WOMEN IN SOME OF BALZAC'S WELL KNOWN NOVELS

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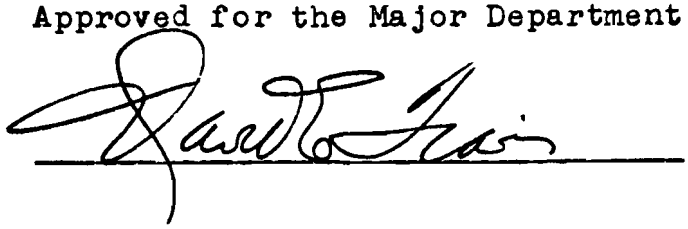

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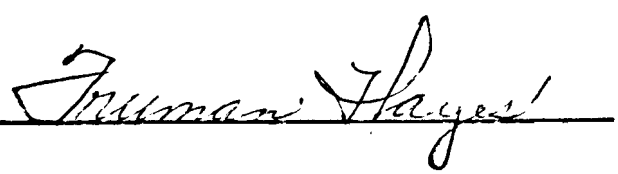

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M. T.

PREFACE

As a great portrait painter of women and one who has given them such a prominent place in the drama of life, Balzac conceived the idea of using his works to portray the whole range of contemporary society, which covers a period of political revolutions from the Consulate to the Empire, the Restoration and the reign of Louis-Philippe, during which time the bourgeoisie became a prominent class in society.

The tremendously wide scope of characters dealt with in the Comédie humaine, which consists of about ninety-five titles, has offered a fertile field for the study of one group of these characters, the women, who are treated neither last nor least in Balzac's novels.

The purpose of this thesis is to make a study of some prominent women who play an important role in some of Balzac's well-known novels, with special reference being given to their relationship to members of their family and other persons around them, their awareness of their often tragic and meaningless existence and their constant struggle for love and understanding.

Among the women studied are found many of aristocratic and noble origin, who through the analytical and descriptive ability of Balzac, are distinguished from

those of bourgeois origin. Balzac's feminine friends belonged to the upper classes of society.

The feminine element played a predominent role in his life, "Il se dégage de presque toutes les pages de son oeurve une odor di femmina."[1] It is evident that he reveals a deep interest in the problems of love and marriage.

The plan of this thesis will consist of a biographical study, including some influences which led to the formation of his women characters, followed by six chapters emphasizing the physical characteristics of the women, their love-life, mysticism, and religion. Since the women of his novels are so closely related to those of his personal acquaintance, it was found necessary to stress the origin of some of his maternal portraits in order to cast light on their hidden influences. The conclusion will sum up the role that the women play in Balzac's novels.

The works of Balzac on which the study is based are the following, arranged in chronological order: La Physiologie du mariage (1829); La Femme de trente ans (1832); Le Médecin de campagne (1833); Eugénie Grandet

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[1]Vicomte de Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, Autour de Honoré de Balzac (Paris: Ancienne Maison Michel Lévy Frères, 1897), p. v.

(1833); La Duchesse de Langeais (1834); Le Père Goriot (1834); Le Lys dans la vallée (1835); Illusions Perdues (1837); La Vieille Fille (1837); Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées (1841); Le Curé de village (1841).

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CHAPTER I

LIFE AND WORKS OF HONORÉ DE BALZAC

Honoré de Balzac was born in 1799 in Tours, a pleasant provincial city of central France. The oldest of four children, he belonged to middle-class and not particularly distinguished parents, but one day, when he was about thirty, he announced to the world that his name was not Honoré Balzac, but Honoré de Balzac. Perhaps he inherited something of his expansive nature from his hot-blooded southern father, who came from Languedoc. Evidences of this may be seen in his impetuous and fiery nature, his changeableness, and his illusions, but he also manifested his vitality and joy in telling stories. His mother, a rich and beautiful Parisian, was thirty-two years younger than her husband and only twenty-one years older than her son.

His childhood was an unhappy one. Often throughout his life he referred to his loneliness as a child and the lack of motherly love, which rankled in his mind as long as he lived. He once wrote to Madame de Berny:[2]

> Quelle vanité pouvais-je blesser, moi nouveau-né? Quelle disgrâce physique ou morale me valait la froideur

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[2]Cited by Gaeton Picon, Balzac par lui-même (Paris: Editions du seuil, 1956), p. 31.

> de ma mère? Etais-je donc l'enfant du devoir, de lui dont la naissance est fortuite ou celui dont la vie est un reproche? Mis en nourrice à la compagne, oublié par ma famille pendant trois ans, quand je revins à la maison paternelle, j'y comptais pour si peu de chose que j'y subissais la compassion des gens. Je ne connais ni les sentiments, ni l'heureux hasard à l'aide desquels j'ai pu me relever de cette première déchéance.

He wrote to his mother when he was fifty:[3]

> Je ne demande certes pas de feindre ses sentiments que tu n'aurais pas, car Dieu et toi savez bien que tu ne m'as pas étouffé de caresses ni de tendresses depuis que je suis au monde.

This deep wound is reflected in so many of his novels.

When he was eight years old, he was sent to a boarding school, le Collège des Oratoriens at Vendôme. He remained there for six years, until April, 1813. During that period he rarely went home and Madame Balzac, who preferred his younger brother Henri, almost never came to see him. These years on the whole were bleak and wretched, and he never became adjusted to the discipline of school life.

The correspondence of mother and son over the years is full of alternate scoldings and affections. It is certain that she was proud of him and it was no doubt from her that he inherited his imagination and constant activity as well as his sensitiveness of feeling.

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[3] Ibid., p. 29.

She was with him during a great part of his life and took care of him in his last illness.

Balzac was very fond of his sister Laure. Throughout his life she remained the most sympathetic of all his confidents. After his death she wrote his memoirs and published a part of his correspondence. His only brother lived an adventurous life in the French colonies of Africa.

The loneliness of his childhood deepened his understanding of all human loneliness, and sorrow drove him into himself and made him independent. The feeling of security given him by madame de Berny, one of his aristocratic friends whom he had come to know in 1822 and whom he admired and loved most, must have helped him to keep the sympathy, the courage, the exuberance that were such essential parts of his genius. Madame de Berny or Dilecta, as Balzac called her, with her love, devotion and guidance, had a tremendous influence on his career as a writer.

Balzac had a brief yet ardent friendship with Madame de Castries during the year of 1832 which ended unhappily for him. This liaison caused him one of the greatest sorrows of his life, and he took revenge on her in his book, La Duchesse de Langeais.

Other women whom he loved and who had an influence upon him were the charming Sophie Gay, also a writer, who is supposed to have inspired the Physiologie de mariage

(1829). La Duchesse d'Abranthès, whom he met in Sophie Gay's salon, influenced him as far as his imperialistic or Napoleonistic sympathies were concerned. Madame Marbanty, with whom he went to Italy, in 1837, was also a writer. One of his well known friends was George Sand with whom he spent many enjoyable visits.[4]

In 1832 he entered into a correspondence with another aristocratic acquaintance, a Polish lady, Madame Eveline Hanska. Geographical distance and lack of adequate transportation separated them for long stretches at a time. After eighteen years of correspondence and waiting, he was free to marry her. In the spring of 1850 he made a final trip to Russia to wed her, as she had become a widow in 1841. He had anticipated this event as the happiest in his life and also as one that would end his financial embarassments. The end of his life, however, was close at hand; his heart became rapidly weaker and he died August 19, 1850, five months after his marriage. The lines he once addressed to madame Hanska so aptly express his life-long conflicts:[5]

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[4]Felicien Marceau, Balzac and his World, translated from the French by Derek Coltman (New York: The Orion Press, 1966), p. 107.

[5]Donald Adamson, The Genesis of le Cousin Pons (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 7. Cited from Lettres à l'Etrangère.

> Il est dit que ma vie sera un long assassinat! . . . je ne puis pas exprimer ce que je souffre: c'est un désarroi général.

It is not difficult to understand why Balzac would reflect pessimism in his novels when his own life with all its disappointments, its series of debts that harassed him throughout life, its failure in business enterprises, its frustrating love affairs and overwork made him one of the most tormented men, but, at the same time, one of the most fruitful novelists.

Balzac was a man of tremendous energy, and was enormously self-confident and capable. He lived through and described an exceptionally crowded and interesting period. The air was full of social and political, religious and aesthetical ideas and systems, merging into each other or struggling against each other.[6] There is hardly one of these that is not reflected in La Comédie humaine. Balzac was old enough to remember the excitement of the last days of the First Empire, the spell cast by Napoleon whose shadow stretches across La Comédie humaine and, like many of his contemporaries, he saw the Restoration and the advent of Louis Philippe. Madame de Berny even had childhood memories of the ancien régime. Her father

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[6]Samuel Rogers, Balzac and the Novel (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1953), p. ix.

had been a musician at the court of Louis XVI. Historians, in order to study and understand the first half of the nineteenth century, often resort to Balzac's works, from which they can sometimes learn more than from many professional historians and economists. Samuel Rogers also states that "one can start from La Comédie humaine as a center and proceed indefinitely in any direction."[7]

Balzac submitted himself to an inflexible discipline in order to represent with a minute precision the manners and the characteristics of his time. He took into consideration that the public, whom he tried to please, was multi-layered and that a conflict existed between the taste of an intellectual and that of a bourgeois. He was by no means content with his age. He felt that he was living in a bourgeois century and that gold and pleasure dominated the classes. It was a money-orientated society. The age marked a decline of individuals and the nation from former greatness. Balzac had the conviction that only the monarchy and the Church could successfully govern a nation. Balzac was often contemptuous of the clambering, awkward rise of petty bourgeois characters, perhaps partly because he secretly had to admit he was like them himself, with his own hunger to associate with the aristocracy and his

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[7]Ibid., p. 11.

persistent courtship with the noblewoman madame Hanska. The decadence of both individuals and society is one of the great pervading themes of the Comédie humaine, which portrays the spirit of a new age of shame, hypocrisy, and moral and physical decay.[8]

To bring this out, Balzac used portraits drawn after nature to represent social groups. His unique discovery was that the novel of sentiment and passion could support and must be supported by a background of actuality.

Balzac was always to remain under the spell of the romantic, the fantastic and the psychic so much so that he saw common-place existence transformed and transmitted by them.[9] The habit of dramatizing everyday life was often to involve him in misrepresentations of reality, but this was to add to the fascination he exercises on his readers. He said: "Je fais partie de l'opposition qui s'appelle la vie."[10]

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[8]Raymond Giraud, The Unheroic Hero in the Novels of Stendhal, Balzac and Flaubert (New Brunswick: Rutger's University Press, 1957), p. 125.

[9]H. J. Hunt, Balzac's Comédie humaine (London: University of London, The Athlone Press, 1959), p. 10.

[10]Cited by Picon, op. cit., p. 114.

Balzac was strong enough to speak the truth about morals and to attack the rich and the powerful. He has been reproached for allowing himself to be monopolized by the painting of moral ugliness, as he seemed mainly concerned with the domestic dramas caused by ill-assorted marriages or by infidelity. But opposite the sinister creatures, we can line up so many ideal figures transfigured by filial love, by conjugal devotion, and by charity. Balzac wanted to paint all the passions in all their varieties. He dwelt on the miseries brought about by avarice, the possession of material property, sensual love and the conflicts between the temptations of the flesh and the desire for religion. He found that hypocrisy was a dominant trait of his age. Even the art of making love, he once declared, was determined by hypocrisy.[11]

Throughout all his works he portrays contemporary society in the setting in which it moves. His novels consist of more than two thousand characters and with this regiment he takes us into the most diverse environments, into the homes and lives of people, particularly women. He brings us into the heart of his domain as an observer of manners and sentiments. He had the imagination of a creative artist and was an expert of minute details

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[11]Giraud, op. cit., p. 124.

who could take individual human cases and so penetrate to their uttermost depth that it is as if no secrets were hidden. He has presented some most exacting observations about private and family life. He possessed the highly developed faculty of identifying himself with his characters. This is so strikingly portrayed in the women of his novels. Through personal observation, reading, and conversation with friends, Balzac enriched his stock of incidents and extended his knowledge of women and married life. Later in his life he tended to take a more serious view of marriage and its problems. Hunt relates that "he studied women less and less in a vacuum and more and more in relation to a social milieu."[12] He studied the more spiritual aspects of love and tried to get a more direct insight into feminine psychology. This whetted his curiosity about women, especially those in the higher ranks of society. Balzac inquired into the sentimental life of mature women, society women who sought love outside of marriage and found it bitter sweet.

Balzac's great themes were:[13]

> L'amour grandi par l'obstacle; l'antonymie de l'amour et du mariage; la confession; le renoncement;

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[12]Hunt, op. cit., p. 22.

[13]Jacques Borel, Personnages et destins balzaciens (Paris: Librairie Jose Karti, 1958), p. 252.

> la pensée qui tue l'amour impossible des héros balzaciens.

In the Comédie humaine evil takes on a positive beauty of its own and becomes an esthetic quality.[14]

Balzac manages to inject into his novels the sinister and foreboding atmosphere of the roman noir. The denouement of his plots seem to affirm the inevitability of the defeat of innocence and virtue when they encounter evil. Balzac wrote with the moral and esthetic conviction that "if goodness is better than evil, evil is more exciting than goodness."[15] Balzac wrote his novels with a realistic tendency and being the father of realism he has shown that the real has aesthetic and moral value.

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[14]Giraud, op. cit., p. 12.

[15]Ibid., p. 130.

CHAPTER II

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF BALZAC'S WOMEN

Balzac's novels usually open with a long descriptive introduction where one sees emerging from its pages an epoch, a milieu, a family, a corner of history, a corner of a street, a city, a desert, a rich country estate, or an aristocratic salon. Balzac says of himself: "J'ai été pourvu d'une grande puissance d' observation parce que j'ai été à travers toutes sortes de professions involontairement."[16]

The descriptions eventually evolve around an original creation, a dramatic situation, or an outstanding character. The pictures of rooms and houses help define the individuals who live in them. But "Balzac's characters emerge from the shadows of their surrounding world to exist solidly and intensely in their own light."[17]

The descriptions have their methodically chosen place in the great structure of his works. Most of them, if not all, have their moral significance. "The descriptions give out their secrets, their torment, their despair, their defeat. The character is described after a unique

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[16]Picon, op. cit., p. 27.

[17]Rogers, op. cit., p. 95.

model of which he is the exact reproduction and to whom he owes his morals and his way of thinking."[18]

Balzac knows how to present in his physical characteristics the maximum of expression with the minimum of detail. His aim is to explain the causes and from them deduct the effects. He describes how the exterior of a person reveals his interior being, as stated by Altszyler:[19]

> Il représentait les états d'âme par la peinture d'un vêtement, d'un détail, d'un geste, d'un trait. L'art descriptif prend souvent un caractère réaliste et parfois scientifique où chaque détail ajoute un trait expressif au personnage.

A garment is not only presented as being beautiful or unbecoming but the very way it is being worn reveals the state of mind of the character. A good example of this is found in madame Vauquer in Le Père Goriot. When she enters, Balzac says:[20]

> Elle est en harmonie avec cette salle où suinte le malheur. . . . Son jupon de laine tricotée, qui dépasse sa première jupe faite avec une vieille robe et dont la ouate s'échappe par les fentes de l'étoffe lézardée, résume le salon, la salle à manger, le

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[18]Borel, op. cit., pp. 163-64.

[19]Hélène Altszyler, La Genèse et le Plan des caractères dans l'oeuvre de Balzac (Paris: Librairie Felix Alcan, 1928), p. 46.

[20]Honoré de Balzac, Le Père Goriot (Paris: Librairie Ollendorf, ca. 1900), p. 9.

> jardinet, annonce la cuisine et fait pressentir les pensionaires (Père Goriot, p. 9).

After keynoting her as part of the house, its personification in fact, Balzac continues to add harmonious details. Madame Vauquer is as fat as a church rat and has faux cheveux mal mis and a nose like the beak of a parrot (Le Père Goriot, p. 8). Bardèche says:[21]

> Madame Vauquer s'adapte tellement à l'odeur, à la saleté, à la misère de sa pension que la description n'en est complète que lorsqu'elle a apparu dans cette salle à manger à l'atmosphère chaudement fétide car toute son personnage explique la pension comme la pension implique son personnage.

The portrait is tied to the description in Balzac's novels. Each house seems to have its particular inhabitants. Often the characters seem to be such a part of the home that they appear to be part of the household furniture. The descriptions follow a psycho-realistic form. There is the similitude of the image and the action, the coordination of their exterior and interior state, the physiognomy and the soul, of the expression and the intelligence, of the individual and society.

Altszyler aptly explains, "Chez Balzac la base du roman est la société où l'individu n'apparaît que

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[21]Maurice Bardèche, Balzac, Romancier (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1967), p. 554.

comme une sorts de conséquence de cette société."[22] The individual and society form thus an harmonious whole.

In Eugénie Grandet the story opens with a topographical description. The words mélancholie, sombre, triste, ruiné, froid, obscure, profondes, noires, and impénétrables, occur with cumulative vividness. The exposition starts with a generalization about things which produce an effect of melancholy. The complete harmony and solidity of the scene are obvious. The affairs of the Grandet family, which prove to be likewise mélancoliques and tristes, fit perfectly into the scene.

