

ROMANTIC ELEMENTS IN SELECTED WRITINGS OF BALZAC

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A Thesis

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## PREFACE

Balzac's life was influenced by three literary movements: Classicism, Romanticism, and Realism. This thesis will concentrate on Romanticism as it is found in selected novels of Balzac. No attempt will be made to discuss Classicism nor Realism except where it is deemed expedient to develop or contrast a particular point.

French Romanticism, often regarded as the antithesis of Classicism, can be dated primarily from Jean-Jacques Rousseau. However, it was not mentioned in France as a term for a literary school until 1816.<sup>1</sup> It is as difficult to give a precise date for Romanticism as it is to define it. The writer found most definitions of Romanticism overly general, if not conflicting.

The great Romanticists of France were Rousseau, Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Musset, and Victor Hugo. Hugo, the leading writer of the Romantic school, was a great admirer of Balzac.

Romanticism is a rebellion against the restraint, order, and authoritarianism of the Classical period. The French Romanticists were influenced by the literature

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<sup>1</sup>Sidney D. Braun, Dictionary of French Literature (New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams, 1965), p. 296.

of foreign writers. England had such Romanticists as Scott, Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge. Scott rejected classical subjects and wrote about medieval history. He wrote about English history and popularized local color. Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge made poetry a free art in which the soul was able to reveal itself while reflecting on the universe.<sup>2</sup>

Schiller and Goethe of Germany also served as models for the French. Goethe's chief contribution was imagination. Imagination replaced reason as the dominant force in Romantic literature. Subjects were drawn from impressions, sensations, history, external nature, and local color. Only the artist was the judge of his inspiration and of his art; his literature was completely personal and individual. It was the self which was important. It was not necessary that one's views conform to that which was traditional. Reality was determined by the passions of the artist and by his ways of seeing and feeling nature.<sup>3</sup>

In this thesis the writer will choose from selected novels of Balzac those elements of Romanticism which

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<sup>2</sup>Ch.-M. des Granges, Histoire illustrée de la littérature française (Paris: Librairie Hatier, 1916), p. 696.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

occur most frequently--specifically, subjectivity, emotion and imagination, and local color. Each of these elements will constitute a chapter of the thesis. These elements will be discussed with regard to the role they play in reflecting the attitudes and passions of characters in the novels which reflect the life of France during the first half of the nineteenth century. The novels selected for this project are la Peau de chagrin (1831), le Colonel Chabert (1832), le Médecin de campagne (1833), Eugénie Grandet (1833), le père Goriot (1834), le Lys dans la vallée (1836), and Béatrix (1839). Because of its abundance of Romantic elements, a separate chapter will be devoted to le Lys dans la vallée. All the other novels will be treated in chronological order. With the aid of critical works, the writer will study representative examples of Romantic elements in these novels of Balzac.

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## CHAPTER I

### BIOGRAPHY OF BALZAC, 1799-1850

Honoré de Balzac was born on May 20, 1799, at Tours, in the province of Touraine. He was the eldest son of Bernard-François Balssa, a government official, and of Anne-Charlotte-Laure Sallambier. His mother came from a respectable middle-class family. There were three other children in the Balzac family: Laure, the only girl, Laurence, and Henry. There is good reason to believe that Henry's father was M. de Margone, a wealthy friend of the Balzac family. This may help to explain the difference in the mother's attitude toward Honoré and Henry.<sup>4</sup> At the baptism of Laurence, for the first time, the father signed his name Bernard-François de Balzac. The aristocratic de was added by Bernard-François de Balzac who was by then spelling his name "Balzac." His ancestors had been farmers in southern France. The family had moved to Tours only a few years before the birth of Honoré.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Samuel Rogers, Balzac and the Novel (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1953), p. 28, note.

<sup>5</sup>Jean Boudout, le Père Goriot, Classiques Larousse (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1934), p. 4.



Balzac had a very sad childhood. He felt that his mother favored his younger brothers, especially Henry. As an infant he was put in the care of a wet nurse. At the age of four he was placed in a demi-pension. When he was between the ages of four and six, his mother came to visit him only on Sundays. At six he went to boarding school at Vendôme where he passed an unhappy and frustrated existence. As a result of his mother's negligence he lacked some of the basic necessities, such as extra winter clothing. He saw his mother only twice during the ages six to fourteen. Since he felt rejected, he rejected society. But in looking within himself he found strength which developed into the positive independence which was to show itself later in life. The lack of affection from his mother left him full of contempt for her. He discussed his feelings toward his mother very frankly in a letter to Madame Hanska in 1846:<sup>6</sup>

Je n'ai jamais eu de mère; aujourd'hui, l'ennemi s'est déclaré. Je ne t'ai jamais dévoilé cette plaie; elle était trop horrible, et, il faut le voir pour le croire.

Aussitôt que j'ai été mis au monde, j'ai été envoyé en nourrice chez un gendarme, et j'y suis resté jusqu'à l'âge de quatre ans. De quatre ans à six ans, j'étais en demi-pension, et à six ans et demi, j'ai été envoyé à Vendôme, j'y suis resté jusqu'à quatorze ans en 1813,

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<sup>6</sup>Gaëtan Picon, Balzac par lui-même (Bourges: L'imprimerie Tardy, 1956), p. 30.

n'ayant vu que deux fois ma mère. De quatre à six ans, je la voyais les dimanches.

Quand elle m'a pris chez elle, elle m'a rendu la vie si dure qu' à dix-huit ans, en 1817, je quittais la maison paternelle et j'étais installé dans un grenier, rue Lesdiguières, y menant la vie que j'ai décrite dans la Peau de chagrin. . . . elle a vu mon adoration pour elle se changer en crainte, la crainte en indifférence; et aujourd' hui, elle en est arrivée à me calomnier. Elle veut me donner des torts apparents. . . . J'ai formellement pris la résolution, quant à moi, de ne voir ma mère que le premier jour de l'an, le jour de sa fête et celui de sa naissance, pendant dix minutes. . . .

His bitter resentment for his mother endured until his death. He is reported to have said that he never heard his mother's voice without trembling.<sup>7</sup> Balzac makes specific reference to his childhood suffering in le Lys dans la vallée.

In 1814, the Balzac family moved to Paris. Honoré continued his study in Paris at a boarding school of the royalists, Lepître. Balzac did not excel academically in Tours nor in Paris. He kept his desks filled with poems and other scribblings that he had written. He was nicknamed le poète or l'écrivain by his friends at the lycée. He enrolled in the law school of the University of Paris in 1816. His father did not want to bear the full responsibility for financing his son's education

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<sup>7</sup>Edwin Preston Dargan, Honoré de Balzac, a Force of Nature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932), p. 19.

although he was well off. Honoré took a job, simultaneous with his studies, at the office of an attorney, Guyonnet de Merville. This office is described in le Colonel Chabert; the attorney's name in the novel is Derville. Derville is to reappear frequently throughout the Comédie humaine. Balzac received his law diploma in 1819. He then shocked his parents by announcing that he wanted to become a writer. His parents consented to support him for two years on the condition that, if he were not successful during that time, he would return to the legal profession. His father provided him with an allowance of a hundred twenty francs per month. During this period he worked almost incessantly, rarely leaving his attic apartment. He passed no time in cafés, and spent no money on entertainment.

The aspiring writer moved back with his family in 1820. The family had by then moved to Villeparisis, a suburb of Paris. It seemed that Balzac's literary career was going to be a certain failure. He wrote under the names of Lord R'hoone and Horace de Saint Aubin. Nothing he wrote was successful. He wrote a tragedy entitled Cromwell, which was read by a professor who was a friend of his family. The professor judged the work without merit.

Just as his allotted time for success was running out, fortune smiled on the young author. He made the acquaintance of a young writer by the name of Le Poitevin. Poitevin had a contract to write a piece of fiction for a publishing company in Paris. Poitevin was more interested in social life and asked Balzac to finish the novel for him. Balzac completed the novel, and it was published under the name of Lord O'Rhoone. It sold well, and the collaboration between Balzac and Poitevin continued. Poitevin secured the contracts, and Balzac wrote the novels using a fanciful pseudonym. He soon found that he did not need Poitevin in order to get commissions. He changed his pen name to Horace de Saint Aubin and began writing for himself. He earned two thousand francs per book and looked forward to a quick fortune.<sup>8</sup>

Balzac was to find, in 1821, the greatest inspiration of his life. He met, through his family, Madame de Berny. In the Comédie humaine she is referred to as La Dilecta.<sup>9</sup> Madame de Berny was probably the most important person in his life. When he met her, nothing would have suggested that a romance would develop. She was forty-five years

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<sup>8</sup>Leslie A. Juhasz, Balzac's Eugénie Grandet and Père Goriot (New York: Monarch Press, 1966), p. 7.

<sup>9</sup>Herbert J. Hunt, Balzac's Comédie humaine (London: The University of London, The Athlone Press, 1959), p. 114.

old and the mother of eight children. She had had two others who had died. Balzac was then twenty-two. He was exactly the same age as her third son.<sup>10</sup> The son had died seven years before. Her maternal attributes were welcomed by Balzac. Madame de Berny offered him the attention and affection that he did not get from his mother. She was about the same age as his mother. She was his chief inspiration and his most severe critic. Madame de Berny criticized his literature as well as his character. She had another asset. She was the godchild of Marie Antoinette. Belonging to the nobility, she had an entrée into high society.

Madame de Berny is not described as a very beautiful woman. She is said to have had "a face sensitive but not beautiful, with intelligent eyes set far apart and a rather hesitant smile."<sup>11</sup> She had spent her childhood at the court of Versailles and had married a man of the old nobility. This friendship with Madame de Berny was continued until her death in 1836. Madame de Berny served as the model for Madame de Mortsauf in le Lys dans la vallée.

By this time, Balzac had also formed a Platonic friendship with Zulma Carraud. She had been in boarding

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<sup>10</sup>Rogers, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

school with his sister Laure and was now married to Artillery Commandant Carraud. Balzac was often the guest of the Carraud family at Frapeles, a château near Tours. Madame Carraud had great influence over Balzac's literary career. She was then one of his two best friends.<sup>12</sup> Prior to writing Illusions perdues, in an often quoted letter, he asked her for detailed information about the streets, monuments, and topography of the province of Angoulême.<sup>13</sup> Madame Carraud, like Madame de Berny, was a severe critic of Balzac's work.

Writing under the name of Horace de Saint Aubin, Balzac became an overwhelming success. He could demand his price from the publishers. But he soon became dissatisfied because, as he saw it, the publisher and the printer got most of the money. In 1824, he became a partner in a publishing company. The venture was a failure, and left Balzac in heavy debt. Already a publisher, he decided to go into the printing business. By 1827, he was bankrupt. His investments had been good, but he lacked a sense of business. He did not know how to keep

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<sup>12</sup>Philippe Bertault, Balzac and the Human Comedy (New York: New York University Press, 1963), p. 31.

<sup>13</sup>Gustave Lanson, Histoire de la littérature française, twelfth edition (Paris: Librairie Hachette 1912), p. 1003.

books; and, consequently, never knew what his assets and liabilities were.

Balzac had proved that his books could sell. Writing under his own name, he now produced les Chouans in 1829. It became an immediate success. This was the beginning of his fame as a serious writer. He was then invited into the salons of high society, notably that of Madame de Récamier. He also frequented the group led by Charles Nodier.<sup>14</sup> After his success with les Chouans, he turned out books in great profusion and formed the plan for la Comédie humaine. He wrote fourteen hours per day. Among the more celebrated works during this period were Gobseck (1830), la Peau de chagrin (1831), le Colonel Chabert (1832), and Eugénie Grandet (1833).

In 1831, Balzac received his first letter from the Marquise de Castries. Madame de Castries was to become his second major love. Her letter permitting him to call on her arrived on February 28, 1832; on that same day he received the first letter from Madame Hanska, the Polish countess whom he later married.<sup>15</sup> Chiefly through introductions made by Madame de Castries, Balzac came to know the great ladies of Paris. His relationship

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<sup>14</sup>Juhasz, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>15</sup>Rogers, op. cit., p. 30.

with her was more emotional than physical. Balzac wrote of his sentimental affair with Madame de Castries in le Médecin de campagne.<sup>16</sup> When he asked her to become his mistress, she refused. He wrote of this in the Confession inédite.<sup>17</sup>

Balzac had four serious loves: Madame de Berny, Madame de Castries, Madame Guidoboni-Visconti, and Madame Hanska, all noble ladies. He met Madame Guidoboni-Visconti in 1834. She was born Sarah Lovell. Balzac chose her as the model for Lady Dudley, the Englishwoman in le Lys dans la vallée. He dedicated the novel Béatrix (1839) to her. She was the model for Fanny O'Brien, a character in Béatrix.<sup>18</sup> It is believed that she suggested the title for le Lys dans la vallée, translated from that of an English story.<sup>19</sup> Balzac went to Italy in 1836 to defend the Guidoboni-Viscontis in an inheritance case. Upon his return, he learned of the death of Madame de Berny.<sup>20</sup> This news caused him great sorrow.

