

'faire-part' letters occupy one paragraph only.¹

Balzac is adamant that children should be breastfed. Renée is a model for the ideal mother as defined in DSM: she demonstrates fully that a woman maintains her health if she pours into 'un chaste hymen ses plus douces affections ... s'entoure de ses enfants, joyeuse famille allaitée de ses mamelles et qui croît par ses soins'.² She lives in the country, supposedly the ideal place to rear children because it is conducive to a sedentary and peaceful life,³ whereas the milk of city women was thought to be vitiated by self-indulgence and overheated passions.⁴

Renée follows DSM's instructions on child-rearing to the letter. DSM believes in the prime importance of breast-feeding, agreeing with Rousseau that it is a dictate of nature.⁵ Balzac wholly concurs, speaking of the great success and lasting value of Rousseau's ideas for: 'En attachant les enfants au sein de leurs mères, Jean-Jacques rendait déjà un immense service à la vertu'.⁶ Naturally Renée suckles her child herself for inevitably 'nature' would be 'rich' in such a model mother. She is also a brunette, another advantage, for DSM informs us that the milk of brunettes is more nourishing than that of blondes.⁷ It is interesting to note that the later DM does not impose suckling as a moral imperative, but merely warns that the best food for new-born children is the milk of a

1. EM p. 354.

2. DSM Fille, p. 538.

3. DSM Génération, p. 59; DM Paediatric, p. 22.

4. DSM Allaitement, p. 405; Femme, p. 649.

5. Nourrice, p. 291; Allaitement, p. 397 - actually quotes Rousseau.

6. Phy pp. 130 - 131.

7. Enfance, p. 224.

mother or a wet-nurse.¹ Renée is far more traditional, at one with DSM- and Rousseau- in her denial that a nurse can ever be a substitute for a mother. However, according to both dictionaries Renée suckles Armand for just the right length of time - one year - for DSM suggests that weaning can take place between twelve and fifteen months,² and DM fixes the cessation of suckling between five or six months and two or three years.³ Renée exhibits a praiseworthy contempt for vanity, continuing to suckle despite her belief that it spoils the contour of the bosom,⁴ something which even the old-fashioned DSM refutes.⁵

The only excuse for not breastfeeding which Balzac is prepared to admit is the 'révolution de lait' caused by an emotional crisis. This again has medical approval, both dictionaries condoning a mother's inability to fulfil her duty in such circumstances.⁶ This is the case of Eve Séchard after Lucien's disastrous return home, and of Sabine du Guénic when she discovers Calyste's infidelity. Both women suffer at not being able to fulfil their maternal duty, and Balzac implies that Lucien and Calyste are reprehensible to have brought this about.

Nevertheless, Balzac tends to indict mothers who do not breastfeed their children, this being evident from his early work onwards. The reason for this was his deep-seated resentment at having been farmed out to a foster mother himself. Félix, alias Balzac, complains in Le Lys

1. Paediatric, p. 19. cf. on the contrary DSM Allaitement, p. 402.

2. Enfance, p. 225.

3. Paediatric, p. 21.

4. MJM pp. 295 - 296.

5. Nourrice, p. 290.

6. DSM Allaitement, p. 407, Femme, p. 469, Nourrice, p. 302; DM Lactation, pp. 426 - 427.

dans la vallée of having been sent away for several years. In a well-known and revealing passage he asks whether he was a child of duty and hence unloved, and relates that he was 'mis en nourrice à la campagne, oublié par ma famille pendant trois ans'.¹ The traditional excuse for Mme Balzac has been that her first-born, Louis-Daniel, had lived only thirty-three days and had died from the insufficiency of his mother's milk. Be that as it may - and there is some speculation that Mme Balzac had not suckled him to the end, or even at all² - the fact remains that the Balzac parents had ignored Honoré until he was three.