Balzac implies at times that the lower classes had a kind of raw, fresh energy and crude vigor that no other class possessed.[23] Eugénie Grandet belonged to this class. She was a robustly built child that typifies her as one of the petty bourgeois whose beauties sometimes seem vulgar. She has the strong build often found among children of that class. Her head is very large, the lines of her forehead are delicate and yet virile. The purity of her life seems concentrated in the dazzling clearness of the gray eyes. The features of her round face, originally fresh and rosy, have been coarsened by an

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[22]Altszyler, op. cit., p. 40.

[23]Rogers, op. cit., p. 119.

attack of smallpox. Her nose is a little too large, but it suits the kindly and affectionate expression of the very red mouth. These sentences give us the feeling of Eugénie herself. Her mother, madame Grandet, is another striking example of where the exterior appearance so well describes the inner life.[24]

> Elle était une femme sèche et maigre, jaune comme un coing, gauche, lente, une des femmes qui semblent faites pour être tyranisées.

The key word of this description is tyranisées and Balzac continues to bring out her position in the family, her disposition, her dress, her absolute submissiveness and the narrow restriction of her life. He paints her upon a most desolate background. Her house was bare and had the dejected gloominess of a monastery. All its furnishings spelled melancholy, monotony and that, together with its crushing silence, suggested the idea of the tyranny of the miser. It is from this lamentable setting that Eugénie is detached, or projected, beautiful, rich, but unhappy and quiet, a quietness of humiliated characters who carry the condemnation of their destiny.

In some of the bourgeois described, their virtues are almost vices and their shortcomings inspire no sympathy.

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[24]Honoré de Balzac, Eugénie Grandet (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1906), p. 26.

One finds this same type in La Vieille Fille. In describing her, Balzac says:[25]

> Les pieds de l'héritière étaient larges et plats; sa jambe, qu'elle faisait souvent voir . . . ne sans y entendre malice . . . ne pouvait être prise pour la jambe d'une femme. C'était une jambe nerveuse, à petit millet saillant et dru, comme celui d'un matelot. Une bonne grosse taille, un embonpoint de nourisse, des bras forts et poteles, des mains rouges.

Balzac finds the hands and feet particularly reliable symbols of a social class. In La Comédie humaine a person's physiognomy announces his character and his features attest or accuse his origin. His physiognomy introduces his soul. La vieille fille, who was called Rose Cormon, has:

> . . . des yeux d'une couleur indécise et à fleur de tête donnaient au visage, dont les contours arrondis n'avaient aucune noblesse, un air d'étonnement et de simplicité moutonnière. . . . si Rose n'avait pas été innocente, elle eût semble l'être. Son nez aquilin contrastait la petitesse de son front, car il est rare que cette forme de nez n'implique pas un beau front. Malgré de grosses lèvres rouges l'indice d'une grande bonté, ce front annonçait trop peu d'idées pour que le coeur fut dirigé par l'intélligence: elle devait être bienfaisante sans grâce (La Vieille Fille, p. 9).

The idea of this last sentence is yet further developed as Balzac goes on to describe her hair, her heavy outmoded clothing, the monotony of her existence and he concludes the seven-page description with: "quelle

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[25]Honoré de Balzac, La Vieille Fille (Paris: Librairie Ollendorf, ca. 1900), p. 68.

paix, quel calme! . . . là, tout semble éternel . . . Là, tout respirait la vieille, l'inaltérable province . . . . un étranger aurait pu deviner la vieille fille" (La Vieille Fille, p. 158 and p. 55).

In describing La Fousseuse in Le Médecin de campagne, Balzac again draws attention to her origin through her hands and feet: "La Fosseuse avait en effet, comme les gens du Nord, le nez relevé du bout et très rentrés; sa bouche était grande, son menton petit, ses mains et ses bras étaient rouges, ses pieds larges et forts comme ceux des paysannes."[26] Balzac consistently relates physiognomy with character, temperament, and intellect. Véronique (Madame Graslin) in Le Curé de village, who sacrificed her whole will power at the marriage altar, submits herself unreservedly to the dominence of her husband. Her facial expression keeps changing throughout the whole story from ugliness to beauty and radiance, harmonizing always with her inner struggles and joys. The facial expressions and especially the eyes of Véronique are the very barometer throughout the whole story of the joys, if any, and the pathos in her life. They change from a suave beauty to homeliness, resignation, melancholy and for a time again to beauty.

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[26]Honoré de Balzac, Medécin de campagne (Paris: Librairie Paul Ollendorff, ca. 1900), p. 157.

Balzac seems well aware of another popular notion, namely the idea that aristocratic bodies are shaped more delicately and pleasingly than those of peasants or bourgeois. In his novels he has made it evident that a bourgeois must not only act or speak his part, but he must look it as well. He is equally consistent in the description of his aristocratic characters who, both male and female, are always endowed with noble features. Madame de Mortsauf, for example, has fine hair, small ears, a Greek nose and the feet of a woman of good breeding: "les pieds d'une femme comme il faut."[27] Of "la vieille fille," who was of the haute bourgeoisie, Balzac wrote: ". . . elle a presque l'air d'une femme comme il faut" (La Vieille Fille, p. 185). The Duchess of Langeais has all the elements of Balzac's ideal image of the aristocratic woman. The predominant feature of her physiognomy is an elegant nobility. Her face is a bit too long and possesses a grace, something fine and slender, that recalls the faces of the Middle Ages. Her complexion is pale and slightly rosy. She is what she wants to be or what she wants to appear to be.[28] Giraud says: "Everything

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[27]Honoré de Balzac, Le Lys dans la vallée (Paris: Librairie Paul Ollendorff, ca. 1900), p. 42.

[28]Honoré de Balzac, La Duchesse de Langeais (Paris: Librairie Paul Ollendorff, ca. 1900), pp. 242-43.

about her erred, so to speak, because of an excessive delicacy. Balzac seemed to envy these qualities, but does not necessarily attribute a moral value to them."[29] In contrast with the red hands of the bourgeoisie, those of the Duchesse of Langeais are described as:

> sa main parut aux yeux de Montriveaux blanche comme une main de marbre . . . l'éclat d'une peau satinée. . . . La duchesse était éblouissante . . . et le brave soldat (Montriveau) ne peut alors s'empêcher de la comparer aux jolies insectes genre bleus qui voltigent au-dessus des eaux (La Duchesse de Langeais, pp. 248, 254).

Madame d'Aiglemont, who appears in La Femme de trente ans, has small feet and small hands, nicely gloved, which resemble the oars of a boat that divides the waves. Balzac further describes her:[30]

> . . , elle avait de très longs cheveux . . . elle etait pâle et parfaitement blanche. Sa peau d'une finesse prodigieuse, symptôme rarement trompeur, annoncait une vraie sensibilité. . . . Son cou était un peu long peut-être; mais ces sortes de cous sont les plus gracieux (La Femme de trente ans, p. 108).

The muscles in Madame Mortsauf's neck did not have the appearance of a cord, and her ears were small and well-shaped and gave the impression of the ears of a slave and of a mother (Le Lys dans la vallée, p. 42), an

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[29]Giraud, op. cit., p. 118.

[30]Honoré de Balzac, La Femme de trente ans (Paris: Librairie Paul Ollendorff, ca. 1900), p. 108.

expression which so aptly describes her position in the home and in the family.

A sure sign that Balzac let his class feelings filter into his art is his identification of physical characteristics with the social origin of characters. Pierre Abraham[31] brings out the passionateness of the characters of La Comédie humaine and how rigorously proportionate it is to the pigmentation of their hair and eyes. The blonde, blue-eyed women are the more decisive ones, those who love for the sake of love rather than men. Madame de Langeais had those long blue eyes (La Duchesse de Langeais, p. 258). The dark brown-eyed women are capable of passionate devotion to a man.[32]

> La brune aux yeux noirs est organiquement monogame. Elle ne devient passionée que dans la proportion même où son organisme monogame l'exige pour se rassasier pleinement. La blonde n'est pas polygame. Elle est simplement indifférente . . . L'homme ne compte guère plus à ses yeux qu'une patère à laquelle on peut accrocher provisoirement la robe dorée du rêve et du roman.

Balzac painted a hundred and sixty portraits of women,[33] and among these there are more with brown and black eyes than there are with blue eyes. The dark eyes correspond to passion, and people with them are more feeble before

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[31]Pierre Abraham, Créatures chez Balzac (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1931), ch. v and vi.

[32]Ibid., p. 206. [33]Ibid., p. 124.

temptation; incline toward sensual love; and desire luxury and riches. The blue-eyed blondes are cooler-nerved, leaning towards idealism and action. Men with blue eyes deceive their wives. But blue eyes are also a symbol of innocence and the sky. Gray eyes indicate pure idealism, contemplativeness, and intelligence, of which we have an example in the clear gray eyes of Eugénie Grandet; but they also mean maliciousness and betray a trecherous character such as the eyes of Graslin: "Deux yeux gris, tigrés de fils verdâtres partant de la prunelle et semés de points bruns; deux yeux avides, pleins de résolution, de rectitude, de calcul."[34] Monsieur Graslin is Véronique's husband in Le Curé de village, who is a hard-working miser, but capable of dying of grief before the indifference of his wife.

Other malicious characters such as Tacheron in Le Curé de village and Vautrin, who appears in several novels, had yellow or orange eyes.[35] The color of the hair follows a similar classification. The blue-eyed blondes and the dark-eyed brunettes are the two poles of Balzac's femininity. Mademoiselle Victorine Taillefer

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[34]Honoré de Balzac, Le Curé de village (Paris: Librairie Paul Ollendorff, ca. 1900), p. 33.

[35]Abraham, op. cit., p. 153.

in Le Père Goriot was a person more reasonable than passionate. Her hair was of a blond fauve. Her dark gray eyes were full of softness and of a Christian resignation. Delphine, the daughter of Goriot, is a blonde who loved for the sake of adventure. Goriot says of her: "Toutes les blondes sont comme ca. La moindre frime les met aux genoux d'un homme" (Le Père Goriot, p. 213).

The brunettes, who are the more passionate ones are best seen from a man's point of view. They are above all a man's woman. They submit themselves to the will of a man to the point of being crushed and to the point of death. Such was Hélène d'Aiglemont who falls down on her knees before her charming pirate in La Femme de trente ans. In Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées, Renée de Meaucombe is a brunette and has les beaux yeux noirs (p. 1). She is more intellectual than sentimental and more reasonable than passionate. She accepted a marriage of convenience and made a success of it. Louise is blonde and is far more passionate and ardent. She married for love two husbands in succession and subordinates everything else to her passions.

In La Physiologie du mariage Balzac gives an analysis of a brunette:[36]

> Cette femme aux cheveux noirs à l'oeil persant, au teint vigoureux, aux lèvres sèches, . . . sera bouillante et convulsive, elle représentera le génie des nevroses classiques, tandis qu'une jeune blonde, à la peau blanche sera celui des névroses romantiques.

In description, characterization, and plot, the writer accumulates his points along a given line; and everywhere he harmonizes his data to accord with a definite keynote, the coordination of the state of mind with the physical features and environment of the individual. It is the total weight of Balzac's descriptions which provides the raison d'être.

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[36]Honoré de Balzac, La Physiologie du mariage (Paris: Librairie Paul Ollendorff, ca. 1900), p. 397.

CHAPTER III

FAMILY LIFE OF BALZAC'S WOMEN

I. CHILDHOOD

Balzac's childhood experiences were like a wound that never ceased to bleed, a wound that was re-opened in so many of his novels. It caused him endless frustration and a deep relentless craving for compensation. He continually had a burning desire to be understood, to love and to be loved. By studying Balzac from this point of view, a dawn of understanding begins to break upon all his works and gradually they emerge transparent before one's mind. These feelings ripple through his being throughout his life, and they automatically reflect themselves in his novels. Because of these experiences, he was able to draw attention to the irreparable damage done to the life of a child who grows up without love and affection. Balzac found in the affection and love of his sister Laure and of Madame de Berny a compensation for his frustrated filial love.

It is easy to see from Balzac's life and from his novels how such a wretched childhood could cause an ill-assortment of marriages. He felt he was an <u>enfant de devoir</u>, whereas his brother Henri, who was born out of

wedlock, was the beloved one. He felt himself the object of hatred; and, instead of adoring his mother, he feared her because of her stiffness and icy, formal kisses.

Balzac relived himself to a great extent in Felix de Vandenesse, who appears in Le Lys de la vallée. Henriette, Madame de Mortsauf, too, had been brought up by a heartless mother and an indifferent father who, at the time of her death, decides to attend to some duties at the court rather than to go and assist his daughter at her death-bed. Henriette says to Felix, her lover: "Nous avons eu la même enfance" (Le Lys dans la vallée, p. 89). Immediately they understand each other. Because neither Henriette nor Felix have ever been given their fill of caresses, both have kept buried inside them a great thirst for tenderness, for gentleness, for the childhood they never had. They found in each other the compensation they had been looking for all their lives, friendship, love and affection. To love and be loved is the greatest of happiness and Henriette said: "après une pause où nos âmes se marièrent dans cette même pensée consolante: Je n'étais donc pas seul à souffrir" (Le Lys dans la vallée, p. 182).

She had had the misfortune of being a girl when her parents had wanted a boy; and, consequently, she was hated. Only her aunt, who had already passed away, had

given her love and affection. She found, also, a great compensation in the love of her two children to whom she sacrificed her very being, for, not only had her childhood been unhappy, her married life was unhappy as well. Marceau says that a happy childhood is necessary to human beings and that it is happiness that brings human beings to maturity.[37] Felix de Vandenesse sometimes acted like a child who had not grown up. Perhaps Balzac attributes his lack of poise to these or like circumstances. Madame de Mortsauf, being a mother, is in certain respects still a child. At the age of thirty she is afraid of her mother. Her husband remarks about her childish scruples and exclaims that she uses every trick she knows to remain a little girl and that she had remained a virgin at his expense. She doesn't like happiness, which is her way of admitting that she had never experienced it. To her happiness was like an illness; she felt crushed by it. (Le Lys dans la vallée, p. 278). Her childhood as well as that of Felix had been a solitary one, deprived of all joy and family affection that a child thirsts for.

Eugénie Grandet, the young girl who evokes pity and who is one of the most touching of Balzac's heroines, had such an ignoble, inactive existence. She, being

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[37] Marceau, op. cit., p. 117.

such an affectionate soul, knew so little about affection; loving, she experienced no real love. She was surrounded by two loving beings: her mother and the servant. However, both of them brought her only a dejected, gloomy and dull image of her destiny. However, the strongest and most vigorous soul that constantly weighed upon her existence, was that of her father with his torturous character. His avarice made her into an ignorant person. His abominable greed deprived her of all joy. He even forbade her to love her cousin because he had lost his fortune. As Balzac says, "Les filles sont élevées en esclaves et s'habituent à l'idée qu'elles sont au monde pour imiter leur grand'mères" (La Physiologie de mariage, p. 175). Bardèche says that:[38]

> Presque tous les auteurs s'efforcent avant tout de prouver qu'une jeune personne n'a pas de moyen plus certain d'assurer son bonheur que de suivre les conseils de sa mère, de se garder des démarches qu'on pourait mal interpréter, de chercher à triompher par sa modestie, sa prudence et sa constance.

Madame de Grandlieu, who appears in Gobseck, told her daughter Camille that if she had confidence in her tenderness, she (the daughter) would let her guide her life since at the age of seventeen one is not capable of judging either the future or the past, nor social affairs. Eugénie

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[38]Bardèche, op. cit., p. 11.

Grandet, too, was under the complete domination of her father. Her fortune was no power nor consolation to her. She said: "Je ferai tout ce qu'il vous plaira, mon père" (Eugénie Grandet, op. cit., p. 200), when he forced her to sign all her inheritance from her mother, over to her father. With her, as well as with Henriette de Mortsauf and Véronique Graslin, the chance of her environment decided her destiny.

Julie's father in La Femme de trente ans warns her against marrying the colorful Aiglemont whom she loves. He says that he has a superficial gaiety, is without talent and extravagent, he is ignorant, egoistic and does not understand life. She retorts that he wanted to thwart her intentions of marrying him, he wanted her to marry for his sake and not for hers. Soon after the marriage, however, she wishes she would have listened to her father.

The children and young people in Balzac's age were not allowed to take any initiative or active part in their own affairs. They were strictly under the jurisdiction of their parents. Donnard relates that long before Balzac the Saint-Simoniens, who were an influential religious sect at that time, deplored the fact that the young girls were vowed to ignorance and abandoned to the bewilderment of the imagination. They felt that

the young girls arrived at adulthood without any fixed principle to which they could relate the acts of their lives. By leaving all the faculties to the prey of their imagination, they came to regard all their bewilderments as actual realities.[39] The argument is that a woman, in spite of having received the education of a man, conserves her feminine graces. It was rather rare for bourgeois girls to receive an education at that time and about the only thing they were taught was submissiveness to their parents and later on to their husbands. Balzac says again, "Une femme qui a reçu une éducation d'homme possède, à la verité, les facultés les plus brillantes et les plus fertiles en bonheur pour elle et pour son mari; mais cette femme est rare comme le bonheur même" (La Physiolcgie de mariage, p. 117). He thinks that if husbands don't have an educated wife they should keep her in the realm of ideas in which she was born; if not, she might in a moment of pride usurp authority and be like a slave who abuses his powers.

