons du faubourg Saint-Germain, je te défends de te vautrer dans les ruisseaux."⁷⁷¹ In *Splendeurs*, we see several instances of how Herrera's evocation of *la boue* serves to recall his own social origins, as well as to qualify the nature of his ties to Lucien and Esther:

1) When Herrera discovers Esther's failed suicide attempt, the narrator explains: "Cet homme semblait être au fait de ces singuliers ménages, il en

⁷⁶⁸ Murata, 149-150. Vautrin's aunt, Jacqueline Collin (alias Mme d'Estève), lives in a miserable hovel on the rue Neuve-Saint-Marc, of which the roads leading to her residence are called "ces boueux sentiers" (*SetM* VI, 568). Vautrin's ties to the working class are implied in the comparison drawn between the *forçat* and Hercules. Commenting on the iconography of the radical period of the French Revolution, Lynn Hunt explains that the image of Hercules was commonly used to represent masculinity; that is, the image of the people, the citizen (Hunt 1, 69-70).

⁷⁶⁹ *se vautrer* = to wallow (in the mire)

⁷⁷⁰ *PG* III, 185.

⁷⁷¹ *SetM* VI, 477.

connaissait tout. Il était là comme chez lui. Ce privilège d'être partout chez soi n'appartient qu'aux rois, *aux filles et aux voleurs.*"

2) When justifying himself to Lucien for having placed Esther in a convent school, Herrera says: " – Si je n'avais pas pris les rênes de ta passion, où en serais-tu aujourd'hui ? Tu aurais roulé avec la Torpille dans *la fange* des misères d'où je t'ai tiré."

3) Later, speaking to Lucien and Esther together, Herrera says: "– Amusez-vous, soyez heureux, c'est très-bien. Le bonheur à tout prix, voilà ma doctrine. Mais toi, dit-il à Esther, toi que j'ai tirée de *la boue* et que j'ai savonnée, âme et corps, tu n'as pas la prétention de te mettre en travers sur le chemin de Lucien ?..."⁷⁷²

In the first citation, the criminal and the prostitute are named as being of the same *trempe sociale*.⁷⁷³ In the following two passages *la boue* is revealed both as a source of weakness as well as an undisclosed source of power. Though Herrera's own proximity to *la boue* maintains him in his physical status as *exclu* (requiring him to rely on others as social intermediaries), it endows him with an authorizing role: to cleanse those marked by *la boue* in order to propel them socially. Therefore, the image of mud promotes a deconstructive vision of procreation; it is at once a nocturnal image positing death, as well as a diurnal image synonymous with new life and the fullness of creation. Placing himself at the head of a new symbolic family, comprised of his "enfants" Lucien and Esther, Herrera remakes Eden.⁷⁷⁴

Herrera's demiurgic role is limited, as are the homeostatic conditions of his new Eden. For instance, we are soon alerted to the fact that although the primacy of the father's role has been reinstated (as *source vitale* or *matière première* of creation), he is limited in his capacity to engage in procreative activity. Writing in his *Avant-Propos* that

⁷⁷² *ibid.*, 451; 479;481, my emphasis.

⁷⁷³ As it has often been noted, the title *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* announces the presence of multiple prostitutes, later to be identified with the twin positions held by Esther and Lucien.

⁷⁷⁴ *SetM* VI, 569.

“[l’Etat Social] est la Nature plus la Société,” Balzac indicates that society, comprised of its numerous “espèces sociales,” surpasses nature both in its variety and in its capacity for mutation. Given the inherently social (rather than biological) value of this statement, the father’s offspring, who, in this scenario, are connected with *la boue*, directly contribute to variety in the human race.⁷⁷⁵ Commenting on this idea in regard to Lucien and Esther’s love affair, the narrator states:

Le bonheur n'a pas d'histoire, et les conteurs de tous les pays l'ont si bien compris que cette phrase : *Ils furent heureux !* termine toutes les aventures d'amour. Aussi ne peut-on qu'expliquer les moyens de ce bonheur vraiment fantastique au milieu de Paris. Ce fut le bonheur sous sa plus belle forme, un poème, une symphonie de quatre ans ! Toutes les femmes diront : – C'est beaucoup ! Ni Esther ni Lucien n'avaient dit : – C'est trop ! Enfin, la formule : *Ils furent heureux*, fut pour eux encore plus explicite que dans les contes de fées, car *ils n'eurent pas d'enfants*. Ainsi, Lucien pouvait coqueter dans le monde, s'abandonner à ses caprices de poète et, disons le mot, aux nécessités de sa position.⁷⁷⁶

First, in amending the fairy tale ending, *ils furent heureux et ils eurent beaucoup d'enfants* to read *ils furent heureux car ils n'eurent pas d'enfants*, we see how the narrative of Lucien and Esther’s affair revises the formulaic ending of the traditional story. Furthermore, recalling Herrera’s comment to Lucien “Je suis l’auteur, tu seras le drame [. . .],” this passage announces a shift in the implicit value of Herrera’s status as progenitor.⁷⁷⁷ If *l’amour physique* (understood as merely a simulacra for physical creation) allows Lucien to exercise what Christopher Prendergast calls an “unbridled” form of sexuality, the son procreates independently from the father in the extent to which the son’s sexual mobility within the social organism generates corruption, excess,

⁷⁷⁵ A-P I, 4.

⁷⁷⁶ *SetM* VI, 491-492.

⁷⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 504.

madness, and death.⁷⁷⁸ Therefore, while Herrera is responsible for giving Lucien new life, the son's role, coveting the improper, and more importantly unregulated, social mingling of *le haut et le bas*, of the *boue* and the society of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, poses the question of the father's ultimate ability to maintain creative exclusivity over his text and its actors.

To conclude this section of our study, we ought to consider the final image from the section entitled *Esther heureuse of Splendeurs*. In this scene Herrera leads his "créatures" Esther and Lucien to a lookout over Paris, an event that marks the end of their four year love affair.⁷⁷⁹

Au moment de quitter la maison du Garde, [Herrera] amena Lucien et la pauvre courtisane au bord d'un chemin désert, à un endroit d'où l'on voyait Paris, et où personne ne pouvait les entendre. Tous trois ils s'assirent au soleil levant, sous un tronçon de peuplier abattu devant ce paysage, un des plus magnifiques du monde, et qui embrasse le cours de la Seine, Montmartre, Paris, Saint-Denis.⁷⁸⁰

As noted previously, the panorama aesthetic is reproduced at several instances throughout the *Comédie humaine*. In *Le Père Goriot*, Rastignac's view of the metropolis from the heights of the Père Lachaise cemetery allows him to shed his idealism and meditate his plans for the future: "Le jour tombait, il n'y avait plus qu'un crépuscule qui agaçait les nerfs ; il regarda la tombe et y ensevelit sa dernière larme de jeune homme [. . .], une de ces larmes qui, de la terre où elles tombent, rejaillissent jusque dans les cieux."⁷⁸¹ Near the end of *Illusions perdues*, Lucien's similar vision communicates utter defeat; after

⁷⁷⁸ Prendergast 2, 156; 159.

⁷⁷⁹ Confined to a small apartment that serves as a love nest for Lucien and Esther, the courtesan is kept under the close surveillance of Asie and Europe (two of Herrera's accomplices), and is permitted to go out only after nightfall. On one such evening, Esther catches the eye of the Baron de Nucingen, an inclination that Vautrin will later turn in Lucien's favor. Ordering Esther to reassume her role as "la Torpille," he will deliver her to Nucingen, only after extorting the money necessary to fund Lucien's social ascension.

⁷⁸⁰ *SetM* VI, 569.

⁷⁸¹ *PG* III, 290.

having failed to determine a viable path for himself in society, the view of Paris evokes bewilderment and despair: “Lucien demeura seul jusqu'au coucher du soleil, sur cette colline d'où ses yeux embrassaient Paris – Par qui serais-je aimé ? se demanda-t-il.”⁷⁸²

Upon Esther's release from captivity, another panoramic scene unfolds. In this passage, we are struck by the change in physical landscape; the three have moved from the inner quarters of Esther's apartment, to a vast metropolitan exterior. Furthermore, the panoramic vision encompassing the Seine, Montmartre, Paris, and Saint-Denis is assumed not by a single individual but shared by multiple persons. Finally, given that the scene takes place at daybreak (rather than at nightfall), one could argue that it signals the dawn of something new.

“Une époque de «macédoines» sociales”⁷⁸³

In her study *Politicizing Gender*, Doris Kadish considers transitions from pure to impure categories, also referred to as “admixutres,” of gender, class, and politics in post-revolutionary literature. Focusing on the role of femininity in particular, she notes that characters with links to the feminine order, equally called “hybrids” or “deviants,” metaphorically express “the kinds of degenerations threatening society, and the kinds of separations needed to contain classes and individuals in their proper social and physical spaces.”⁷⁸⁴ Previously having considered the role of femininity in the art of the revolutionary and post-revolutionary period, Kadish's study testifies to the continued treatment of femininity as a barometer for social change and disorder. For instance, the representation of femininity, bound to notions of decadence and corruption in the revolutionary age, is linked, in the post-revolutionary era, to theories on bad breeding, or

⁷⁸² *IP V*, 550.

⁷⁸³ This term is attributed to Nicole Mozet's study entitled *Balzac au pluriel*.

⁷⁸⁴ Kadish, 1. 52, 53

the improper mingling of different social species.⁷⁸⁵ In Balzac's treatment of the question, not only does he relate the feminine character to a deviant figure with obscure social origins (who contributes to society's tendency toward *mélange*), but he assigns the hybrid figure a critical role in the conclusion of his new creation myth.

In the beginning of this chapter, we stated that Balzac's writing reflects the idea of an "avant" and of an "après" (understood in terms of stark contrast and mixture) that is manifested in the physical portraits of his characters, as well as in his conception of historical time. Mirroring this theme in *Splendeurs*, the timeline of 1824-1830 is significant because it alludes to both the Restoration's desire to reinvent origins (a new creation myth in the restored Bourbon monarchy), as well as prefigures the events of 1830 and, with it, the dawn of an era of *mélange* (a new Babel). Lucien's contractual relationship with Herrera, determined by an underlying desire to rival natural creation with artistic creation, affirms the fatherless son in his role to shape the vacant and therefore unregulated space of authority. However, the novel's end, crowned by Lucien's suicide occurring on the very eve of his success,⁷⁸⁶ underscores that, in the wake of 1830, not only is the authorizing paternal force subject to mutation, but it has undergone, in the words of Nicole Mozet, a "changement de sexe."⁷⁸⁷ When Herrera encounters a critical snag in his plans and orders Esther to quit her life of seclusion to resume her role as la Torpille, we see how the feminine inclusion in the trio, (though initially intended to

⁷⁸⁵ This idea is treated in Nancy Stepan's article "Biological Degeneration: Races and Proper Places" (Quoted in Kadish, p. 52).

⁷⁸⁶ At the time of his arrest, Lucien's case is known by all: "Puis Lucien, à la veille de devenir le secrétaire intime du premier ministre, appartenait à la société parisienne la plus élevée. Dans tous les salons de Paris, plus d'un jeune homme se souvint d'avoir envié Lucien quand il avait été distingué par la belle duchesse de Maufrigneuse, et toutes les femmes savaient qu'il intéressait alors madame de Sérizy, femme d'un des premiers personnages de l'Etat. Enfin la beauté de la victime jouissait d'une célébrité singulière dans les différents mondes qui composent Paris : dans le grand monde, dans le monde financier, dans le monde des courtisanes, dans le monde des jeunes gens, dans le monde littéraire" (*SetM* VI, 700).

⁷⁸⁷ Mozet 2, 176.

reproduce the homosocial dynamic, and, by extension, reinforce the tenets of the pact, and its political aims), causes Herrera to share, and then to relinquish, the reigns of social procreation.

Herrera's various identities or "incarnations" (an English creditor named William Barker, an officer *de la paix*, a traveling salesman, Vautrin, and finally Jacques Collin), reveal the failure of his poetic enterprise. While the pact with Lucien seeks to determine the solidity and permanence associated with the father, the fact that Herrera is successively "banished" into new identities conveys the instability of the masculine universe.⁷⁸⁸ Considering the female capacity to authorize, we reflect briefly on the significance Balzac attaches to Esther's role. Like Herrera, Esther is capable of metamorphosis. However, unlike the false priest, her final incarnation (as la Torpille) achieves an absolute value:⁷⁸⁹

Elle gardait en son cœur une image d'elle-même qui tout à la fois la faisait rougir et dont elle se glorifiait, l'heure de son abdication était toujours présente à sa conscience; aussi vivait-elle comme double, en prenant son personnage en pitié. Ses sarcasmes se ressentaient de la disposition intérieure où la maintenait le profond mépris que l'ange d'amour, contenu dans la courtisane, portait à ce rôle infâme et odieux joué par le corps en présence de l'âme. A la fois le spectateur et l'acteur, le juge et le patient, elle réalisait l'admirable fiction des Contes Arabes, où se trouve presque toujours un être sublime caché sous une enveloppe dégradée, et dont le type est, sous le nom de Nabuchodonosor, dans le livre des livres, la Bible. Après s'être accordé la vie jusqu'au lendemain de l'infidélité, la victime pouvait bien s'amuser un peu du bourreau. D'ailleurs, les lumières acquises par Esther sur les moyens secrètement honteux auxquels le baron devait sa fortune colossale lui ôtèrent tout scrupule, elle se plut à jouer le rôle de la déesse Atè, la Vengeance [. . .].⁷⁹⁰

Esther's realization of the double is determined by her faculty to think and to act simultaneously. In possessing both a subjective and objective points of view, the

⁷⁸⁸ Rivers, 167.

⁷⁸⁹ I use the word absolute in the sense that it relates an infinite, transcendent, or eternal value.

⁷⁹⁰ *SetM* VI, 643-644.

prostitute plays the role of creator *and* creation, of which she herself will serve as “la suprême expression” of the sublime.⁷⁹¹ Furthermore, with regard to the reference to Nabuchodonosor,⁷⁹² the famous ruler of Babylon responsible for sustaining the city’s independence before the fall of its second empire, one could offer that Esther’s sacrifice to Nucingen symbolically preserves the name of the father because it procures the monetary resources necessary to subsidize Herrera’s projects for Lucien. Unlike Goriot, a martyred father who liquidates his assets until “il n’est plus père,” Esther’s becomes a “father” in an absolute sense. Not only does she leave Lucien the sum paid her by Nucingen, but at the time of her death (when her true identity is discovered to be the niece of the usurer Gobseck), she is named as the heiress of a fortune valued at seven million francs. In bequeathing her fortune to Lucien, she provides the son of a pharmacist with the financial tools necessary to realize his political ambitions: to become a son of one of France’s first families (the Grandlieu family), a Marquis de Rubempré, and finally a Peer. By the same token, given that the procreative faculty is here appropriated and improvised by the feminine order, Esther’s commerce, likened also to the ruinous commerce of the goddess Atè, both fulfills the terms of the new creation myth outlined by the pact *as well as* induces Babel’s fall.