Throughout his work Balzac's Rousseauist insistence on breast-feeding is accompanied by an equally Rousseauist disapproval of society women as mothers, this latter also being endorsed by DSM.³ From the Oeuvres de jeunesse onwards the heroes and heroines almost invariably have been breastfed or else breastfed their babies themselves. Annette Gérard's upbringing is a transposition of Sophie's. The small Abel plays on his mother's breast after imbibing her milk which is as pure as her soul (sic!).⁴ The Countess Beringheld, a forerunner of Renée de l'Estorade, finds great joy in offering her child her breast⁵ which for her symbolises 'toutes les forces de l'amour maternel au dernier degré'.⁶ The virtuous Sténie is reminded of her maternal duty, the only compensation for an unsatisfactory marriage, by the cry of her child asking to be fed.⁷ In the Comédie humaine exemplary mothers suckle their children, and mothers who do not do so invoke censure. Someone like Mme d'Espard, for instance, regards children as a

1. Lys p. 5.

3. Femme, p. 649.

5. Le Centenaire, Ch. X, p. 89.

7. Sténie, p. 165.

2. AB 1966, E. Brua, Notes

4. La dernière Fée. vol. I, pp. 13-14

6. ibid., pp. 119 - 120.

misfortune to be hidden, for they betray her age. It seems to have been a general habit at the time to pay lip-service to Rousseauist precepts but to ignore them in practice, for many women did not wish to restrict their social life.¹ Balzac feels strongly that society ladies are more interested in preserving their waistlines than in caring for their children.² Nathalie de Manerville is a case in point, as is Mme de Marsay, whose maternal feelings are so extinguished by her Parisian successes that she forgets the existence of her adulterine child for thirty-five years. Louise de Chaulieu knows from experience what an unsatisfactory mother a society woman makes. In Entre Savants Balzac describes the obverse side of this vanity: women of forty sometimes breastfeed because they realise that 'un sein blanc, d'où coule la vie à flots' will belie their age.³

Balzac does not show much interest in the development of infants. He gives perfunctory attention to their nurture after weaning, and this attention is confined almost exclusively to Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées. As DSM advises,⁴ Renée refuses to swaddle her child and frequently washes him and brushes his hair.⁵

There are a few rare allusions to infant illnesses and again the most detailed is that of little Armand de l'Estorade. His attack of convulsions follows a classic pattern. It occurs while he is teething, a period dreaded by early nineteenth century doctors as the stormiest in an infant's

1. q.v. La Nourrice sur place in Les Français peints par eux-mêmes.
2. PMV p. 28.
3. OD III, p. 628.
4. Age, p. 178.
5. MJM p. 296.

life.¹ Armand displays all the symptoms enumerated in DSM: fever, rigidity of the muscles, distended and immobile pupils.² According to DSM, doctors usually had difficulty in diagnosing the cause of convulsions. Renée finds this out, and triumphantly demonstrates the truth of both DSM and DM's belief that mothers are the best doctors. Where DSM observes: 'L'habitude où est une mère de famille d'observer les maladies de l'enfance, d'y remédier, lui donne, sur l'homme ... qui a plus de lumières qu'elle, une supériorité remarquable',³ DM declares: 'si incessante est la vigilance des mères ... la médecine des jeunes enfans offre tant de difficultés qu'il faudrait presque y renoncer s'il n'y avait point de mères'.⁴ Renée summarises these opinions in her terse observation that mothers know more about convulsions than doctors.⁵

Armand's convulsions are not the only childhood illness described in the *Comédie humaine*. Both Henriette de Mortsauf and Sabine du Guénic fear that their children have croup. As Le Yaouanc has pointed out, Balzac always fits the illness to the age group, and Jacques de Mortsauf presents the medical type of a child with a tendency to consumption.

It cannot be denied that Balzac's treatment of 'tout ce trafic de maternité'⁷ is a little perfunctory. The whole of his thinking on child-bearing and rearing is summarised in *Mémoires de deux jeune mariées* and aspects are merely echoed elsewhere in his work. Renée's ideas on puericulture are hardly original because they are pedantically Rousseauist as interpreted by DSM. Balzac's niggling complaints about the unsuitability of society women to be mothers is not particularly important or relevant

1. DSM, *Age*, p. 178, *Tétanos*; DM, *Convulsions*

2. *Convulsions*.

3. *Femme*, p. 652.

4. *Paédiatrie*, p. 16.

5. MJM pp. 317 - 318.

6. in *Nosographie de l'humanité balzacienne*, p. 112.