Balzac exposed all the advantages of an emancipation of young girls that would accompany a profound reform of the educational system. To make the emancipation

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[39]John H. Donnard, Balzac Les Realités économique et sociales dans la Comédie humaine (Paris: Armand Colin, 1961), p. 63.

effective it would have to be guaranteed by a radical change of certain institutions. Men should be constrained to choose girls who could offer them some happiness by virtue of their talents and character and that they should be willing to marry the girls without receiving a dowry. It should be the choice of the heart and not of reason. Mlle. Taillefer in Le Père Goriot could not get married because her stingy father refused to pay the dowry. "Il était un monstre de père" was the remark that was being made. (Le Père Goriot, p. 52). The girl in dispair tried everything to win the favor of the father in order to get the dowry, ". . . la fille voulait baiser les mains de son père mais il les a retirées. Est-ce n'est pas une scélératesse ça? . . . c'est donc des monstres!" (Le Père Goriot, p. 60)

Donnard feels also that a great deal of educational damage stems from the cloistering of children and young people. At the age of ten, a girl would often be more refined than a boy but at the age of twenty she is timid and awkward, is afraid of a spider, talks about nonsensical things, thinks only of materials, fashion and has not the courage to be a mother nor a chaste wife. The young boys and girls lived in separate worlds and didn't learn to know each other until after a marriage arranged by the parents. Each one is an enigma to the other and

it is often at too great a price that this riddle is being guessed or solved.[40] One can easily see that with such an education each one easily falls prey to his own appetites, his own learnings, and his own incompatible impressions. He would easily accept a partnership that would result in marriage disharmony. Balzac states that there are certain women, who are naturally spirited and bright, and reflect, like a mirror, the most brilliant ideas. By their natural intelligence they learn more of what the world is like, than others do in books. They like neither reason nor ripe fruit, but create for themselves an ideal existence around which those who lead a more or less mechanical life appear pale (La Physiologie de mariage, pp. 173-74). Eugénie, with her intelligence really belonged to this class.

Another example of a frustrated childhood is that of Hélène d'Aiglemont, eldest daughter of Madame d'Aiglemont in La Femme de trente ans. While still a child, she provides us with a fair indication of her character by pushing her little brother into the river out of jealousy because he was the preferred one, the child of her mother's lover, Charles de Vandeness. Speaking of Hélène, her mother says:

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[40] Ibid., pp. 62-63.

> Elle est un enfant du devoir et du hazard . . . elle ne rencontre en moi que l'instinct de la femme, la loi qui pousse irresistiblement à protéger la créature née dans nos flanks. Ne lui ai-je pas sacrifié ma vie et mon bonheur? . . . Mais elle n'est pas dans mon coeur (La Femme de trente ans, p. 96).

She goes on to say that when the child will have no more need of her she will be finished with her. When the child will be gone the irritation it causes will cease, for the child reminded her of everything that could have been and that was not, meaning a marriage of love and affection instead of one of convenience and therefore the sight of the child was unbearable to her. To fulfill the duties of a mother annoyed her, but thinking of herself as virtuous she said: "Je lui rendrai les trésors de vertu, pour remplacer les trésors d'affection, dont je l'aurai frustrée" (La Femme de trente ans, p. 96). Hélène grows up to be a tall, beautiful girl; but she is taciturn and introvertive. Even so, she cannot conceal the seething, passionate nature beneath. Whether it is her mother's adultery or the killing of her brother that weighs so heavily upon her is not clear. She ends up by running away with a mysterious murderer who takes her to live with him on a pirate ship and gives her four children.

La Fosseuse in Le Médecin de campagne felt that her childhood of grief and sorrow had wilted her leaves in the middle of springtime and had kept her life from

bursting out into full bloom, and Benassis felt that this was one thing he had in common with her. Their vocation had been misled (Le Médecin de campagne, p. 148).

In Le Père Goriot the situation is reversed. Here Père Goriot is the oppressed one and not the oppresser. Altszyler says that he is sacrificed at the altar of the egoism of his two daughters whose ingratitude toward their loving father suffices to make this novel a symbol.[41] The father, Goriot, is a small bourgeois who idolizes his two daughters, but his love is the superior love of a father for his children. He is incapable of understanding the extent of an ungrateful humanity. To the end he rests attached to his fictional paternal love. He is indifferent to their ingratitude; he wants to see them in order to satisfy his eyes with their image. He becomes their slave and virtue here seems to take on the form of vice. He exclaims:

> Je suis heureux à ma manière. Est-ce contre la loi que j'aille voir mes filles le soir, au moment où elles sortent de leur maison pour se rendre au bal? . . . si j'avais vécu chez elles, mais rien que d'entendre leur voix, de les savoir là, de les voir aller, sortir comme quand je les avait chez mois; ça m'eût fait cabrioler le coeur! . . . ma vie à moi est dans mes deux filles (Le Père Goriot, p. 333).

He sacrificed himself for these girls because he was their father, he approved of their faults, of their

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[41]Altszyler, op. cit., p. 112.

wayfaring, in spite of the fact that they denied him. The blind adoration he feels for his daughters does not seem a stupidity but a weakness. He had originally spoiled them; and, at the end of his life, when they chose going to a ball instead of coming to console him at his death-bed, he said:

> Dieu, pourquoi me fais-tu donc souffrir aujourd'hui? . . . J'ai bien expié le péché de les avoir trop aimer. Elles se sont bien vengées de mon affection, elles m'ont tenaillé comme des bourreaux . . . Oh! je meurs! Eh bien, les pères sont si bêtes, je les ai aimées tant, que j'y suis retourné comme un joueur au jeu. C'était mon vice à moi . . . La patrie périra si les pères sont foulés aux pieds . . . J'ai fait la bétise d'abdiquer mes droits . . . Je suis justement puni (Le Père Goriot, p. 333).

These regrets were too late to change his girls, but Balzac tries to reveal this vice which was evidently quite common. Madame Langeais says that it is something they see every day (Le Père Goriot, p. 95).

There were other children in La Comèdie humaine who showed little concern for the well-being of their parents. They would extract their last coin, their last drop of blood; and accept their colossal sacrifice with little or no appreciation. Rastignac in Le Père Goriot, who was so indignant about the conduct of Goriot's two daughters, was doing the same thing. He himself took the very last bit of livelihood of his mother and sisters in order to lead a gala-life in Paris. Lucien, in Les

Illusions perdues, lived off his brother-in-law, David, until the latter was ruined. Perhaps, Balzac was thinking of his own experiences when he used up his mother's small fortune in order to meet debts.

It appears generally speaking, that parental feeling is not a thing that the high society, the aristocracy, indulges in very much. A great many were more interested in their lovers than in their children. In order to find any pretty scenes of motherhood, one has to go out into the provinces to such as Madame Mortsauf, Madame Granson, and Madame de l'Estorade who are charming, affectionate and attentive young mothers. Rarely do we find a happy, normal childhood in Balzac's novels. They are either pampered too much or not loved at all.

II. MARRIAGE

One of Balzac's fundamental theories was that the family was ideally the base of the social order. He reveals this definitely in Le Médecin de Campagne in the words of Doctor Benassis:

> La base des sociétés humaines sera toujours la famille. Là commence l'action du pouvoir et de la loi, là du moins doit s'apprendre l'obéissance. Vus dans toutes leur conséquences, l'esprit de famille et de pouvoir paternel sont deux principes encore trop peu développés dans notre nouveau système législatif (Le Médecin de campagne, p. 101).

Again in Le Curé de village Balzac brings out his respect for the solidarity of the Tacheron family in their suffering, saying that, "La famille sera toujours la base des sociétés" (Le Curé de village, p. 131). In losing the solidarity of the family, the society loses its fundamental force (Le Curé de village, p. 131). The different ideas concerning the emancipation of women at this time, issued out of the Revolution, had weakened the paternal power and authority, and they had caused the triumph of individualism which, in turn was devouring modern society (Le Curé de village, p. 131). The authority of the father had so far been unlimited; his word was considered sovereign; he would eat by himself at the end of the table; his wife and his children would serve him and would not speak to him without using certain respected formulas; before him each one would be in a standing position and cover their heads. Being thus brought up the men were conscious of their greatness and importance. The wife would call her husband "my lord" (Le Médecin de campagne, p. 104).

Marceau says that it is marriage that is the true subject of all Balzac's novels which have sometimes been hastily labeled as love stories, not the sacrament of marriage because there are very few wedding ceremonies in La Comédie humaine, but the civil contract, the

integration into society.[42] Practically all of them are stories of married life, of adultery, and of jealousy. Le Lys dans la vallée is an epic of marital fidelity. For Balzac love and marriage should be, before anything else, the combining of two individuals' total resources. Delphine, daughter of Père Goriot, brings Rastignac the money and the connections he lacks. Together they triumph. Madame de Mortsauf brings her husband the ability to deal with economic affairs; and she brings her lover the social training he needed. The nineteenth century wanted to be great and expected women to exert an influence on the manners of society, but they were victims or products of their own time and environment. A real base for their education had been lacking and Donnard feels that Christianity only entered in as a social convenience.[43] It was an unsettled period politically. Present danger and an uncertain future caused a moral and intellectual problem in the high classes of society. All this left its imprints on social and married life. Donnard says that all these women of the high classes of society with all their virtues, grace and power that one has to admire, are not yet what they should be.[44] Rastignac

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[42]Marceau, op. cit., p. 275.

[43]Donnard, op. cit., p. 167.

[44]Ibid.

in Père Goriot ". . . remarque combien les femmes ont l'influence sur la vie sociale et il voulut se conquérir des protectrices" (Le Père Goriot, p. 38). Madame Beauséant, who already knew the deceitfulness and hypocrisy of society, warned him in saying: ". . . apprenez à vous méfier de ce monde-ci" (Le Père Goriot, p. 98). Finally, he came to see the world as it was: "Les lois et la morale sont impuissantes chez les riches, et il vit dans la fortune l'ultima ratio mundi. Vautrin a raison, la fortune est la vertu! se dit-il" (Le Père Goriot, p. 101).

If women had social ambitions, the men of the world of finance and big business were almost exclusively interested in money--money as a means of power. Money and fortune played a big role in getting a marriage partner. Speaking about Balzac, Borel draws attention to his sentiments:[45]

> La question de l'argent n'est pas étrangère aux préoccupations des grandes familles. . . il a peint de tableaux si sévères du monde aristocratique . . . Ce (les drames de l'argent) sont les ennuis de la classe sociale, les soucis vulgaires, l'obstacle matériel qui viennent contrarier les coeurs purs des tendres et modestes héroines, comme Eugénie Grandet et plusieurs d'autres.

But the affairs of money were always such that they could be arranged and it was not this that made love impossible. Here, too, Balzac's doctrine could be applied, that l'amour

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[45]Borel, op. cit., pp. 98-99.

agrandit par l'obstacle. All these difficulties served to rather double the passion. So often marriages were thwarted by unreasonable parents who were not guided by anything but fortune and ambition. Life was so much more cruel than fiction, and Balzac found his examples, not in theatres, but in actual life. He could but condemn their rich and immoral leisure. The sordid passions and prejudices suffocate the pure sentiments and cause disenchantment to delicate souls.

Practically all the marriages in La Comédie humaine were unhappy ones because they were marriages of convenience and not of love. So often Balzac's statement was true when he said: "Quelques années s'écoulent, et les deux époux atteignent à la dernière situation de l'existence artificielle à laquelle ils se sont condamnés en s'unissant" (La Physiologie du mariage, p. 427). Asking one of his old acquaintances how he felt about marriage, the marquis of about seventy replied: "L'amour n'existe pas; ce n'est même pas un sentiment c'est une nécessité" (La Physiologie du mariage, p. 434). And again, "L'amour est un luxe social, comme les dentelles et le diamants. C'est la dernières de toutes les passions et la plus méprisable. Elle promet tout et ne tient rien" (La Physiologie du mariage, p. 435).

The husbands in the Comédie humaine are old, morose, moody, boring, dull, and irksome. Authoritative, at least in appearance, and filled with vain pride, they want to appear to command or to be the master of the situation. Inwardly they admired their wives. One sees examples in Monsieur Bargeton, Monsieur Mortsauf, Monsieur Graslin and others. They secretly admitted the wives to be superior to themselves and felt their counsel to be wise if it was given without airs. As Monsieur Mortsauf said: "Elle est si nécessaire à ma vie" (Le Lys dans la vallée, p. 274). The wives' courtesy and politeness often surpassed that of the men, who, preoccupied with only material and vulgar interests, often crushed awkwardly the delicate aspirations and the sentimental nostalgia of those who lived around them. This very situation is found in Le Lys dans la vallée, as seen here:

> La comtesse se trouvait sans courage pour supporter ce nouveau coup et . . . des tourments redoublés du caractère de son mari. Ainsi, des orages de plus en plus troublés et chargés de graviers déracinaient par leur vagues après les espérances le plus profondement plantées dans son coeur (Le Lys dans la vallée, p. 256).

However, she had already abandoned herself to the tyranny of the comte.

Throughout La Comédie humaine aristocratic husbands function only incidentally. Langeais has disappeared. Dudley is away a great deal. Mannerville goes abroad.

Restaud pays no attention to his wife. Serisy is resigned to his fate, Nucingen and Aiglemont couldn't be less interested. Beauséant simply smiles. Graslin is so occupied that he hardly notices his wife. Hence one finds the abundance of conjugal dramas and misunderstandings that have usually preceded the plots of the novels. The husbands' roles in some cases were curtailed, like those of Espard, Mortsauf and others; nevertheless, they were not cut completely. They were still there but more or less just as a social factor, "as an accessory imposed upon them by the social structure."[46] Also, one of the main consequences of this fact is that the wives can never contemplate further marriages until the death of their husbands. Balzac himself waited for the death of Baron Hanska for nine years. However, the rivalries of the women, the scenes with their husbands "ne cesse de la prier de considerer ce qu'elle doit à son bonheur et au sien."[47] There was always this subconscious guilty feeling which would creep up as a remorse.

The life that the women are leading was a life without aim and without hope. They arrive at a monotonous existence which is ignored by their husbands as well

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[46]Marceau, op. cit., p. 83.

[47]Bardèche, op. cit., p. 8.

as by their families. Referring to it, Madame Graslin sighed: "Le mariage, ce dur métier" (Le Curé de village, p. 56). Her husband, too, was a miser and a screw. Balzac says of him:

> Il abandonna Madame Graslin pour ses affaires. . . Il ne donna plus rien à sa femme . . . il fut le plus heureux mari du monde, en ne rencontrant aucune résistance à ses volontés chez cette femme qui lui avait apporté un million de fortune (Le Curé de village, p. 61).

La Baronne Nucingen had the same experience. Her husband, also, used all her dowry money in his enterprise and would leave her without a penny. Her father Goriot had been successful in marrying off his daughters to wealthy men, but where was the happiness in it all? Marriage was the most horrible of disappointments to Delphine, Madame Nucingen, and she said she would rather throw herself out of the window than live in the same room with her husband (Le Père Goriot, p. 180). Monsieur de Mortsauf took all the inheritance money of his wife and: "jamais son mari ne lui en avait tenu compte, il ne savait pas son débiteur . . . Monsieur de Mortsauf oubliait de lui donner l'argent nécessaire à la maison" (Le Lys dans la vallée, p. 91). Henriette, Madame de Mortsauf, was one of the richest heiresses in the valley. Mademoiselle Carmon, right after her marriage, was under the complete domination of her husband and had no more control over

all her earthly possessions. Her husband was another of these nullités dominatrices.

Monsieur Grandet had complete control over his household. At Eugénie's birthday party, the miser sat apart from his guests and smiled with grim humor at the scramble of the Cruchots and the Grassins for his daughter's dowry. He was going to reserve her for her rich Parisian cousin, but, when the latter's father went bankrupt, he objected to the marriage. The pitiful meagerness of the breakfast served in the Grandet home and the abject fear of the wife and daughter when they sought to vary the program of the rigid economy in honor of Charles' visit, reveals the hopeless struggle which the victims waged with him. Madame Grandet is dying for lack of medical care and attention and because of Monsieur Grandet's outburst of anger over Eugénie's generosity. Grandet goes to his desk, takes out a handful of louis, and puts them on his wife's bed to reconcile his brutality.

The Marquis d'Aiglemont made a good impression everywhere by his outward appearance and his promotions from the king, but at home he submitted to his wife and recognized her superiority. Finally, he considered himself a victim, and his married life he considered an empty shell. "Il est vrai que je suis sûr de la vertu de ma femme; mais mon mariage est une chose de luxe; et si tu

me crois marié, tu te trompes" (La Femme de trente ans, p. 55). Upon this, and the fact that he was tired of paying attention to the squeamish susceptibilities of his wife, he felt he could excuse his infidelities. She, on her part, felt that he was a clumsy soldier who refused to pay any attention to her and because of this she developed a repugnant feeling toward conjugal life. As soon as the word "love" is mentioned to her, she trembles like a person in whose mind the memory of some unpleasant situation is always present. Her father, before the marriage, had told her that "un jour tu déplorera amèrement sa nullité, son défaut d'ordre, son indélicatesse, son ineptie en amour" (La Femme de trente ans, p. 18). Now she was disenchanted and her aunt said to her, "Ainsi mon bon petit ange, le mariage n'a été jus-qu'à présent pour vous qu'une longue douleur?" (La Femme de trente ans, p. 35)

Monsieur Bargeton was a husband who had come to feel a dog-like devotion to his wife. As a matter of fact, he sets out to obey her requests as far as the duel and other affairs were concerned without any hesitation. Roger says: "this gentleman had one of these small minds."[48]

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[48]Rogers, op. cit., p. 253.