Arrested Development: The New Tower of Babel

In the Book of Genesis, the Tower of Babel is symbolic of the union of humanity.

However, when God realizes that it was built to rival His creation, rather than to glorify

⁷⁹¹ “Quand la mourante parut dans le salon, il se fit un cri d'admiration : les yeux d'Esther renvoyaient l'infini dans lequel l'âme se perdait en les voyant [. . .] Elle parut comme la suprême expression du luxe effréné dont les créations l'entouraient [. . .] Elle commanda l'orgie avec la puissance froide et calme que déploie Habeneck au Conservatoire dans ces concerts où les premiers musiciens de l'Europe atteignent au sublime de l'exécution en interprétant Mozart et Beethoven” (*SetM* VI, 690).

⁷⁹² I am referring here to Nabuchodonosor, (aka Nebuchadnezzar II [630-532 BC]), ruler of Babylon and conqueror of the Jews (see the books of Daniel and Jeremiah), as opposed to Nabuchodonosor I the king of the Babylonian Empire from 1125 BC to 1103 BC.

it, He descends upon the city, scattering Babel's people throughout the earth, and confusing their language so that they can no longer organize themselves against Him: "And the Lord Said, 'Behold they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.'" ⁷⁹³ In *Splendeurs*, a similar scenario is envisioned. In the pact, Herrera attempts to rival God and His creation. However, in relinquishing control over the feminine order, he ceases to direct the "travail productif" of society, which, for Nicole Mozet, comes from workers and courtesans. ⁷⁹⁴ As a result, the feminine order, viewed as an unregulated procreative source, promotes disorder, as well as discloses the absence of the father's role.

In a discussion of so-called hybrid forces and social mutation, it would seem that the young hero has ceased to be a focal point, serving rather as a collateral figure, or pawn, in the quest for the rights to social procreation. However, the opposite is true. Ignorant of Esther's sacrifice and wealth at the time of his incarceration, Lucien's mental resignation to his fate testifies, on a symbolic level, to Babel's impending fall, or to the incommunicability of the young hero's position in the face of history: "Quand [Lucien] enfantait un projet, c'était le suicide." ⁷⁹⁵ In providing the exact date of Lucien's death, May 15, 1830, Balzac frames the youth's demise against the historical backdrop of revolution to come. Inducing an element of historical fatality, Balzac indicates that it is *already* too late for Lucien. Continuing to play the comedy at the time of his arrest, Herrera names Lucien as his illegitimate son. Lucien quickly reveals the truth to the contrary as he succumbs to his authorities:

⁷⁹³ Gen. 11.6-7.

⁷⁹⁴ See *Balzac au pluriel* p. 158.

⁷⁹⁵ *SetM* VI, 715.

– Un Jacques Collin mon père! . . . Oh! Ma pauvre mère . . . [. . .]. Là est la différence entre le poète et l’homme d’action: l’un se livre au sentiment pour le reproduire en images vives, il ne juge qu’après; tandis que l’autre sent et juge à la fois [. . .]. Là où Jacques Collin avait tout sauvé par son audace, Lucien, l’homme d’esprit, avait tout perdu par son inintelligence et par son défaut de réflexion.⁷⁹⁶

In his condemnation of Herrera’s paternity, we note the return to an antinomic mode within the text. No longer are Lucien and Herrera’s differences shown to be complementary; rather they communicate discord: Herrera remains the perpetual Hercules, whereas Lucien is the perpetual “poète faible”⁷⁹⁷; Lucien embodies the man of thought as opposed to Herrera, the man of action. Transposing this dynamic on a mythic scale, Balzac compares the story of Herrera and Lucien to that of Daedalus and Icarus:⁷⁹⁸

Lucien, en entrant dans sa cellule, trouva donc la fidèle image de la première chambre qu’il avait occupée à Paris, à l’hôtel Cluny [. . .] Cette ressemblance entre son point de départ, plein d’innocence, et le point d’arrivée, dernier degré de la honte et de l’avilissement, fut si bien saisie par un dernier effort de sa fibre poétique, qu’il fondit en larmes. Il pleura pendant quatre heures insensible en apparence comme une figure de pierre, mais souffrant de toutes ses espérances renversées, atteint dans toutes ses vanités sociales écrasées, dans son orgueil anéanti, dans tous les *moi* que présentent l’ambitieux, l’amoureux, l’heureux, le dandy, le parisien, le poète, le voluptueux et le privilégié. Tout en lui s’était brisé dans cette chute icarienne.⁷⁹⁹

In this classical allusion to the son who has forever fallen away from the father, Balzac qualifies the irreparable division of father and son. The collapse of Lucien’s *moi*, the self understood in its plurality, consolidates the historical legacy of the fatherless son as the fallen son.

⁷⁹⁶ *ibid.*, 773.

⁷⁹⁷ *ibid.*, 768. “Le poète est faible, il est femme; il n’est pas comme moi, qui suis l’Hercule de la diplomatie” (*ibid.*, 768).

⁷⁹⁸ Daedalus, the architect of the Labyrinth (who showed Ariadne how Theseus could escape it), was imprisoned with his son Icarus in his intricate invention. Devising a plan for escape, Daedalus constructs wings for himself and his son. Daedalus warns Icarus not to fly too close to the sun lest the wax on the wings should melt; Icarus fails to heed his father’s words and falls to his death in the sea below (Hamilton, 193).

⁷⁹⁹ *SetM* VI, 716.

“C’est la poésie du mal.”⁸⁰⁰

In his farewell letter to Herrera, Lucien sums up this point when, speaking of the rupture between father and son, he spells out the pact’s significance in terms of its failure. As he writes: “votre fils spirituel, celui que vous aviez adopté, s’est rangé du côté de ceux qui veulent vous assassiner à tout prix [. . .].”⁸⁰¹ In his alliance with those who seek to destroy the father, Lucien recognizes the son’s double bind: his position is forged through paternal transgressions, and yet, if the father falls, so too must his son: “Vous avez voulu me faire puissant et glorieux, vous m’avez précipité dans les abîmes du suicide, voilà tout. Il y a longtemps que j’entendais bruire les grandes ailes du vertige planant sur moi.”⁸⁰² In the second part of the letter, Lucien’s approach is more methodical. Naming Herrera as one of these vast organisms who synthesize “toutes les forces humaines,” Lucien both pays homage to the strength of Herrera’s poetic vision, as well as identifies its limitations.⁸⁰³

Quand Dieu le veut, ces êtres mystérieux sont Moïse, Attila, Charlemagne, Mahomet ou Napoléon; mais, quand il laisse rouiller au fond de l’océan d’une génération ces instruments gigantesques, ils ne sont plus que Pugatcheff, Robespierre, Louvel et l’abbé Carlos Herrera. Doués d’un immense pouvoir sur les âmes tendres, ils les attirent et les broient. C’est grand, c’est beau dans son genre. C’est la plante vénéneuse aux riches couleurs qui fascine les enfants dans les bois. C’est la poésie du mal.⁸⁰⁴

In this passage, Lucien lists two kinds of “êtres mystérieux.” In the first group he identifies figures of leadership whose names are synonymous with epic periods in history. Conversely, in the second group, the names Pugatcheff, Robespierre, Louvel, and Herrera, are associated with the stunting of history. In tracing the origins of the

⁸⁰⁰ *ibid.*, 790.

⁸⁰¹ *ibid.*, 789.

⁸⁰² *ibid.*, 789.

⁸⁰³ *ibid.*, 789.

⁸⁰⁴ *ibid.*, 789-790.

youthful generation's mimetic dilemma, we observe the significance that Balzac attaches to the Terror, and specifically to the literal and symbolic severing of the sacred order incurred at the time of Louis XVI's execution.⁸⁰⁵ Herrera's inclusion in the second category of men reiterates for Lucien this point on a personal level.

Above, we suggest that Lucien's initial failure to succeed in Paris is, in large part, due to his inability to reconcile his existence with the heroic past; his *is* the "trauma of experiencing [his] own era as a secondary text."⁸⁰⁶ Driven to the brink of suicide at the end of *Illusions perdues*, his encounter with Herrera, giving rise to their contractual alliance, seems to supply Lucien with the desired loophole, a way out to bypass the youthful generation's mimetic dilemma. As Herrera indicates to this effect:

– Eh ! bien, le jour où ce pacte d'homme à démon, d'enfant à diplomate, ne vous conviendra plus, vous pourrez toujours aller chercher un petit endroit, comme celui dont vous parliez, pour vous noyer: vous serez un peu plus ou un peu moins ce que vous êtes aujourd'hui, malheureux ou déshonoré...⁸⁰⁷

In other words, once Lucien breaks their pact, *le fil de l'histoire se reprend*, and his fate will, once again, conform to that of his generation. However, what Lucien ultimately discovers is that Herrera's narrative, a seductive formulation of the heroic, is equally subject to repetition; its strength lies not in its ability to rewrite history, but in its artifice – its *poésie du mal*.

Just prior to his arrest, Lucien appears to grasp this point. His final effort to force the hand of his political adversaries and play the role of usurper is self-conscious and lacking in conviction:

⁸⁰⁵ Pugatcheff, a Cossack leader during the Seven Years War against Prussia (1768-1774), was ultimately delivered to authorities by his own men and executed in 1775. Louis Pierre Louvel was executed for the assassination of the Duke of Berry, February 13, 1820.

⁸⁰⁶ Jenson, 15.

⁸⁰⁷ *IP V*, 703-704.

– C’est là, se dit-il, en s’asseyant sur une des roches d’où se découvre le beau paysage de Bourron, l’endroit fatal où Napoléon espéra faire un effort gigantesque l’avant-veille de son abdication [. . . A]llons, jouons bien cette comédie, et je suis sauvé, je serai le gendre du duc malgré lui.⁸⁰⁸

Much like Raphaël de Valentin, whose commerce with the wild ass’s skin serves only to delay his death, Lucien’s sobering realization of the disparity existing between the historical past and the present mark the end of his detour from reality. He concludes his suicide letter as follows: “je me retrouve ce que j’étais au bord de la Charente, après vous avoir dû les enchantements d’un rêve; mais malheureusement, ce n’est plus la rivière de mon pays où j’allais noyer les peccadilles de la jeunesse; c’est la Seine, et mon trou, c’est un cabanon de la Conciergerie [. . .].”⁸⁰⁹ In other words, “les enchantements d’un rêve” devised by Herrera to recreate the order of things reveal not the changing nature of history, but a false sense of its immutability. Within the larger spectrum of 1830, not only does Lucien’s death testify to the irreparability of the sacred lineage, but, on the level of the historical imagination, it reflects the end of the heroic age, and with it, the son’s fantasy of reinstatement.

In disclosing a rift in the fabric of history, Balzac’s *Comédie* posits an aesthetic solution⁸¹⁰: it strives to build substance in the place of absence, while at the same time using the theme of destruction as a positive narrative construct. In the final chapter of our study dedicated to the inscriptive figure of youth, we have examined how, in working within and without the young hero’s mimetic historical dilemma, Balzac seeks to rewrite origins. Whereas our previous discussion on the aesthetic configuration of the young

⁸⁰⁸ *SetM*, 695.

⁸⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 790.

⁸¹⁰ “Tous les arts, tels que Balzac les a compris, impliquent à divers degrés, une philosophie esthétique qui repose essentiellement sur la relation de la pensée à l’acte, sur l’accord du verbe et du fait” (Eigeldinger, 12).

hero posits the youth as an imagistic pretext for divulging the word's transformative capacity, this chapter probes the question of assigning the word an absolute value – to reinstate “equivalence.”⁸¹¹ Informed by the lens of revolution, and the implicit intertext of 1830, the historical space, resonating with tones of discontinuity and repetition formed by the father's absence, requires a creative act to bridge the symbolic crevasse dividing past from present.

The infrastructure necessary to fill the historical vacuum is imagined in the form of a “creative pact,” thus offering a narrative strategy for reclaiming the rights to natural creation by way of artistic creation. In the works treated in this chapter, listed sequentially as *Les Proscrits*, *La Peau de chagrin*, *Illusions perdues*, and *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, we have considered this question in its evolution in the *Comédie humaine*. In *Les Proscrits*, Balzac specifies the boundaries of artistic creation. In relating the mystical function of the poet, the creative act is projected in terms of his ability to synchronize thoughts and actions, and, at the same time, precludes taking possession of the ideal in order to exist in an absolute manner. In *La Peau de chagrin*, this premise is put to the test. In order to contextualize the young hero's lackluster historical performance, Balzac performs a sort of narrative liquidation of the myth of the past. Then, in exposing the depths of the abyss, the author institutes a new poetic system capable of procuring certain “paradis artificiels,” thus granting the young hero the illusion of a less hollow social existence. Finally, Raphaël's pact with the wild ass's skin, ending in his death, associates masculinity with the procreative faculty.

⁸¹¹ Mozet 2, 175.

At the end of *Illusions perdues*, we have come full-circle. Like Godefroid and Raphaël before him, Lucien is also shown to be a kind of “génie incomplet.”⁸¹² However, unlike his predecessors, Lucien’s situation differs in his relationship to historical time. Whereas 1830 is implicit within the previous two narratives, constituting a kind of invisible barrier against which the young hero will inevitably collide, Lucien’s story will diverge from those of his *sosies* at the time of his meeting with Herrera in 1824; he can still create *dans le temps*, or so it seems. Marked by a Judeo-Christian representation of the world, the pact established between Herrera and Lucien serves as the basis for a new creation story seen in reverse order; the word isn’t made flesh, but rather the flesh is made word.⁸¹³ Herrera’s desire to re-script Lucien’s existence, restores, in a symbolic sense, the father’s position in that he offers his son a viable historical path; the young hero, ceasing to be an historical cipher, serves as a *tabula rasa* upon which a new order will be inscribed. However, in also assuming the role of Lucien’s mother, wife, and double, Herrera’s demiurgic status is compromised, as is the creative integrity of his artistic edifice. Designed to supplement creation, and provide a key to its lost unity, the pact revalidates the masculine position. Forming an androgynous pair, Herrera and Lucien are a model of self-sufficiency, an equilibrium of opposing forces. At the same time, they collectively lack the creative dynamism necessary to rival God. With the inclusion of the feminine order, the duo’s contractual union is breached and then dissolved.