In January of 1842, Balzac received very important news. Count Hanski had died. The correspondence between

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<sup>16</sup>Hunt, op. cit., p. 71.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>19</sup>Bertault, op. cit., note, p. 114.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. xi.



Balzac and Madame Hanska became more frequent and more ardent. He had met her in Switzerland in 1833 and in 1834. He went to Saint Petersburg and spent three months with her in 1843. A daughter was still-born to Madame Hanska in 1846. A boy had been expected and the name Victor-Honoré had already been chosen. In 1847 Madame Hanska moved to Paris.

Balzac expected to get the seat in the French Academy left vacant by the death of Chateaubriand. He received only two votes. They came from Victor Hugo and Lamartine.<sup>21</sup> His health was becoming increasingly poor. He suffered from crises of hypertrophy of the heart.

On March 14, 1850, he and Madame Hanska were joined in matrimony. By May, Balzac has become very ill. On July 11, his case was diagnosed as peritonitis. He died on August 18. Victor Hugo, who was present at Balzac's death, delivered an admirable address at the funeral three days later. Balzac was buried at the Père-La-Chaise cemetery.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Bertault, op. cit., p. xv.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. xvi.

## CHAPTER II

### SUBJECTIVITY

Balzac is always participating in his stories. He talks to his reader about individual characters and about his interpretations of reality. By not detaching himself from the story, Balzac permits the reader to participate also. The reader is called on from time to time to confirm or deny certain views held by the author. We find that Balzac frequently talks to his reader in la Peau de chagrin. In this novel Raphaël, having lost his last cent gambling, contemplates suicide. Before jumping into the Seine, he stops at an antique shop where he sees vestiges of many past civilizations. While perusing the various rooms of the shop, Raphaël relates his situation to the old man who is waiting on him. The old man offers him the peau de chagrin and tells him that, with it, he can have anything he wishes; but, with every fulfilled wish the skin will shrink and with it a portion of his life. Raphaël takes the skin. He has nothing to lose, for he is ready to commit suicide anyway.

Balzac lets us know at once that danger lies ahead for Raphaël. He talks to his reader:<sup>23</sup>

. . . Existe-t-il chose plus déplaisante qu'une maison de plaisir? Singulier problème! Toujours en opposition avec lui-même, trompant ses espérances par ses maux présents, et ses maux par un avenir qui ne lui appartient pas, l'homme imprime à tous ses actes le caractère de l'inconséquence et de la faiblesse. Ici-bas, rien n'est complet que le malheur.

In a few words, he shows that he is observing his characters and reacting to them. In addition to giving his attitudes, Balzac searches for absolutes. He is constantly trying to discover truths and the reasons for them:

Quand vous entrez dans une maison de jeu, la loi commence par vous dépouiller de votre chapeau. Est-ce une parabole évangélique et providentielle? N'est-ce pas plutôt une manière de conclure un contrat infernal avec vous en exigeant je ne sais quel gage? Serait-ce pour vous obliger à garder un maintien respectueux devant ceux qui vont gagner votre argent? Est-ce la police, tapie dans tous les égouts sociaux, qui tient à savoir le nom de votre chapelier ou le vôtre, et si vous l'avez inscrit sur la coiffe? Est-ce, enfin, pour prendre la mesure de votre crâne et dresser une statistique instructive sur la capacité cérébrale des joueurs? Sur ce point, l'administration garde un silence complet. Mais, sachez-le bien, à peine avez-vous fait un pas vers le tapis vert, déjà votre chapeau ne vous appartient pas plus que vous ne vous appartenez à vous-même: vous êtes au jeu, vous, votre fortune, votre coiffe, votre canne, et votre manteau (la Peau de chagrin, p. 25).

Balzac suggests that, when one enters a gambling house, he surrenders his personality to the will of the house.

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<sup>23</sup>Honoré de Balzac, la Peau de chagrin (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1962), p. 28. For each of Balzac's works footnote data will be listed once; thereafter only the title and the page will be indicated in the body of the thesis.

By asking questions Balzac creates a mood. The reader is compelled to reflect even though the questions may be rhetorical:

Ne faut-il pas être bien malheureux pour obtenir de la pitié, bien faible pour exciter une sympathie, ou d'un bien sinistre aspect pour faire frissonner les âmes dans cette salle où les douleurs doivent être muettes, ou la misère est gaie et le désespoir décent? Eh bien, il y avait de tout cela dans la sensation neuve qui remua ces cœurs glacés quand le jeune homme entra. Mais les bourreaux n'ont-ils pas quelquefois pleuré sur les vierges dont les blondes têtes devaient être coupées à un signal de la Révolution? (la Peau de chagrin, p. 29)

Balzac subtly suggests answers by asking a series of logical questions.

As a child Balzac was rejected and almost became an ascetic himself, so great was his contempt for society. This rejection of society is very much present in Raphaël after his many adventures. By the end of the novel, he begins to measure the value of society. He feels that society has drawn limits for each individual. As long as that individual stays within those limitations, he is acceptable to society. If he crosses them, he is rejected. He gives these words of advice:

Mourants, restez sur vos lits désertés. Vieillards, soyez seuls à vos froids foyers. Pauvres filles sans dot, gelez et brûlez dans vos greniers solitaires. Si le monde tolère un malheur, n'est-ce pas pour le façonner à son usage, en tirer profit, le bâter, lui mettre un mors, une housse, le monter, en faire une joie? Quinteuses demoiselles de compagnie, composez-vous de gais visages; endurez les vapeurs de votre prétendue bienfaitrice; portez ses chiens; rivaux

de ces griffons anglais, amusez-la, devinez-la, puis taisez-vous! (la Peau de chagrin, p. 252)

He feels that there was a police-like force governing the world, enforcing the paradox of amusements without pleasure, gaiety without joy, feasts without enjoyment and wood without a spark or a flame (la Peau de chagrin, p. 252). Balzac frequently reflects the influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and makes several references to him (la Peau de chagrin, pp. 26 and 110). Romanticism is shown in Raphaël's rejection of society and his return to nature (la Peau de chagrin, p. 264). More specifically Balzac poses these questions:

Qui n'a pas, une fois dans sa vie, espionné les pas et démarches d'une fourmi, glisse des pailles dans l'unique orifice par lequel respire une limace blonde, étudié les fantaisies d'une demoiselle fluette, admiré les mille veines, colorées comme une rose de cathédrale gothique, qui se détachent sur le fond rougeâtre des feuilles d'un chêne? Qui n'a délicieusement regardé pendant longtemps l'effet de la pluie et du soleil sur un toit de tuiles brunes, ou contemplé les gouttes de la rosée, les pétales des fleurs, les découpures variées de leurs calices? Qui ne s'est plongé dans ces rêveries matérielles, indolentes et occupées, sans but et conduisant néanmoins à quelque pensée? Qui n'a pas, enfin mené la vie de l'enfance, la vie paresseuse, la vie du sauvage, moins ses travaux? (la Peau de chagrin, p. 268)

Balzac feels that everyone at one time or another experiences a childlike wonder at the marvels of nature.

Each of Balzac's works represents a world in the vast universe of the Comédie humaine. He has made a careful study of every crevice and is the omniscient

guide who is eager to have others share in his findings. He invites the reader to enter and tells him what he will see:<sup>24</sup>

Entrez. Une fille propre, pimpante de jeunesse, au blanc fichu, aux bras rouges, quitte son tricot, appelle son père ou sa mère, qui vient et vous vend à vos souhaits, flegmatiquement, complaisamment, arrogamment, selon son caractère, soit pour deux sous, soit pour vingt mille francs de marchandise.

Vous verrez un marchand de merrain assis à sa porte et qui se tourne ses pouces en causant avec un voisin, il ne possède en apparence que de mauvaises planches à bouteilles et deux ou trois paquets de lattes; mais sur le port son chantier plein fournit tous les tonneliers de l'Anjou.

Balzac is noticeably subjective when using local color or giving background information.

During the suffering of Eugénie the people of Saumur cannot determine how she keeps her angelic appearance when they see her on her way to or from mass. Eugénie is sustained by her love of God and her love for Charles. Her reality is based on her memory of Charles and her faith in God. The author knows the sources of her strength and he reminds the reader:

Ne voyait-elle pas la mappe monde, le petit banc, le jardin, le pan de mur, et ne reprenait-elle pas sur ses lèvres le miel qu'avaient laissé les baisers de l'amour? Elle ignore pendant quelque temps les conversations dont elle était l'objet en ville, tout aussi bien que les ignorait son père. Religieuse et

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<sup>24</sup>Honoré de Balzac, Eugénie Grandet (Paris: Bibliothèque Larousse, 1833), pp. 6-7.

pure devant Dieu, sa conscience et l'amour l'aidaient patiemment à supporter la colère et la vengeance paternelle (Eugénie Grandet, p. 137).

Eugénie has a map of the world on her wall. She follows Charles' course to the Indies day by day. She has imaginary conversations with him. Vicariously she is with Charles.

The author has very definite attitudes about the reader. He has an idea of what his reader looks like and what he thinks. Balzac anticipates that the reader will find le Père Goriot hard to believe:<sup>25</sup>

Ainsi ferez-vous, vous qui tenez ce livre d'une main blanche, vous qui vous enfoncez dans un moelleux fauteuil en vous disant: "Peut-être ceci va-t-il m'amuser." Après avoir lu les secrètes infortunes du pere Goriot, vous dînez avec appetit, en mettant votre insensibilité sur le compte de l'auteur, en le taxant d'exagération, en l'accusant de poésie. Ah! sachez-le: ce drame n'est ni une fiction ni un roman. All is true: il est si véritable, que chacun peut en reconnaître les éléments chez soi, dans son coeur peut-être.

The author sometimes excuses himself from lengthy descriptions for fear of offending his reader who may not have time to listen to these digressions which retard the narration:

Pour expliquer combien ce mobilier est vieux, crevassé, pourri, tremblant, rongé, manchot, borgne, invalide, expirant, il faudrait en faire une description qui retarderait trop l'intérêt de cette histoire, et que les gens pressés ne pardonneraient pas (le Père Goriot, p. 8).

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<sup>25</sup>Honoré de Balzac, le Père Goriot, Scènes de la vie privée (Paris: Librairie Paul Ollendorff, 1917), p. 2.

Anyone who has read Balzac can appreciate this generous consideration, for he is often boring by his very complexity of detail.

For the benefit of the reader, before beginning le Père Goriot, which he refers to as a drame, Balzac defines the word as it applies to his story:

En quelque discrédit que soit tombé le mot drame par la manière abusive et tortionnaire dont il a été prodigué dans ces temps de douloureuse littérature, il est nécessaire de l'employer ici, non que cette histoire soit dramatique dans le sens vrai du mot, mais l'oeuvre accompli, peut-être aura-t-on versé quelques larmes intra muros et extra. Sera-t-elle comprise au delà de Paris? Le doute est permis (le Père Goriot, pp. 1-2).

The work is certainly understood beyond Paris. It is a study of human nature which transcends the barrier of geography. In studying internal nature, Balzac immortalizes himself, for his work stands the test of time.

Balzac takes us to anachronistic Guérande in Béatrix. Guérande is in the southwestern part of Brittany. It is unique because it is a medieval city in a modern century; its architecture, customs, and manners have not evolved with the changing times. Guérande remains as it was in the Middle Ages. Balzac depicts what one might expect to find should he visit that city:<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Honoré de Balzac, Béatrix (Garnier frères, 1962), pp. 10-11.



Si vous arrivez à Guérande par le Croisic, après avoir traversé le paysage des marais salants, vous éprouverez une vive émotion à la vue de cette immense fortification encore toute neuve. Le pittoresque de sa position et les grâces naïves de ses environs quand on y arrive par Saint-Nazaire ne séduisent pas moins. A l'entour, le pays est ravissant, les haies sont pleines de fleurs, de chèvrefeuilles, de buis, de rosiers, de belles plantes. Vous diriez d'un jardin anglais dessiné par un grand artiste.