7. B. p. 100.

in the Comédie humaine. He totally ignores the graver problem of infanticide, which was then one of the chief objects of study in legal medicine.¹ The only fleeting interest he showed in this was a project for a philosophical study, Le Roi, which would have contrasted an infanticide with the parricide depicted in El Verdugo.²

In the final resort what is the value of Balzac's presentation of procreation and child-rearing? His ideas are not startlingly novel and many were already dated in their time. They represent a convergence of influences: that of his father and thence Sterne, the social climate of the period, his emotional insecurity as regards his mother and the stable, informative friendship and example of Zulma Carraud. Most of these influences are fortunately corroborated by DSM and, far more rarely, by DM. There is a paragraph in DSM's article Enfance, for example, which states Balzac's ideas in a nutshell: 'La diversité de l'âge, de l'ardeur amoureuse, du régime de vie, de la saison dans laquelle la conception a lieu, contribue à établir une différence native entre les enfans d'un même mariage ... et quelque pareille que soit l'éducation, elle ne les assimile jamais exactement'.³

Nevertheless, Balzac has the merit of being the first nineteenth century writer to introduce these ideas in the novel and he, more than any other novelist in the first half of his century, proves the truth of his own dictum. 'L'avidité scalpel du 19e siècle fouille les coins les plus obscurs du coeur que la pudeur des siècles précédents avaient respectés'.⁴

1. DM, Infanticide, p. 383.

2. CH, ed. Aux éditions du Seuil, t. VII, p. 90.

3. pp. 230 - 231.

4. MD p. 77.

CHAPTER VII

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

It is clear from the structure of both the Comédie humaine and individual novels that Balzac had given more than a passing thought to the different stages of human growth and development from birth onwards. For this he drew on a simplified version of pseudo-scientific concepts dating from the Middle Ages, and divided human life into childhood, adolescence, virility and senility. He is not as detailed or clinical as DSM which divided childhood into 'infantia', comprising three sub-divisions, and 'pueritia'.¹ This should not necessarily be seen as a limitation, for even the twentieth century layman is not in the habit of using these sub-divisions.

The importance of these phases of growth for the structure of the Comédie humaine is apparent from a letter written to Mme Hanska in 1834, in which Balzac tells her that the whole of the Etudes de Moeurs depicts childhood, old age and maturity with all their social implications, omitting nothing.² The substance of this declaration is repeated in Félix Davin's preface to the Etudes philosophiques, a preface which was most likely written under Balzac's direction. Davin's grandiloquent claims are worth quoting in some detail. He declares that the Scènes de la vie privée are meant to 'figurer la vie humaine dans son réveil matinal, et croissant pour fleurir. Ce sera d'abord l'enfance ... peinte dans ses premiers débrouillements d'intelligence; ce seront, dans Une Fille d'Eve, les premières sensations de la jeune fille; puis les délicieuses timidités des grands enfants de vingt ans;.... Dans ce livre, la vie est donc prise entre les derniers développements de la puberté qui finit et

1. art. Age, p. 178.

2. Lettres à Mme H. I, p. 269.

les premiers calculs d'une virilité qui commence.... Au contraire, les Scènes de la vie de province sont destinées à représenter cette phase de la Vie humaine ... (où) à trente ans ... l'homme devient égoïste, ... Dans les Scènes de la vie parisienne l'existence ... arrive graduellement à l'âge qui touche à la décrépitude.¹ In short, Davin concludes that the Etudes de Mœurs depict all professions, explore all ages (most important for the purposes of this thesis) and describe men and women as civic, physical and moral beings.² If further proof were needed that Balzac envisaged the Comédie humaine as a symbol of an individual's development it would be provided by his own preface to Une Fille d'Eve and Massimilla Doni, published five years after Davin's, in which he declares that the Scènes de la vie privée are meant to portray 'cette phase de la vie humaine qui comprend les émotions de l'Enfance, celles de la Jeunesse ... les commencements de toutes les existences, leurs erreurs ... causées enfin par l'inexpérience de la vie.'³ The Etudes analytiques were planned to follow a similar chronological order, studying man from before conception, during gestation and after birth to the age of twenty-five, then spanning the ages of twenty-five to thirty, and finally considering his conduct in maturity.⁴ Moreover, some of Balzac's most serious philosophical thought, that concerning the soul, seems to have been envisaged in terms of human growth. He believed that before one can consider a man's soul one must examine his life. Part of his synopsis of man's growth has already been quoted in the chapter dealing with

1. Pléiade XI, pp. 207 - 208.

2. ibid., p. 213.

3. ibid., pp. 370 - 371.