⁸¹² Eigeldinger, 23.

⁸¹³ In *Louis Lambert*, Balzac states Lambert’s unrealized poetic ambitions in similar terms: “Aussi, peut-être un jour le sens inverse de l’ET VERBUM CARO FACTUM EST, sera-t-il le résumé d’un nouvel évangile qui dira : ET LA CHAIR SE FERA le VERBE, ELLE DEVIENDRA LA PAROLE de DIEU” (LL XI, 689).

Upon Lucien's death, it is said that Herrera "redevint Jacques Collin," an event that marks an end to masculine procreative exclusivity.⁸¹⁴ In conjunction with Herrera's retransformation, the resurgent use of familial terms (used within the narrative to describe Collin's relationship to the fallen youth), betray the persistent desire to secure meaning, and subsequently to fill the void left by the father's absence.⁸¹⁵ As Collin exclaims over Lucien's corpse:

– Si vous avez des enfants, messieurs, dit Jacques Collin, vous comprendrez mon imbécillité, j'y vois à peine clair... Ce coup est pour moi bien plus que la mort, mais vous ne pouvez pas savoir ce que je dis... Vous n'êtes pères, si vous l'êtes, que d'une manière; ... je suis mère, aussi!... Je... je suis fou,... je le sens.⁸¹⁶

Within the purviews of the pact, words used to express filiation and redefine origins give way to a collapsed image of the family. As Janet Beizer expresses to this effect:

"Balzac's language repeatedly names the sublimity it is unable to express, poses the father it is unable to find."⁸¹⁷ Therefore, in the absence of a language powerful enough to recreate the father, Balzac "overwrites" in an attempt to "guarantee the inviolability of paternity and the indestructible presence of meaning;" a desire expressed in Collin's subsequent attempt to assume one final incarnation: "Je règnerai toujours sur ce monde, qui, depuis vingt-cinq ans, m'obéit."⁸¹⁸

In essence, the pact generates a text destined to write continuity, progress, and achieve synthesis in the form of a totalizing fiction. In doing so, it gives way to a alternative vision of creation encapsulated by a *poésie du mal*. This is to say, that rather than reinstating masculinity's role in history, a poetry of evil operates a writing of

⁸¹⁴ *SetM* VI, 835.

⁸¹⁵ Beizer 1, 136.

⁸¹⁶ *SetM* VI, 817.

⁸¹⁷ Beizer 1, 135.

⁸¹⁸ *SetM* VI, 934.

absence; it draws an ideal from the depths of the *néant* while producing a false sense of movement, rather like a vertigo effect. Illustrating this point in a superlative manner is the story of Lucien de Rubempré, an elided figure, or a social chameleon, designed to accommodate a society exponentially inclined to mixture. Therefore, Lucien's death in May of 1830 would seem to establish an end to this process, signaling a clear break with the past. Herrera equates the loss of the youth with the Battle of Waterloo.⁸¹⁹ For our part, this monumental image of failure posits renewal, serving as a critical literary scaffold upon which to devise a new mythical, historical, and poetical system.

⁸¹⁹ The narrator, speaking from Vautrin's point of view, states: "Napoléon a connu cette dissolution de toutes les forces humaines sur le champs de bataille de Waterloo!" (ibid., 822). The narrator also writes that Vautrin's decision to "tenter une dernière incarnation" is similar to Napoleon's decision "sur la chaloupe qui le conduisit vers le *Bellerophon* (ibid., 872).

CONCLUSION

– Faire jaillir l'abondance du milieu le plus dénué, n'est-ce pas ce que vous souhaitez, vous qui voulez construire un poème?¹

This study has traced the narrative paradigm of the young hero within the literary universe of Balzac's *Comédie humaine*. A dynamic literary signifier in nineteenth-century literature, the young hero epitomizes the problematic nature of existence encountered by the individual in post-revolutionary France, revealing "la mystification contenue dans le mythe de l'amour, dans le mythe de l'ambition, dans le mythe de la réussite individuelle"⁸²⁰ At the same time, he serves as a mouthpiece for an entire youthful generation burdened by historical legacy. Left to assert his position, the young hero seeks avenues for historical self-creation. However, at every turn, he is reminded of the absence of legitimate authority, be it social, political, or moral. In Balzac's narrative universe, the young hero confronts the illegitimacy of his own position. The historical dead-end experienced by the *fils sans père* acts thus as a springboard upon which Balzac launches his own aesthetic enterprise. In the author's repeated denial of social and political restoration, underscoring the division between past and present in the nineteenth-century historical consciousness, Balzac wishes to simulate its reconciliation through a writing of continuity. Therefore, to rephrase Balzac's audacious comparison between Napoleon's achievements and his own, it could be said that what Napoleon began with his sword, Balzac would continue through artistic meditation.

In chapter one, we began with a definition of the social category of youth, followed by a thorough consideration of the drama of the young hero's social

¹ CV IX, 807-808.

⁸²⁰ Barbéris 1, 129.

development. Identified as the sudden awakening of desire elicited by the young hero's contact with society, the onset of adolescence is evoked as "un élément du drame lui-même."⁸²¹ As presented physiologically, psychologically, as well as semantically, the adolescent phase constitutes a period of maximum mutability. However, adolescence does not necessarily lead to maturity. First, many young men do not possess the "force des organes" necessary to survive it; the result is premature death or even suicide.⁸²² Second, because the young hero pursues a path in society riddled by illegitimacy and paternal transgressions, the passage to adulthood (underscoring his mimetic dilemma), prevents the young hero from assuming the father's place. As Félix de Vandenesse explains it in *Le Lys dans la vallée* (1835) "[M]a vie est dominée par un fantôme, il se dessine vaguement au moindre mot qui le provoque, il s'agite souvent de lui-même au-dessus de moi."⁸²³ Therefore, the adolescent drama, which, in part, serves to distill the quintessence of youth, or the poetical undercurrent that Balzac attaches to the vision of the young hero "dans sa fleur," also exposes his problematic relationship with history, defined largely by the father's absence.

Forged through revolution, regicide, and regime change, the young hero's relationship with history is also determined by the legacy of Napoleon Bonaparte and his impossible dream of self-realization. In chapter two, we analyzed Napoleon's historical role, his assumption of the father's position, as well as that of the usurper or the fatherless

⁸²¹ Sussman, 25. In her succinct definition of the term "drama," Linda Rudich writes: "Not surprising that modern "drama" for the individual begins psychologically and chronologically at that moment when internal desire or aspiration comes into contact with the "forces réelles" of modern bourgeois society, i.e. in Paris where their contradictory nature is revealed most essentially and in advance of the provinces" (Rudich I, 248).

⁸²² As Balzac writes in *Le Curé de village* (1837): "Eh! Bien, je crois, moi, maintenant, que la règle générale est de rester longtemps and l'état végétatif de l'adolescence. L'exception que constitue la force des organes dans l'adolescence a, la plupart du temps, pour résultat l'abréviation de la vie" (CV IX, 795-96).

⁸²³ *Lys IX*, 970.

son; what his reign gained for the father's reinstatement, his fall magnified the absence of paternal authority. Interweaving the portrait of Napoleon with that of the young hero, Balzac conveys this verity. He produces a biting critique of the Restoration regime and its leadership, and underlines the rift in the nineteenth-century historical consciousness instituted by the literal loss of the father, first, in the figure of King Louis XVI and, second, in Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. Additionally, Balzac emphasizes the father's loss in terms of the son's symbolic inheritance; that is, the absence of an organizing principle upon which to establish the son's economic, legal, and social status, that which would allow the son to secure his own historical legacy. Napoleon's metonymical presence in *La Comédie humaine* signals a way for Balzac to interrogate this critical gap in history left by the father.

The fatal legacy of Napoleon's self-generative imperative reveals a lopsided vision of the young hero, while at the same time providing a key to unlocking Napoleon's *raison d'être* within the universe of Balzac's *Comédie humaine*. In chapter three, we examined Balzac's treatment of masculinity as it figured into a sociopolitical, as well as artistic reaction to the ideological softening of his times. A comparative analysis of text and image, taken in conjunction with a semiotic study of the painting or work of art, showed how the author's engagement with the feminized young hero adheres to an aesthetic aim – to script masculinity in terms of desire. In drawing parallels between his young hero and certain *éphèbes* in art (like Girodet's *Endymion* or David's *Bara*), it would seem that Balzac had shifted toward allegory, reproducing within his narrative this visual pronouncement of a new aesthetic generated entirely by male genius. However, Balzac's feminized youth testifies also to the flaws in this kind of aesthetic system;

namely, that the androgynous model and its projection of a self-generative figure of masculinity are not translatable beyond the imagistic realm. The text is shown to be superior to the image in its joining of semblance and reality. Therefore, to reprise the failed prerogative of male authority, the pictorial version of the feminized young hero allows Balzac to infer the textual model's corrective: to posit an absolute.

Exploring this idea within the purview of the creative pact, the final chapter of this study examined the poetic enterprise of re-Creation: that is, the strictures of a poetical contract designed to rewrite origins, and reinstate the procreative masculine authority once and for all. As we considered this question in its evolution, defining, for instance, the limits of creative production, and the endowment of creative authority upon the individual, we reflected also upon the theme of destruction. Applied as a positive narrative construct, it is used to erect a new poetical system or a *poésie du mal*. That is, a text destined to write continuity, progress, and achieve synthesis in the form of a new totalizing fiction – an alternative creation story. However, we see the limits imposed upon this kind of poetical system in *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, where the poetic faculty must be executed by two individuals (Herrera, who meditates without action, as opposed to Lucien, who acts without meditation), and where the collective effort to reinstate the procreative masculine order (on an absolute scale) is imperfectly realized. With the amendment of this pact to include a third member, Esther van Gobseck, the female courtesan achieves the dual function of the poet, or the synthesis of thought and action, at the novel's close. For his part, Lucien succumbs to suicide; his demise consummates the father's irreparable absence.

Commenting on Lucien's death, Victor Hugo wrote: "Sans doute Lucien se brise-t-il *avant 1830*, mais que son ralliement à un parti vaincu d'avance serve à préfigurer son destin, que Balzac établisse une correspondance instinctive entre la chute du poète et son ralliement suffit, sans doute à faire sentir *où n'était pas* l'avenir."⁸²⁴ Hugo's point, reiterating the role of historical fatality within Balzac's narrative, calls attention to the poet's untriumphant end. Many critics attach particular importance to this episode as well, calling the decisive blow leveled against the poet an event punctuating the end of the virile age, to be replaced by capitalism and alternative sources of authority. For example, Charles Affron links Lucien's fall to Balzac's pessimism concerning the incongruity between modern society and the individual.⁸²⁵ Georg Lukács⁸²⁶ and Maurice Descotes observe that "l'effrondement du Héros coïncide avec l'apothéose des gens de finance," thus relating the theme of failure to the rise of modern capitalism.⁸²⁷ In her discussion of Collin's final "incarnation,"⁸²⁸ Kyoto Murata argues that his avowal to resurrect his position and avenge Lucien's death are possible only by way of Collin's "cerebral maternity," thus validating a feminine authority to the detriment of its paternal or masculine counterpart.⁸²⁹ Finally, in reading capitalism through the lens of feminist criticism, Claudia Moscovici and Nicole Mozet consider individually the social influx of

⁸²⁴ Quoted from Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862) in Barbéris's *Mythes balzaciens* (1972), p. 49.

⁸²⁵ See Affron's study, *Patterns of Failure in La Comédie humaine* (1966).

⁸²⁶ In his chapter on *Illusions Perdues* in his *Balzac et le réalisme français*, Lukács calls Lucien a new kind of poet who is specifically bourgeois. He describes his disillusionment as a type of novel in which false ideas are shown to appear out of necessity, but are destroyed when they come into contact with the brutal force of capitalist life. He concludes that this story of disillusion is characteristic of a period marked by successive regime change and fallen ideals, because the "pionniers héroïques doivent se retirer et céder la place à ceux qui profitent du développement, aux spectateurs" (Lukács 1, 48-49).

⁸²⁷ Descotes, 266. Balzac's pessimism aside, we are not saying that the post-1830 political and specifically economic landscape is of no account. To the contrary, it is of great significance. However, we do not want to overstate its importance; it provides a lens, among others, through which to read Balzac's Second Generation youth.

⁸²⁸ *SetM* VI, 872.

⁸²⁹ Murata, 237; 284.

new (and unregulated) procreative forces: the female citizen-subject⁸³⁰; the worker.⁸³¹

The tragic conclusion of *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (coupled with its allusion to the approaching July revolution) is suggestive of an important turning point within Balzac's *Comédie*. The question remains however as to how it can be qualified? For instance, is it an altogether fair assessment to claim, as does Hugo, that Balzac's fallen poet is not included in his vision of the future? Although these queries exceed the scope of this study dedicated to the inscriptive figure of masculinity in Balzac's *Comédie humaine*, where we analyzed the aesthetic enterprise attached to the discourse of youth and of the hero, leading us to its apex in the story of Lucien, in this concluding segment, we will offer a glance ahead into the future beyond 1830. We will consider the *dénouement* of the young hero's story: the future of the poet as it lies outside of the French novel as Balzac had conceived it.

Physionomie du pays, physionomie du héros

In his study *Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism* (1965), Donald Fanger comments upon the "de-poetization" of fiction in the literature after 1850. Motivated by a desire to capture the intricacies of the world around them, authors and painters alike challenged accepted ideas of art, seeking the sublime in its presentation of "unvarnished truth."⁸³² Although Balzac's death in 1850 precluded his further participation in the changing landscape of nineteenth-century literature directly, his *Comédie* (according to Fanger) announced this literary trend. As Balzac writes in *Le Père Goriot*, "All is true," while presenting his reader with a fictional world predisposed to nuances, to hyperbole, and

⁸³⁰ See for instance Moscovici's study *Gender and Citizenship*. In her excellent chapter on *La Cousine Bette*, she discusses the changing role of the feminine-citizen subject, and specifically the impact of Bette's entrance upon the public sphere.

⁸³¹ Mozet 1, 158.