Balzac talks more directly to his reader in Béatrix than in any of the selected works. Reflecting on Guérande, Balzac compares it to the memory the reader may have of a beautiful woman met in a foreign land:

Parfois l'image de cette ville revient frapper au temple du souvenir: Elle entre coiffée de ses tours, parée de sa ceinture; elle déploie sa robe semée de ses belles fleurs, secoue le manteau d'or de ses dunes, exhale les senteurs enivrants de ses jolis chemins épineux et pleins de bouquets noués au hasard; elle vous occupe et vous appelle comme une femme divine que vous avez entrevue dans un pays étrange et qui s'est logée dans un coin du coeur (Béatrix, p. 12).

Maintaining his rapport with the reader, Balzac uses the first person plural, "N'oublions pas un détail précieux et plein de naïveté qui n'est pas sans mérite aux yeux des archéologues" (Béatrix, p. 18).

After a considerable discourse on the influence of Venetian architecture in Guérande, the author reveals an interesting side light on the psychology of the French family of his day:

Si ce logis surprend votre imagination, vous vous demanderez peut-être pourquoi l'époque actuelle ne renouvelle plus ces miracles d'art. Aujourd'hui les beaux hôtels se vendent, sont abattus et font place

à des rues. Personne ne sait si sa génération gardera le logis patrimonial, où chacun passe comme dans une auberge; tandis qu'autrefois en bâtissant une demeure, on travaillait, on croyait du moins travailler pour une famille éternelle (Béatrix, p. 20).

The French family no longer expects to live in a home that will serve them for hundreds of years, as did their ancestors.

By constantly injecting opinions and talking to the reader, Balzac makes use of one of the basic tenets of Romanticism--subjectivity.

## CHAPTER III

### EMOTION AND IMAGINATION

One finds in Balzac's works emotion which is sometimes so gripping that it appears that the author is guilty of sensationalism. Exaggerated emotions in Balzac's work stem from imagination. In la Peau de chagrin, one can easily see the influence of Goethe's Faust. The old man in the antique shop may represent Mephistopheles and Raphaël, Faust. The idea of the supernatural and a contract that may sentence one to Hell is suggested at the very beginning of the story. The author states that in a gambling house there are rules that virtually take possession of a person. His hat, his cane, and even his person no longer belong to him. Everything is under the control of the gambling house. Balzac thinks of it as an infernal contract whose demands are not clear, "N'est-ce pas plutôt une manière de conclure un contrat infernal avec vous en exigeant je ne sais quel gage?" (la Peau de chagrin, p. 1).

Raphaël is the vehicle the author uses to express his philosophical ideas on good and evil. He loses his last cent in a gambling house and contemplates suicide. Balzac sees suicide as poetry, the climax of a sublime and melancholic drama. His regret is that these suicides

snuff out beautiful lives. He considers the act of suicide to be such a powerful story that no literature can match it. Speaking of suicide, he states:

A cette pensée, le suicide prend des proportions gigantesques. Entre une mort volontaire et la féconde espérance dont la voix appelait un jeune homme à Paris, Dieu seul sait combien se heurtent de conceptions, de poésie abandonnées, de désespoirs et de cris étouffés, de tentatives inutiles et de chefs-d'oeuvre avortés. Chaque suicide est un poème sublime de mélancolie. Où trouverez-vous, dans l'océan des littératures, un livre surnageant qui puisse lutter de génie avec cet entrefilet:

"Hier, à quatre heures, une femme s'est jetée dans la Seine du haut du pont des Arts" (la Peau de chagrin, p. 33).

Balzac recognizes that suicide is the result of intense frustrated emotion.

Balzac recognizes in man a tremendous desire to experience wealth, power, and sensual pleasures. He seems to feel that it is in the realization of these pursuits that man is destroyed. To use his own words, "Vouloir nous brûle, et pouvoir nous détruit" (la Peau de chagrin, p. 56). This statement calls to mind the Christian teaching that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). The "good life" then seems to consist in the suppressing of one's emotions. Interrogatively Balzac defines emotion:

Semblable en ses caprices à la chimie moderne, qui résume la création par un gaz, l'âme ne compose-t-elle de terrible poisons par la rapide concentration de ses jouissances, des (sic) ses forces ou de ses idées? Beaucoup d'hommes ne périssent-ils pas sous le foudroiement de quelque acide moral soudainement

épandu dans leur être intérieur? (la Peau de chagrin, p. 44)

The author thinks that the soul acts very much like chemicals. When the poisons of passion are concentrated, they destroy the moral fiber in the same manner as a chemical acid destroys the physical.

Raphaël, Balzac's mouthpiece, does not commit suicide; he goes to an antique shop where he obtains the magic skin. After seeing relics from past civilizations, Raphaël is overcome with fatigue. He goes into a hallucinatory trance wherein the little old antique dealer is the central figure. Balzac relates the experience:

Cette apparition eut quelque chose de magique. L'homme le plus intrépide, surpris ainsi dans son sommeil, aurait sans doute tremblé devant ce personnage qui semblait être sorti d'un sarcophage voisin. La singulière jeunesse qui animait les yeux immobiles de cette espèce de fantôme empêchait l'inconnu de croire à des effets surnaturels; néanmoins, pendant le rapide intervalle qui sépara sa vie somnambulique de sa vie réelle, il demeura dans le doute philosophique recommandé par Descartes, et fut alors malgré lui, sous la puissance de ces inexplicables hallucinations dont les mystères sont condamnés par notre fierté ou que notre science impuissante tâche en vain d'analyser (la Peau de chagrin, p. 47).

La Peau de chagrin has many imaginative symbols, none of which is more mysterious than the skin itself. There are many questions to be raised here. Does the skin really shrink? How is it that it shrinks in proportion to the wish granted?

Balzac seems to feel that in spite of the fact that one knows the consequences of overindulgence, a man will always do those things that he really wants to do if he gets the opportunity. The magic skin offers a Mephistopheles-type of contract: pleasure in exchange for one's life. The inscription on the skin reads:

SI TU ME POSSÈDES, TU POSSÉDERAS TOUT.  
 MAIS TA VIE M'APPARTIENDRA, DIEU L'A  
 VOULU AINSI. DÉSIRE, ET TES DÉSIRS  
 SERONT ACCOMPLIS. MAIS RÉGLE  
 TES SOUHAITS SUR TA VIE.  
 ELLE EST LÀ. A CHAQUE  
 VOULOIR, JE DÉCROITRAI  
 COMME TES JOURS.  
 ME VEUX-TU?  
 PRENDS. DIEU  
 T'EXAUCERA  
 SOIT! (la Peau de chagrin, p. 54)

Once in control of the magic skin, Raphaël burns with desire, and he lets his imagination run wild. He decides to have an orgy with which he will satisfy all of his appetites:

Je veux un dîner royalement splendide, quelque bacchanale digne du siècle où tout s'est, dit-on, perfectionné! Que mes convives soient jeunes, spirituels et sans préjugés, joyeux jusqu'à la folie! Que les vins se succèdent toujours plus incisifs, plus pétillants, et soient de force à nous enivrer pour trois jours! Que cette nuit soit parée de femmes ardents! Je veux que la débauche en délire et rugissante nous emporte, dans son char à quatre chevaux, par delà les bornes du monde, pour nous verser sur des plages inconnues! Que les âmes montent dans les cieux ou se plongent dans la boue, je ne sais si alors elles s'élèvent ou s'abaissent, peu m'importe! Donc, je commande à ce pouvoir sinistre de me fondre toutes les joies dans une joie. Oui, j'ai besoin d'embrasser les plaisirs du ciel et de la terre dans

une dernière étreinte, pour en mourir (la Peau de chagrin, p. 58).

This orgy represents man's insatiable desires. But it also represents the beginning of his undoing. Georges Hourdin expresses this in detail:<sup>27</sup>

Il semble que, pour Balzac, la passion mène non seulement à la destruction de la vie, mais encore, lorsqu'elle est poussée à son terme et idéalisé, à une sorte de rupture, à un saut dans l'inconnu, dans l'incompréhensible et dans la mort. La passion remplit de ses monotones violences les pages de la Comédie humaine. Elle s'y révèle presque toujours la puissance de trouble et de dégradation. Elle est l'énergie vitale qui tend à retourner au néant, ou à s'abîmer dans l'énergie cosmique de l'univers.

Balzac used his imagination to set goals for himself. Through his imagination he lived many lives and did many things. Edwin Preston Dargan tells us that Balzac's visions of splendid achievement often took the form of hallucinations. During the wee hours of the morning Balzac would rouse a friend saying that they must leave at once to go to the empire of the Great Mogul. According to Balzac, the Mogul would pay a huge reward for a ring in Balzac's possession once worn by the prophet Mahomet. Of course no one knows whether Balzac really believed these things. However, according to Professor Dargan, Balzac would write labels on bare walls of his cottage

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<sup>27</sup> Georges Hourdin, Balzac, Romancier des passions (Paris: Temps Présent, 1950), p. 75.

indicating a fresco by Delacroix or a casing in Parisian marble. Although the walls were bare, Balzac would persuade himself that these works were actually on his walls.<sup>28</sup>

Balzac had dreams that were real. Most of all he wanted to be loved. He also feared dying before becoming famous. He felt that he was destined for greatness and seems to be speaking of himself when he writes:

O mon cher Emile, aujourd'hui que j'ai vingt-six ans à peine, que je suis sûr de mourir inconnu, sans avoir jamais été l'amant de la femme que j'ai rêvée de posséder, laisse-moi te conter mes folies! N'avons-avens pas tous, plus ou moins, pris nos désirs pour des réalités? Ah! je ne voudrais point pour ami un jeune homme qui dans ses rêves ne serait pas tressé des couronnes, construit quelque piédestal ou donné de complaisantes maîtresses. Moi, j'ai souvent été général, empereur; j'ai été Byron, puis rien. Après avoir joué sur le faite des choses humaines je m'apercevais que toutes les montagnes, toutes les difficultés restaient à gravir (la Peau de chagrin, p. 105).

Not only did Balzac get inspiration from other people, he also got inspiration from nature. Speaking of his admiration for nature, he writes:

. . . J'admirais dans les gouttières quelques végétations éphémères, pauvres herbes bientôt emportées par un orage! J'étudiais les mousses, leurs couleurs ravivées par la pluie, et qui sous le soleil se changeaient en un velours sec et brun à reflets capricieux. Enfin, les poétiques et fugitifs effets du jour, les tristesses du brouillard, les soudains pétilllements du soleil, le silence et les magies de la nuit, les mystères de

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<sup>28</sup>Dargan, op. cit., p. 11.



l'aurore, les fumées de chaque cheminée, tous les accidents de cette singulière nature, devenus familiers pour moi, me divertissaient. J'aimais ma prison, elle était volontaire (la Peau de chagrin, pp. 109-10).

Raphaël has just killed a man. He takes refuge in a rural village of southern France. He loses himself among the treasures of nature to which he refers as his voluntary prison. Balzac found inexpressible joy in contemplation. He described it so lyrically that one can not help but join in his imaginative delight. He writes:

L'exercice de la pensée, la recherche des idées, les contemplations tranquilles de la science nous prodiguent d'ineffables délices, indescriptibles comme tout ce qui participe de l'intelligence, dont les phénomènes sont invisibles à nos sens extérieurs. Aussi, sommes-nous toujours forcés d'expliquer les mystères de l'esprit par des comparaisons matérielles. Le plaisir de nager dans un lac d'eau pure, au milieu des rochers, des bois et des fleurs, seul et caressé par une brise tiède, donnerait aux ignorants une bien faible image du bonheur que j'éprouvais quand mon âme se saignait dans les lueurs de je ne sais quelle lumière, quand j'écoutais les voix terribles et confuses de l'inspiration, quand d'une source inconnue les images ruisselaient dans mon cerveau palpitant (la Peau de chagrin, p. 111).

Balzac believes that through contemplation one can have sublime experiences that are unknown to the senses.