Taking the married life from the women's standpoint, Madame de Bargeton found him a disappointing husband. Madame de Nucingen says to Tastignac:

> Voilà la vie de la moitié des femmes à Paris; un luxe extérieur, des soucis cruels dans l'âme. . . Cette vie extérieurment splendide, mais rongée par tous les ténias du remords et dont les fugitifs plaisirs étaient chèrement expiés par des persistantes angoisses (Le Père Goriot, pp. 182; 192).

Madame Nucingen told her father that she hated and despised her husband, could not esteem that vile Nucingen after all that he had told her. She had married him for money and now she bemoaned the fact. "Les chaînes d'or sont les plus pesantes" said she to Rastignac, to which he replies, "Vous êtes belle, jeune, aimée, riche . . .". But she repeats that, "Rien ici ne vous annonce le malheur, et cependant, malgré ces apparences je suis au désespoir . . . le mariage pour moi est la plus horrible des déceptions" (Le Père Goriot, pp. 284, 175, 180).

The Duchess of Langeais, also, had entered a marriage of convenience with a marriage partner with whom she had nothing in common. "Les deux caractères les plus antipathiques du monde, s'étaient trouvés en présence" (Duchesse de Langeais, p. 227). She was a social lioness, was most beautiful, considered as the fashion queen, lived on flatteries, but led a most unhappy life. Her aunt, the princess of Blamont, told her: "Nous savons

tous, ici, que le mariage est une défectueuse institution tempérée par l'amour" but in spite of it she still counseled her to accept her marriage of convenience for the sake of a fortune, a social title, and her place in the royal court. If she is an unmarried girl, she is a prisoner of the family, and through marriage she gets into a second prison.

Mademoiselle Carmon had hoped to be loved for her own sake but found out that Bousquier had married her for her money and her social standing, since she was at the top of the social scale in the province. She was the hostess of an aristocratic salon, clinging to bygone fashions in silverware, furniture, and carriages as well as in manners and speech. Balzac transmuted into material everything that was part of his age, bringing out the contrast here between two generations, two ways of life.

Julie d'Aiglemont was unhappy since the beginning of her marriage. She confided in her aunt saying, "Je suis sans voix pour me plaindre et sans paroles pour exprimer ma peine. Je souffre, et j'ai honte de souffrir en voyant Victor heureux de ce qui me tue" (La Femme de trente ans, p. 36). Victor, le Comte d'Aiglemont, was satisfied and happy with what he found in married life, and this tortured her. She tried to be prudent as far as her conduct was concerned so that nothing would ruin

her reputation but at what price and with what efforts! She admitted to her aunt that she would prefer being Victor's sister than to being his wife and for this reason her marriage could not be successful (La Femme de trente ans, p. 36).

Madame de Mortsauf felt herself like a "femme enchaînée" (Le Lys dans la vallée, p. 244). Her devotion was without a recompense; she distributed happiness without receiving any in return. She exercised a silent patience over against the nullités dominatrices of her husband. She would support the onslaughts of her husband with a sweetness of soul in which anger seemed an impossibility. She remained in these circumstances the white lily of the valley. Balzac always felt that the true greatness of a wife was submission to the man whose name she bore. In spite of his taste for male stupidity and female subtlety, he did take a more serious view of marriage and its problems later on in life. Altszyler feels that Balzac's big concern was to unveil behind his outstanding characters, a being, humiliated by destiny, by the oppression of des êtres forts.[49] In this case, it means the husbands. However, he has special sympathy for the free characters who struggle against society such as Rastignac, Lucien,

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[49]Altszyler, op. cit., p. 101.

Benassis and others. Their humility is another and nobler kind of pride.[50]

The two ideals of womanhood are found in Les Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées. Renée de Maucombe stands for the principle that the procreation and nurturing of children are the real end of marriage, as even the childless Louise admits at times; and so the two ideals of womanhood, to which Balzac felt himself drawn, are unfolded. This is how Louise puts it to her friend: "Beaucoup de philosophie et peu d'amour, voilà ton régime; beaucoup d'amour et peu de philosophie, voilà le mien."[51] Renée felt it alright to enter into a marriage of convenience, and this point of view seemed so justified by events that it appears to be the fundamental viewpoint of the author. Louise has debased the institution of marriage. The exclusive felicities for which she has striven are condemned by society and by heaven itself. In the course of the book Balzac emphasizes that marriage means a resignation and a devotion to each other. Louise, herself, confesses at the end: "Oui, la femme est un être faible qui doit, en se mariant faire un entier sacrifice de sa volonté

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[50]Rogers, op. cit., p. 73.

[51]Honoré de Balzac, Les Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées (Paris: Librairie Paul Ollendorff, ca. 1900), p. 102.

à l'homme, qui lui doit en retour le sacrifice de son égoisme" (Les Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées, p. As for her, love is the origin of all virtue.

Balzac deplores the fact that the inclinations of the young girl are not being considered at the time of her marriage. If the girls are wealthy, they have to marry a wealthy man; but he also points out that once married the divisions between husband and wife, whatever the cause, bring terrible unhappiness sooner or later. The people concerned are being punished for having disobeyed social law. Donnard feels that Balzac believes he has discovered in the French institutions two contradictory principles; one is favorable to the subordination of the women; and the other favors their emancipation. He feels that the woman should cease to be the object of exploitation and almost comes to the conclusion that the woman is never wrong, and is not responsible for her faults but that her unhappiness originates from the conditions into which the law has placed her and from the blindness of her husband.[52]

David Séchard and his wife Eve, Lucien's sister, form the ideal couple in La Comèdie humaine.[53] The secret

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[52]Donnard, op. cit., p. 61.

[53]Honoré de Balzac, Illusions perdues (Paris: Librairie Paul Ollendorff, ca. 1900), Vol. I, p. 327.

of their happiness lies in perfect understanding and esteem, and contentment with enough money to make ends meet. ". . . du moment que le mariage n'est pas renversé le mariage, il est inattaquable" (La Physiologie du mariage, p. 449). This seems to be Balzac's point of view of married life and happiness.

III. UNATTAINABLE LOVE

Passionate love is a jewel stolen by society from the treasure house of nature (translation of Renée's words--Les Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées, pp. 183; 300) by which Renée probably means that illicit love tends to destroy social morality. Real love in Balzac's novels always seems something unattainable; something beyond reach of the starving heart. The truth is, says Altszyler, that Balzac himself is all passion, all drama, and that he has clothed his whole work with his soul and with his stormy temperament.[54] The woman brings disorder into society through her passion, but in the novels it seems more often that it is a passion in the disorder. Balzac tries to combat these social vices by showing how much damage they cause to virtue. It is the evil that they do, though, that brings the characters back

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[54]Altszyler, op. cit., p. 227.

to repentance and to virtue. "La philosophie de Balzac voit le beau à travers la laideur."[55] Altszyler thinks that Balzac's works are very moral if seen from the standpoint that in general Balzac's humanity suffers from evil produced by altogether material or lucrative instincts.[56] One would, however, be more tempted to think that there is a prevading moral insufficiency. But Balzac made a study of the manners of his day, a realistic study of humanity, one that fitted into the social pattern of his day.

The consuming passion that motivates the great loves in Comédie humaine is exclusive, blinding, single-minded. Affron states that passion has the capacity to uplift as well as degrade and that it offers two possibilities. One is selfless and enabling; the other selfish and vilifying, ending in destruction.[57] This paradox controls Balzac's attitude; he says that La Duchesse de Langeais was destroyed by her own passion and ill-fated love life. Bardèche feels that Balzac describes the violence of passion that at a given moment breaks through all dikes and bursts out into a verbal delirium of all

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[55] Ibid., p. 229. [56] Ibid.

[57] Charles Affron, Patterns of Failure in La Comédie humaine (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 52.

desires such as has not been employed by anyone before him since Shakespeare.[58] One need but think of the emotional scene of Madame Langeais, her outcry at her lover's door: "Mon Dieu! . . . le voir ici se serait le bonheur. . . . puis, toujours la même pensée: 'Il va venir'" (La Duchesse de Langeais, p. 231). Then the last passionate sighs of Goriot on his death bed, --sighs that sum up the blind passion of his entire life, the passion that has destroyed him and his girls as well. "La rage me gagne!" says he, "en ce moment, je vois ma vie entière. Je suis dupe! Elles ne m'aiment pas, elles ne m'ont jamais aimé! Cela est clair. . . . Je suis trop bête (Hâan! heun! heun!)" (Le Père Goriot, p. 332). Blinding passion is a decided liability in Balzac's world.

Most of the women are gripped by passion and feel it a conflict with a sense of duty toward their husbands and their children. After the disenchantments of married life, the woman still retains this strong sense of duty which causes her great struggles in the face of passion. These characters are principally young women who, through a series of circumstances, have been brought to accept a marriage of convenience as have, for example, Henriette in Le Lys dans la vallée, Madame de Bargeton in Les

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[58]Bardèche, op. cit., p. 585.

Illusions perdues, Madame Graslin in Le Curé de village, Madame de Langeais in La Duchesse de Langeais and many ethers. Their husbands, distracted and occupied by the affairs of the world, took little or no interest in conjugal life. One is astonished at the emptiness of the lives of these men and of their interior poverty. They are as Balzac describes: "l'homme de l'Etat, froid, et sans passion" (Le Lys dans la vallée, p. 365). They are for the most part considerably older than their wives who fall into boredom and become weary at the side of such men. A young dandy would arrive unexpectedly, and the young lady, full of charm and virtue but dissatisfied with her conjugal life, would allow new affections to invade her life to compensate for the void in her existence--in spite of her inner struggles and sentiments. Being profoundly virtuous, she is divided between her inclinations and her duty dictated by virtue and often also by a religious sentiment. A deep understanding develops between the two lovers without their daring to call it love. This outpouring of one life into another is the form friendship takes in Balzac's novels says Marceau.[59] The woman comes inwardly to a full maturity. Borel, who writes about the feminine psychology states that

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[59]Marceau, op. cit., p. 317.

after "un affreux désenchantement" in her marriage "les tendres illusions sont fannées. La femme a jugé le monde, elle est plus sûre d'elle-même, elle peut mentir à la société. Elle veut la réalization de la passion,"[60] but every once in a while the repressed uneasiness about it comes to the surface as is so well demonstrated in Le Lys dans la vallée, where Henriette is gripped periodically by her duty to her husband and her children. This passionate love carries in it the germ of a family tragedy. Borel notes that there is a "malheur assuré à la femme qui transgresse la loi social . . . la mort par le chagrin, la pensée lancinante qui tue."[61] This pensée qui tue runs through a number of the novels. It kills Benassis; it kills la Duchesse de Langeais and a number of others. It is the mystic superior idea that englobes them, dominates and surpasses them; it is love unattainable, an impossible love. It is this touch of realism that brings with it the unhappy untangling of friendships. The heroines have the right to die in the conflict but have not the permission to have their wishes fulfilled.

The woman whom the dandies are looking for is the intelligent one, the one who can instruct the young "lions" about the world. Madame Mortsauf instructs Felix de

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[60]Borel, op. cit., p. 142.

[61]Ibid., p. 145.

Vandeness about social graces; Madame Bargeton adopts the same role toward Lucien de Rubempré. Rastignac is looking for an instructress; Benassis regrets the fact that he has never met a woman who devotes herself to pointing out various reefs that threaten him, someone who would provide him with excellent social manners, one who would advise him without ever hurting his pride. Balzac himself found these instructressess in Madame du Berny, Madame de Castries, Madame Hanska and others.

In a number of cases the ladies assume a mother-child relationship, as they are older than their lovers, the kind of relationship Madame de Berny tried to have with Balzac. This, too, would furnish a pretext for being together, going out for walks on multiple occasions. Bardèche brings out that:[62]

> D'autant plus que par une fatalité qu'on ne concoit guère, mais qui se retourne toujours, elles sont forcées de passer presque toutes leurs journées auprés de leur dangereux courtisan comme Lord Melville et Julie d'Aiglemont, Henriette et Felix, etc. Si elles le fuient, une autre fatalité veut qu' elles se retrouvent sur leur chemin. Les amants sont condamnés à un contact perpétuel. Ils sont condamnés à s'aimer parce qu'ils ne peuvent s'éviter.

The women soon reveal the emptiness of their lives because of the indifference of their husbands, and because, as Balzac comments:

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[62]Bardèche, op. cit., p. 12.

> Le bonheur en menage est comme en politique, un bonheur négatif. L'affection des peuples pour le roi d'une monarchie absolue, est peut-être moins contre la nature que la fidelité de la femme envers son mari quand il n'exist plus d'amour entre eux (Le Physiologie du mariage, p. 117).

The women are beautiful and possessing prestige, and it seems natural that the young men allow themselves to be beguiled. It is striking that Balzac reserves this situation almost exclusively for people of nobility, of the aristocracy. He incarnates passion in a more or less unconscious manner into all his high class characters. The affairs of those in the bourgeoisie could usually be arranged as they were often of a pecuniary nature. For example, David Séchard and Eveline marry in spite of their financial embarassement. The sad but charming Victorine Taillefer misses her happiness because of Rastignac's social ambition, but the drama of the deep soulish struggle is being played in the highest strata of society. Perhaps Balzac considers them capable of a deeper psychological and spiritual perception. Borel points out that disaster overtakes great souls.[63] Over every one of these couples an unrelenting fatality seems to be brooding, but it is a reflection of an unrealizable, unattainable dream. Felix de Vandenesse

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[63]Borel, op. cit., p. 97.

never possesses Henriette, Montriveau never obtains the Duchess of Langeais. Balzac had similar experiences with la marquise de Castries and in part with Madame Hanska as well.

Henriette de Mortsauf, living a solitary life in her forgotten vallée knows that her happiness is not to be in this world. This unattainable, yearned for love is the lot of a series of heroines and heroes in the Balzacian novels, and this thread of "l'amour agrandit par les obstacles" (La Duchesse de Langeais, p. 280) runs throughout. For example, Henriette cannot give up the tenderness she feels for Felix, she plays with the idea of drowning it, once and for all in her more permissible maternal feelings. Marceau indicates that they have reached that frontier where exaltation ends and mad ecstacy begins.[64] Henriette reaches that terrible hour when she doubts the value of her sacrifice to her vocation as a wife and a mother. In her last struggle she gazes in stupor on the ruins of her life, and "Je veux être aimée . . ." (Le Lys dans la vallée, p. 349). She feels like Renée d'Estorade in Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées, that if she didn't have love why shouldn't she seek passion (p. 347). Clearly for her they are two distinctly different

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[64]Marceau, op. cit., p. 884.

things. Le Lys dans la vallée brims over with love; but the happiness is never anything but ephemeral. Madame Mortsauf resists or rejects love because of her vocation. Madame Graslin does not. She yields to it, and it leads to remorse and the scaffold. Tacheron loves Madame Graslin; his love takes him to the scaffold.

Madame de Bargeton seems to profess an exuberant love to Lucien Rubempré, which crumbles to pieces as soon as it is built, nothing but the shatterings of an air castle are left, resulting in a love without a lover.

Julie has married Victor Aiglemont, a brutal and clumsy soldier, but his brutality does not exempt her from a charge of egoism. She has a sort of a priori perverseness.[65] She finds an Englishman, Lord Grenville, who takes upon himself the task of doctoring her out of love and finally dies in order to protect her reputation. After this experience she falls in love with Charles de Vandenesse and embarks upon a long liaison with him that apparently continues even after the lovers' marriage "rien ne pouvait plus lui rendre le bonheur qu'elle avait espéré qu'elle avait rêvé si beau . . . elle devait toujours pâtir de n'être pas ce qu'elle aurait être" (La Femme de trente ans, p. 60). After some absence Vandenesse

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[65]Marceau, op. cit., p. 146.

visits Madame d'Aiglemont. The surface ice finally cracks and she breaks out in tears: "Dès ce moment, ils entrèrent dans les cieux de l'amour . . . Le ciel, n'est-il pas toujours une image de l'infini de nos sentiments?" (La Femme de trente ans, p. 123). When she confides in her aunt telling her about her unhappiness, the aunt replies: "parfois ne pensez-vous point que l'amour légitime est plus dur a porter que ne le serai une passion criminelle?" --"Oh! c'est cela dit elle en pleurant" (La Femme de trente ans, p. 36). She has already asked herself why she should resist a lover whom she adores when she has given herself against her own heart to a husband whom she can not love.

Armand Montriveau falls in love with Antoinette de Langeais, the woman in vogue. She is perfectly prepared to let a man love her, and the fact that she has a husband does not prevent her from spending all her time with Montriveau. From the moment she begins to care more about a man than about her worldly scepter, she loses all right to her title. This same thing holds true for Madame de Beauséant. "Le malheur m'a fait duchesse," she says, "Je serai grisette pour toi et reine pour les autres" (La Duchesse de Langeais, p. 320). The Duchesse, being awakened to her duty to her husband, says to Montriveau: "Vous ai-je donné le moindre droit

de penser que je puisse être à vous?" (La Duchesse de Langeais, p. 265). She seems strangely unaffected by Armand's arguments and tells him in regard to her husband: ". . . mon ami, il ne m'aime pas, il n'est pas bien pour moi, mais j'ai des dévoirs a remplir envers lui" (La Duchesse de Langeais, p. 269). She is more a woman than she herself has figured. She has tried to reconcile her action, but begun to waver. But here again l'amour agrandit par l'obstacle. The tone begins to change; she is gripped with a passionate love for Montriveau. He has receded by this time and she, overtaken with grief, flees to a convent on an island near Spain to bury her heart ache. Montriveau persues her, finds her after two years, has a brief word with her and, when he finally arrives to rescue her, he finds her dead in her cell. Bardèche points out that: "Balzac fait de Montriveau une balle jetée au fond d'un abîme et de la Duchesse un ange revolant vers son ciel particulier."[66] For her, too, real love is unattainable, unrealizable, and is the shock of this pensée qui tue that she is not able to survive.