⁸³² Fanger, 5.

charged with what Baudelaire called an “ardeur vitale.”⁸³³ Alternatively, Balzac documents the “flattening” of French society;⁸³⁴ “l’uniformité, l’ennui et la laideur” are terms used synonymously to describe Balzac’s portrait of post-revolutionary France.⁸³⁵

If the physiognomy of the country has changed after 1830, so too has the portrait of the young hero. Reunited under the title of “les jeunes gens de Paris,” Balzac classifies the post-revolutionary young hero in several different ways. As he writes in *La Fille aux yeux d’or* (1834)⁸³⁶:

Ils se divisent en deux classes: le jeune homme qui a quelque chose, et le jeune homme qui n’a rien; ou le jeune homme qui pense et celui qui dépense [. . .]. Il y existe quelques autres jeunes gens, mais ceux-là sont des enfants qui conçoivent très tard l’existence parisienne et en restent les dupes. Ils ne spéculent pas, ils étudient, ils piochent, disent les autres. Enfin il s’y voit encore certains jeunes gens, riches ou pauvres, qui embrassent des carrières et les suivent tout uniment; ils sont un peu l’Emile de Rousseau.⁸³⁷

The dupes aside, this passage distinguishes between two categories of young men, those who have versus those who do not. Characterized as elegant, ironic, individualistic in the extreme, atheistic, and “cariés jusqu’aux os par le calcul, par la dépravation, par une brutale envie de parvenir,” those who have and those who do not are cut from the same cloth.⁸³⁸ However, the latter are presented as having a greater advantage for the simple reason that they have nothing to lose, and therefore have everything to gain: “[I]ls pèsent les hommes comme un avare pèse ses pièces d’or [. . .] tandis que les autres se font

⁸³³ *PG* III, 50; quoted from Baudelaire’s *L’Artiste en 1850* in Barbéris’s *Une Mythologie réaliste* (1971), p. 243.

⁸³⁴ Fanger, 20.

⁸³⁵ Courteix, 418.

⁸³⁶ As we have encountered previously in this study, the date of composition should often be read anachronistically in relationship to the action of a particular novel. Although *La Fille aux yeux d’or* is set in 1819, Balzac’s paints a picture of post-revolutionary France. The lifeblood of modern Paris is summed up in terms of “l’or et le plaisir.”

⁸³⁷ *FYO* V, 1059-1061.

⁸³⁸ *ibid.*, 1060.

respecter et choisissent leurs victimes et leurs protecteurs. Alors, un jour, ceux qui n'avaient rien, ont quelque chose et ceux qui avaient quelque chose, n'ont rien."⁸³⁹ This negative portrait of the young hero can be attributed to the limitations placed upon him in the "étouffoir" that is modern society.⁸⁴⁰ As conveyed in Marxist terms, the young hero's commerce with society relates social formation to "the economic activity that [. . .] constitutes the ultimate determination of collective existence."⁸⁴¹ Therefore, within a budding capitalist system, the young hero contributes directly to a system of exchange; reifying himself, he alternatively commodifies others and is in turn commodified.⁸⁴² However, this vision of modernity, of which the young hero is perpetually representative, extends beyond an authoritarian Marxist view.⁸⁴³

Continuing in his description of modern Paris, Balzac identifies the proletariat, comprised of "ses hommes complets," and "ses Napoléons inconnus," as a stimulus for social procreation through its steady combination of "la pensée et le mouvement."⁸⁴⁴ Conversely, the dupes or "niais," this class of mediocre young men who vie for a position, and "infest" society at every level, are considered an obstacle to positive social

⁸³⁹ *ibid.*, 1059-1061.

⁸⁴⁰ *CV IX*, 801.

⁸⁴¹ *Petrey 4*, 449.

⁸⁴² Balzac warns against the political and socioeconomic repercussions associated with an increasingly bourgeois society; his *Comédie* documents certain phases in its realization: the "embourgeoisement" of his characters; the increased attention given to themes related to social infrastructure and bureaucratic inefficacy (see *Les Employés* [1836]); the dissected image of the world of finance. For example, in *César Biroteau* (1837), Balzac treats the commercial enterprise and subsequent ruin of a *parfumeur*. The unfinished work *Les Petits Bourgeois* (1830-1840) relates the story of a fraudulent real estate investment scam *aux environs de la Madeleine*. Finally, in the short story *La Maison Nucingen* (1836), we have a detailed account of the Baron de Nucingen's business practices, and specifically his manipulation of the stock market in the form of three "liquidations."

⁸⁴³ See Pierre Barbéris's *Mythes balzaciens* (1972). See also Linda Rudich's excellent article "Balzac and Marx."

⁸⁴⁴ *FYO V*, 1041-42.

growth; they are “une lymphe qui surcharge [le corps politique] et le rend mollasse.”⁸⁴⁵

This unflattering portrait of the “jeunes gens” relates, (still again), to the fundamental question of the young hero’s ability to transform the world around him. Even in late novels such as *Béatrix* (1838), *L’Envers de l’histoire contemporaine* (1840), and *La Cousine Bette* (1846), the young hero’s adaptive skills are measured in an almost disdainful manner; he is evoked as a parodied version of the Romantic hero, a hackneyed *parvenu*, a mediocre artist, or a second-rate politician.⁸⁴⁶ The late young hero is a victim of his political actuality, and yet Balzac faults his lack of imagination, and, more importantly, his lack of volition.

In *La Cousine Bette*, Balzac sums up his portrait of the young man of 1830, writing: “Ces gens sont des cercueils ambulants qui contiennent un Français d'autrefois; le Français s'agite par moments [. . .] mais l'ambition le retient, et il consent à y étouffer. Ce cercueil est toujours vêtu de drap noir.”⁸⁴⁷ Whereas the ideological configuration of the pre-revolutionary or first generation young hero shaped social formation in terms of a *rêve napoléonien*, limitless desire and ambition, *parole et action*, the portrait of the 1830

⁸⁴⁵ The entire citation reads: “[Les jeunes gens] augmentent le nombre de ces gens médiocres sous le poids desquels plie la France. Ils sont toujours là ; toujours prêts à gâcher les affaires publiques ou particulières, avec la plate truelle de la médiocrité, en se targuant de leur impuissance qu’ils nomment mœurs et probité. Ces espèces de *Prix d’excellence* sociaux infestent l’administration, l’armée, la magistrature, les chambres, la cour. Ils amoindrissent, aplatissent le pays et constituent en quelque sorte dans le corps politique, une lymphe qui le surcharge et le rend mollasse” (ibid., 1059).

⁸⁴⁶ In *L’Envers de l’histoire contemporaine* (1840-48), we are presented with the portrait of the mediocre young hero known only as Godefroid. At nearly thirty years of age, Godefroid is a man who typifies one of the great “malheurs” of revolution. As Balzac writes: “un des plus grands malheurs des révolutions c’est que chacune d’elles est une nouvelle prime donnée à l’ambition des classes inférieures” (*EHC VIII*, 226). Godefroid’s inability to “lutter contre les choses, ayant le sentiment des facultés supérieures, mais sans le vouloir qui les met en action [. . .],” is further testament of this fact (*EHC VIII*, 223). Likewise, in *La Cousine Bette*, Wenceslas Steinbock embodies the role of the “demi-artiste” (*Be. VII*, 246). Described as being a great artist in word only, Steinbock no longer possesses the will necessary to pass from “la Conception à l’Exécution” (*Be. VII*, 241). Like a Lucien, he is a “poète incomplet”; his masterpieces, along with his artistic renown were gained through his “alliance” with Bette, she who virilized Steinbock’s “mollesse morale” with her “besoin d’action” (*Be. VII*, 108). Attributing his first success to Bette, Steinbock exclaims: “[. . .]vous ne m’avez pas seulement nourri, logé, soigné dans la misère; mais encore vous m’avez donné de la force! Vous m’avez créé ce que je suis [. . .]” (ibid., 109).

⁸⁴⁷ ibid., 97.

young hero speaks to the death of this social ideology. As further evidence of this, we consider again the portrait of those former “lions” who have matured within Balzac’s literary universe.⁸⁴⁸ Like their second generation counterparts, Eugène de Rastignac, Henri de Marsay, and Maxime De Trailles, (to name only a few), embody the softening of the times. “Tout fatigue, même l’enfer” says De Trailles who, at 48 years of age, retires to the provinces where he hopes to escape his reputation and acquire a social position (marry a rich widow, and seek a diplomatic post).⁸⁴⁹ At age 40, De Marsay marries a rich widow. His accession to the post of Prime Minister is followed by his mysterious death.⁸⁵⁰ After twenty years as Delphine de Nucingen’s lover, Rastignac marries what could be his own daughter.⁸⁵¹ Commenting upon the aging portrait of the First Generation young hero, Jean-Hervé Donnard observes: “[. . .] une jeunesse chaleureuse et héroïque se métamorphose en gérontocratie désabusée, accumulant les richesses matérielles pour compenser la perte de ses illusions.”⁸⁵² Therefore, even the most glowing examples of success and social ascension come to reflect their grim reality. Except for De Trailles’s decision to enter the religious life, retreat, marriage and death punctuate the so-called “end” of the young hero’s story. In spite of this, Balzac does manage to offer a small glimmer of hope in the redemptive role of the artist, and the act of artistic creation.⁸⁵³

⁸⁴⁸ See again our page 14, for a full definition of the term “lion.”

⁸⁴⁹ *B II*, 914.

⁸⁵⁰ In a future study, it would be interesting to devote further attention to the figure of Henri de Marsay, a uniquely androgynous character whose strength lies in the possession of certain undisclosed powers.

⁸⁵¹ In spite of the fact that Rastignac becomes Minister of Justice, a Pair of France, and receives the title of Count, (not to mention that he is named successor to De Marsay after his death), the implication of an incestuous union with Augusta de Nucingen, coupled with the fact that the pair bear no offspring, do well to characterize the sterile portrait of the period.

⁸⁵² Donnard 2, 435.

⁸⁵³ Linda Rudich makes a similar observation, stating that as the political horizon dims, the artist becomes Balzac’s only hope for social regeneration: “Thus the poet alone in capitalist society retains the godlike

La Bohème

Throughout this study we have discussed the role of the panorama aesthetic, and particularly the manner in which it initiates the reader into Balzac's vision of the modern hero, he who is capable of assimilating the panoramic field before him. There was Rastignac who, from the Père Lachaise cemetery, meditated his plan of attack against the "beau monde" of Parisian society.⁸⁵⁴ Lucien, accompanied by Herrera and Esther, formed a similar project.⁸⁵⁵ That is, the Individual's path to social domination requires that he quit society's periphery and strike at its core.⁸⁵⁶ However, as Balzac's vision of post-1830 society informs us, the center is no longer conducive to creative innovation. Given this, we are asked to return once again to the periphery.⁸⁵⁷

Paying homage to a class of young men circulating within *la bohème* of Paris, Balzac paints the picture of a marginalized group of urban youth left to cultivate their talents on the "asphalte des boulevards."⁸⁵⁸ Referred to also as "les artistes de Paris," *la bohème* dedicates its efforts to reconciling "le monde et la gloire, l'argent et l'art"⁸⁵⁹; their art is seen as their last available recourse to fight against the "ilotisme" or quasi-slavery to which France has condemned its youth.⁸⁶⁰ In *Un prince de la bohème* (1839) a

power of *self-reproduction*, of unalienated self-activity because he can simultaneously realize himself and reproduce matter (Rudich 1, 261).

⁸⁵⁴ *PG* III, 290.

⁸⁵⁵ *SetM* VI, 569.

⁸⁵⁶ In *Le Père Goriot*, the Parisian center is compared to a "ruche bourdonnante," a place of intense activity and industry. (*PG* III, 290).

⁸⁵⁷ Previously, we have examined the role of the periphery in the provincial space, as well as the peripheral space occupied by certain social minorities: the *Cénacle*; the *Treize*. Divergent in their interests, literary production versus criminal activity, the periphery designates a socially dynamic zone favorable to creative activity.

⁸⁵⁸ *Pr.B* VII, 808.

⁸⁵⁹ *FYO* V, 1049.

⁸⁶⁰ Also evoking this particular class of youth in *Illusions perdues*, Balzac writes: "Travailleuse, cette belle jeunesse voulait le pouvoir et le plaisir; artiste, elle voulait des trésors; oisive, elle voulait animer ses passions; de toute manière elle voulait une place, et la politique ne lui en faisait nulle part" (*IP* V, 490).

short story dedicated to the exploits of its supposed “roi,” Charles-Edouard Rusticoli, comte de La Palférine,⁸⁶¹ Balzac writes:

Ce mot de bohème vous dit tout. La bohème n’a rien et vit de ce qu’elle a. L’Espérance est sa religion, la Foi en soi-même est son code, la Charité passe pour être son budget. Tous ces jeunes gens sont plus grands que leur malheur, au-dessous de la fortune, mais au-dessus du destin.⁸⁶²

To lament the talented, underutilized (“fleur inutile”), and marginalized subset of French society who, because of the political climate and the myopia of its leaders, are left to flounder in their idle state is, again, nothing new. However, what is novel about the portrait of Paris’s *bohème* youth is that their despair is not expressed as an intractable condition. In striving to circumvent historical fatality via the arts, the poet is granted some form of social improvisation – often manifesting itself in a carnivalesque spirit – suggestive of social transcendence. At the same time, this image of renewal is tenuous in that it is produced concurrently with the stale vision of modern Paris. We will return to this point momentarily.

Mise-en-abyme

The center and the periphery, the heroic past and the present of post-revolutionary France, are curiously reconciled in the short story *Z. Marcas* (1840), the last story for our consideration in the concluding segment of this study. In the opening paragraph Balzac writes: “Ce Z qui précédait Marcas, [. . .] cette dernière lettre de l’alphabet offrait à

⁸⁶¹ *Pr.B* VII, 810. La Palférine’s origins are somewhat vague. It is said that he is a descendant of a noble family, however with no family to speak of, he is said to be so poor that he lives on public assistance. In *Béatrix*, Maxime de Trailles names him as his heir: “La Palférine ! vous avez de la hardiesse dans l’esprit, vous avez encore plus d’esprit que de hardiesse, vous pouvez aller très-loin, devenir un homme politique. Tenez... de tous ceux qui se sont lancés dans la carrière au bout de laquelle je suis et qu’on a voulu m’opposer, vous êtes le seul qui m’ayez plu.” (*B* II, 915). This is one instance where we see the proverbial torch being passed from Balzac’s first generation youth to the second generation successor, from “le chef des aventuriers parisiens” to “le roi de la Bohème” (*ibid.*, 915).