The examples of imagination used up to this point have been those of enjoyable diversions. However, there are times when one's imagination is his only escape from reality. Such is the case for Colonel Chabert. Chabert has been an illustrious soldier in Napoleon's army. He

is believed to have been killed in the battle of Eylau. His wife remarried. When he returns home, he decides not to break up his wife's marriage, but he does want his fortune which has been legally turned over to his wife when the courts declare Chabert dead. Chabert decides to give up his fame and to assume another name, Hyacinthe, in order not to cause complications for his wife. This is not enough for his wife whose second husband is a wealthy man. She wants Chabert to renounce himself legally. This means that he will give up any legal right to his fortune. Chabert loves his wife. Nevertheless, he is so hurt by her selfishness that he renounces everything he has earned under the name of Chabert. In response to her demands, he says:<sup>29</sup>

. . . Madame, je ne vous maudis pas, je vous méprise. Maintenant, je remercie le hasard qui nous a désunis. Je ne sens même pas un désir de vengeance, je ne vous aime plus. Je ne veux rien de vous. Vivez tranquille sur la foi de ma parole, elle vaut mieux que les griffonnages de tous les notaires de Paris. Je ne réclamerai jamais le nom que j'ai peut-être illustré. Je ne suis plus qu'un pauvre diable nommé Hyacinthe, qui ne demande que sa place au soleil. Adieu. . . .

This scene is extremely emotional for Chabert because he loves his wife and has spent many years planning to rejoin her. When she asks him to renounce himself legally, he

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<sup>29</sup>Honoré de Balzac, le Colonel Chabert, Scènes de la vie privée, OEuvres complètes de H. de Balzac (Paris: Société d'édicions littéraires et artistiques, Librairie Paul Ollendorff, 1917), p. 83.

finds out how she feels about him. He has to assume a new name and lead a new life; Hyacinthe's past and future are products of Chabert's imagination.

Eugénie Grandet falls in love with her cousin Charles. She is banished to her room by her father for refusing to tell what has happened to the gold coins that he has given to her as birthday presents. She has given them to Charles, who has gone to the Indies to seek his fortune. Charles has promised to return to her and has led her to believe that he will marry her. When he leaves, she buys a map of the world so that she can trace his route. She goes to the map, which she has hung on her wall, morning and night. Through her imagination she is with Charles. She always has many questions to ask: "Es-tu bien? Ne souffres-tu pas? Penses-tu à moi, en voyant les nuages dont tu m'as appris à connaître les beautés et l'usage en amour?" (Eugénie Grandet, p. 123) For Eugénie life in Saumur is imaginary because her real life is in the Indies with Charles.

Père Goriot epitomizes emotion and imagination; he has only one passion--his two daughters. Motivated by the desire to have his daughters marry well, Goriot divided his fortune between the two. He reasoned that, with each of his daughters married well, he would have two homes where he would be worshipped by his daughters

and admired by society. Within two years of the marriages of his daughters, he is banished from their homes by his sons-in-law. But no one can sever the emotional attachment Goriot has for his daughters. After he is banished from their homes, he continues to conceal himself in order to see them for a few seconds or to give them more of the money that they constantly demand of him. He rushes daily to the Champs-Élysées to get a glimpse of his daughters as they pass by in their luxurious carriages. A smile cast in his direction by either one of them would send him into an ecstatic swoon. He says that, in becoming a father, he came to understand God:

Eh bien, quand j'ai été père, j'ai compris Dieu. Il est entier partout, puisque la création est sortie de lui. Monsieur, je suis ainsi avec mes filles. Seulement, j'aime mieux mes filles que Dieu n'aime le monde, parce que le monde n'est pas aussi beau que Dieu, et que mes filles sont plus belles que moi (le Père Goriot, p. 164).

He has created something beautiful--his daughters.

The story, although at times exaggerated, is made touching by Goriot's fanatical love for his daughters. We get a glimpse of this when the student Rastignac invites Delphine, one of Goriot's daughters, to his apartment where they are joined by Père Goriot. The author describes the behavior of the old man:

Il se couchait aux pieds de sa fille pour les baiser; il la regardait longtemps dans les yeux; il frottait sa tête contre sa robe; enfin il faisait

des folies comme en aurait l'amant le plus jeune et le plus tendre (le Père Goriot, p. 208).

Goriot knows that his daughters do not love him. He tells Rastignac of the good treatment that he was given during the early days of his daughters' marriages. The table was always set for him. He was attended at every turn. He dined with his sons-in-law, and they were nice to him. His daughters acknowledged him publicly as their father. He was driven to the theatre in their carriages along with their husbands. He explains that this attention was given to him because he had not told anyone how much money he had left. He explains further:

Un homme qui donne huit cent mille francs à ses filles était un un homme à soigner. (Heun! heun!) Et l'on était aux petits soins, mais c'était pour l'argent. Le monde n'est pas beau. J'ai vu cela, moi (le Père Goriot, p. 332).

In all instances, Goriot's passport is his money. If someone asks one of his sons-in-law,

Qui es ce monsieur la?

--C'est le père aux écus, il est riche.

--Ah diable! disait-on, et l'on me regardai avec le respect dû aux écus (le Père Goriot, p. 332).

Although he will not allow himself to believe that his daughters do not love him, he finally admits it. Upon hearing Christophe, a fellow boarder, tell Rastignac that neither of the old man's daughters will come to see him on his deathbed, Goriot, who is believed sleeping, responds:

Elles ont des affaires, elles dorment, elles ne viendront pas. (Heun! heun!) Je le savais. (Heun! heun!) Il faut mourir pour savoir ce que c'est des enfants. . . . Ah! mon ami, ne vous variez pas, n'ayez pas d'enfants! Vous leur donnez la vie, ils vous donnent la mort. Vous les faites entrer dans le monde, ils vous en chassent. (Heun! Heun! heun! heun!) Non, elles ne viendront pas! je sais cela depuis dix ans. Je me le disais quelquefois, mais je n'osais pas y croire. (le Père Goriot, pp. 330-31).

Goriot has depended upon his imagination to convince himself that he is loved by his daughters. Otherwise, life would have been unbearable for the old man.

Béatrix is a study of the psychology of love. The principal characters are involved in love affairs in which their love is not returned. Béatrix is married to the musician Conti. Conti is a man of the world and has many extra-marital affairs. Béatrix grows tired of Conti's neglect and begins to invite the attention paid to her by Calyste. Calyste loves Béatrix, but she uses him only for her sensual gratification. Calyste is pursued by Camille de Maupin, who goes to a convent when she sees that she can not win Calyste's affection.

Calyste marries Sabine whom he does not love. She has wealth so it is a good arrangement. They are happy until they move to Paris, only to find Béatrix there, three months later. Calyste is not able to suppress his love for Béatrix. He is unfaithful to his wife, Sabine; but true to his heart. In the preface to Béatrix, Balzac discusses the positive side of her character:

Sans Béatrix, l' auteur aurait oublié de peindre les sentiments qui retiennent encore les femmes, après une chute. Quand certaines femmes du haut rang ont sacrifié leur position à quelque violente passion, quand elles ont méconnu les lois, ne trouvent-elles pas dans l'orgueil de la race, dans la valeur qu'elles se donnent et dans leur supériorité même, des barrières presque aussi difficiles à passer que celles déjà franchies, et qui sont à la fois sociales et naturelles? N'était-ce pas aussi l'un des plus beaux accidents de la passion, que cet ennoblissement dû à l'amour vrai et qui peut relever une femme tombée? Béatrix se purifie par l'affection qu'elle porte et qu'elle inspire à Calyste, elle veut être une grande chose, une figure sainte pour lui, et s'immole à sa propre grandeur (Béatrix, "préface," p. 389).

This discussion by Balzac is a good example of the Romantic tendency to recognize both good and evil in nature.

Béatrix, a fallen woman, is ennobled by consummating the love that Calyste has for her. Calyste's love is true. Calyste thinks Béatrix loves him until a plot is put into action to disillusion him. When he sees that he has been deceived, he is persuaded to go back to his wife. Béatrix goes to a convent.

Béatrix has in it several characters who represent famous personalities. Camille de Maupin represents George Sand. Conti, the musician, is a combination of Franz Liszt and George Sand's former collaborator, Jules Sandeau.

## CHAPTER IV

### LOCAL COLOR

For Balzac, local color plays a very vital role. Most importantly, it provides a setting in which a particular part of a novel takes place; it yields a mood which helps to shape the personalities of the story. It creates focal points which the reader is able to follow geographically. It provides perspective for the reader. It helps the reader to understand the forces which have shaped a particular character.

Balzac was born in Tours and spent most of his life in Paris. Many of his novels have urban settings. However, having known Touraine firsthand, he could not completely overlook the beauties of nature in his work. He is particularly conscious of nature in le Médecin de campagne and le Lys dans la vallée. It seems that Balzac does not need a setting in which to base his works; he creates it. He is often singled out for his extraordinary vision. It is this quality that makes his local color live. His settings are never apart from his characters. They are one and are reflected in each other.

Not only does Balzac give us pictures of the interiors and exteriors in which his characters revolve,



but he also lets us explore the universe of human nature with the author serving as a guide for the tour.

Balzac so lived in his characters that they seem to live in his imagination. According to his sister,<sup>30</sup> Balzac spoke of his characters as if they were close friends and often gave her reports of the latest news about them. He would ask her whether she knew whom Félix was going to marry, and give his opinions on the marriage. When he was on his death bed, he is reported to have said that he would recover if Blanchon were there.<sup>31</sup> Balzac was anxious to get his reader involved in the story. He describes the gambling house:

Essayez de jeter un regard furtif sur cette arène, entrez! . . . Quelle nudité! Les murs, couverts d'un papier gras à hauteur d'homme n'offrent pas une seule image qui puisse rafraîchir l'âme. Il ne s'y trouve même pas un clou pour faciliter le suicide. Le parquet est usé, malpropre. Une table oblongue occupe le centre de la salle. La simplicité des chaises de paille pressée autour de ce tapis usé par l'or annonce une curieuse indifférence du luxe chez ces hommes qui viennent périr là pour la fortune et le luxe (la Peau de chagrin, p. 27).

Already he has built an atmosphere of suspense, fear; there is the expectation of something dangerous, if not spectacular. The men in the room will either leave proud

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<sup>30</sup>Dargan, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid. Blanchon is the medical student in le Père Goriot.

of their winnings or ruined by their losses. Symbolically, it is the arena of life.

There is no limit to the variety of Balzac's settings. He was equally at home in the city or in the woods, whether surrounded by wealth or by poverty, for he knew the extremes of celebrity and obscurity, poverty and luxury, hope and despair.

The dining room, which is the center of the French home, was not neglected by Balzac. He noticed all that was there and appreciated the value of each item. The taste of the host is also observed by Balzac:

Le dessert se trouve servi comme par enchantement. La table fut couverte d'un vaste surtout en bronze doré, sorti des ateliers de Thomire.\* De hautes figures, douées par un célèbre artiste des formes convenues en Europe pour la beauté idéale, soutenaient et portaient des buissons des fraises, des ananas, des dattes fraîches, des raisins jaunes, de blondes pêches, des oranges arrivées de Setubal par un paquebot, des grenades, des fruits de la Chine, enfin toutes les surprises de luxe, des miracles du petit four, les délicatesses les plus friandes, les plus séductrices. Les couleurs de ces tableaux gastronomiques étaient rehaussées par l'éclat de la porcelaine, par des lignes étincelantes d'or, par les découpures des vases. Gracieuse comme les liquides franges de l'Océan, verte et légère, la mousse couronnait les paysages du Poussin, copiés à Sèvres. Le territoire d'un prince allemand n'aurait pas payé cette richesse insolente (la Peau de chagrin, p. 78).

Balzac is able to stimulate an appetite through words.

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\*Pierre-Philippe Thomire (1751-1843) was a sculptor known for his bronzes.

Local color is not just a setting, for Balzac it is an instrumental force in his work. La Peau de chagrin furnishes another example of this. After having killed a man, Raphaël, who has always had an aversion to rural things suddenly finds that nature beckons him. Nature offers a new meaning for him now. It is interesting that Raphaël not only loses his antipathy for nature, but he now feels that he needs the treasures of nature. Balzac states:

Il sentait instinctivement le besoin de se rapprocher de la nature, des émotions vraies et de cette vie végétative à laquelle nous nous laissons si complaisamment aller au milieu des champs. Le lendemain de son arrivée, il gravit, non sans peine, le pic de Sancy, et visita les vallées supérieures, les sites aériens, les lacs ignorés, les rustiques chaumières des monts Dore, dont les âpres et sauvages attraits commencent à tenter les pinceaux de nos artistes. Parfois, il se rencontre là d'admirables paysages pleins de grâce et de fraîcheur qui contrastent vigoureusement avec l'aspect sinistre de ces montagnes désolées. A peu près à une demi-lieue du village, Raphaël se trouva dans un endroit où, coquette et joyeuse comme un enfant, la nature semblait avoir pris plaisir à cacher des trésors; en voyant cette retraite pittoresque et naïve, il résolut d'y vivre (la Peau de chagrin, p. 262).