The passionate love of Madame Restaud, Goriot's daughter, gives a striking example of exclusive and blinding

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[66]Bardèche, op. cit., p. 579.

passionate love. Her lover is a gambler. She has already sold all her jewels and other valuables to pay his debts: "Je lui ai sacrifié fortune, honneur, repos, enfants" (Père Goriot, p. 292) says she, and now she wants her father Goriot to pay a fortune yet to bail him out of jail so that her lover can be free and honored. Balzac comments in Le Père Goriot:

> si les Parisiennes sont souvent fausses, ivres de vanité, personnelles, coquettes, froides, il est sûr que quand elles aiment réellement, elles sacrifient plus de sentiment que les autres femmes à leur passion (Père Goriot, p. 303).

Madame Nucingen, who is also Goriot's daughter, finds in Rastignac's love a recompense for the lack of love in her conjugal life, while nothing outwardly indicates the emptiness and despairs in her life.

Madame de Beauséant resorted to the convent after being hostess at a last glorious ball, because of an amour irréalisable for Monsieur de Marsay and the shadows of death accompany her henceforth. It is in this that the author finds a sort of fatalism, something that weighs on her impossible love and crushes her.

Love and passion are deified in Les Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées, passion that burns and devours with a malignant fever the women whose prideful egoism idolizes itself. These women kill those whom they wish to enslave

in the belief that they love them, but love destroys itself.[67]

Where are the delights of love in all this? These all were guilty loves, or at least, loves not sanctified by marriage. Their marriages have been disasters; they are all equally unhappy. They have married for the sake of money and prestige. "L'argent c'est la vie," says Goriot (Le Père Goriot, p. 283), but once having tasted this life they find it dispairing. All these women are waiting for their husbands to die so that they can re-marry. Not feeling themselves freed from the marriage vow, they are torn between a sense of duty and passionate love. They taste the bitter consolation of the remembrance of what might have been in their lives and realize that it is unattainable for them in the present circumstances. Such is the hard lesson of a love that can not be realized. But the strange thing is that once they are free, once they are widows and this longed for realization of true love could materialize, they refuse. They consider it a crime that they have not loved their husbands more and feel it a second crime to remarry. It is a reflection upon Balzac's experience with Madame de Castries and

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[67] Philippe Bertault, Balzac and the Human Comedy. English translation by Richard Monges (New York: New York University Press, 1963), p. 153.

Madame Hanska, who, finally after long years of waiting, did consent to marry him.

Donnard feels that there is something incoherent and incomplete in the women of the century: "Le faux s'y rencontre à côté du vrai, l'ombre à côté de la lumière, le mal à côté du bien."[68] He feels that the women were much less to blame for the evils in society, than was the century of which they were a product. The conjugal dramas which Balzac describes definitely conflict with social law; it is though, in Balzac's view, a law that pretends to be just and moral in the name of a society that is neither just nor moral nor good. It is an accusing society that in itself has little or no morals of its own.

Balzac has edited his conception of feminine psychology, of a longing unsatisfied, a secret struggle of a prey subjected to tyrannic violence that struggles for the realization of true love and affection only to find that it is a dream never to be realized. It is a love without a lover (Les Illusion perdues, p. 72) and a love without possession (Le Lys dans la vallée, p. 284) and as Henriette says: "La vie d'amour est une fatale exception à la loi terrestre"(Le Lys dans la vallée, p. 97). Real love is impossible, unrealizable, unattainable

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[68]Donnard, op. cit., p. 167.

for the women in his novels. There are few examples of love proving stronger than self-interest, than the conventions, than vanity, but in these cases it is the lover who succumbs, crushed by love into ruin and disaster. Either love or the lover becomes the victim.

CHAPTER IV

MYSTICISM IN BALZAC'S WOMEN

What Balzac called "mysticism" influenced his life and his works profoundly. Strongly attracted by temperament toward solid, concrete enjoyments, he was no less overjoyed to fly off toward more ethereal regions. Bertault comments that despite his sublime impulses, he was always opposed to engaging personally in the fleeting practices of devotion.[69] So many of his characters guided to illuminism, sheltered their hope, as Balzac did too, in the Roman Catholic Church as a bird wearied with too daring flights settles, wings folded, upon the golden cross atop the familiar spire.[70]

For Balzac mysticism and Catholicism complimented each other usefully if not necessarily. To the extent that the soul advanced toward its triumph in the midst of earthly ordeals and indifference, its nature, that of its humanity, becomes more transformed into light, so to speak. This ascension is achieved by virtue of an innate energy. We see examples of this in Madame de Mortsauf, Madame de Langeais, Madame Graslin, Monsieur Benassis and many others. Thought mounts from sphere

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[69]Bertault, op. cit., p. 86.

[70]Ibid.

to sphere and finally reaches the goal of its destiny. Balzac thought that by uniting his body to action, man could attain inner illumination. He says:

> J'ai cherché longtemps le sens de cette énigme, je l'avoue. J'ai fouillé bien des mystères, j'ai découvert la raison de plusieurs lois naturelles, le sens de quelques hiéroglyphes divins. . . . Henriette et son Philosophe Inconnu auraient-ils donc raison? Leur mysticisme contiendrait-il le sens général de l'humanité? (Le Lys dans la vallée, pp. 164-65).

The "Unknown Philosopher" he refers to here is Monsieur de Saint-Martin who was initiated to illuminism by Martiner Pasquali. He had his followers mostly among the women of the higher society. A native of Touraine, Balzac heard a great deal about him and quotes him frequently in his works. For Saint-Martin, matter is only a representation and an image of what is not material. Matter and spirit seem to be two aspects of one reality. All these ideas are referred to directly and indirectly in various parts of La Comédie humaine.

Rogers states that the quest for the unattainable "absolute" which filled Balzac with ecstacy as something divine is exemplified in his book Séraphita and also as something that leads to madness.[71] Marceau finds that especially in the early years of his career, Balzac took

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[71]Rogers, op. cit., p. 84.

a great deal of interest in mysticism and the occult sciences.[72] Saint Martin was a philosopher whose disciples practiced the virtues counseled by the sublime speculations of mystic illuminism. Madame de Mortsauf's aunt, the duchesse de Verneuil, was actually one of his disciples and Madame de Mortsauf received visits from this man on more than one occasion. Marceau says that while Balzac himself was never an initiate of this sect, he was certainly very well acquainted with Henry de Latouche, who was one of Saint Martin's real-life disciples.[73] Another influence of mysticism on Balzac's life was Madame Hanska herself. It was to her that he dedicated his great mystical work, Séraphita. His mother was deeply involved in spiritualism and so was la Comtesse Guidobonie, who was one of his close friends. Spiritualism, mysticism and magnetism, seem to have all become a little jumbled up in Balzac's works.

He became acquainted with Swedenborg through his mother's library. Swedenborg became mystic and created a hierarchy of heavens and hells intimately corresponding to the material world in a unified system more grandiose than any of the social utopias. He conceived the universe of consisting of matter in different states of energy

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[72]Marceau, op. cit., p. 347. [73]Ibid.

and the soul as being of the same energy which is called magnetic. The same idea is found in Jacob Bochme's philosophy, a man who attempts to harmonize the undeniable claim of pantheism, that God is not to be known out of and apart from nature, but in it, and through it. This is another idea that threads its way through La Comédie humaine.

The problem of human destiny occupied his thoughts. It seems that each of the characters in the mystical novels repeats the words of Dante: "I who am a mystery to myself." They try to see the truth, and their aspiration is so violent that each of them longs for death in order to approach it (Madame Graslin, Madame Langeais, Madame Beauséant and especially those in his mystic novels). Bertault states that they think of heaven not so much as a place of happiness as of definite clarity.[74]

Saint Martin was a disciple of Swedenborg who held to the philosophy of the "Inner Church," which is being constantly persecuted by the Church of Rome. Bertault says while the latter endlessly encumbers the Christian religion with external observances, Swedenborg brings it back to its primitive simplicity.[75] This idea is so very clearly expressed by Balzac.

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[74]Bertault, op. cit., p.

[75]Ibid., p. 79.

Balzac respected the Church partly for pragmatic reasons; he seems to have thought of it as an institution which, if fallable and transitory, was yet, in its stress on charity, brotherhood and humility, the possessor of at least partial truth. One sees this illustrated in the charitable acts of Benassis in Le Médecin de la campagne; in those of Madame Graslin of Le Curé de village, and in Eugénie Grandet and other characters.

While trying to spread the doctrine of illuminism, which to Balzac seems to represent the truth, he likewise encouraged the practice of Catholicism. The author breathes into his characters of fiction his own convictions. "Mysticism becomes the material of art" notes Bertault. "It often becomes confused with the fantastic, but often he restricts himself to the relationship of the soul with the divinity or with the region of the absolute, in virtuous acts."[76] Occult mysticism is one of the most powerful motivational forces of La Comédie humaine. It is frequently employed in the building of plots in such characters as Madame Mortsauf, La Fosseuse, and Monsieur Benassis.

At various times Balzac denied that he professed pantheism. His thinking seemed to be quite confused at

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[76] Ibid., p. 87.

this point. Bertault believes that, "Just as he reconciled theosophy and Catholicism, so he joined Illuminism and scientific rationalism. Martinism introduced mysticism into the system of nature, whereas Balzac admits physical continuity throughout all the spheres."[77]

In describing nature in different novels, one easily perceives how everything participates in the elementary correspondence with the Divine. The pebble, the toad, the blossoms, the clouds all communicate with thought, which Balzac considers a spiritual flower. All are in communion, in a sort of fraternity. It is a sanctuary corresponding with the inner being and seems to arrive at a superterrestrial unity. Balzac states: "L'homme est composé de matière et d'esprit: l'animalité vient aboutir en lui, et l'ange commence à lui" (Le Lys dans la vallée, p. 261).

In Madame Graslin this state seems to have been arrived at through the process of dematerialization which brought her into the reintegration of the Universal Principle. It is like a metamorphosed passion not only in her case but in that of many others. Beneath the passion in La Comédie humaine there is often a suicidal impulse; like it is in this case. So it is that of

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[77] Ibid., p. 84.

Madame Mortsauf, in Madame de Langeais and to an extent in Eugénie Grandet.

A landscape scene appears quite often in Balzac's novels. The silence of nature with its mystic influence upon the soul, does not just appear in its vivid description as a fantasy of the author, but it enters right into the action; it forms a harmonious part of the whole in the novel. More than one of his heroines retires into the country, into a forest, into a bit of a mysterious house or castle. Madame d'Aiglemont is one of them. The author himself was very delicate in his childhood and youth. He was in need of rest and open air and found it in the valley of Voreppe. Coming back to it thirty years later in 1847 he wrote to Madame Hanska that this demie-patrie had restored his health at the age of eighteen. In this valley we find the setting of Le Médecin de campagne with all its emotional overtones and the significance that these elements of nature had in his imaginative writing.

Another sentimental and famous valley is found in Le Lys dans la vallée. It is a novel where the shadows of the great revolution extend into the private life of a family and ruin it. However, nature, indifferent and beautiful, continues regardless of political upheavals, to rustle the leaves of the trees at the edge of the

sinuous river, and to perfume the prairies with the sensual odors of the vernal grass. "La vallée ne change qu'avec les sentiments et ne vieillit qu'avec les amours. Cette élégie est aussie une épopée" (Le Lys dans la vallée, p. 10). It is in this valley that the White Lily croissait pour le ciel, in filling it with the perfume of her virtues (p. 28). The whole romance between Henriette and Felix takes place in the midst of ash trees, water lillies, in a climate so gentle that the soul and the passions are easily lulled to sleep there. Felix says of Henriette:

> La nature était le manteau sous lequel s'abritaient ses pensées. Elle savait maintenant ce que soupire le rossignol pendant la nuit, et ce que répète le chantre de marais en psalmodiant sa note plaintive (Le Lys dans la vallée, p. 204).

On another occasion he found the valley in tune with his depressed sentiments. The wilted leaves were falling from the poplar trees, turning rusty and creating a melancholy atmosphere. He says: "Toujours en harmonie avec mes pensées, la vallée où se mouraient les rayons jaunes d'un soleil tiède, me présentait encore une vivante image de mon âme" (Le Lys dans la vallée, p. 170). Balzac as an artist analyses the sentiments and their nuances, the alternations between spontaneous tenderness with contrition, then withdrawal, which supplies the key to the inner torments. The valley, which had seemed like

a deserted place is turned into a universe populated with sentiments through the love of two lovers. Bertault describes how they are wrapped in a cloud of incense, stolen from the immortal Divinity, and these perfumes weaken the will of a woman. They have one single subject: the splendor of true love.[78] The valley changes with the sentiments of the lovers. It becomes a desert when Henriette finds out that Felix has another friend. It becomes the reflection of the desert in her heart (Le Lys dans la vallée, p. 270). "--Du désert dit elle avec amertume en montrant la vallée" (Le Lys dans la vallée, p. 284). The blue sky of this valley calms the irritable spirits and brings about a religious atmosphere (Le Lys dans la vallée, p. 124). And Henriette's piety is there too, spreading its purifying light over Felix's story. Time and again it holds their relationship back from the brink, being poised in an ambiguous balance. Henriette's conversations with Felix often run into a sort of litany. Henriette, having been under the mystical influence of her aunt, her visions and premonitions reveal the mystical state of illuminism. She hears a soft voice that explains without words, by some mental communication,

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[78]Bertault, op. cit., p. 107.

revealing to her what she is to do (Le Lys dans la vallée, p. 201).

This book is a finished specimen of the religious system that the author professes, says Bertault.[79] It is a formalistic and traditional Catholicism, completing and purifying itself in Martinist Illuminism, which infuses into the spirit solicitude for social and altruistic activity. According to the novels, this seems to be Balzac's religion. It is an active prayer. This novel is the perfect working out of his doctrine. Active prayer and pure love are the elements of that faith which comes out of Catholicism in order to return to the Christianity of the Primitive Church. There is nothing, however, that forbids one's remaining within Catholicism and practicing its rites, as Henriette de Mortsauf does. She dies in an atmosphere of sanctity assured by the Abbé of ascending to the regions of light, but before resigning herself to a Christian death, Hunt says that she goes through the paroxysms of doubt and regret.[80] "Je ne sais ce qu'est la vertu. . . . qu'est-ce donc la vertu. . ." (Le Lys dans la vallée, pp. 287,290). The revolt of nature wrings from her the momentary admission: "Non,

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[79]Bertault, op. cit., p. 113.

[80]Hunt, op. cit., p. 114.

je n'ai pas aimé, mais j'ai eu soif au milieu du désert. Tout a été mensonge dans ma vie" (Le Lys dans la vallée, p. 285). The final episode of the drama, the dying Henriette's revulsions reveal her desperate attempt to grasp at the now unattainable sweets of love. But this novel does not end in despair but continues on to new victories. Her death becomes a victory. She had searched and found herself. According to Saint Simon, who held that in addition to a permanent marriage, one was allowed some temporary friendships,[81] she was not utterly condemned.

The Saint-Simoniens taught that love is a woman's virtue and it is because of love that she can build up a glory out of her faults, and that is what makes her into a heroine. The more it costs her to commit the crime, the more she merits the one she loves. If love is a virtue and if love comes from God, then love is a savior. This was an idea prevalent in Balzac's time.

In Le Curé de village l'Abbé can sympathize with the passion of Véronique, which leads or has led to murder, because of its intensity, its integrity. So the priest, overcome by the majesty of any great human feeling, even if it were criminal, judged the greatness of his passion by the crime which it had caused. In this novel again,

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[81]Bouteron, op. cit., p. 152.

Balzac interlaces the scenery into the drama. Bardèche says: ". . . il indique les accidents, il recherche les contrastes, Il veut des contrastes puissants pour que la physionomie de la nature inspire un sentiment terrible ."[82] Nature is a part of the drama; it explains the drama and seems to take the part of a character in it. It is personified. Balzac knew how to give a dramatical value to the mountain in Le Curé de village. There is often something strange in his images. His talent lights up portraying the causes that engender the facts in the mysteries of the human heart.

Often, through the mysticism of nature, he prepares a progression of tension, and the destiny of the character hangs in this framework. The landscape into which Véronique is placed, is an expression of her life that is devastated and to which she tried to give meaning and purpose through the regeneration of the country around her. Both she and Benassis in Le Médecin de campagne try to redeem their guilty lives through the transformation of the landscape into which they are set. What concentrates this energy and sets it to work is passion; it is the interêt, l'amour, the intense over-mastering craving to achieve, to identify oneself with something. Man

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[82]Bardèche, op. cit., p. 551.

will become infatuated with an idea and will not let go. In this is seen Balzac's influence from the Austrian mystic. Rogers notes that Balzac was deeply interested in the theories of this mystic physician Mesmer, who held that there is a vital magnetic fluid, everywhere present in the universe, by means of which a human mind can influence a situation. Balzac often refers to this vital fluid that he calls volonté as powerful and transmissable.[83] Benassis, already mentioned, furnishes an ideal example for this doctrine. He is a mystic who is motivated by this strong interior will power that is transmitted into action. He, as well as Véronique, feels that mystic influence in nature as he relates to his friend: "L'amour pour la nature est le seul qui ne trompe pas les espérances humaines. Ici point de déceptions" (Le Médecin de campagne, pp. 166-67).