⁸⁶² *Pr.B* VII 809.

l'esprit je ne sais quoi de fatal."⁸⁶³ The narrator goes on to comment that while Marcas has "le droit d'aller à la postérité," there remains something unfinished ("inachevé") in this name.⁸⁶⁴ This passage encapsulates one of the major currents of Balzac's *Comédie*. Our discussion will show that it announces the end of the young hero's narrative, prompted, as we understand it, by the son's persistent failure to synchronize thoughts and actions and assume his place in history. At the same time, in placing emphasis on the initial Z, and suppressing the whole of Marcas's surname, Z serves as a positive construct to stimulate the continued narration of Balzac's social analysis.

Organized as a series of narrative frames, *Z. Marcas* epitomizes the young hero's path within Balzac's *Comédie*. Returning again to the Parisian boarding house – the place where it all began – the story of Rastignac (and Bianchon) acts as a subtext for the story of Charles Roubourdin and Just, a law student and a medical student respectively, as well as that of Z. Marcas.⁸⁶⁵ As in the earlier novel, the boarding house again becomes a microcosm for the whole of French society, thus permitting both a synchronic and diachronic reading of the young hero's social drama within *Z. Marcas*, as well as throughout *La Comédie humaine*. In addition to the story of Rastignac, we have the stories of those who followed in his footsteps: Marcas recounts the interim period between the Restoration and July monarchy regimes, followed by Charles and Just, whose story traces the advent of 1830 to the present-day of 1838 France.⁸⁶⁶

⁸⁶³ *ZM* VIII, 829.

⁸⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 829.

⁸⁶⁵ Horace Bianchon, the medical student, and friend to law student, Rastignac in *Le Père Goriot*, reappears in *Z. Marcas* to care for Marcas on his deathbed (*ibid.*, 853-54).

⁸⁶⁶ In spite of his birth year in 1803, Marcas should be considered within Balzac's First Generation youth. The beast most closely associated with Marcas is the lion: "Ses cheveux ressemblaient à une crinière, son nez était court, écrasé, large et fendu au bout comme celui d'un lion, il avait le front partagé comme celui d'un lion par un sillon puissant, divisé en deux lobes vigoureux" (*ZM* VIII, 834-35). Second, the fact that at age 35 Marcas continues to reside in a boarding house (similar to the Maison Vauquer in *Le Père Goriot*),

It is the serendipitous meeting between Marcas and the two young students (returning to the boarding house from the carnival) that permits a simultaneous recounting of their separate and overlapping stories to unfold. Additionally, the encounter establishes an internal chronology within the story, to be understood in terms of a *before* and an *after*. Prior to their meeting with Marcas, the youth adhere to a pre-determined path (“Juste et moi, nous n’apercevions aucune place à prendre dans les deux professions que nos parents nous forçaient d’embrasser. Il y a cent avocats, cent médecins pour un”⁸⁶⁷), supplemented, in large part, by the pursuit of frivolous activity: “Aussi les étudiants étudient-ils dans les cafés, au théâtre, dans les allées du Luxembourg, chez les grisettes, partout [. . .] excepté dans leur horrible chambre, horrible s’il s’agit d’étudier [. . .].”⁸⁶⁸ In times of financial difficulty, Charles and Just, like their predecessor Rastignac, are also inclined to send letters to their aunts, mothers, and sisters in the provinces: “Nous résoudrons un beau problème de chimie en changeant le linge en argent.”⁸⁶⁹ However, after making Marcas’s acquaintance, the students are forced to confront the reality of their situation. Under the elder’s guidance, Charles and Just learn their past, while they also get a glimpse of their future should they continue to choose the path of indifference and inaction: “Marcas, notre voisin, fut en quelque sorte le guide qui nous mena sur le bord du précipice [. . .] et qui nous montra par avance quelle serait notre destinée si nous nous y laissions choir.”⁸⁷⁰ Compared to Napoleon “sur son rocher”

shows us what *could have been* had Rastignac elected to follow the path determined by virtue and hard work.

⁸⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 831.

⁸⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 831.

⁸⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 838.

⁸⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 834.

(Sainte-Hélène), Marcas operates from the place of experience, failure, and lost illusions.⁸⁷¹

The story of Marcas unfolds as follows: arriving in Paris in 1823, at the age of 20, Marcas studied law, attained a clerkship (rising to the rank of First Clerk), and eventually completed his doctorate in law. Subsequently, when he sought to embark upon a career in politics, the political climate had become hostile to the social *parvenu*. Therefore, Marcas was required to find another to act on his behalf. Called a “Nouveau Bonaparte” in search of his Barras, Marcas formed a political alliance with a rich deputy.⁸⁷² However, when he was betrayed by his protector, and with his reputation marred, he became a “Napoléon tombé.”⁸⁷³ Retreating to his room in the boarding house, he earns his 30 cents *pour vivre* as a legal copyist. The brief summary of Marcas’s life and career testify, once more, to the connection Balzac draws between his young hero and the myth of the past, while also underscoring his limitations as he tries to live up to (or recede from) an inherited ideal.

With the advent of 1830, and the events following, Marcas warns Charles and Just against risking a similar fate:

Août 1830, [. . .] fait par la jeunesse qui a lié la javelle, fait par l'intelligence qui avait mûri la moisson, a oublié la part de la jeunesse et de l'intelligence. La jeunesse éclatera comme la chaudière d'une machine à vapeur. La jeunesse n'a pas d'issue en France, elle y amasse une avalanche de capacités méconnues, d'ambitions légitimes et inquiètes, elle se marie peu, les familles ne savent que faire de leurs enfants ; quel sera le bruit qui ébranlera ces masses, je ne sais ; mais elles se précipiteront dans l'état de choses actuel et le bouleverseront. Il est des lois de fluctuation qui régissent les générations, et que l'empire romain avait méconnues quand les barbares arrivèrent. Aujourd'hui, les barbares sont des intelligences. Les lois du trop plein agissent en ce moment lentement, sourdement au

⁸⁷¹ *ibid.*, 841.

⁸⁷² *ibid.*, 842.

⁸⁷³ *ibid.*, 846.

milieu de nous. Le gouvernement est le grand coupable, il méconnaît les deux puissances auxquelles il doit tout, il s'est laissé lier les mains par les absurdités du contrat, il est tout préparé comme une victime.⁸⁷⁴

In his prediction of further revolutions, Marcas also foresees the emigration of France's talented youth, and encourages the students to travel abroad.⁸⁷⁵ Ironically, Marcas is unable to follow his own advice. When the rich deputy returns, imploring Marcas's support, to which the latter agrees, hope is born anew.⁸⁷⁶ The narrator writes: "Marcas portait la France dans son cœur; il était idolâtre de sa patrie [. . .]. Sa rage de tenir dans ses mains le remède au mal dont la vivacité l'attristait, et de ne pouvoir l'appliquer, le rongait incessamment."⁸⁷⁷ Therefore, in believing himself to be in a position to act, Marcas does so out of patriotism. Betrayed again by his protector, he returns to the boarding house, where he dies shortly thereafter.

As with the death of Père Goriot, causing Rastignac to shed the last tear of his youth and to meditate his subsequent plan of attack on society, Marcas's death serves likewise as a call to action. Whereas Rastignac buried what was for him a symbol representative of "la Paternité," Charles and Just bury a symbol of France and its heroic past.⁸⁷⁸ In serving as the principal narrator, Charles calls upon the nation's youth to benefit from his experience, and quit France before it is too late: "J'imite Juste, je déserte

⁸⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 847-848.

⁸⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 848.

⁸⁷⁶ "Le Doute boiteux suivit de près l'Espérance aux blanches ailes" (*ibid.*, 852).

⁸⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 850.

⁸⁷⁸ *PG III*, 287. No longer considered to be integral to France's future, the nation's youth, (represented here by Charles and Just), relinquish their ownership over it. The past provides examples indicating the contrary. As Marcas explains: "Louis XIV, Napoléon, l'Angleterre étaient et sont avides de jeunesse intelligente." (*ZM VIII*, 847). Marcas predicts the fall of any nation that denies its youth both position and opportunity: "[L]a jeunesse surgira comme en 1790. Elle a fait les belles choses de ce temps-là. En ce moment, vous changez de ministres comme un malade change de place dans son lit. Ces oscillations révèlent la décrépitude de votre gouvernement [. . .] vous périrez certes pour ne pas avoir demandé à la jeunesse de la France ses forces et son énergie, ses dévouements et son ardeur ; pour avoir pris en haine les gens capables, pour ne pas les avoir triés avec amour dans cette belle génération, pour avoir choisi en toute chose la médiocrité" (*ibid.*, 850-851).

la France, où l'on dépense à se faire faire place le temps et l'énergie nécessaires aux plus hautes créations. Imitez-moi, mes amis, je vais là où l'on dirige à son gré sa destinée."⁸⁷⁹

We are to understand that his message has been received by those for whom it was intended. At the end of the narrative, an unspecified "nous" confirms that Charles has indeed left France for Malaysia, and that his story (dovetailed with that of Marcos) served as his parting legacy. However, "nous" (France's youth) also confirms: "nous connaissons plus d'un Marcos, plus d'une victime de ce dévouement politique, récompensé par la trahison et par l'oubli."⁸⁸⁰ The assertion that this sequence will recur, that there were, are, and will continue to be others like Marcos, demonstrates "la brutale indifférence du pouvoir."⁸⁸¹ On another level, it expresses the cynicism of France's youth. However, contained within this image of inaction, despair, failure, and death is a smaller image of redemption: those individuals who remember their history, their young representatives, and their generals, will persist in their fight for their emancipation in the republic to come.⁸⁸²

The narrative paradigm of the young hero traced within Balzac's *Comédie humaine* ends in a paradigm shift. In pushing the dialectic for creation to the extreme, Balzac seeks to apply the Napoleonic model to the arts, that is, to find a way to repair the social fabric torn by revolution through a writing of continuity; to accomplish with the pen that which could not be achieved through historical measures. In liquidating the myth of the past, Balzac sets forth a new poetical system: he posits a new androgynous dream of self-realization, culminating in a creation myth generated within the bonds of a

⁸⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 833.

⁸⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 854.

⁸⁸¹ *ibid.*, 832.

⁸⁸² *ibid.*, 848.

pact that can never be fulfilled. Balzac erects his own tower of Babel, only to see it fall to ruins. Therefore, the son's failure to reinstate the procreative masculine authority is likewise mirrored in an aesthetic of failure; that is, in the text's inability to secure meaning on an absolute scale.

Lucien de Rubempré's story marks the height of the *parvenu*'s quest for social assimilation, to be followed by his precipitous downfall, an event which would seem to reiterate "où *n'était pas* l'avenir." However, as suggested within the body of this conclusion, and its summary treatment of Balzac's portrait of post-revolutionary France represented in the figure of youth, the fallen poet remains integral to Balzac's vision of the future. In many respects, the fallen poet is the future. As Nicole Mozet observes: "Tout se passe comme si 1830, remettant l'Histoire en marche, avait permis au Roman de s'écrire, c'est-à-dire, d'écrire les soubresauts du patriarcat moribond qui n'en finit pas de s'éteindre dans les déchirements et les guerres de toutes sortes."⁸⁸³ Haunted by the ghost of the past, Balzac's narrative of youth provides the literary scaffold upon which to mount further narration. As opposed to Mozet who posits Balzac's novel as the origin for the French novel that will succeed him, it is our view that Balzac's myth of society and a youthful generation that are jointly supportive ends in failure: not only does youth fail, but so does France, finally. Therefore, the future of the poet lies somewhere outside of France, and so outside the French novel as Balzac had conceived it.

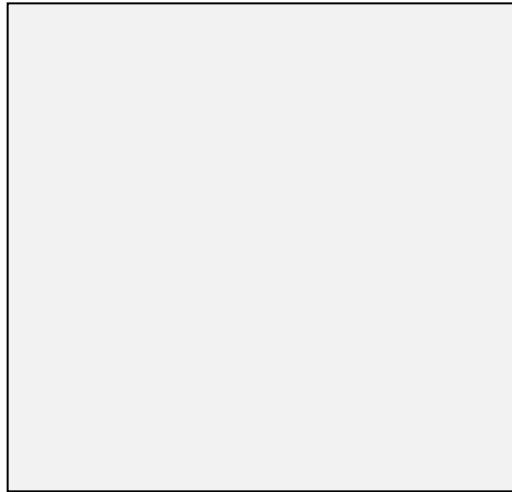
From his portrait of the mediocre young hero, to that of the Parisian *bohème*, to that of Zéphirin Marcas, the story of youth after 1830 is produced by way of, and for the purpose of maintaining a writing of continuity; that is, to create a new way of connecting past, present, and future, where the disjointed or broken narrative of the young hero is

⁸⁸³ Mozet 1, 9.

continually unraveled, reexamined, and rewritten. This, as explains Adam Bresnick, is the “fundamental paradox of a fetishistic writing practice that represents the absolute only in the guise of its impossibility.”⁸⁸⁴ Bresnick’s point superbly illustrates *Z. Marcas*. Designed to operate according to the laws of the heroic paradigm, *Z. Marcas* recounts the rise and fall of the young man of ambition. However, in its retelling, Marcas’s story is unraveled, undone, banalized – there will be others like him. Like his generation, Marcas is both subject to and a victim of history. Therein lies the paradox, however, and by extension the iterative principle proper to the paradigm of youth in Balzac’s *Comédie humaine*. Thought is met by inaction. At the same time, Marcas’s end resurrects the self-generative model, positing reunion in the east, a mythic space synonymous with social opportunity and regeneration. Therefore, Charles and Just, along with those who follow in their footsteps, project a new story of the young hero beyond the confines of Balzac’s pages.

⁸⁸⁴ Bresnick, 850.