After exploring the area Raphaël decides to live there. This turn of events is not so surprising if one knows what events have led Raphaël to his present state of mind. Raphaël has been enjoying all of life's pleasures. He was guaranteed anything he desired by the peau de chagrin; his most immediate wish was to take a man's life. The wish was granted. But the unanticipated result

is an aversion for society. He needs the tranquility of nature. It is important to take a closer look at what nature offers to different individuals. The inhabitants of the area are completely indifferent to the charms of nature. Many of them no doubt longed to leave that environment for the luxuries of Paris. Balzac provided more insight:

Le toit de cette espèce de chaumière, en harmonie avec le site, était orné de mousses, le lierres et de fleurs qui trahissaient une haute antiquité. Une fumée grêle, dont les oiseaux ne s'effrayaient plus, s'échappait de la cheminée en ruine. A la porte, un grand banc était placé entre deux chèvrefeuilles énormes, rouges de fleurs qui embaumaient. A peine voyait-on les murs sous les pampres de la vigne et sous les guirlandes de roses et de jasmin qui croissaient à l'aventure et sans gêne. Insouciants de cette parure champêtre, les habitants n'en avaient nul soin, et laissaient à la nature sa grâce vierge et lutine (la Peau de chagrin, p. 264).

Raphaël needs nature as a place of refuge. So it is easy to see here how local color plays a participating role in this story. This passage gives an example of Balzac's occasional references to ruins, which is also a Romantic characteristic.

Le colonel Chabert lives in a house that is, like him, a derelict. The house is located on a street on which coach drivers will not even allow their carriages to pass. Balzac describes it:

Au fond d'une cour assez spacieuse s'élevait, en face de la porte, une maison, si toutefois ce nom convient à l'une de ces masures bâties dans les

faubourgs de Paris, et qui ne sont comparables à rien, pas même aux plus chétives habitations de la campagne, dont elles ont la misère sans en avoir la poésie. En effet, au milieu des champs, les cabanes ont encore une grâce que leur donnent la pureté de l'air, la verdure, l'aspect des champs, une colline, un chemin tortueux, des vignes, une haie vive, la mousse des chaumes et les ustensiles champêtres; mais, à Paris, la misère ne se grandit que par son horreur (le Colonel Chabert, p. 39).

The ugliness of this house is comparable to the ugliness of Chabert whose head was split open during the war. The house is depicted as being out of place; that is, it would be accepted in the country, but not in Paris. Colonel Chabert is not accepted in Paris, and considering the way he is described by Balzac it is doubtful that he would be accepted anywhere. This feeling of rejection, when he was accustomed to being welcomed as a hero, leads him to wish that he had been killed in battle as people think he has been. Although no chapter in this thesis specifically deals with melancholy as a Romantic element, it is a recurring force in the works of Balzac and should be recognized as such.

In le Médecin de campagne, local color plays another role; it helps us to understand and to appreciate Benassis, the country doctor. When the doctor arrived in the village, it was almost totally undeveloped. The people were illiterate. There were few, if any, roads; no commerce and no organization of the community life. When Genestas, the soldier, came into the village seeking the doctor,

he stopped at a house to refresh himself. The author gives the following account:

Genestas s'assit au coin d'une haute cheminée sans feu, sur le manteau de laquelle se voyait une Vierge en plâtre colorié tenant dans ses bras l'enfant Jésus. Enseigne sublime! Le sol servait de plancher à la maison. A la longue, la terre, primitivement battue était devenue raboteuse, et, quoique propre, elle offrait en grand les callosités d'une écorce d'orange. Dans la cheminée étaient accrochés un sabot plein de sel, une poêle à frire, un chaudron. Le fond de la pièce se trouvait rempli par un lit à colonnes garni de sa pente découpée. Puis, çà et là, des escabelles à trois pieds, formées par des bâtons fichés dans une planche de fayard, une huche au pain, une grosse cuiller en bois pour puiser l'eau, un seau et des poteries pour le lait, un rouet sur la huche, quelques clayons à fromage, des murs noirs, une porte vermoulue ayant une imposte à claire-voie; tels étaient la décoration et le mobilier de cette pauvre demeure (le Médecin de campagne, pp. 12-13).

Benassis came to a village where houses did not have floors and developed it into a healthy, educated, organized, commercial village. He helped the people to build roads that connected it to Grenoble and other cities; he brought life into the village. He felt that he should give his talents and his learning to those people who needed it so much.

Local color is used in Eugénie Grandet to prepare the reader for the complex personality of M. Grandet. Grandet is a miser. He is described as having tiger and boa-like tendencies when money is involved. He pounces upon his victims coldly, but methodically. He is completely domineering in his household and community. The story

begins with the author comparing the city of Saumur with many other provincial towns which are so melancholy that they resemble cloistered monasteries:

Ces principes de mélancolie existent dans la physionomie d'un logis situé à Saumur, au bout de la rue montueuse qui mène au château, par le haut de la ville. Cette rue, maintenant peu fréquentée, chaude en été, froide en hiver, obscure en quelques endroits, est remarquable par la sonorité de son petit pavé caillouteux, toujours propre et sec, par l'étroitesse de sa voie tortueuse, par la paix de ses maisons, qui appartiennent à la vieille ville et que dominent les remparts (Eugénie Grandet, p. 1).

In this town, which is economically stable, where the streets are clean and quiet, there is an unmistakable air of melancholy. We can draw several parallels here with the Grandet household. Grandet, when he married, had his own fortune which was complemented by the considerable dowry of his wife. The maid, Nanon, sees that the house is always clean. The avaricious old man saddens most of those with whom he comes in contact.

At the time of the French Revolution of 1789, Monsieur Grandet knew how to read, write, and count, and had a comfortable existence. The author takes the reader inside the house. He describes it:

Un vieux cartel de cuivre incrusté d'arabesques en écaïlle ornaît le manteau de la cheminée en pierre blanche. Les sièges, de forme antique, étaient garnis en tapisseries représentant les fables de la Fontaine; mais il fallait le savoir pour en reconnaître les sujets, tant les couleurs passées et les figures criblées de reprises se voyaient difficilement. Aux quatre angles de cette salle se trouvaient des

encoignures, espèces de buffets terminés par de crasseuses étagères. Une vieille table à jouer en marqueterie, dont le dessus faisait échiquier, était placée dans le tableau qui séparait les deux fenêtres. Au-dessus de cette table, il y avait un baromètre ovale, à bordure noire, enjolivé par des rubans de bois doré, où les mouches avaient si licencieusement folâtré, que la dorure en était un problème (Eugénie Grandet, pp. 17-18).

This house is by no means elegantly furnished. Everything in it is functional. Madame Grandet's chair is so designed that she can look out of her window to see the passers-by in the street. Eugénie's smaller chair is close beside; she is always at her mother's side as they do the sewing.

Balzac is known for his meticulously detailed descriptions. Not only does he describe the physical environment, but he also explores all areas of the senses--sound, sight, taste, smell, and touch. The reader feels himself vicariously transplanted into the author's setting. He is the unseen spectator who goes beyond the barriers of various facades. He is also able to examine the impressions and attitudes of the author.

Le Père Goriot is set in a section of Paris so bleak that it immediately creates the mood for the melancholy and misery that is to dominate the work le Père Goriot. Only Balzac could describe it justly:

La maison où s'exploite la pension bourgeoise appartient à Madame Vauquer. Elle est située dans le bas de la rue Neuve-Sainte-Genève, à l'endroit



où le terrain s'abaisse vers la rue de l'Arbalète d'une façon si brusque et si rude, que les chevaux la montent ou la descendent rarement. Cette circonstance est favorable au silence qui règne dans ces rues serrées, entre le dôme du Val-de-Grâce et le dôme du Panthéon, deux monuments qui changent les conditions de l'atmosphère en y jetant des tons jaunes, en y assombrissant tout par les teintes sévères que projettent leurs coupes. Là, les pavés sont secs, les ruisseaux n'ont ni boue ni eau, l'herbe croît le long des murs. L'homme le plus insouciant y est à la gêne, les passants y sont tristes, le bruit d'une voiture y devient un événement, les maisons y sont mornes, les murailles y sentent la prison. Un Parisien égaré ne verrait là que des pensions bourgeoises ou des institutions, de la misère ou le l'ennui, de la vieillesse qui meurt, de la jeunesse emprisonnée, contrainte à travailler. Nul quartier de Paris n'est plus horrible, ni, disons-le, plus inconnu (le Père Goriot, p. 3).

It has been said that Balzac's descriptions are so precise that a painter could paint them or that they could be easily transferred to an engraving. His descriptions are sometimes so detailed that they seem exaggerated.

Balzac possessed Romantic tendencies of which not even he was aware:<sup>32</sup>

Balzac, lui, introduira de puissance original dans le roman, il ne le devine pas. Il ne sent pas la parenté secrète qui l'unit à la nouvelle école, que c'est être romantique d'écrire minutieusement. . . .

Balzac was an observer. Nothing escaped him. Although he often refers to things as being indescribable, he somehow manages to give a very exact description. At least one of Balzac's critics thinks that Balzac lacked

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<sup>32</sup>Théophile Gautier, Souvenirs romantiques (Paris: Garnier frères, 1929), p. 93.

facility of expression and labored hard to accomplish it.<sup>33</sup> That he labored or not is unimportant. What is important is the result of his vision. His general descriptions are as precise as his specific observations are exact; at the beginning of le Père Goriot he gives this account of Paris at the time the story takes place:

Les particularités de cette scène pleine d'observation et de couleur locale ne peuvent être appréciées qu'entre les buttes Montmartre et les hauteurs de Montrouge, dans cette illustre vallée de plâtras incessamment près de tomber et de ruisseaux noirs de boue; vallée remplie de souffrances réelles, de joies souvent fausses, et si terriblement agitée, qu'il faut je ne sais quoi d'exorbitant pour y produire une sensation de quelque durée. Cependant, il s'y rencontre ça et là des douleurs que l'agglomération des vices et des vertus rend si grandes et si solennelles qu'à leur aspect, les égoïsmes, les intérêts s'arrêtent et s'apitoient; mais l'impression qu'ils en reçoivent est comme un fruit savoureux promptement dévoré (le Père Goriot, p. 2).

Balzac seems to have thought of Paris as a kind of jungle in which many people are innocently swallowed up.

Smells are particularly recurrent in Balzac's descriptions. He is particularly effective in describing what he calls that "boarding house" odor:

Cette première pièce exhale une odeur sans nom dans la langue, et qu'il faudrait appeler l'odeur de pension. Elle sent le renfermé, le moisi, le rance; elle donne froid, elle est humide au nez, elle pénètre les vêtements; elle a le goût d'une salle où l'on a dîné; elle pue le service, l'office, l'hospice. Peut-être pourrait-elle se décrire si l'on inventait un procédé pour évaluer les quantités élémentaires et nauséabondes

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

qu'y jettent les atmosphères catarrhales et sui generis de chaque pensionnaire, jeune ou vieux. Eh bien, malgré ces plates horreurs, si vous le compariez à la salle à manger, qui lui est contiguë, vous trouveriez ce salon élégant et parfumé comme doit l'être un boudoir (le Père Goriot, p. 7).

Although Balzac tells us that there is no word in the language to describe the boarding-house odor, by the time he has finished describing it the reader can almost sense this odor nipping at his nostrils.

Contrasts are also used to provide local color. Maxime de Trailles in le Père Goriot is a polished courtier. Eugène de Rastignac is desperately trying to enter the social world of Paris. Balzac lets us see the crude provincial student face-to-face with his Parisian counterpart:

Rastignac se sentit une haine violente pour ce jeune homme. D'abord, les beaux cheveux blonds et bien frisés de Maxime lui apprirent combien les siens étaient horribles; puis Maxime avait des bottes fines et propres, tandis que les siennes, malgré le soin qu'il avait pris en marchant, s'étaient empreintes d'une légère teinte de boue: enfin, Maxime portait une redingote qui lui serrait élégamment la taille et le faisait ressembler à une jolie femme, tandis qu'Eugène avait à deux heures et demi un habit noir! (le Père Goriot, p. 71)

In these few lines we see the elegant clothes of the day. We also see those of Rastignac, the student from the provinces who wants to be a dandy.