La Fosseuse, who appears in the above novel is another rather mystic personality. In describing her dwelling, Balzac says: "Son habitation, son mobilier si simple vous semblent jolis . . . parce que le secret de cette élégance est dans une sorte d'harmonie entre sa maison et la nature qui a réuni là des ruisseaux" (Le Médecin de campagne, p. 159). La Fosseuse is a child

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[83]Rogers, op. cit., p. 73.

woman, at once slightly comic and rather touching, "burdened by the weight of her own soul," says Marceau.[84] She is so full of sensibility that it is practically an illness; she is so changeable that a break in the weather, a cloud, a bird flying by is enough to alter her mood completely. She is a plante dépaysée, a human plant, incessantly devoured by sad and profound thoughts. In her case, the soul kills the body. When the weather is gray and humid, she is sad and cries with the sky; this mood suits her. She sings with the birds, she calms herself and becomes serene with the skies, and finally she becomes beautiful on a clear, sunny day. Her soul opens up like a flower that gives freshness and brilliance to the day. When the doctor asks her why she is this way, she answers, "Je ne sais pas, Monsieur. . . . je ne puis vous le dire" (Le Medécin de campagne, pp. 149-150). She communicates with nature in a meaningful way.

We are given a touching glimpse of Eugénie Grandet as she notices the sun shining on a patch of the old stone wall of her garden, on the dried grasses, the ferns and bluebells that grow in the drannies; the effect of the light, the faint, dry rustle of the leaves, becomes as it were the very expression of her love for Charles, so

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[84]Marceau, op. cit., p. 161.

that after his departure, that fragment of wall reminds her of her happiest moments. Rogers brings out that it is the sunlight that she sees on the patch of the wall that becomes a mysterious symbol of Eugénie's happiness.[85] Her whole youth has been speckled with the hope of a happy reunion with Charles, but her hopes are shattered and lie like rustling leaves under her feet. Nature harmonizes with her moods.

Characteristic scenes are found in La Duchesse de Langeais. One notes first the social landscapes which Balzac never forgets and which form the backgrounds and become the cause of action. He describes the convent with its mystic atmosphere where man searches the poetry of the infinite; it is the solemn horror of the silence in which man expects to meet God. He searches for Him on summits, at the bottom of the abbeys, at the edge of a precipice and, in accordance with Balzac's pantheism, finds Him everywhere. But nowhere except on a certain rock is there such a fusion of different harmonies that join in uplifting the soul, in smoothing out its most burdensome agonies and creating a profound bed for the sorrows of life (La Duchesse de Langeais, pp. 180-81). This rock is on an island in the Mediterranean on which

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[85]Rogers, op. cit., p. 123.

is situated the convent where Madame Langeais seeks refuge for her troubled soul. Again, there is a harmonious whole between soul and nature.

The scene of the big ball with its mystic forebodings of evil forms a complete melodrama. The thread of the story is announced by the strains of music that indicate a coloring of profound sadness. The high notes throw out a torrent of distress that suddenly becomes an angelic voice as if to announce the last but not forgotten lover and to indicate that the reunion of the two souls would not take place but in heaven. A touching hope! It is the mystic and poetic expression of the deep emotions of a sublime agony. Love, religion, and music are the three poetries that unite in God (La Duchesse de Langeais, pp. 191-92).

When Julie d'Aiglemont in La Femme de trente ans, withdraws herself from everybody after the death of her lover Arthur, she goes to an old castle in a solitary place

> . . . dans une vaste plaine. . . . Cet aride pays n'offre à la vue que de rares monticules parfois au milieu des champs, quelques carrés de bois qui servent de retaite au gibier, puis, partout ces lignes sans fin, grisés et jaunâtres. . . . Les matinées de brouillard, un ciel d'une clarté faible, des nuées courant près de la terre sous un dais grisâtre convenaient aux phases de sa maladie morale (La Femme de trente ans, p. 80).

And as Julie listens to the twittering of the birds, to their lavish, joyous expressions of tenderness at the setting of the sun, she says to the priest that "Nous sommes, nous femmes, plus maltraitéss par la civilization que nous ne serions par la nature" (La Femme de trente ans, p. 94). This peaceful influence of nature caused her open wound to bleed all the more as she thinks of the violent commotion that has caused them to separate. It has been nature that has charged itself to express their mutual love to them, a love of which they have not dared speak. The earth has smiled everywhere, and everywhere there has been this soft magic enveloping the soul, sending it indolent lanquishing. This beautiful soothing countryside lulls to sleep the sufferings and awakens the passions. No one can stay cold and indifferent under this pure sky. There dies more than one ambition; there one sinks into the bosom of a quiet happiness as the sun sinks into its purple and azur repose. "Arthur," Julie has said, "this valley seemed so savage to me, but now it's radiant" (La Femme de trente ans, pp. 59, 61, translated). Later on in the novel, in similar circumstances, Balzac brings out the same sentiment: ". . . toutes les harmonies de la nature s'accordaient pour rejouir l'âme" (La Femme de trente ans, p. 134). The point of departure resides for the most part in an

affective wound that cannot be closed, a suffering heart that finds compensation for deep peace in the glories of nature with this mystic implication that human love, through nature, leads to divine love. The faculty of these complex souls to feel allies itself to the impotence of their will for their greatest interior suffering and gives them a moral and cerebral superiority.

The real mystic is gripped by an interior sentiment that puts him directly and intimately in relation with God, the world being excluded as seen in Madame Graslin, Madame Mortsauf, Madame Langeais, Madame Beauséant and others--a reflection of Boehme's philosophy and Martin's mysticism in nature. But as high as their spirituality may climb, there rests an egoism in their character. From each one of these singular dramas is disengaged a lesson of psychology, an argument of social philosophy.

CHAPTER V

RELIGION IN BALZAC'S WOMEN

"Christianity" wrote Balzac in his preface to La Comédie humaine, "and especially Catholicism, being a complete repression of man's depraved tendencies, is the greatest element in social order."[86] This does not mean that he was an orthodox believer. "I conceive of Catholicism as poetry," he wrote to Madame Hanska.[87] And again, more specifically he commented, "I am not orthodox and do not believe in the Roman Church. Swedenborgism, which is only a repetition in Christian terms of ancient ideas, is my religion, though I should add to that the incomprehensibility of God."[88]

In Le Médecin de campagne Balzac says that religion is a tie, and most certainly a cult, or otherwise an expressed religion, which constitutes the only force that can reunite the social species and give them a durable form. Finally, he senses the balm that religion throws on the wounds of life. (Le Médecin de campagne, p. 101)

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[86] Honoré de Balzac, in Twenty-five Volumes, the first complete translation into English (New York: Peter Fenelon Collier and Son, 1900), p. 16.

[87] Cited by Rogers, op. cit., p. 15.

[88] Ibid.

"Une religion est le coeur d'un peuple," says Benassis in the same novel (p. 89). Bertault notes that, like many theosophists, he was convinced that Balzac's dualism in no wise sullied his conscience. On the literary plane, it throws light on the composition of several novels. It mingles in the soul of the Catholic and mystic Madame Mortsauf. There is no one religion in Balzac; there are several. In Le Médecin de campagne religion is regarded in its relationships with human interest, defense of property and economic interests. In his Avant Propos he writes, "I am writing in the light of two eternal verities, Religion and Monarchy."[89] It seems that in this novel the popular form of simple faith is yet best expressed, the wisdom of obeying the rites of the religion, because it implies the idea of future recompense, which alone helps to endure the pain of this life. Altszyler states that:[90]

> Balzac revient à l'intervention d'une cause suprateŕrestre dominant et expliquant toutes choses. La pensée principale des maux et des biens ne peut être préparée, domptée, dirigée que par la religion.

Balzac often refers to the passions as being jesuitic, and the Balzacien characters are a perpetual demonstration

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[89]Balzac in twenty-five volumes, op. cit., p. 17.

[90]Altszyler, op. cit., p. 25.

of this quality. La Marquise de Castries, who was Balzac's close friend, serves as an example with her partial renouncement of the world. The women in the novels, too, submit themselves to Christian obligation, believing in the reality of sacred marriage and family relations and religion; for them religion is at once a moral support and a heartbreak. They seek help in their confessors who intervene in their conduct. The denying of self leads to neurosis, melancholy and pining away in doubly dissatisfying impossible love. They loathe life after the loss of their lovers; not a single souvenir in the desert of their sentiments helps them to want to live. Then divine sublimation of human suffering offered to God, helps the woman to surmount her state of depression and transform it into altruism. This is the lesson in Le Curé de village, Le Lys dans la vallée, Le Médecin de campagne, and in Eugénie Grandet to a certain degree.

Benassis explains that: "La Societé ne vit pas seulement par des idées morales; pour subsister, elle a besoin d'actions en harmonie avec ces idées" (Le Médecin de campagne, p. 100). Borel speaks of it as: ". . . ces êtres supérieurs qui . . . se consacrent à l'action altruiste et par l'oubli ou le sacrifice, la souffrance,

le renoncement total d'eux-mêmes, s'élèvent jusqu'à Dieu . . . ."[91]

Balzac discovers in altruism a psychological motivation of which the will is but the exterior expression. The renouncement that imposes itself does not lead to a retiring within oneself. The vulgar joys, the material satisfactions, the ordinary desires are destroyed; this void created by them is refilled with the altruistic tendency. It realizes itself in action. Of Madame Mortsauf we read ". . . le dégout qui l'avait saisie pour toutes les choses d'ici-bas." And she says: "Si Dieu nous a donné le sentiment et le goût du bonheur, ne doit-il pas se charger des âmes innocentes qui n'ont trouvé que des afflictions ici-bas" (Le Lys dans la vallée, p. 287). It is an ideal, a sentiment that upholds and animates all her energy.

Borel says that happiness is an energy according to Aristotle's formula, that brings to the blessed soul, who lives in the shadow of silence a compensation for true happiness.[92] Madame de Mortsauf is a figure both true and typical of a Christian woman. She embodies that constant struggle between infidelity and devotion to a husband who is brute. The repressive virtue of

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[91]Borel, op. cit., p. 128.

[92]Ibid.

Catholicism here takes on its full meaning, because this creature is the Lily of the Valley, whom the demon has not wilted with his drying breath. "She will be cut down by Death still spotless in her splendor," says Bertault.[93] She loves, says Marceau, and she dies of her struggle against that love. If she had given way to it, she would die of remorse.[94] She undergoes the assaults of temptation by her love for a young man who admires her and who consoles her with a full measure of devotion. Only one thing keeps her from giving herself to him: her Christian faith. But, says Bertault: Henriette (Madame Mortsauf) is a failure as a representation of the struggle of the spirit against the flesh. Divine help is reduced to nothingness--divine succor plays no part in the drama.[95] It is a religion du devoir (Le Lys dans la vallée, p. 31). Marceau points out that for the Christian, there exists only one truth, only one justification: the soul's salvation. All the rest is mockery.[96] But Henriette searches herself, and finds herself in her last moment, rediscovers

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[93]Bertault, op. cit., p. 105.

[94]Marceau, op. cit., p. 259.

[95]Bertault, op. cit., p. 113.

[96]Marceau, op. cit., p. 120.

her joy and serenity. The novel ends not in dispair, but in victory.

The experiences of Madame Graslin at Montegnac, like those at Voreppe, prove that the Catholic religion is the supreme social ferment as well as the only tether on passion. Balzac, as already seen, envisioned Catholicism as a code of social morality. Véronique Graslin, a woman of the upper middle class, pretends to be very pious but hypocrisy, hidden by superior technique, masks the crime. Bertault remarks that she hides her passion in the shadow of the altar; thus she avoids entangling herself in horrible scandal of which she is the cause.[97] "La Religion maintenait son esprit," we read in Le Curé de village, p. 48. In this case it seems that faith presents no obstacles to the desires of the flesh. Repentance comes to her only on her deathbed ten years later.

In spite of appalling penance, Véronique is never able to erase the memory of her guilty pleasures. "Les misères que je m'éfforce de soulager m'attristent l'âme, . . . les émotions que m'a causées leur detresse calmée me suffisent pas à mon âme" (Le Curé de village, p. 50). The regret for having caused the death of her lover takes

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[97]Bertault, op. cit., p. 105.

precedence in her heart over that of having given offense to God. Bertault again comments that:[98]

> La Comédie humaine "consecrates" the victories of the flesh over the ever defeated faith, but it takes its revenge by offering the edifying spectacle of repentance for the good of civilization.

Véronique starts to repent when she learns of her lover's death: "Véronique se condamna, chercha ses torts;" but she consoles herself saying: "La Religion n'occupe-t-elle pas mon âme?" (Le Curé de village, pp. 48, 50). From the cradle to the grave Véronique is led every step of the way by priests, by her Church. The priest says: "La Religion est, par anticipation, la justice divine. L'Eglise s'est réservé le jugement de tous les procès de l'âme" (Le Curé de village, p. 183). Her adultery estranges her from it for a moment. But then her lover's crime leads her back onto the right path. It is really a story that never emerges from the shadow. There is a deification at the end of the novel in which Véronique toils slowly up the hard path that leads from repentance to a hair-shirt and finally attains saintliness. Balzac speaks of it as: ". . . la grandeur des tardives vertus par lesquelles elles expiaient leurs fautes" (La Duchesse de Langeais, p. 221).

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[98] Ibid.

Véronique looks for an atonement for her criminal passion. She says: "Pourquoi désire-je une souffrance qui romprait la paix énervante de ma vie?" (Le Curé de village, p. 50). And she finds it in converting her huge wilderness estate into a flourishing country to the benefit of a suffering community. This sets her private tragedy into a historical setting. Balzac brings out this idea of atonement through the mouth of Vautrin: "On nous parle de faire pénitence de nos fautes. Encore un joli système que celui en vertu duquel on est quitté d'une crime avec un acte de contrition!" (Le Père Goriot, p. 141). He says again: "Tout peut se racheter par les bons oeuvres du repentir," and, "Vos prières doivent être des travaux" (Le Curé de village, p. 185). The l'abbé also tells Véronique:

> La mort du Rédempteur, qui a racheté le genre humain, est l'image de ce que nous devons faire pour nous mêmes: rachetons nos fautes! rachetons nos coeurs! rachetons nos crimes! Tout est rachetable. Le catholicism est dans cette parole . . . (Le Curé de village, p. 185).

It is the result of an exposition of the Catholic doctrine and an application of Catholic repentance that Véronique undertakes an "evangelical" project. She is inspired with this desire to atone her mistake. The accent here is put on social problems and religious problems, to which the Saint-Simoniens also attached a great deal

of importance. Balzac puts emphasis on spiritual regeneration. Madame Graslin gains her salvation by repenting of her evil, and the money at the root of all this evil is purified in becoming the instrument of charity. The only real punishment is that of conscience. Véronique, like Henriette, dies like a saint after having made public confession and being pardoned by the priest, and is accompanied to heaven by a procession of good works.

Mademoiselle Rose Cormon in La Vieille Fille is a very pious person. Balzac says of her: "Elle marchait dans la voie du salut, en préférant les malheurs de sa virginité infiniment trop prolongée au malheur d'un mensonge, au péché d'une ruse" (La Vieille Fille, p. 76). Balzac feels that this type of moral aphtalmia which obscures the view of many on their way to eternity, to little earthly facts; in other words, they are stupid in many ways. He is not quite certain whether it is stupidity that makes people devout or whether devotion makes intelligent women stupid. Mademoiselle's silliness is multiplied by her religious feelings. One reads again in the same novel:

> Songez bien, la vertu catholique la plus pure, avec ses amoureuses acceptations de tout calice, avec sa pieuse soumission aux ordres de Dieu, avec sa croyance a l'empreinte du doigt divin sur toutes les glaises de la vie, est la mystérieuse lumière qui se glissera dans les derniers replis de cette histoire pour leur donner tout leur relief, et qui

> certes les agrandira aux veux de ceux qui ont encore la foi (La Vieille Fille, p. 77).

This is more or less Balzac's conception of religious influence. Marceau indicates that Balzac had a tendency toward leveling down values, a rejection of all à priori immoral notions. Balzac puts priesthood, motherly love, and genius on the same level with gambling, plotting, and piracy. His sacriligious hand strips the noble values of their halo and the baser values of their infamy.[99] It is a rejection of all moral absolutes. For Balzac, religious beliefs can lead to saintliness, as in the case of Henriette or religious beliefs can also lead to petty-mindedness or idiocy, as in the case of Rose Cormon. Thus she sins in the eyes of the world by the divine ignorance of a virgin. She is too unobservant to understand Athanase's wooing; she fortifies herself in her virtue by the most severe religious practices advised by the priest. And these absurd practices shed a monastic glow on her face.

"La Duchesse de Langeais incarnates the hypocrisy of the conventions of the good manners of the upper Parisian society," says Bertault.[100] The author mocks the great

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[99]Marceau, op. cit., p. 358.