IMAGES



1. Baron Antoine-Jean Gros: *Portrait of Bonaparte, First Consul* (detail), 1802.
See online at: <http://www.photo.rmn.fr/>



2. Jacques-Louis David: *Coronation of Napoleon I* (detail), 1806-07.
(Source: Wikimedia)



3. Jacques-Louis David: *Napoléon at Saint-Bernard*, 1800.
(Source: Wikimedia)



4. Paul Delaroche: *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*, 1850.
(Source: Wikimedia)



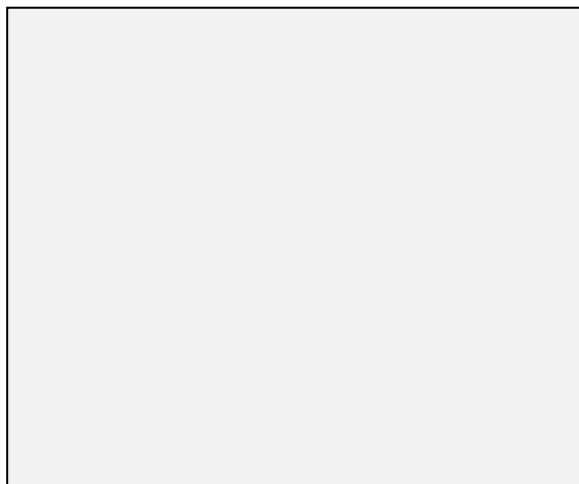
5. Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres: *Portrait of Napoleon I on his Imperial Throne*, 1806.
(Source: Wikimedia)



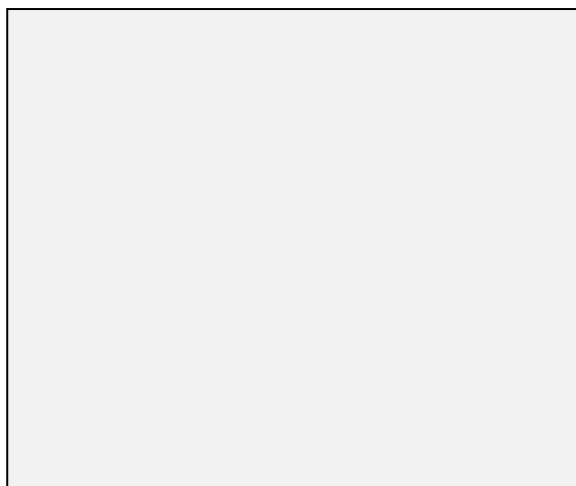
6. Anne-Louis Girodet de Roucy Trioson: *Ossian Receiving Napoleonic Officers*, 1802.
(Source: Wikimedia)



7. Baron Antoine-Jean Gros: *Visiting the Victims of the Plague at Jaffa*, 1804.
(Source: Wikimedia)



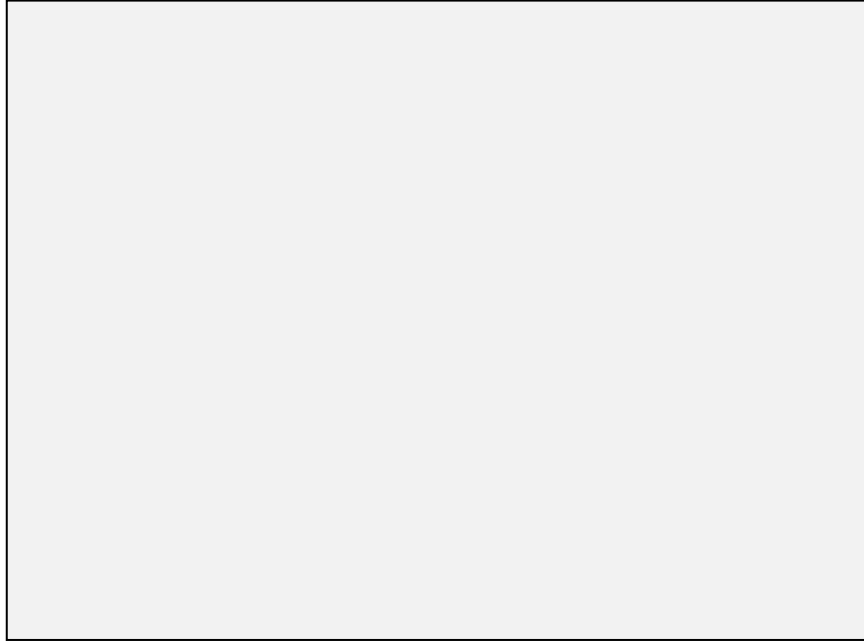
8. Emile Seurre: Statue of *Napoléon* for the Vendôme column, 1833.
See online at: <http://www.photo.rmnm.fr/>



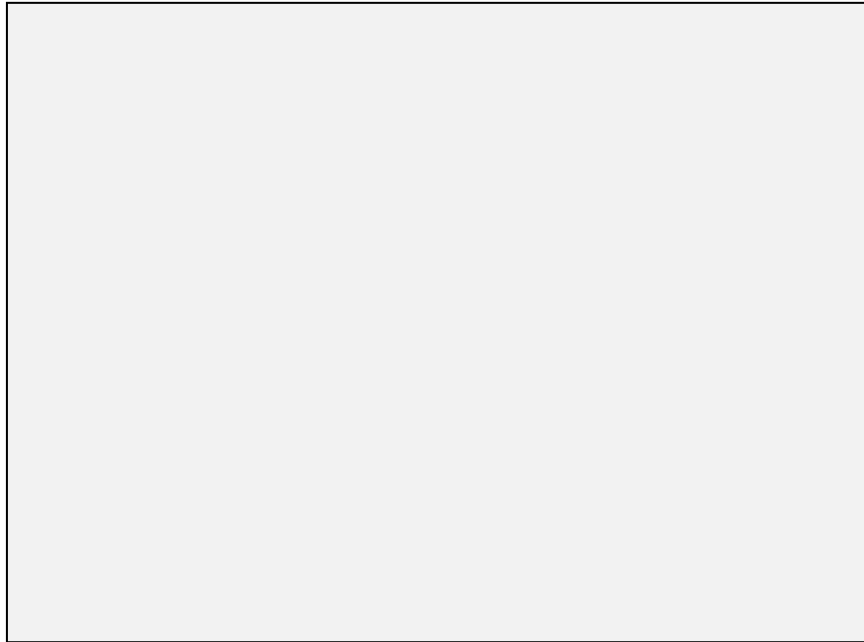
9. Denis-Auguste-Marie Raffet: *The Master's Eye*, 1833.



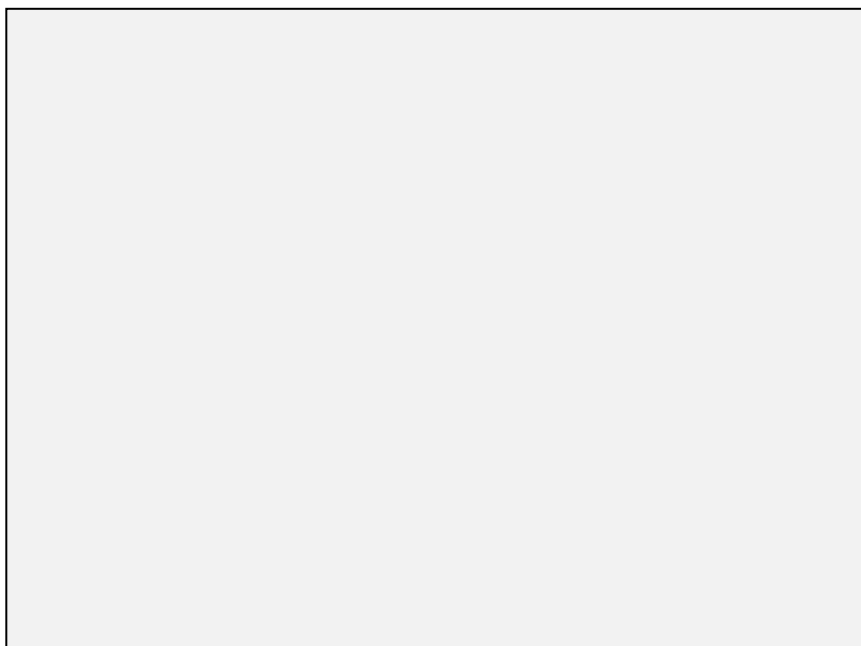
10. François Bouchot: *The Battle of Zurich*, 1837.
(Source: Wikimedia)



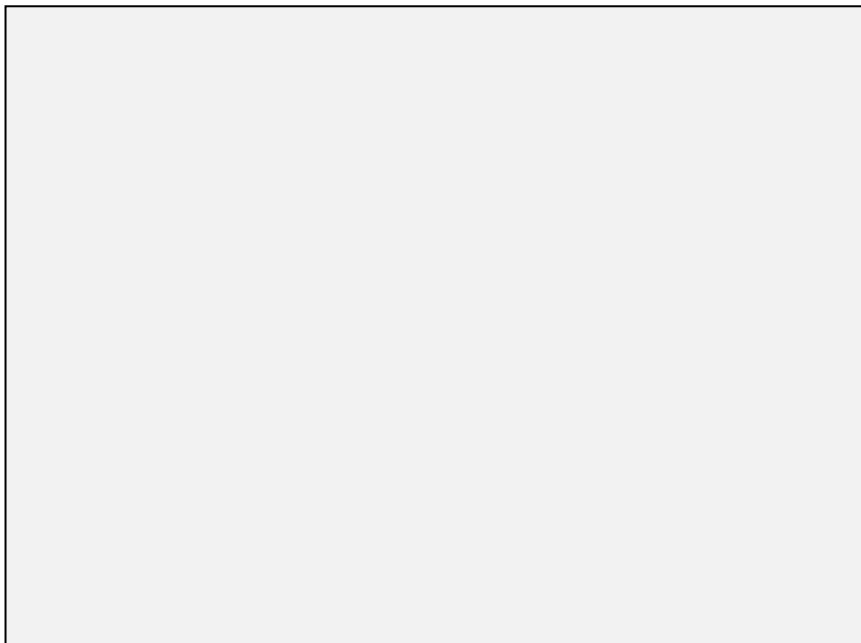
11. Jean Alaux: *The Apotheosis of Napoléon*, 1837.
See online at: <http://www.photo.rmn.fr/>



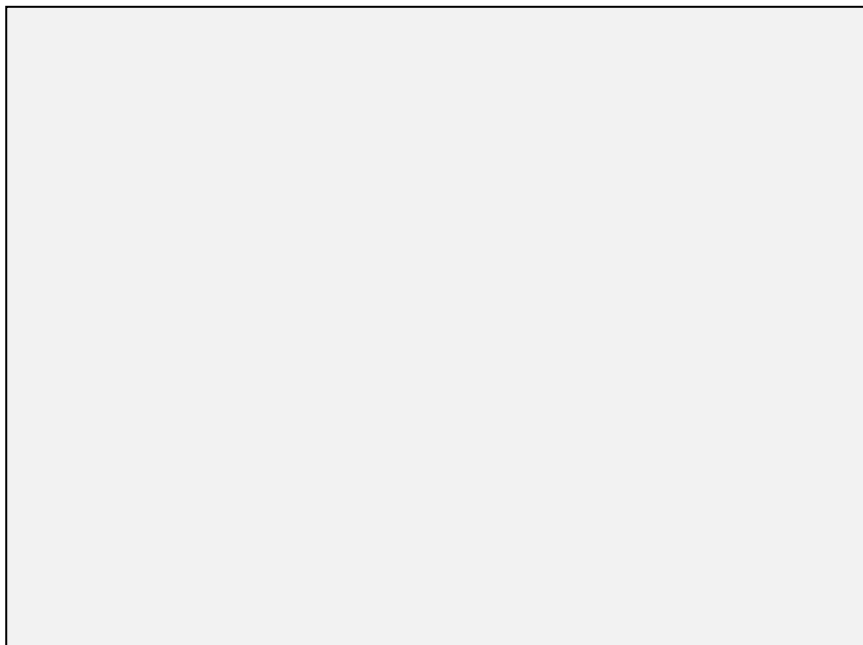
12. Baron Antoine-Jean Gros: *Napoléon Visiting the Battlefield of Eylau*, 1808.
See online at: <http://www.photo.rmn.fr/>



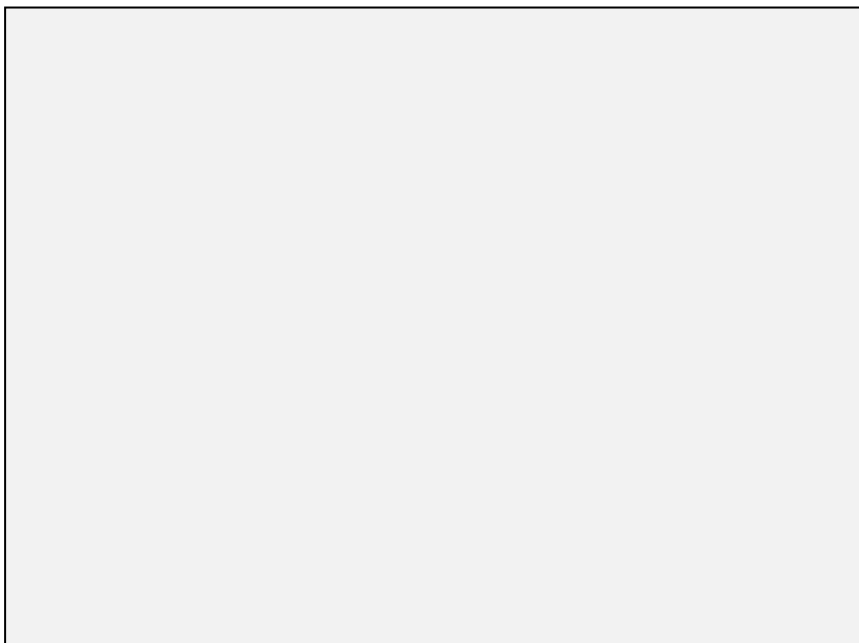
13. Hippolyte Bellangé: *The Postilion's Silhouette-Drawing*, 1830.



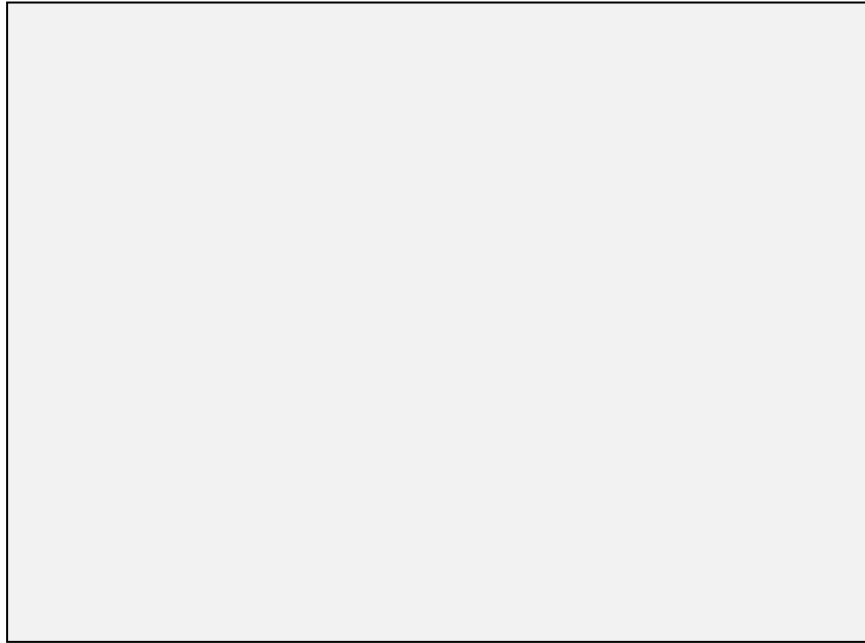
14. Hippolyte Bellangé: *Look Here Father, for Me That's Him, the Heavenly Father*, 1835.