Although an admirer of Walter Scott, Balzac does not often glorify the Middle Ages. He does, however, pay

tribute to the medieval-like town of Guérande in writing

Béatrix:

Une des villes où se retrouve le plus correctement la physionomie des siècles féodaux est Guérande. Ce nom se réveillera mille souvenirs dans la mémoire des peintres, des artistes, des penseurs qui peuvent être allés jusqu'à la côté où gît ce magnifique joyau de féodalité, si fièrement posé pour commander les relais de la mer et les dunes, et qui est comme le sommet d'un triangle aux coins duquel se trouve deux autres bijoux non moins curieux, le Croisic et le bourg de Batz. Après Guérande il n'est plus que Vitré situé au centre de la Bretagne, Avignon dans le midi, qui conservent au milieu de notre époque leur intacte configuration du Moyen Age. Encore aujourd'hui, Guérande est enceinte de ses puissantes murailles: ses larges douves sont pleines d'eau, ses creneaux sont entiers, ses meurtrières ne sont pas encombrées d'arbustes, le lierre n'a pas jeté de manteau sur ses tours carrées ou rondes. Elle a trois portes où se voient les anneaux des herses, vous n'y entrez qu'en passant sur un pont-levis de bois ferré qui ne se relève plus, mais qui pourrait encore se lever (Béatrix, pp. 6-7).

The charm of Guérande's antique beauty makes it a painter's paradise: The streets are exactly as they were four hundred years before except that the population has decreased and the social activities are fewer. Balzac points out that the thinking, dress, and manners all remain medieval:

Il est impossible de se promener là sans penser à chaque pas aux usages, aux moeurs des temps passés: toutes les pierres vous en parlent; enfin, les idées du Moyen Age y sont encore à l'état de superstition, Si, par hasard, il passe un gendarme à chapeau bordé, sa présence est un anachronisme contre lequel votre pensée proteste; mais rien n'est plus rare que d'y rencontrer un être ou une chose du temps présent. Il y a même peu de chose du vêtement actuel: ce que les habitants en admettent s'approprie en quelque

sorte à leurs moeurs immobiles, à leur physionomie stationnaire (Béatrix, p. 8).

Balzac attributes Guérande's lack of progress to its location. To use his words, Guérande is "jetée au bout du continent" (Béatrix, p. 10). Because the area is covered with salt marshes, it is not easily accessible. Roads, made in the day, disappear at night with the tide. Guérande is not in communication with changes taking place in Paris and other parts of France.

Balzac pays tribute to the artistic influence of the Moors, Byzantines, Venetians, and Spaniards as he recognizes this influence in the art forms of Guérande.

He notes:

Les rampes en pierre sont disjointes: il y pousse des herbes, quelques petites fleurs et des mousses aux fentes, comme dans les marches de l'escalier, que les siècles ont déplacées sans leur ôter de la solidité. La porte dut être d'un joli caractère. Autant que le reste des dessins permet d'en juger, elle fut travaillée par un artiste élevé dans la grande école vénitienne du treizième siècle. On y trouve je ne sais quel mélange du byzantin et du moresque. Elle est couronnée par une saillie circulaire chargée de végétation, un bouquet rose, jaune, brun ou bleu, selon les saisons. La porte en chêne clouté, donne entrée dans une vaste salle au bout de laquelle est une autre porte avec un perron pareil qui descend au jardin. Cette salle est merveilleuse de conservation. Ses boiseries à hauteur d'appui sont en châtaignier. Un magnifique cuir espagnol, animé de figures en relief, mais où les dorures sont emiettées et rougies, couvre les murs (Béatrix, p. 16).

One may wonder why Balzac went to the trouble of giving such lengthy descriptions. An explanation is given:

Sans la topographie et la description de la ville, sans la peinture minutieuse de cet hôtel, les

surprenantes figures de cette famille eussent été peut-être moins comprises. Aussi les cadres devaient-ils passer avant les portraits. Chacun pensera que les choses ont dominé les êtres. Il est des monuments dont l'influence est visible sur les personnes qui vivent à l'entour. Il est difficile d'être irreligieux à l'ombre d'une cathédrale comme celle de Bourges. Quand partout l'âme est rappelée à sa destinée par des images, il est moins facile d'y faillir (Beatrix, p. 20).

The destinies of his characters are often determined by the monuments that form the environment. In the above passage the author mentions that the frame should come before the portrait. He paints many portraits in Béatrix. One of them is George Sand, here called Camille de Maupin. He paints her eyes with words:

L'arc des sourcils, tracé vigoureusement, s'étend sur deux yeux dont la flamme scintille par moments comme celle d'une étoile fixe. Le blanc de l'oeil n'est ni bleuâtre, ni semé de fils rouges, ni d'un blanc pur; il a la consistance de la corne, mais il est d'un ton chaud. La prunelle est bordée d'un cercle orange. C'est du bronze entouré d'or, mais de l'or vivant, du bronze animé. Cette prunelle a de la profondeur. Elle n'est pas doublée, comme dans certains yeux, par une espèce de tain qui renvoie la lumière et les fait ressembler aux yeux des tigres ou des chats; elle n'a pas cette inflexibilité terrible qui cause un frisson aux gens sensibles; mais cette profondeur a son infini, de même que l'éclat, des yeux à miroir a son absolu. Le regard de l'observateur peut se perdre dans cette âme que se concentre et se retire avec rapidité qu'elle jaillit de ces yeux veloutés. Dans un moment de passion, l'oeil de Camille Maupin est sublime: l'or de son regard allume le blanc jaune, et tout flambe; mais au repos, il est terne, la torpeur de la méditation lui prête souvent l'apparence de la niaiserie; quand la lumière de l'âme y manque, les lignes du visage s'attristent également. Les cils sont courts, mais fournis et noirs comme des queues d'hermine. Les paupières sont brunes et semées de fibrilles rouges qui leur donnent

à la fois de la grâce et de la force, deux qualités  
difficiles a réunir chez la femme (Beatrice, pp. 76-77).

In reading Balzac, it is important to remember that he  
is not only a story-teller, but also a painter with enormous  
vision and, above all, a historian of manners.

## CHAPTER V

### LE LYS DANS LA VALLÉE

#### I. SUBJECTIVITY

In le Lys dans la vallée, Balzac shows more Romantic qualities than in any other of the selected works. He is unusually subjective, and the story seems to be in part autobiographical although some points are exaggerated. The story is narrated in the first person singular. Balzac began the story with an attempt to explain his rejection by his mother:<sup>34</sup>

A quel talent nourri de larmes devrons-nous un jour la plus émouvante élégie, la peinture des tourments subis en silence par les âmes dont les racines tendres encore ne rencontrent que de durs cailloux dans le sol domestique, dont les premières frondaisons sont déchirées par des mains haineuses, dont les fleurs sont atteintes par la gelée au moment où elles s'ouvrent? Quel poète nous dira les douleurs de l'enfant dont les lèvres sucent un sein amer, et dont les sourires sont réprimés par le feu dévorant d'un oeil sévère? La fiction qui représenterait ces pauvres coeurs opprimés par les êtres placés autour d'eux pour favoriser les développements de leur sensibilité serait la véritable histoire de ma jeunesse. Quelle vanité pouvais-je blesser, moi nouveau-né? quelle disgrâce physique ou morale me valait la froideur de ma mère? étais-je donc l'enfant du devoir, celui dont la naissance est fortuite, ou celui dont la vie est un reproche?

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<sup>34</sup>Honoré de Balzac, le Lys dans la vallée (Paris: Librairie Paul Ollendorff, 1917), p. 3.



In addition to being rejected by his mother, he was treated coolly by his father; and his brothers and sister seemed to find joy in seeing him suffer. He was often punished for a brother's wrong doings. Balzac states:

La courtisanerie, en germe chez les enfants, leur conseillait-elle de contribuer aux persécutions qui m'affligeaient, pour se ménager les grâces d'une mère également redoutée par eux? était-ce un effet de leur penchant à l'imitation: était-ce besoin d'essayer leurs forces, ou manque de pitié? Peut-être ces causes réunies me privèrent-elles des douceurs de la fraternité. Déjà déshérité de toute affection, je ne pouvais rien aimer, et la nature m'avait fait aimant! (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 4)

It is believed that Balzac's youngest brother was illegitimate and was the offspring of the man his mother really loved.

Not being able to find a friend in the external world in whom he could confide, Félix, the character who resembles Balzac, looks within himself for answers. He is forbidden to go into the garden in the evening to watch his favorite star. He romantically relates the child's natural desire to rebel against authority:

Atteint et convaincu d'avoir imaginé cette espièglerie, accusé de mensonge quand j'affirmais mon innocence, je fus sévèrement puni. Mais, châtement horrible! je fus persiflé sur mon amour pour les étoiles, et ma mère me défendit de rester au jardin le soir. Les défenses tyranniques aiguissent encore plus une passion chez les enfants que chez les hommes; les enfants ont sur eux l'avantage de ne penser qu'à la chose défendue, que leur offre alors des attraits irrésistibles. J'eus donc souvent le fouet pour mon étoile. Ne pouvant me confier à personne, je lui disais mes chagrins dans ce délicieux ramage intérieur

par lequel un enfant bégaye ses premières idées, comme naguère il a bégayé ses premières paroles (le Lys dans la vallée, pp. 6-7).

His strength came from within.

In order for the reader to understand better the author, he is sometimes called upon to reflect upon his own experiences:

Pour rien comprendre mon récit, reportez-vous donc à ce bel âge où la bouche est vierge de mensonges, où le regard est franc, quoique voilé par des paupières qu'alourdissent les timidités en contradiction avec le désir, où l'esprit ne se plie point au jésuitisme du monde, où la couardise du coeur égale en violence les générosités du premier mouvement (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 18).

At other times the author leaves things to the reader's imagination, "Je ne vous parlerai point du voyage que je fis de Paris à Tours avec ma mère" (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 19).

To solve his problems, he looks to the country.

Here Balzac sounds extremely Romantic:

La campagne, cet éternel remède des affections auxquelles la médecine ne connaît rien, fut regardée comme le meilleur moyen de me sortir de mon apathie. . . . Le jour où j'eus ainsi la clef des champs, j'avais si drument (sic) nagé dans l'océan de l'amour, que je l'avais traversé. J'ignorais le nom de mon inconnue; comment la désigner? où la trouver? d'ailleurs à qui pouvais-je parler d'elle? Mon caractère timide augmentait encore les craintes inexplicables qui s'emparent des jeunes coeurs au début de l'amour, et me faisait commencer par la mélancolie qui termine les passions sans espoir (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 26).

Félix looks to the country for another reason. He senses that the lady who caused his emotions to overflow lived in the country near Tours.

## II. EMOTION AND IMAGINATION

Le Lys dans la vallée is the story of a love triangle which closely resembles Balzac's own love-life with Madame de Berny. The persons involved in the triangle are Monsieur de Mortsauf, his wife, Blanche or Henriette, and Félix de Vandenesse. Most authorities believe that the characters of this novel are easy to recognize. Félix represents Balzac. Madame de Mortsauf is probably Madame de Berny, although some think that she is Sarah Guidoboni-Visconti. Sarah is also the model for Lady Dudley.<sup>35</sup> Natalie de Manerville, to whom Félix addressed the story, is Madame Hanska, whom Balzac later married.

Félix, a student who has been called back to Tours by his father, represents his family at a ball. Félix has lived a relatively sheltered life, having spent most of his youth in boarding school under the instruction of monks. He has, however, met many attractive young ladies at the salon of his aunt in Paris. None of them made any real impression on him.

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<sup>35</sup>Hunt, op. cit., p. 114.