[100]Bertault, op. cit., p. 101.

ladies: they rarely go to church but their apologetic flow of words pours out in stereotyped phrases of neo-Christian speech sprinkled with personal politics. There is such a feebleness in their confessions. The confession is a rapid narration inspired by grief and by a conscience which is a product of their social milieu. They give all they can to their lover and still remain chaste and pure. La Duchesse de Langeais says to Montriveau: "Si vous m'exaucez, je serai heureuse, si vous êtes inexorable, j'expierai mes torts" (La Duchesse de Langeais, p. 359). She had no real spiritual convictions; she had nothing that was really light and nothing that was really serious in her character. Her passion, with exception of perhaps the last was hypocritical and compromising. The ladies of society of that time had a thirst for pleasure that was injurious to the religious sentiment and would therefore necessitate hypocricies. They all seem to speak a good deal about religion but knew not the power thereof. It seems to be used as a convenience to unknot the plot in almost every case. Letting her speak for herself the Duchesse in writing to Montriveau says:

> Adieu. . . . Votre amour était mortel, il ne savait supporter ni dédain, ni la raillerie; le mien peut tout endurer sans faiblir, il est immortellement vivace. Ah! j'éprouve une joie sombre à vous écraser. . . . Vous n'avez que de passagers désirs; tandis que la pauvre religieuse vous éclairera sans cesse de ses ardentes prières . . . je . . . vous donne

> rendevous dans le ciel. . . . Me voila si calme, que je craindrais de ne plus t'aimer, si ce n'était pour toi que je quitte le monde (La Duchesse de Langeais, p. 361).

In this long declaration (of a few pages) that the Duchess makes to Montriveau, the author is painting this particular variety of feminine comedy. He shows the feminine coquettery even in the confessions and it is not difficult to read some satire into these lines. Just as the author reveals character through his descriptions, so he does through the words uttered by the individuals. Bardèche points out that all the futile remarks about the vanity of the character are a part of the secret plan of the coquettery and ". . . qu'elles sont pour la Duchesse un moyen de jeter Montriveau 'dans les petites du monde' et tâchant de l'initier aux vanités d'une femme à la mode."[101] Madame Langeais' piety is of a somewhat doubtful quality. She confesses all her shortcomings to the abbé, who as in all the other novels, serves as a director of her conscience. Confessors and directors of conscience crop up often in La Comédie humaine.

Eugénie Grandet is a deeply pious girl like her mother. She goes on her way, submissive and broken hearted, weeping and forgiving, praying till her last sigh for

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[101]Bardèche, op. cit., p. 580.

him whom she can never forget. This is the kind of love that angels know; love that bears itself proudly in anguish that lives by the secret pain of which it dies at last. There is nothing left to her but to live prayerfully till the day of her deliverance will come and her soul will spread its wings for heaven. "My mother was right," she says, "souffrir et mourir" (Eugénie Grandet, p. 222). She is an obscure saint. She is in many respects like Véronique, but she remains pure. This offers a kind of Christian elevation on the mysteries of sorrow. Her calvary and her ascension are realities to her. It is a formalistic and traditional Catholicism, completing a purifying itself in Martinist Illuminism, which infuses into the spirit solicitude for social and altruistic activity. She, as well as Henriette, finds solace and compensation in "active prayer."

Madame d'Aiglemont is not a religious woman. She is a girl of the eighteenth century and influenced by its philosophies; just so, the religious ideas floated in her heart--half enlightened, soon thwarted, and often extinguished (La Femme de trente ans, p. 205). She is now old before her age (fifty years) because of the deeply hidden remorse that she carries. She carries a frozen face in order to hide what is underneath. She exclaims:

> Je veux rester vertueuse. Cependant je serai tout à la fois fidèle à ma conscience d'épouse, à mes devoirs de mère et au voeux de mon coeur. . . . Je ne veux être une prostituée . . . si je ne suis point a monsieur d'Aiglemont, je ne serai jamais à un autre. Vous n'aurez de moi que ce que vous m'avez arraché (La Femme de trente ans, p. 65).

These words are addressed to her lover when she is under a spell of remorse, when she struggles between a sense of duty and the magnetism of passion. She feels obligated to confess to her daughter her origin, which she, herself, could not face: ". . . ces meurtrissures secrètes qui finissent par détruire les fleurs de l'âme et jusqu' au sentiment de la maternité" (La Femme de trente ans, p. 208). She is battling this secret in her mind and soul. These retained sufferings have produced a sort of morbidness in this woman. But this hidden acid that pierces crystal, was corroding her heart. She feels she owes this confession to her daughter Moina, but when she finally draws up her last strength and energy to do it, she dies. Here again it is La pensée qui tue.

After the last grand ball, Madame de Beauséant wants to withdraw herself to a convent in Normandy, where she wants to ". . . aimer prier jusqu' au jour où Dieu me retira de ce monde. . ." (Père Goriot, p. 322). At my departure from this world I will have had like some other priviledged dying ones, the sincere and religious emotions around me, she says. (Père Goriot, p. 322).

Madame de Beauséant had just received the news that her lover, Monsieur d'Ajuda has married someone else for the sake of money, and now religion is a means of escape from the world. Religion plays no part in the drama in which essentially human happiness of Madame de Beauséant, of Madame d'Aiglemont or la Duchesse de Langeais occupies the stage. It is as if religion has not actually occurred to these souls. Bertault remarks that it is rather ignored by a sort of facile forgetfulness, driven, in these sorts of intriques, by mundane usages.[102] Religion plays no consoling sustaining role in the hearts of these lovers, now defeated and aching with loss and abandonment.

Madame Graslin, Madame Mortsauf and others are women whose religious beliefs produce excellent results. Balzac speaks of them with respect. None of these women are in exactly the same situation, but almost all "sympathetic" characters in the Comédie humaine are practicing Christians. The spirits that are directed to the progress of enlightenment and perfectibility have deserted Catholicism. But the humble people remain faithful to their beliefs, and, with moral purity, they preserve the force of that faith which saves them. The upper classes, says Bertault, are proud of their great capacity and

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[102]Bertault, op. cit., p. 106.

see their ills increase together with their pride, and their sorrows together with their enlightenment.[103]

Balzac's Catholicism is far from being really Catholic. Often religious faith is regarded as merely a contributory factor to a happy marriage or to political stability as brought out in Le Médecin de campagne. But, according to Balzac, it always seems that le saint de l'abîme is always the most saintly one. The supremacy of evil over good is the subject matter of the novels. It is the author's taste for the realistic and his ambiguous and moving treatment of the fault and of redemption (including occultism of magnetism, mysticism, illuminism, and mystic Christianity) that have become the source of the modern novel of which Balzac is the father.

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[103]Bertault, op. cit., p. 83.

CHAPTER VI

THE SOCIAL ORIGIN OF BALZAC'S WOMEN

It has been repeatedly seen that Balzac had a tendency to put his own life and that of his acquaintances into his works. Buffum indicates how Félix and Louis Lambert describe his youth; le Père Goriot, his struggle for money; and le Cousin Pons, his expensive tastes as a collector of curiosities. Eugénie Grandet was written when he, himself, was in love.[104] So, too, he puts his acquaintances in his books; that is, the characters often have a real person as a background, but his powerful imagination has developed them. They represent the struggle of interests and ambitions that conflict with one another.

Buffum states that in the novels one is aware of the individualistic spirit that issued from the French Revolution, the triumph of the common people, the bourgeois tragedy hidden in a drawing room and in the back shop, with money as the greatest of powers always increasing in its influence and always degrading in its effects.[105]

Balzac was so obsessed with his imaginary world that when confronted with his subject, he forgot himself entirely to the extent that he was no longer "he" when

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[104] Buffum, op. cit., p. xviii. [105] Ibid.

he "saw." "En fermant les yeux, j'y suis," he says.[106] Bertault brings out that he draws from his inner-depth characters who share in his own nature, even should he shape their souls from a material that he borrows from divine inspiration.[107] Thus, he and his acquaintances become the prototypes of his characters, but the latter do take on a distinctive form of their own into which the prototypes are fused.

Some of these acquaintances had a tremendous influence upon the author and his works, and Balzac would not have been Balzac without them. The most important of these is Madame de Berny, a lady connected with the court of the ancien régime, much older than Balzac himself and the mother of nine children, to whom he was introduced in 1821, who became to him La Dilecta, who, in turn, became the prototype of Madame de Mortsauf in Le Lys dans la vallée. She seems to have exercised an excellent influence upon him in matters of taste till her death in 1836.

Madame de Berny loved Balzac passionately and at the same time became his mundane and literary educator in correcting his proofs with an unrelenting hand--she

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[106]Picon, op. cit., p. 25.

[107]Bertault, op. cit., p. 115.

recognized the genius in him. Hunt indicates that through her he obtained, with some initiation in the more spiritual aspects of love, a more direct insight into feminine psychology. Her loving devotion, and soon his increasingly intimate liaison with the Duchesse d'Abranthès, gave him better equipment than all his book-learning for studying the psychology of passion.[108] This Dilecta, the chosen one of his heart, is seen in Madame de Mortsauf. Félix, the prototype of Balzac, reveals all this passionate love that he has for the dilecta, in whom he sees the earthly perfection of a virtuous, fantastic woman in all her charm and purity.

The long love that Athanase holds for Mademoiselle Cormon in La Vieille Fille recalls the long attachment that Balzac had to Madame de Berny. But Athanase brings out the inclination to marry some one who can help him out of his financial difficulties. Athanase wants to marry Mademoiselle Cormon for love as well as for money. Balzac wrote to his sister Laure: "Cherche-moi quelque veuve, riche héritière. . ." and again "Je te déclare, en mon âme et conscience que je ne me marierais jamais à une jeune fille. . . ."[109] This was written after

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[108]Hunt, op. cit., p. 9.

[109]Cited by Abrahams, op. cit., pp. 41-42.

the death of madame de Berny. He does not think that marriage and love can exist in poverty.

Le Lys dans la vallée where he exalts this burning passion he had for her, appeared just before the death of la Dilecta. It serves as a most splendid tombstone of love that he in advance raised for her. He wrote to madame Hanska that madame de Mortsauf was just a pale representation of the celestial creature of Madame de Berny. "Madame de Mortsauf n'est qu'un souffle imparfait de ses inspirations constantes. . . . Elle était vraie, elle ne voulait que mon bien et ma perfection."[110] She was for him a compensation for what he had missed all his life. She entertained the same maternal feelings toward him as Henriette did to Félix, and yet they were lovers.

In Un Drame au bord de la mer Balzac and madame de Berny are transposed into Louis Lambert and Pauline as they promenade themselves at the lake shore. In Le Lys dans la vallée other characters have their prototypes such as Matalie de Mannerville as madame Hanska, and it was to her that the book was addressed. Félix, as already pointed out, is Balzac, and Madame Guidobonie, whose acquaintance he had recently made, is the model for Lady

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[110]Cited by Bouteron, op. cit., p. 72.

Dudley. She represents the femme sans coeur; Balzac wrote this to Madame Guidobonie:[111]

> . . . Adieu, mille tendresses. Vous savez que je vous aime chèrement. Mais le plus singulier de l'affaire c'est que je dois vous aimer . . . quand à mon amitié pour vous, elle est ce que doit être le sentiment qui nous lie, inaltérable, tendre et profond.

She was a woman of rare beauty and of English origin. She was about thirty, and her maiden name was Sarah Frances Lovell.[112]

A Polish-Russian countess, Evelina Hanska, who after addressing Balzac as l'Etrangère, wrote a letter to him in 1832 and became his idol, rarely seen but constantly corresponded with during the last eighteen years of his life. She was his wife for the last few months of his life. She was a rich proprietress, dreamy, living on sentimental imagination, married to a husband twenty-five years older than she and to her, destiny had refused the realization of her aspirations. In 1835, Balzac was taken between these two loves, that of the Dilecta and that of l'Eve. He considered the one the angel of heaven and the other the angel of this life.[113] His views on women and love became more sophisticated

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[111]Cited by L. J. Arrigon, Balzac et la "Contessa" (Paris: Editions des Portiques), p. 26.

[112]Ibid. [113]Bouteron, op. cit., p. 70.

in accordance with a deepening intimacy with madame Hanska which was perceptibily enriching. His heroines became more mature, more psychologically complex. Madame Hanska wrote in one of her letters:[114]

> Je suis fière d'être quelque chose dans l'existence de cet homme de génie, quelque chose qu'aucune autre femme n'a été pour lui. Car il est un génie, un des plus grands que la France ait produits.

With madame Hanska Balzac seemed at first more than anything else to seek the security and comfort which his first love with madame de Berny had given him, for after her death he wrote:[115]

> When I'm wounded like this, I fly now only toward you, toward you who understands me and who judges me objectively enough to make your praise worth something.

His knowledge of Russian life must have armed him against provincialism and given him a new dimension of his feeling for human nature and human destiny.[116] In la Fausse Maftresse Balzac puts in the scene the Polish people that he found in Madame Hanska's circle of friends. It evokes the picture of an ideal lover. Hunt feels that this perfect example of a selfless passion was apparently inspired by the silent adoration which Thaddaeus Wylezinski

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[114]Cited by Altszyler, op. cit., p. 21.

[115]Cited by Rogers, op. cit., p. 35.

[116]Ibid.

accorded to his cousin, madame Hanska.[117] Albert Savarus is a transcription of Balzac's own experiences--his long courtship of Madame Hanska, says Bouteron.[118] He wrote to her in the spring of 1842, after having at last learned that Monsieur Hanska had died and that his Eveline was free. His first and most obvious purpose must have been to present his own case before her.

The Russian disposition is also seen in La Fosseuse in Le Médecin de campagne. The little social activity, the dreaminess, the ignorance of a fight for existence. As she says, for example: "En certains jours j'aime mieux manger un morceau de pain sec que de m'accomoder quelque chose pour mon diner" (Le Médecin de campagne, p. 397). This, Altszyler says, is typical of Russian lassitude and Russian mentality.[119] The whole village in that novel has a slavic atmosphere about it. In Le Curé de village the whole idea of crime and redemption stems from a slavic conception which Balzac got from madame Hanska. Also the description of the countryside of Montegnac corresponds with Wierzchownia, where madame Hanska had her estate with its unexploited lands.

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[117] Hunt, op. cit., p. 307.

[118] Bouteron, op. cit., p. 75.

[119] Altszyler, op. cit., p. 144.

In Les Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées, Balzac is the prototype of Macumer and madame Hanska is Louise.[120] It brings out her various manifestations of jealousy. Balzac receives much admonishment from Evelina, and he referred to her as a serious abbesse. Macumer receives similar admonishments and dictatorial counsels from the girl whose slave he has become. In La Recherche de l'absolu Monsieur de Wierzchownia bears the name of madame Hanska's castle and several heroines bear the name Eve; for example Eve, sister of Rubempré in Les Illusions perdues and Eveline, in Le Médecin de campagne, are taken from the name of Evelina. Séraphita is dedicated to her. Modeste Mignon is dedicated to "Une Extrangère." Madame Hanska is present everywhere in Balzac's works dating from 1833 to 1850.

On Balzac's general themes is engrafted a precise episode of his life. When, in October, 1831, he received a letter from a lady admirer signed with an assumed English name, a correspondence started and the mysterious lady soon revealed her identity as la marquise de Castries. She had married young and soon separated from her husband. She had then had a love-affair with Victor de Metterlich who died in 1829. She was intelligent, sensible, cultured

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[120]Hunt, op. cit., p. 300.

and tried to befriend artists and writers. Eight months after their first meeting Balzac's intimacy with the marquise had become so great that she invited him to go with her on a trip to Italy. The break occurred in Geneva. This is one place where Balzac learned to know aristocracy and describe it. Rogers states that it is chiefly through this friendship that he came to know the great Parisian ladies who appear in his stories. As long as they lived, they saw each other and corresponded. In 1844 Balzac dedicated L'Illustre Gaudissart to her.[121] After the break with her, Balzac returned to Paris deluded and in dispair. Balzac said of her: "Je souffre par elle mais je ne la juge pas";[122] he realized the impossibility of a liaison--an impossibility that has repercussions throughout his novels. His love to madame de Berny had been an unrealizable one, too.

Julie, in La Femme de trente ans finds in madame de Castries a prototype. She can not forget the death of her lover either when Charles de Vandenesse (who represents Balzac) tries to win her. But Balzac senses the inclination of the marquise and takes hope just as Vandenesse does when Julie first refuses him. He said

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[121]Rogers, op. cit., pp. 32-33.

[122]Borel, op. cit., p. 156.

to her that she thought life ended for her there, where it really began. Balzac could not have said otherwise to the marquise.

La Duchesse de Langeais, as is well known, owes its origin in large part to Balzac's bitter memories of madame de Castries, who treated him, it is said, rather in the same way as madame de Langeais at first treats Montriveau. This work is considered to be Balzac's vengeance against madame de Castries in which he brings out the atrocities with which he reproaches the marquise. He avenged himself cruelly. His bitterness is apparent and casts a shadow over the whole plot. Marceau points out that everything is seen from Balzac's--Montriveau's point of view, nothing from that of madame Castries--madame de Langeais'.[123]

Borel feels that Henriette de Castries is not altogether Antoinette de Langeais. She furnishes only the elements of the circumstances and the psychological reality, the theme of an impossible love, a love unattainable.[124] Antoinette is the incontestable queen of the Parisian salons as was madame de Castries. She belongs to one of the oldest families of the French nobility and

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[123]Marceau, op. cit., p. 42.