15. Hippolyte Bellangé: *The Peddler of Plaster Figurines*, 1833.



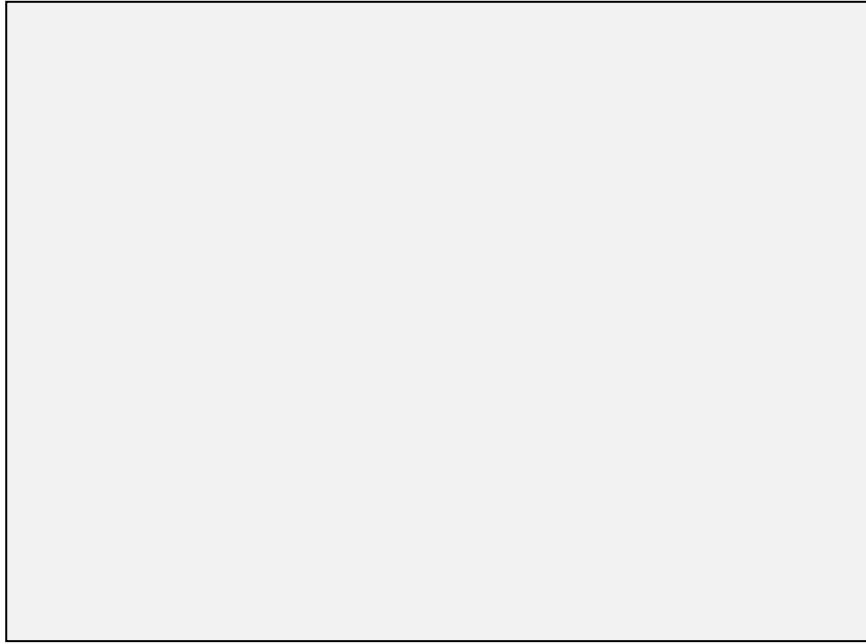
16. Nicolas-Toussaint Charlet: *Napoléon in Bivouac*, 1822.



17. Robert Lefèvre: *Portrait of Napoléon Bonaparte*, 1809.
See online at: <http://www.photo.rmn.fr/>



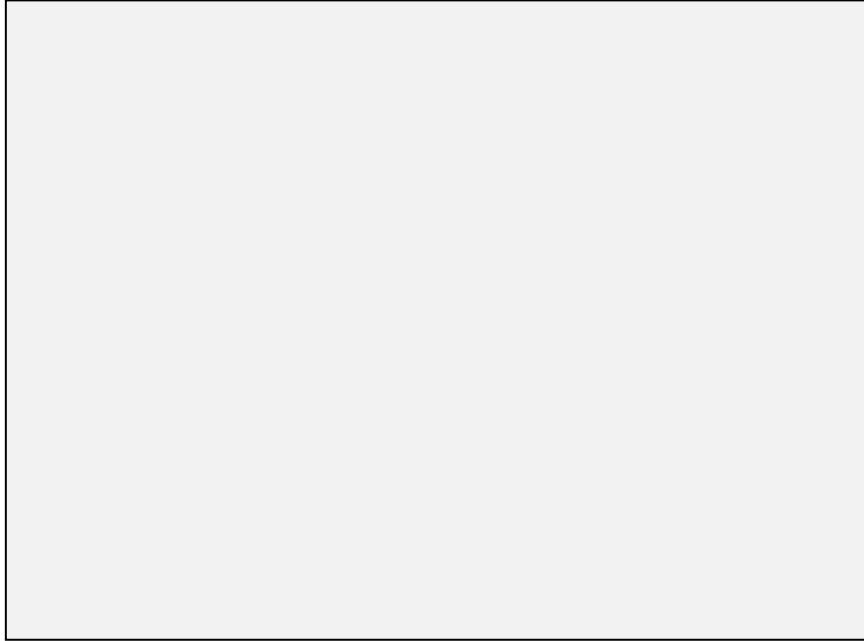
18. Nicolas-Antoine Taunay: *Entry of the Imperial Guard into Paris*, 1810.
See online at: <http://www.photo.rmn.fr/>



19. Méry-Joseph Blondel: *Napoléon Visits the Palais-Royal*, 1834.
See online at: <http://www.photo.rmn.fr/>



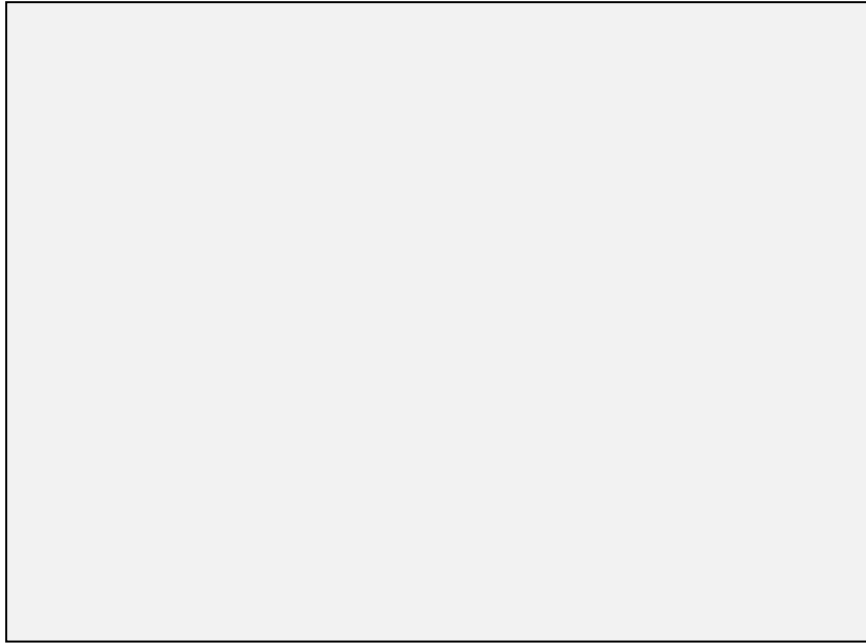
20. Anne-Louis Girodet de Roucy Trioson: *François-René de Chateaubriand*, 1809.
(Source: Wikimedia)



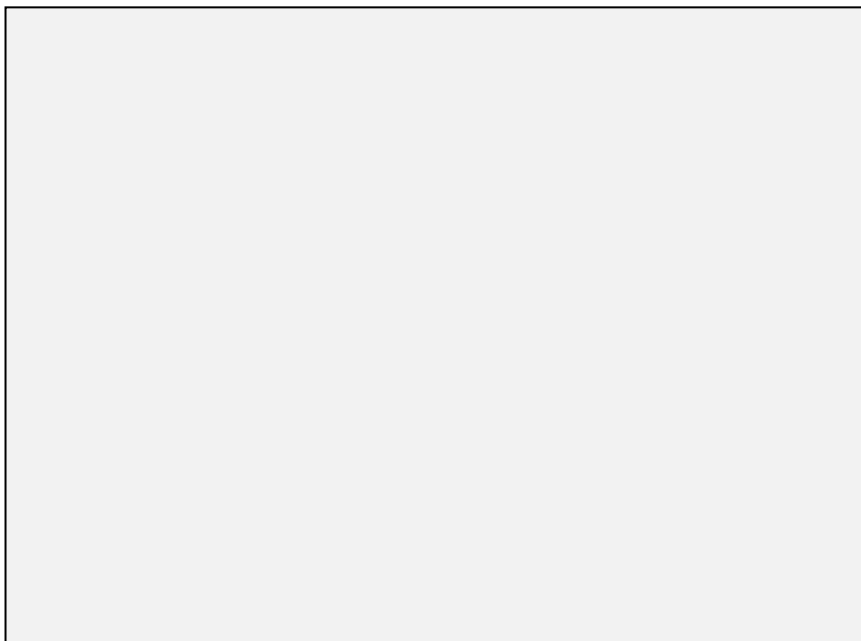
21. Jean-Baptiste Greuze: *The Father's Curse*, 1777.
See online at: <http://www.photo.rmn.fr/>



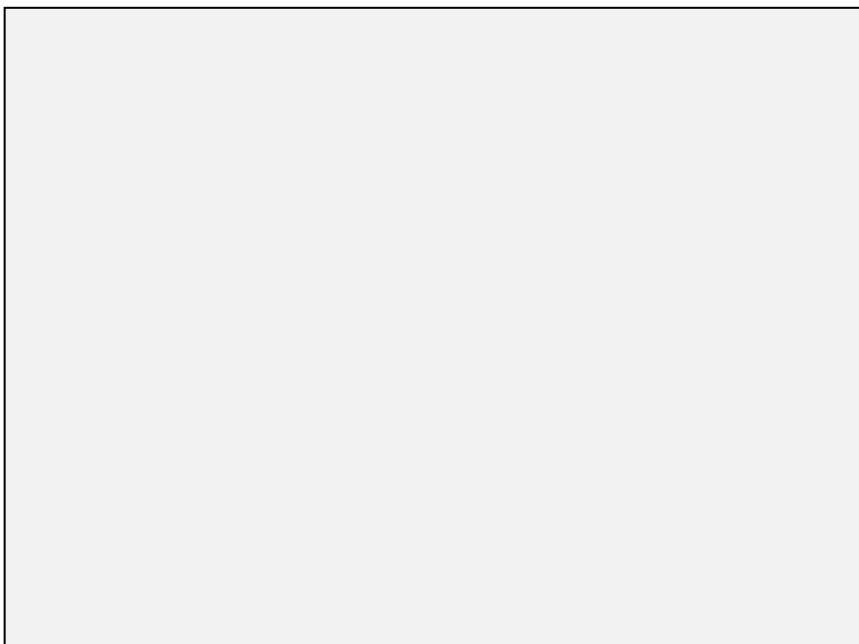
22. Jean-Baptiste Greuze: *The Punished Son*, 1778.
(Source: Wikimedia)



23. Jean-Baptiste Greuze: *Return of a Drunkard*, 1782.
See online at: <http://portlandartmuseum.org/>



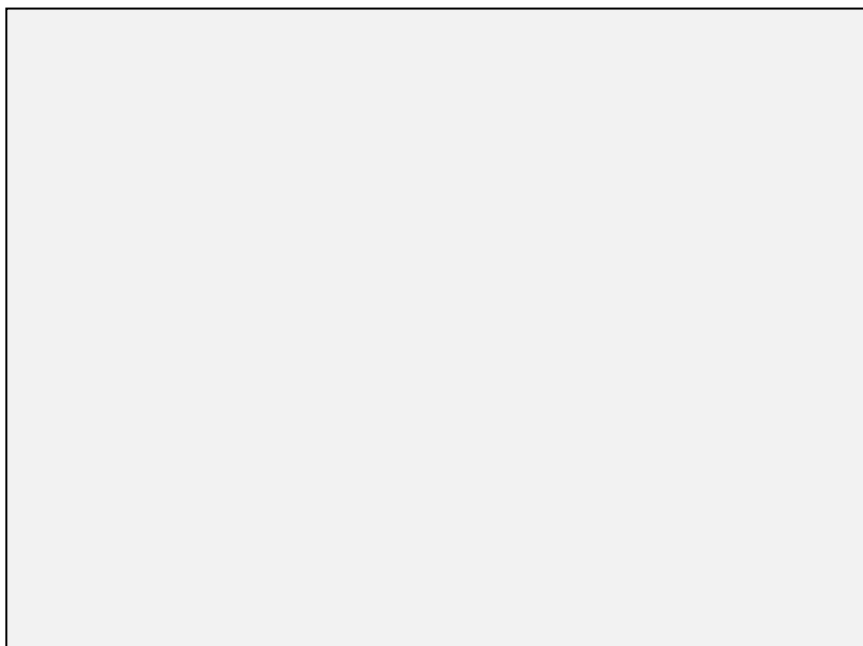
24. Anonymous: Engraving of *the Royal Family as Pigs*, 1791.



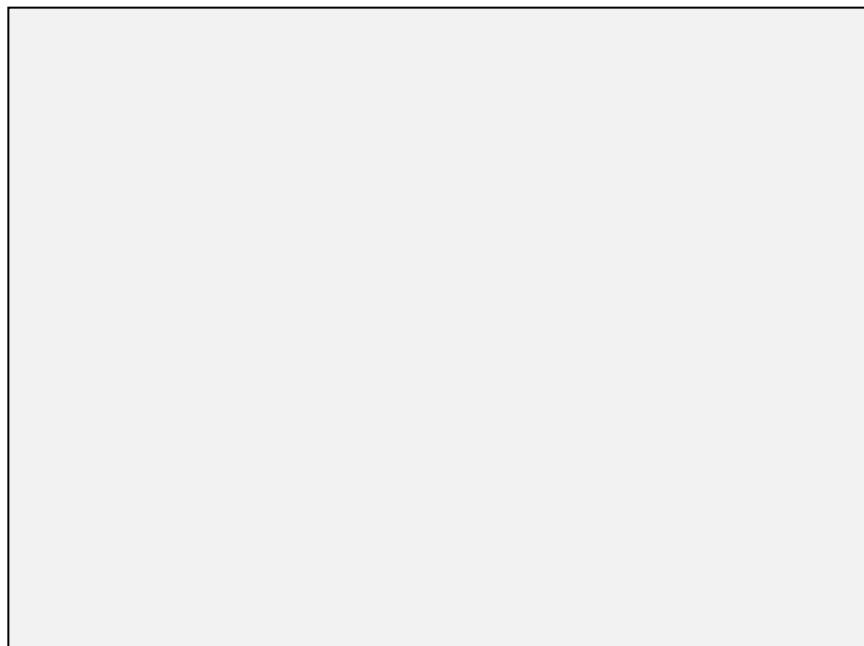
25. Villeneuve: Engraving "Food for Thought for the Crowned Jugglers," 1793.