At the ball, Félix is very uncomfortable. He is too timid to dance, and does not know what to do with himself. He does not think that it is wise to leave the ball even though he is thoroughly disgusted with it. He takes refuge in a corner where he stares and sulks. In that corner, he is to have a date with destiny. A woman, who apparently understands and feels sorry for him in his discomfort, approaches him. Félix is struck with the fever of sudden passion. "Je sentis un parfum de femme qui brilla dans mon âme comme y brilla depuis la poésie orientale" (le Lys dans la vallée, pp. 23-24). He is enraptured by the smell of her perfume and dazzled by her beauty. His pent-up emotions yearn to be set free. "Si vous avez bien compris ma vie antérieure, vous devinerez les sentiments qui sourdirent en mon coeur" (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 24). He is particularly captivated by her beautiful shoulders which make an indelible impression on his young mind. He relates his impressions:

Mes yeux furent tout à coup frappés par de blanches épaules rebondies sur lesquelles j'aurais voulu pouvoir me rouler, des épaules légèrement rosées qui semblaient rougir comme si elles se trouvaient nues pour la première fois, de pudiques épaules qui avaient une âme, et dont la peau satinée éclatait à la lumière comme un tissu de soie (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 24).

Félix has met his lily-of-the-valley. There is no limit to his emotion nor his imagination. "Mon imagination courut comme en de frais sentiers, tout me fit perdre l'esprit" (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 24). When he is certain that he is not being watched, the lust-filled youth devours the fruit of his passions. "Après m'être assuré que personne ne me voyait, je me plongeai dans ce dos comme un enfant qui se jette dans le sein de sa mère, et je baisai toutes ces épaules en y roulant ma tête" (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 24). The woman's only response is--Monsieur! She then loses herself in the crowd.

Félix is not able to understand this sudden outburst of emotion for the unknown woman:

Existe-t-il donc une heure, une conjonction d'astres, une réunion de circonstances expresses, une certaine femme entre toutes, pour déterminer une passion exclusive, au temps où la passion embrasse le sexe entier? (le Lys dans la vallée, pp. 25-26)

He feels that this has been the inevitable meeting of two star-crossed lovers.

For several days following the ball, he thinks of nothing but the woman with the beautiful shoulders. His mother thinks that he is ill, and suggests that he spend a few days at Frapesle, a château on the Indre, between Montbason and Azay-le-Rideau. During his visit at Frapesle, he is introduced to the Mortsaufts who live at near-by Clochegourde.

At Clochegourde, Félix is warmly received by the Mortsaufts and their children. Félix recognizes Madame de Mortsauf as the woman he kissed at the ball. She also recognizes him. Félix does not mention the incident at the ball, but neither he nor Madame de Mortsauf has forgotten it. They have many occasions to talk and, some time later, Félix tries to exonerate himself of that extraordinary display of emotion. Madame de Mortsauf does not want to discuss it. "Ne parlez jamais de ce bal. Si la chrétienne vous a pardonné, la femme souffre encore" (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 88). It is the only shameful event of her life. Although Félix was indifferent to all the women at the ball, as he had been with all other women he has met, when he saw Madame de Mortsauf he was overcome by her beauty. He explains:

Moi de qui la vie était si studieuse, de qui l'âme était si peu hardie, j'avais été comme emporté par une frénésie qui ne pouvait être condamnée que par ceux qui ne l'avaient jamais éprouvée, que jamais coeur d'homme ne fût si bien rempli du désir auquel ne résiste aucune créature et qui fait tout vaincre, même la mort. . . (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 88).

Nothing could have quelled his emotions at that moment. Félix tells Madame de Mortsauf how he suffered from a lack of maternal love and that he still seeks this love. "J'étais le trésor de mes vœux brillants, l'or vierge de mes désirs, tout un coeur brûlant conservé sous les glaces de ces alpes entassées par un continuel hiver"

(le Lys dans la vallée, p. 89). Félix knows that he is now possessed with a passion for her of which he will never be free. "Elle éclaira les ténèbres par un regard, elle anima les mondes terrestres et divins par un seul mot" (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 89).

Félix' life up to this point has been almost parallel to that of Balzac and Madame de Berny. It is also significant that Félix is twenty-two years old at this time and Madame de Mortsauf is twenty-eight.<sup>36</sup> No doubt she offered him the things that he always sought from his mother, but rarely, if ever, received, namely, love and understanding.

Madame de Mortsauf also had an unpleasant childhood. "Je n'étais donc pas seule à souffrir!" (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 89) They now have a common bond. They can understand each other's sufferings. But this is not the kind of bond Félix has in mind. Félix wants a romantic alliance. He tries to convince Madame de Mortsauf that their common background is not an accident:

Voyez par quelles voies nous avons marché l'un vers l'autre; quel aimant nous a dirigés sur l'océan des eaux amères, vers la source d'eau douce, coulant aux pieds des monts sur un sable pailleté, entre deux rives vertes et fleuries. N'avons-nous pas, comme les mages, suivi la même étoile? Nous voici

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<sup>36</sup>Philippe Bertault, Balzac and the Human Comedy (New York: New York University Press, 1963), p. 109.

devant la crèche d'où s'éveille un divin enfant qui lancera ses flèches au front des arbres nus, qui nous ranimera le monde par ses cris joyeux, qui, par des plaisirs incessants, donnera du goût à la vie, rendra aux nuits leur sommeil, aux jours leur allégresse. Qui donc a serré chaque année de nouveaux nœuds entre nous? Ne sommes-nous pas plus que frère et soeur? Ne déliez jamais ce que le ciel a réuni (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 98).

Félix feels that if their love is denied they will be acting against the natural forces which brought them together. Madame de Mortsauf understands why Félix thinks as he does:

Vous êtes un enfant, je vous pardonne encore, mais pour la dernière fois. Sachez-le, monsieur, mon coeur est comme enivré de maternité! Je n'aime M. de Mortsauf ni par devoir social, ni par calcul de béatitudes éternelles à gagner, mais par un irrésistible sentiment qui l'attache à toutes les fibres de mon coeur (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 99).

Madame de Mortsauf emphasizes that she wants only a fraternal relationship with him, and that if he cannot respect her marriage then "l'entrée de cette maison vous serait à jamais fermée" (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 99). They finally agree to a fraternal friendship. Madame de Mortsauf is referred to by her husband as Blanche. She permits Félix now to call her Henriette. That name was reserved for one person--her favorite aunt who has recently died. "Aimez-moi comme m'aimait ma tante, de qui je vous ai donné les droits en vous autorisant à m'appeler du nom qu'elle avait choisi pour elle parmi les miens" (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 109).



Henriette tries to keep the relationship as pure as possible. She sometimes permits Félix to kiss her hand, but only the back of her hand:

Puis j'étais jeune, assez jeune pour concentrer ma nature dans le baiser qu'elle me permettait si rarement de mettre sur sa main, dont elle ne voulut jamais me donner que le dessus et jamais la paume, limite où, pour elle, commençaient peut-être les voluptés sensuelles (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 120).

Her virtue is accepted by Félix, but it is always frustrating to him. "Si jamais deux âmes ne s'étreignirent avec plus d'ardeur, jamais le corps ne fut plus intrépidement ni plus victorieusement dompté" (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 120). Félix never completely abandons the hope of consummating the relationship in carnal love.

Félix leaves his friend's château and goes to the court of Louis XVIII. During this time he meets Lady Dudley, an extremely beautiful English woman. For Lady Dudley, Félix' emotions are purely physical. He compares her to Madame de Mortsauf:

Elle était la maîtresse du corps. Madame de Mortsauf était l'épouse de l'âme. L'amour que satisfait la maîtresse a des bornes, la matière est finie, ses propriétés ont des forces calculées, elle est soumise à d'inévitables saturations; je sentais souvent je ne sais quel vide à Paris, près de lady Dudley. L'infini est le domaine du coeur, l'amour était sans bornes à Clochegourde (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 265).

His love for Lady Dudley is physical, therefore finite.

His love for Madame de Mortsauf is spiritual and, therefore, infinite.

Madame de Mortsauf learns of Félix' other love and is deeply saddened. She is so hurt that she refuses to permit Félix to call her by the name that symbolizes their fraternal union: "Ne m'appellez jamais Henriette, répondit-elle, elle n'existe plus, la pauvre femme; mais vous trouverez toujours Madame de Mortsauf, une amie dévouée qui vous écoutera, qui vous aimera" (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 281).

Madame de Mortsauf is not totally unsympathetic with Félix; she recognizes that their relationship has limitations. She promises to accept Lady Dudley as a sister:

Aimez-la donc bien, Félix, cette femme, dit-elle avec des larmes aux yeux, ce sera ma soeur heureuse. Je lui pardonne les maux qu'elle m'a faits, si elle vous donne ce que vous ne deviez jamais trouver ici, ce que vous ne pouvez tenir de moi. Vous avez eu raison, je ne vous ai jamais dit que je vous aimasse, et je ne vous ai jamais aimé comme on aime dans ce monde. Mais, si elle n'est pas mère, comment peut-elle aimer? (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 283)

She doubts, however, that Lady Dudley, who is married but has no children, can love him as a mother can.

When Madame de Mortsauf meets Lady Dudley, she is stunned by the beauty of the English woman. "Je n'ai jamais vu de plus belle femme. Quelle main et quelle taille! Son teint efface le lys, et ses yeux ont l'éclat du diamant" (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 305).

Lady Dudley loves Félix, but she knows that he is in love with Madame de Mortsauf. She would sacrifice

anything to replace her in his heart. She says that she will love the French woman because he loves her. She also warns him against betrayal:

. . . en Angleterre, nous aimons tout ce que nos souverains seigneurs aiment, nous haïssons tout ce qu'ils haïssent, parce que nous vivons dans la peau de nos seigneurs. Permettez-moi donc d'aimer cette dame autant que vous l'aimez vous-même. Seulement, cher enfant, dit-elle en m'enlaçant de ses bras humides de pluie, si tu me trahissais, je ne serais ni debout ni couchée, ni dans une calèche flanquée de laquais, ni à me promener dans les landes de Charlemagne, ni dans aucune des landes d'aucun pays d'aucun monde, ni dans mon lit, ni sous le toit de mes pères! Je ne serais plus, moi. Je suis née dans le Lancashire, pays où les femmes meurent d'amour. Te connaître et te céder! Je ne te céderais à aucune puissance, pas même à la mort, car je m'en irais avec toi (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 307).

She will not give him up, not even to death.

Although Madame de Mortsauf has had a virtuous relationship with Félix, she loves him more than she will admit even to herself. Her knowledge of this new love causes her to become deathly ill. Félix, who has been in Paris for the last two years, rushes to her bedside. Nearing her death, Madame de Mortsauf no longer has the strength to suppress her emotions for Félix. She has been unable to take food for more than forty days. When she sees Félix she feels that her strength will come back to her. In the presence of Félix and her confessor she opens the secrets of her heart:

. . . quand j'aurais recouvré quelques forces, quand je commencerai à pouvoir prendre quelque nourriture,

je redeviendrai belle. A peine ai-je trente-cinq ans, je puis encore avoir de belles années. Le bonheur rajeunit, et je veux connaître le bonheur. J'ai fait des projets délicieux: nous les laisserons à Clochegourde et nous irons ensemble en Italie (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 346).

She goes on to reveal the cause of her mysterious illness:

Vous êtes un si bon garde-malade! Puis vous êtes si riche de force et de santé, qu'après de vous la vie est contagieuse. Mon ami, prouvez-moi donc que je ne puis mourir, mourir trompée! Ils croient que ma plus vive douleur est la soif. Oh! oui, j'ai bien soif, mon ami. L'eau de l'Indre me fait bien mal à voir, mais mon coeur éprouve une plus ardente soif. J'avais soif de toi, . . . Mon agonie a été de ne pas te voir! (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 347)

She later reflects and asks that Félix forget the things she has just said to him. Madame de Mortsauf has written a letter to Félix and requests that he read it only after her death. In the letter she reaffirms her earlier statements:

Quand j'ai bien su que j'étais aimée autant que je vous aimais moi-même et que je n'étais trahie que par la nature et non par votre pensée, j'ai voulu vivre. . . et il n'était plus temps. Dieu m'avait mise sous sa protection, pris sans doute de pitié pour une créature vraie avec elle-même, vraie avec lui, et que ses souffrances avaient souvent amenée aux portes du sanctuaire. Mon bien-aimé, Dieu m'a jugée, M. de Mortsauf me pardonnera sans doute; mais vous, serez-vous clément? (le Lys dans la vallée, pp. 372-73)

She has a clear conscience with God and with her husband, and asks Félix' pardon.