[124]Borel, op. cit., p. 136.

is one of the greatest ladies of the Restoration. Antoinette inherits coquettery and religious impulses from her.

There are yet a number of other heroines who have for their social origin madame de Castries, such as madame de Beauséant in Père Goriot, who owes her charm, her gracious manners, and the dignity of her demi-renouncement to the world to her. Madame Castries' first names were Claire-Clemence-Henriette-Claudine and Balzac gives the name to the purest and sweetest of his heroines, that of la Lys dans la vallée. A number of others in La Comédie humaine carry her name. He gives something of her to the heroines that unite the aristocratic elements to those of the heart. In Le Médecin de campagne, Balzac refers to la Grande Chartreuse, a place that he visited together with the marquise, and the author engrafts himself into the médecin with all his disappointment in love, because of a coquette, destitute of heart, who is the marquise, and retreats to a forgotten valley.

Balzac was a friend of George Sand. Borel brings out how Balzac had several forms of identifying his characters, and he thinks that George Sand is used as a type of resemblance, an incarnate thesis into others.[125] There is a great resemblance between madame de Bargeton

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[125]Borel, op. cit., p. 168.

in Les Illusions perdues, and George Sand. Many of the events in the story date back to Balzac's association with George Sand. They also refer to George Sand's association with Sandeau--especially the beginning of Les Illusions perdues where madame Bargeton is attracted to Lucien de Rubempré. Lucien's face resembles that of Sandeau, and Charles Didier finds in madame Bargeton's turban the exotic tastes of George Sand. He finds, also, the ideas that madame de Bargeton expresses about marriage to resemble slightly those of George Sand.

Marceau brings out that madame Bargeton is a rather flimsy character; there is no stature, no body to her at all.[126] The compensation is, however, her high birth which Balzac respected. George Sand too, had a fairly high birth. Balzac may have expressed well his admiration or affection for her in having her represented by Mademoiselle de Touches called Félicité in Les Illusions perdues, but Félicité is much superior to George Sand. No doubt Balzac preferred to give her a flattering portrait.

The Touches family is of good aristocratic stock, and Félicité orphaned at the age of two--like George Sand--is brought up by an old uncle. In her case, morality and prejudice have succumbed to the dictates of intellect--

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[126]Marceau, op. cit., p. 105.

George Sand's ideas. Reason is master. She becomes famous as a writer--like George Sand. There is a moment when Félicité seems to be entertaining a certain fondness for Lucien de Rubempré--Balzac and George Sand--yet their feeling never blossoms. It becomes another one of those relationships that somehow do not happen. Félicité contents herself with retaining a tender sympathy toward him in her heart. She goes to Italy with her new lover, much like George Sand did with Musset. George Sand appears again in La Muse du Département. Balzac frequently cites George Sand and speaks of her influence over so many high class women as she advocated the saint somonian doctrine of marriage which was very much like free love. Les Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées is dedicated to her.

Another lady, also a superior one well-known by the author and one whom he put either in one way or another in the scene of La Muse du Département, is Delphine de Girardin. She lived withdrawn in the country with her mother, Sophie Gay, at Villiers-sur-Orge, for economic reasons. Borel compares her situation with that of La Muse du Département and finds a real parallelism. She was too beautiful, too brilliant, and too poor to find a husband easily. The same situation is found in the novel.[127]

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[127]Borel, op. cit., p. 187.

Both Delphine and her mother were writers, and Balzac liked to consult them and even collaborated with Delphine in finishing his novel Béatrix. She also composed the sonnets for Les Illusions perdues.[128] Sophie Gay had a salon that Balzac liked to frequent and where he always felt at ease. It was here that he liked to tell his big anecdotes. For him this place was paradise where the stories repeated in La Physiologie du mariage were told him by Sophie Gay. In the drama of La Grande Bretèche, the mysterious house described is the Red House of Villiers, the house of Delphine. She is represented also in La Femme abandonnée and the red inn there is also her house. But in part it is also madame de Castries who is la femme abandonnée.

It was in Sophie's salon that Balzac was introduced to a number of other society people. He was well accepted there because of his sociability and because these women were always well informed about writers and incidents. It is thought that Balzac visited Sophie Gay before Delphine's marriage, but whether it was because of her that he went there is not known. Madame Castries knew these ladies and was invited over there. It was in Sophie's salon where Balzac met Laure Abranthès who had a great influence

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[128]Bouteron, op. cit., p. 93.

upon his political views. She interested him in the Imperial world of Napoleon, which is brought out in part in Le Médecin de campagne.

Madame Zulma Carraud is a friend of Laures, Balzac's sister, in whom he confided all his woes and joys. Balzac wrote to her in one letter:[129]

> There is in me a worship of women, and a need of loving, which have never been completely satisfied. . . To dedicate myself to the happiness of a woman is my count and dream. . .

She was a delicate and pure friend and understood everything, states Andre Maurois in the preface to Le Lys dans la vallée. Zulma was an honest critic of Balzac's works. She was not jealous of his other women friends and asked him to bring madame du Berny with him when coming to Frapesle. At the time of writing Les Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées, he had Zulma Carraud much in mind, whose marriage had been a typically reasonable one and so she was the prototype of Renée de l'Estorade. Like Renée, she had married an ex-prisoner of war who had the same after effects as had the husband of Louise de Macumer. Hunt says that her correspondence with Balzac is still sage advice, and Zulma's steadiness was a contrast to Eve's changeableness. Balzac had been asking her to

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[129]Cited by Hunt, op. cit., p. 302.

find him a well-to-do girl who would marry him and pay off his debts--just as he makes Louise pay off her second husband's debts. As Zulma is to Balzac, so is Renée to Louise. The novel La Maison de Nucingen is dedicated to her.

Madame Caroline Marbouty of Limoges was another of Balzac's friends. She accompanied him on his adventurous trip to Italy disguised as a man. This trip had been arranged for Balzac by the Countessa Guidobonie who felt that he was in great need of diversion and refreshing. Madame Marbouty had a complacent husband and found things boring in Limoges. She agreed enthusiastically to accompany him to the land of romance disguised as a page. Caroline Marbouty was a prototype of Claire Brunne in a book that is read very little.[130] But she also furnished certain elements for the character of Madame Bargeton and for her entourage.

Of Marie du Fresnay very little is known. She was a lovely creature. It was not Balzac who adored her in silence but rather Marie who adored Balzac, and he said of her:[131]

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[130]Bouteron, op. cit., p. 87.

[131]Arrigon, op. cit., p. 28.

> La pauvre, simple et délicieuse bourgeoise, la plus délicieuse créature qui soit tombée comme une fleur du ciel, qui vient chez moi en cachette, n'éxige ni correspondance, ni soin, et qui dit: "Aime-moi un an, mon ami, je t'aimerai toute ma vie."

She is described as a gentle and affectionate creature with whom he had one of the numerous intrigues described so complacently in his letters to his sister, madame de Surville. She was a prototype of Véronique whose love affair lasted precisely one year. After she lost her lover, all her life remained centered around this love. It obsessed her to the extent that she wanted to expiate his crime. It is probable that Marie inspired certain reactions in the Femme de trente ans, and it is above all to her that the novel Eugénie Grandet is dedicated in which she was, no doubt, the prototype of the heroine.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Honoré de Balzac, the great observer, made a study of the manners of his contemporary society, the nineteenth century, an aspect which is generally neglected by professional historians. He felt that writers of history of Egypt, Persia, Greece, and Rome had forgotten to give the history of manners.[132] He describes social life in its various forms and it was no small task to depict the over two thousand conspicuous types of a period. He tried to discover in what particular ways societies approach or deviate from the eternal law of truth and beauty. He felt that society, itself, would bear the reasons of its workings.[133] He found an explanation, the cerebral life, the life of passion, and the life of society as a whole. The improvised, powerful appearance of certain characters that astonish the reader is not but a union of Balzac as romanticist, observer, realist, and philosopher.

Bardèche notes that the central thought in Balzac's novels frees itself and suddenly gives a sense to his

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[132] Honoré de Balzac in Twenty-five Volumes. The first complete translation into English. (New York: Peter Fenelon Collier and Son, 1900), Vol. I, p. 13.

[133] Ibid., p. 14.

work. The romanticist explores the social life guided by the idea the reader has just discovered: the destructive power of thought: la pensée qui tue. He analyses the sentiments and reveals the veritable nature of a person.[134] In the unraveling of the knot, one finds the melodrama. In depicting all of society, Balzac felt that he could not but paint a picture of more evil than good, but the moral aspect is brought out, in that crime always meets with punishment, either human or divine. Altszyler states that, "Nous sommes presque tenté d'affirmer que le trait général du monde balzacien est l'insuffisance morale de l'individu et de la societé. . . . il n'en est rien. Balzac a fait une étude des moeurs du XIX^{e} siècle, une étude de l'humanité."[135] Balzac describes the social manners of the women after the great Revolution who have replaced the great ladies of the Old Regime (the monarchy before the Revolution), the flower of monarchical and aristocratic civilization, says Hunt.[136] The graceful figure of the nineteenth century was la femme comme il faut. Balzac has brilliantly drawn a distinction between the aristocratic, sophisticated woman

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[134]Bardèche, op. cit., p. 601.

[135]Altszyler, op. cit., p. 186.

[136]Hunt, op. cit., p. 314.

and the less artificial but also less exquisite bourgeoise who is becoming a prevalent feminine type.

The author has shown in the novels that he regards the family and not the individual as the true social unit and with this revelation has brought out the importance of a woman. His novels are a portrayal of real and normal conjugal life, where there are often prolonged descriptions of the state of mind rather than narrated facts. But gestures and dialogues have their place in them. In this dramatization of everyday life, where he allows his unbridled imagination to take free course, he becomes a galvanizer of the commonplace. Each novel opens with a description so powerful and true that it causes the reader suddenly to enter into another being and grasp the particular scent of that life.

Balzac says that he feels Walter Scott had to conform to a hypocritical society and therefore did not draw a picture of a woman true to humanity. In "Protestantism" he says, "there is no possible future for the woman who had sinned; while in the Catholic Church, the hope of forgiveness makes her sublime."[137] He feels that virtue is revealed in repentance, a point which he has brought out in every novel mentioned in this thesis.

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[137]Honoré de Balzac in twenty-five volumes, op. cit., p. 20.

In creating his women characters, he assumes that passion is the sum-total of humanity. He solves the literary problem by making a virtuous woman more interesting through her struggles against vice and unbridled powers. It is in her where the extremes of good and evil meet. He emphasizes in the novels that man is neither good nor bad, but instead is born with instincts and possibilities of choice, and that passion combines thought and feeling and is the vital social element, but also a destructive element. Through the role that the priests play in the novels, he reveals his principle that good or ill can only be trained or guided by religion. To him Catholicism and Royalty are twin principles.[138]

In La Comédie humaine there are always some mysteries, as in Le Curé de village, Le Médecin de campagne, and La Duchesse de Langeais. The author seems to take pleasure in leaving certain of his thoughts to the magician who knows how to extract their treasures. There is a certain irony in his description of society that runs through the novels. According to Buffum he was the first to introduce social satire into the novel or rather he made of his novels a complete satire of social life in the nineteenth century.[139] In describing the complexities

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[138]Ibid., p. 17. [139]Buffum, op. cit., p.

of life the moral deformations could not but swarm in it. His sister Laure says of him:[140]

> Honoré a la prétension de peindre les vices et la vertues de son époque, de faire le tableau complet de son temps en attaignant toutes les classes . . . et toutes les professions qui régissent, soutiennent, nourrissent la société . . . . ce tableau ne sort pas de hautes moralités.

And the individual woman can hardly detach herself from her physical, moral, and social background. Balzac was himself obsessed by his personal struggles and by a sense of the inevitable triumph of evil over good. It is in these patterns of failure that his realism is seen. All the great women, the good, the loving, are sent to their ordained defeats with a slight recognition on the part of the author. This is the true measure of realism, thinks Affron.[141] It is a fact that the later realists imitated him. The failures of the women are explained in the whole light of their existence. Borel notes that La Princesse de Clèves, by Madame La Fayette, served Balzac as an example of the tragic destinies of great characters.[142] Beautiful, rich, noble, and honored, the

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[140]Laure Surville, Lettres de Laure Surville de Balzac, publiées par André Chancerel (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1932), p. 229.

[141]Affron, op. cit., p. 113.

[142]Borel, op. cit., p. 99.

high-class lady is not responsible but to herself for the decision of her heart, for the refusal of her happiness and the choosing of her sacrifice.

In every novel, Balzac has brought out the important place that women hold in human society. They have their own, well-defined intrinsic value that gives them their attraction and originality. Their due place is assigned to them, and that is what distinguishes them. It is through them that one learns to know more closely and more completely the greatest of French novelists. Truly, all his principles of psychology, art, religion, and society can be interpreted through the characters of the women in his novels.

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Surville, Laure. Lettres de Laure Surville de Balzac, publiées par André Chancerel. Paris: Librairie Plon, 1932. 239 pp.

This is a collection of letters of Balzac's sister Laure which she wrote to her friend, the Baronne de Pommereul in which, among other things, she gives her opinion about her brother's novels.

APPENDIX

SUMMARIES OF NOVELS READ

LA PHYSIOLOGIE DU MARIAGE

This analytical book is a satire on contemporary mores, the eternal drama with the case of three. It is a total scepticism with regard to marriage. This work is somewhat remarkable for its strength of observation and analysis of a young author.

LA FEMME DE TRENTE ANS

An impetuous love-match leads to a rapid estrangement between a dull husband and a quickly dissatisfied wife, then to a romantic and impossible triangle situation from which the third party, the chivalrous young Englishman, Lord Arthur Grenville, reaps nothing but a painful death; and then to a guilty liaison whose consequences, some of them atrocious, extend to the second generation and beget in the hearts of the children concerned, hatred, rebellion and cynicism.

LE MÉDECIN DE CAMPAGNE

This novel is an application of philanthropy and the first where Balzac gives a frank exposition of his political philosophy and proclaims that Monarchy and Church are the twin bulwarks of society. It is at once a piece of political propaganda and apology for Catholicism as a socializing force and a personal way of life, and a treatise of rural economy. But it is also a story of an individual, doctor Benassis, who finds his way through suffering to altruism.

EUGÉNIE GRANDET

Eugénie is Balzac's first study of a middle class girl. The tyrany of her rich father, who is a personification of avarice produces a sort of paralitic torpor in wife, daughter and servant. When she learns that Charles, her cousin, whom she loves, has betrayed her, she accepts

the situation with deep grief. Her marriage to the Cruchot candidate is motivated by her resolve to organize her life for the exercise of charity.

LA DUCHESSE DE LANGEAIS

Antoinette de Langeais is a representative of her caste. She is the living social type. As such, she is la femme sans coeur. She is a high-born trifler with men's affections. Her marriage is merely a conventional one. But she refused to yield to her high-minded lover, Montriveau. When hardly pressed she harps upon the themes of wifely duty and sanction of religion, but when she is ready to accept him, he puts himself on guard against further dupery. She despairs and goes to the Convent. He searches for her and finds her dead on the floor of her cell.

LE PÈRE GORIOT

This story takes place in a bourgeois boarding house in Paris. Le père Goriot is the victim of the idolatrous love he bears for his two daughters; it is a transference to them of a religious adoration formerly lavished on his now deceased wife. This love has become uncritical and monstrous and takes on the flavor of an unnatural vice. The mutual hatred of these two sisters brings him to his death bed, and they have not an atom of real affection for him.

LE LYS DANS LA VALLÉE

Madame de Mortsauf, the Lily of the Valley, joins to the elevation of her faculties and the rare qualities of soul, the fine sensibility of a woman and of a lover. Infirm and disgraced, she is distinguished and loved by Félix de Vandenesse, a man of superior intelligence. All her sensibility of a wife, of a friend and lover are summed up in a gratitude without limits to the man who gives her more than love, who gives her an interest in life and who creates her happiness. She prefers to sacrifice her life and die without bitterness to a prolonged life without love.

LES ILLUSIONS PERDUES

The first part of the novel brings in the two friends, David Séchard and Lucien de Rubempré, both writers in a provincial setting. Madame Bargeton meets the talented Lucien, and the protective relationship develops into an amourous one. After having taken Lucien to Paris and having seen his lack of savoir vivre and his conversational adroitness, there is a mutual disillusion. Lucien, alone in Paris without a protector, draws upon the modest income of his now brother-in-law, David. He ends by taking his life, but Balzac sympathizes with him as a type of struggling man of letters against whom Paris directs its hypocritical and destructive malevolence.

LA VIEILLE FILLE

The author conveys here the feelings of provincial life, drowsing in its melancholy past. Through mademoiselle Rose Cormon he portrays the mores, manners and morals of the aristocracy of the middle class under the Restoration and under the reign of Louis Philippe. Rose Cormon is courted by three suitors, the chevalier de Valois, monsieur Bousquier and a young man, Athanase, who loved her as much as he desired her fortune. She, by hazard, chooses monsieur Bousquier who then dominates her and makes her unhappy. This novel, like many others, ends on a note of melancholy and disenchantment.

MÉMOIRES DE DEUX JEUNES MARIEES

This novel states the pros and cons of a diametrically opposed type of marriage: the romantic and the common sense type. The continued debate of the two married women, Renée de l'Estorade and Louise the Macumer, revolving around the meaning and purpose of marriage, forms the substance of the novel.