26. Jacques-Louis David: *The Oath of the Horatii*, 1784.
(Source: Wikimedia)



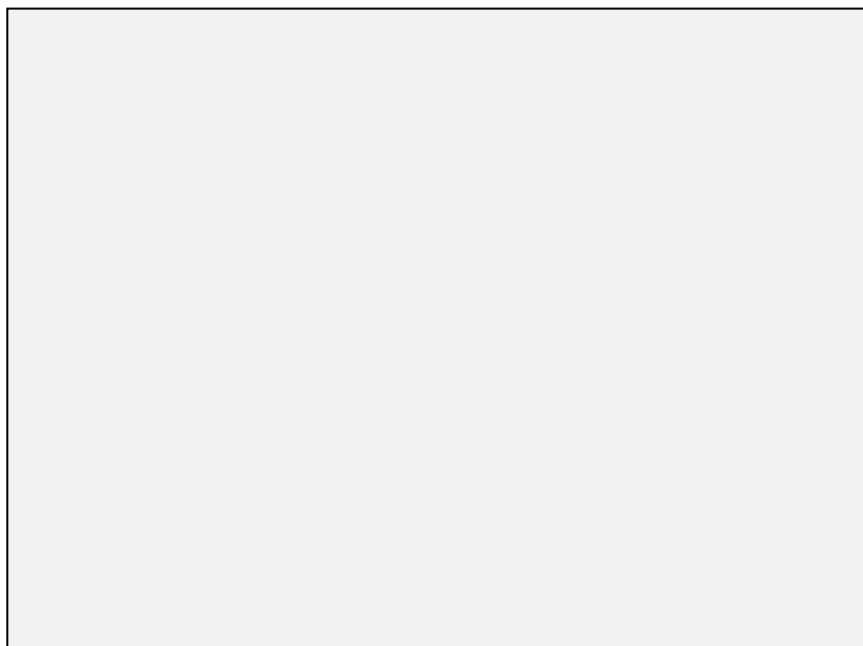
27. Jacques-Louis David: *Lictors Returning to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons*, 1789.
See online at: <http://www.photo.rmn.fr/>



28. Méry-Joseph Blondel: *Aeneas Carrying his Father Anchises*, 1803.



29. Jacques-Louis David: *Leonidas and Thermopylae*, 1814.
(Source: Wikimedia)



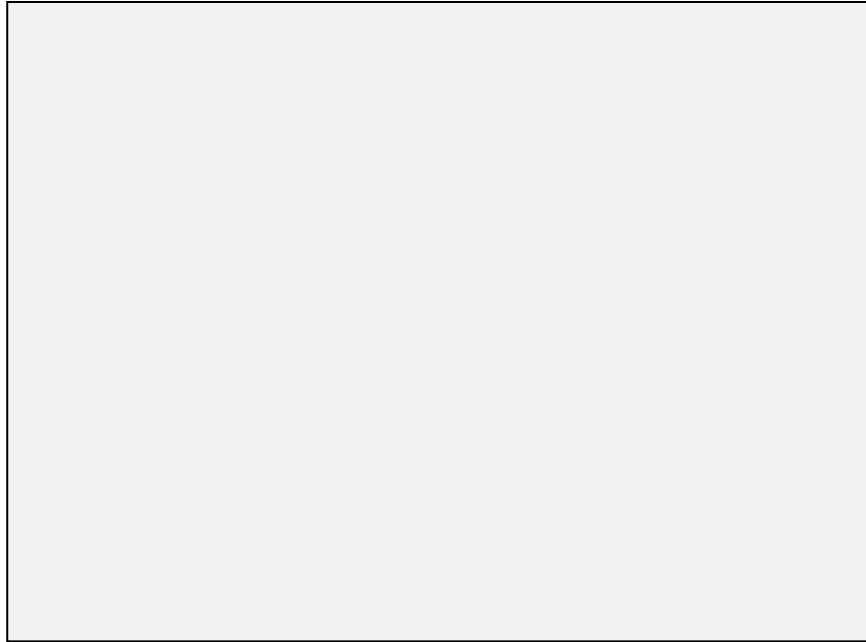
30. Pierre-Paul Prud'hon: *The Union of Love and Friendship*, 1793.
See online at: http://www.artsmia.org/index.php?section_id=340



31. François Delorme: *Sappho and Phaon*, 1833.



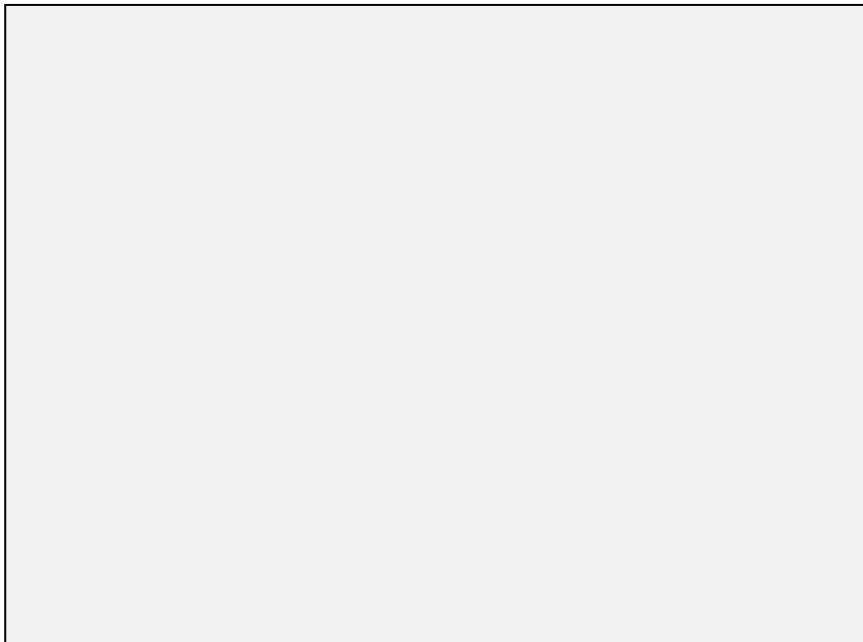
32. Anne-Louis Girodet de Roucy Trioson: *The Sleep of Endymion*, 1793.
(Source: Wikimedia)



33. Pierre-Narcisse Guérin: *Aurora and Cephalus*, 1810.
See online at: <http://www.photo.rmn.fr/>



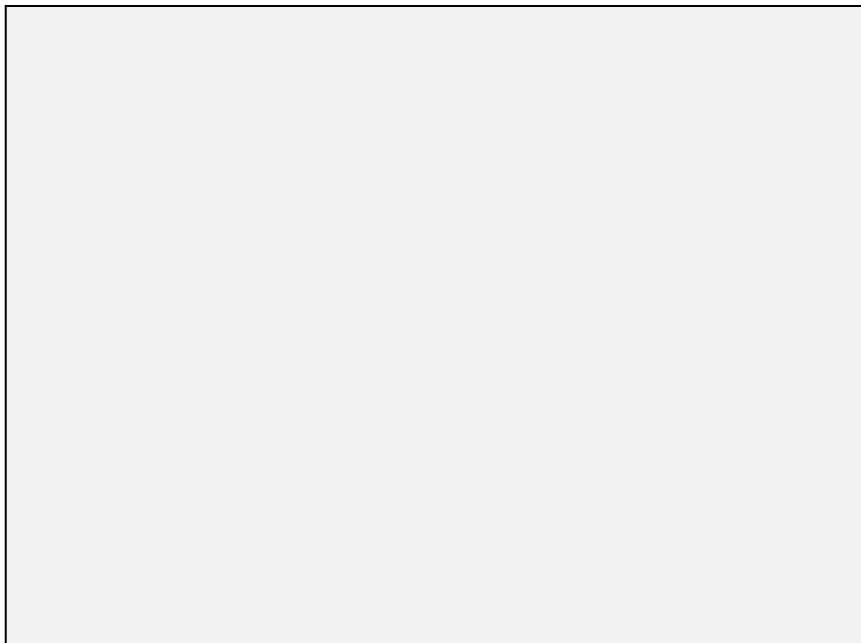
34. Pierre-Narcisse Guérin: *Iris and Morpheus*, 1811.
(Source: Wikimedia)



35. Pierre-Claude-François Delorme: *Cephalus and Aurora*, 1822.
See online at: <http://national.gallery.ca/>



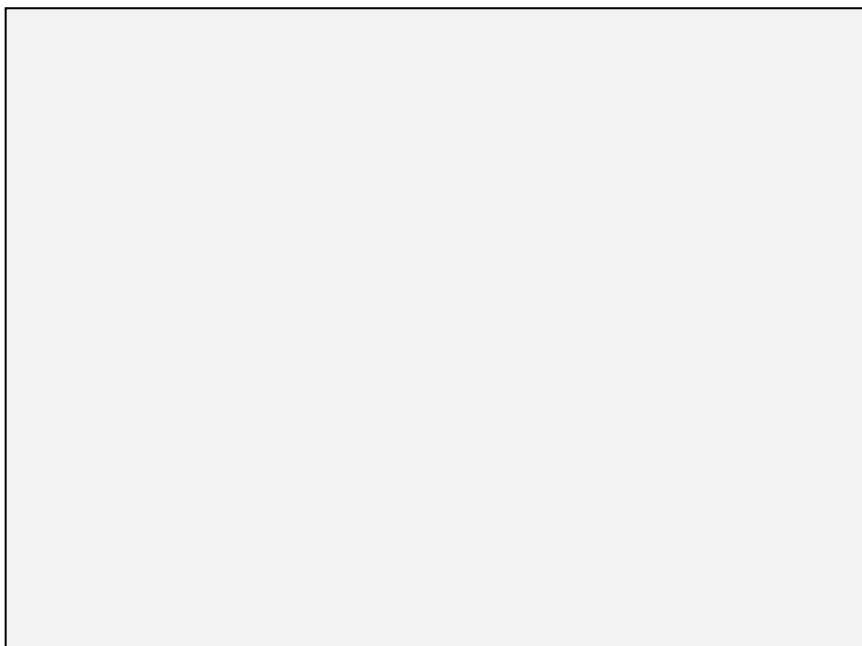
36. Jacques-Louis David: *The Death of Joseph Bara*, 1794.
(Source: Wikimedia)



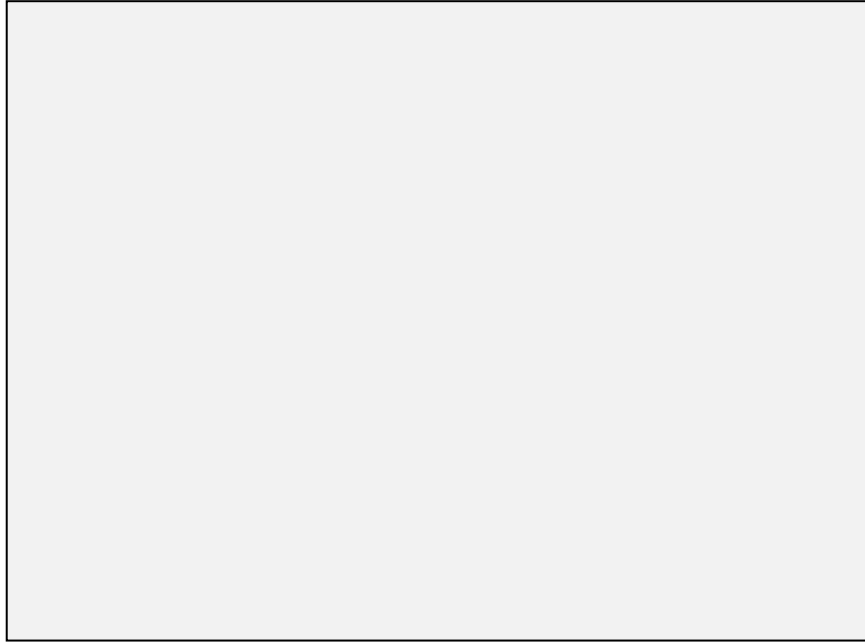
37. Anne-Louis Girodet de Roucy Trioson: *The Burial of Atala*, 1808.
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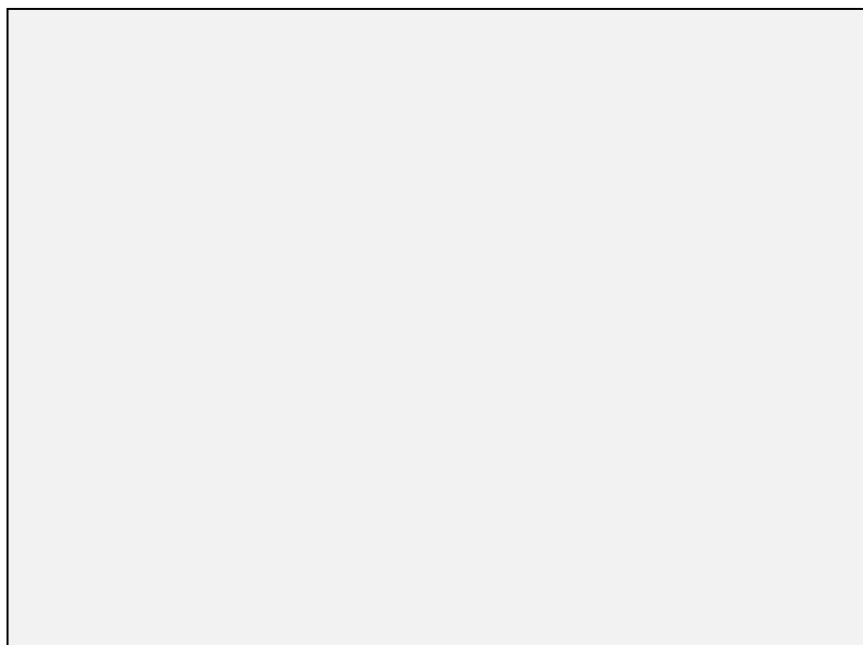
38. Jean Broc: *The Death of Hyacinthus*, 1801.
(Source: Wikimedia)



39. Jean-Pierre Granger: *Apollo and Cyparissus*, 1817.



40. Claude-Marie Dubufe: *Apollo and Cypris*, 1821.
See online at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/63839718@N00/324398118/>



41. Berthel Thorvaldsen: *Anacreon and Amor*, 1823.

See online at <http://www.thorvaldsensmuseum.dk/en/collections/work/A827/zoom>

<http://www.thorvaldsensmuseum.dk/en/collections/work/A827/zoom>



42. Eugène Delacroix: *The Barque of Dante*, 1822.
(Source: Wikimedia)

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