She asks that he be kind to her husband and care for her children until they are of an age of independence. She would like for him to marry her daughter Madeleine. What

Madame de Mortsauf does not understand is that Madeleine knows that Félix is the cause of her suffering and consequent death. Madeleine has a mortal antipathy for Félix. When he discusses the last wishes of Madame de Mortsauf, Madeleine replies, trembling with emotion:

Je connais aussi toutes vos pensées; mais je ne changerai point de sentiments à votre égard, et j'aimerais mieux me jeter dans l'Indre que de me lier à vous. Je ne vous parlerai de moi; mais, si le nom de ma mère conserve encore quelque puissance sur vous, c'est en son nom que je vous prie de ne jamais venir à Clochegourde tant que j'y serai. Votre aspect seul me cause un trouble que je ne puis exprimer, et que je ne surmonterai jamais (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 379).

Madeleine would kill herself rather than marry Félix. She asks that he never return to Clochegourde. Félix does not return. In an effort to forget recent events, Félix tries to lose himself in his work, in literature, and in politics. He becomes a diplomat with the ascension of Charles X.

The writer feels that Balzac's imagination does cause him to exaggerate his emotional episodes. A youth with little social experience would hardly kiss a woman he has never seen nor spoken to before, as did Félix.

The suggested marriage between Félix and Madeleine is also very hard to conceive. Had the marriage taken place, Madeleine would have ceased to exist in the eyes of Félix. She would have become Madame de Mortsauf. There

is no wonder that Madeleine found this arrangement unthinkable.

### III. LOCAL COLOR

It is not surprising that Balzac fills le Lys dans la vallée with local color. Here he is describing Touraine, the land that he knew best, the land that he loved. He gives us a glimpse of a lovely valley in this province:

Je descendis, l'âme émue, au fond de cette corbeille, et vis bientôt un village que la poésie qui surabondait en moi me fit trouver sans pareil. Figurez-vous trois moulins posés parmi des îles gracieusement découpées, couronnées de quelques bouquets d'arbres au milieu d'une prairie d'eau; quel autre nom donner à ces végétations aquatiques, si vivaces, si bien colorées, qui tapissent la rivière, surgissent au-dessus, ondulent avec elle, se laissent aller à ses caprices et se plient aux tempêtes de la rivière fouettée par la roue des moulins? Ça et là, s'élèvent des masses de gravier sur lesquelles l'eau se brise en y formant des franges où reluit le soleil (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 30).

Balzac is very subjective in these descriptions; and nature, as a background for the emotions, is found in each scene. He gives us his first impressions upon seeing the château of Azay-le-Rideau:

. . . mes yeux furent attirés à l'horizon par la belle lame d'or de la Loire où, parmi les roulées, les voiles dessinaient de fantasques figures qui fuyaient emportées par le vent. En gravissant une crête, j'admirais pour la première fois le château d'Azay, diamant taillé en facettes, serti par l'Indre, monté sur des pilotis masqués de fleurs. Puis je vis dans un fond les masses romantiques du château de Saché, mélancolique séjour plein d'harmonies, trop graves pour les gens superficiels, chères aux poètes dont l'âme est endolorie (le Lys dans la vallée, pp. 31-32).

Azay-le-Rideau is like a large diamond crowned by nature.

Balzac has been given many names that try to explain his unusual ability to describe. He has been called the observer, the architect, the interior decorator. All are accurate and here we can see why. He describes the château at the imaginary Clochegourde:

Elle a cinq fenêtres de face, chacune de celles qui terminent la façade exposée au midi s'avance d'environ deux toises, artifice d'architecture qui simule deux pavillons et donne de la grâce au logis; celle du milieu sert de porte, et on en descend par un double perron dans des jardins étagés qui atteignent à une étroite prairie située le long de l'Indre. Quoiqu'un chemin communal sépare cette prairie de la dernière terrasse ombragée par une allée d'acacias et de vernis du Japon, elle semble faire partie des jardins; car le chemin est creux, encaissé d'un côté par la terrasse et bordé de l'autre par une haie normande. Les pentes bien ménagées mettent assez de distance entre l'habitation et la rivière pour sauver les inconvénients du voisinage des eaux sans en ôter l'agrément (le Lys dans la vallée, pp. 33-34).

Having played the role of architect, we now see him as the interior decorator:

Le salon où restait la comtesse était entièrement boisé, peint en gris de deux nuances, la cheminée avait pour ornement une pendule contenue dans un bloc d'acajou surmonté d'une coupe, et deux grands vases en porcelaine blanche à filets d'or d'où s'élevaient des bruyères du Cap. Une lampe était sur la console. Il y avait un trictrac en face de la cheminée. Deux larges embrasses en coton retenaient les rideaux de percale blanche, sans franges (le Lys dans la vallée, pp. 44-45).

Balzac is equally effective in or out of doors.

The fact that so much of le Lys dans la vallée is personal perhaps explains why Balzac is so subjective in

his descriptions of Touraine. The major portion of the story has its setting in his native province, at the château de Clochegourde, between Montbason and Azay-le-Rideau. After discovering love in the valley, he studies the countryside and talks about it:

En ce moment, les moulins situés sur les chutes de l'Indre donnaient une voix à cette vallée frémissante, les peupliers se balançaient en riant, pas un nuage au ciel, les oiseaux chantaient, les cigales criaient, tout y était mélodie. Ne me demandez plus pourquoi j'aime la Touraine; je ne l'aime ni comme on aime son berceau, ni comme on aime une oasis dans le désert; je l'aime comme un artiste aime l'art; je l'aime moins que je ne vous aime; mais, sans la Touraine, peut-être ne vivrais-je plus (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 29).

The fact that many of the French rulers chose to have their châteaux constructed in Touraine attests to its beauty.

Balzac continues:

Imaginez au delà du pont deux ou trois fermes, un colombier, des tourterelles, une trentaine de masures séparées par des jardins, par des haies de chèvre-feuilles, de jasmins et de clématites; puis du fumier fleuri devant toutes les portes, des poules et des coqs par les chemins; voilà le village du Pont-de-Ruan, joli village surmonté d'une vieille église pleine de caractère, une église du temps des croisades, et comme les peintres en cherchent pour leurs tableaux. Encadrez le tout de noyers antiques, de jeunes peupliers aux feuilles d'or pâle, mettez de gracieuses fabriques au milieu des longues prairies où l'oeil se perd sous un ciel chaud et vapoureux, vous aurez une idée d'un des mille points de vue de ce beau pays (le Lys dans la vallée, pp. 30-31).

Balzac is a master of local color, and Touraine offers a lovely panorama for him to display his talent.



## IV. NATURE

Balzac does not usually treat nature as something to be revered. This is unusual in a Romantic writer. Love of nature is one of the basic characteristics of Romanticism. This apparent indifference to nature on Balzac's part is misleading as he used it extensively in le Lys dans la vallée.

Balzac was not reared in the country and did not have the opportunity to explore nature as some boys do. Early in his life he found peace in nature when he could find it nowhere else. Nature was a distant friend:

Dans mon enfance, mes promenades ne m'avaient pas conduit à plus d'une lieue hors de la ville. Mes courses aux environs de Pontlevoy ni celles que je fis dans Paris ne m'avaient gâté sur les beautés de la nature champêtre (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 27).

As he continued to contemplate nature, he began to see parallels between physical and moral nature:

La nature morale a-t-elle donc, comme la nature physique, ses communications électriques et ses rapides changements de température? . . . La nature s'était parée comme une femme allant à la rencontre du bien-aimé, mon âme avait pour la première fois entendu sa voix, mes yeux l'avaient admirée aussi féconde, aussi variée que mon imagination me la représentait dans mes rêves de collège. . . (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 35).

As an adult, Balzac's curiosity grew deeper. He became a student of nature. He said: "Je fis une étude approfondie, moins en botaniste qu'en poète, étudiant plus leur esprit que leur forme. Pour trouver une fleur là où elle venait,

j'allais souvent à d'énormes distances" (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 128). Like Rousseau, Balzac saw moral concepts in nature that could be found nowhere else:

Il est, dans la nature, des effets dont les significances sont sans bornes, et qui s'élèvent à la hauteur des plus grandes conceptions morales. . . . Jetez sur ces tableaux tantôt des torrents de soleil ruisselant comme des ondes nourrissantes, tantôt des amas de nuées grises alignées comme les rides au front d'un vieillard, tantôt les tons froids d'un ciel faiblement orangé, sillonné de bandes d'un bleu pâle; puis écoutez: vous entendrez d'indéfinissables harmonies au milieu d'un silence qui confond (le Lys dans la vallée, pp. 128-29).

It is as a poet that Balzac speaks when he writes his beautiful descriptions:

Si vous voulez voir la nature belle et vierge comme une fiancée, allez là-bas par un jour de printemps; si vous voulez calmer les plaies saignantes de votre coeur, revenez-y par les derniers jours de l'automne; au printemps, l'amour y bat des ailes à plein ciel; en automne, on y songe à ceux que ne sont plus. Le poumon malade y respire une bienfaisante fraîcheur, la vue s'y repose sur des touffes dorées qui communiquent à l'âme leurs paisibles douceurs (le Lys dans la vallée, p. 29).

One may conclude that Balzac used nature not to prove that he was a Romanticist, but as it served his need. He shows, nevertheless, the influence of his own time and also of Rousseau. Le Lys dans la vallée (p. 231) has a promenade on a river, if not a lake, by a married woman and her beloved. Le Lys dans la vallée also describes a harvest festival of grapes (p. 137). Similar episodes are found in La Nouvelle Héloïse of Rousseau. Balzac frequently refers to Rousseau and appears to know well this famous Romanticist.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSIONS

Whereas Balzac is often regarded as a Realist, he does partake of his own time. His first successes as a serious writer came at the end of the 1820's. It was about this time that Romanticism was reaching its peak in France. It seems inevitable that he would be influenced by the literary movement which reached its ascendancy and decline parallel to his own career.

The Realists are known for their objectivity; that is, it is the writer's duty to remain detached from his story and report his information with the cold objectivity of a surgeon performing an operation. There is no place for subjectivity on the part of the author. Balzac, however, was frequently subjective. He found it very difficult to keep himself out of his novels. He talked to his reader, creating moods, injecting his opinions, and asking rhetorical questions. Subjectivity is a Romantic quality.

Balzac was very imaginative. His powerful imagination gave rise to strong emotion in his writing. Balzac's father had the strong imagination that is characteristic of people from southern France. His mother was well read in mystic philosophy. Balzac absorbed both of these

Romantic qualities and used them in such works as la Peau de chagrin, and le Colonel Chabert. He was particularly effective with love and death scenes. His imagination gave vigor to emotional episodes. The death scenes of le Père Goriot and le Lys dans la vallée are fine examples of Balzac's use of imagination to heighten the effect of his emotional scenes. Balzac has often been accused of exaggeration in his emotional and imaginative scenes, but exaggeration is also a characteristic of Romanticism.

Few people, if any, have been able to reproduce the impressions of the senses as did Balzac. His sensitivity to his environment makes him perhaps the keenest observer in literary history. He is unmatched as a descriptive writer. His pages are often filled with lengthy details of local color. Balzac believed that a thorough description of the environment was necessary in order for the reader to understand thoroughly the characters being studied. He believed that the environment helped to shape character; therefore, it is necessary for the reader to be acquainted thoroughly with both the environment and the characters, for they are integral parts of each other.

Balzac handled external and internal nature with equal facility. In his works one sees a cross-section of the society in which he lived. His scope was vast and his perception was profound. He understood the poor and

rejected as well as he understood the rich and the celebrated. He was a student of human nature, and he revealed its many changing facades with detailed accuracy. His descriptions of minute details are also Romantic.

There are other Romantic elements that are neglected by Balzac. Nature is usually idealized by Romantic writers. Only in le Lys dans la vallée does Balzac idealize nature. It should be remembered, however, that Balzac was a city man and spent most of his life in Paris. There is an element of melancholy throughout Balzac's writings, but it is never treated as a single force. Old ruins are occasionally referred to, but there is never a real glorification of antiquity. Many of Balzac's characters reflect a yearning for adventure, but few of his characters rebel against the various forms of restraint used against them. Most of Balzac's heroes are individualists, as was Balzac himself.

Balzac was frequently Romantic. He was a contemporary of Romanticism and it is natural that his writings reflect the time in which he lived, while at the same time he foreshadows the Realism of the latter part of the century.

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\_\_\_\_\_. le Lys dans la vallée. Paris: Librairie Paul Ollendorff, 1917. 451 pp.  
This is the story of a Platonic love affair between a young man and a considerably older woman. The woman is married and struggles to remain virtuous. The story is in many respects similar to Balzac's love life. It is the most Romantic of all of Balzac's works.

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