4. ibid., pp. 160 - 161.

procreation. It is unfortunate that so much should be illegible in the manuscript, especially the evocative and significant metaphor: 'Un papillon paraît: l'enfant rit, l'adolescent court après, l'homme etc. la vieillesse ...' (what follows is illegible).¹ Furthermore Balzac's description of the genesis of Séraphita, which he regarded as the keystone of his mysticism, is revealing. He told Mme Hanska that 'Falturne ... est le manuscrit de l'enfant; puis vient le manuscrit de Séraphita'.²

Not only the framework of the Comédie humaine and Balzac's philosophical cogitation were determined by the pattern of human growth and development, but individual novels as well. La Femme de trente ans was intended to show the development of a young girl to womanhood, for when it appeared in the Revue des deux mondes it was divided as follows: la jeune fille, la Femme, la Mère, la Déclaration and le Rendez-vous.³ M-J. Durry has rightly observed that in the Comédie humaine love is depicted at all ages: the childhood love of Pierrette and Brigaut, followed by 'la duveteuse adolescence des Calixte, les griseries et les désenchantements des jeune mariés, les fautes des femmes de trente ans ... jusqu'aux sénilités des pères Cardot, des barons de Nucingen, des barons Hulot'.⁴

Thus one cannot deny Balzac's very real awareness of the stages of human growth and development, traditional and simplified though it be. Our next task is to examine just how he regards each stage.

1. quoted in CH, ed. Club de l'Honnête Homme, vol. 25, p. 558.

2. ibid., p. 263.

3. Lovenjoult. op cit., p. 26.

4. in J. Bertaut (ed.): Balzac, p. 199.

Childhood

In the chapter on children's characteristics we saw how Balzac, contrary to other Romantic writers, tends to be realistic and often para-scientific. However, when he comes to consider childhood in the abstract he is more often than not shamelessly idealistic for, like the Romantics, he adopts the twin Rousseauist myths of the sanctity of childhood and the rôle of childhood as the seed-time of the soul. Rousseau announced the first myth in the initial sentence of *Emile*: 'Tout est bien sortant des mains de l'Auteur des choses, tout dégénère entre les mains de l'homme';¹ and he expounded the second in the Preface, asserting that his predecessors 'cherchent toujours l'homme dans l'enfant, sans penser à ce qu'il est avant que d'être homme'.² Balzac had fixed ideas on what childhood should be. Like Hugo he felt that it should rightfully be a period of unalloyed happiness and told his nieces that the Survilles, unlike the Balzacs, had given their children 'tout entier ce beau poème de l'enfance',³ and had made of it 'ce que doit être l'enfance, un poème de tendresse'.⁴ His own unhappy childhood probably confirmed him in his adherence to the second myth mentioned above, especially in its corollary found in the work of Chateaubriand that men of genius necessarily have unhappy childhoods. In this chapter I shall examine the appearance of each myth in the *Comédie humaine*, and then attempt to show that Balzac differentiates himself from other Romantic writers and redeems his wholesale acceptance of them when he alters the quality of the myths, especially the second, turning from a semi-mythical sentimentalization of childhood to a judicious appraisal of the conscious and sub-conscious influence of childhood experiences on the adult.

The well-known history of Balzac's relations with his family indicates that an ineradicable feeling of grievance, rather than whole-hearted loyalty,

1. *Emile*, p. 1.

2. *ibid.*, p. vi.

3. *Corres.* V, p. 673.

4. *ibid.*, p. 407.

is the basis for his conviction that childhood has a quasi-mystical significance. Hence his belief that acquaintance formed during, or similar experiences in, childhood create a mystic tie between people, and that a person's attitude to his childhood may reveal his character.

Balzac's veneration of childhood is apparent from his letters to Mme Hanska. He evidently considered their unhappy childhoods a persuasive argument in favour of closer intimacy and declared: 'Ton enfance a été la mienne. Nous sommes frères et soeurs (sic) par les douleurs de l'enfance'.¹ He sought in her a compensation for his deprived childhood, and thought of her both as his 'pauvre chère petite fille'² and as a source of pure 'douceurs, même maternelles'.³ These are the reasons which attract Félix de Vandenesse to the only two women he really loves, Mme de Mortsauf and his wife Marie-Angélique de Granville, for he seeks in the former a 'mère-amante' and in the latter a 'femme-enfant'. In both relationships Balzac underlines the importance of parallel experiences in childhood. The first manuscript of Le Lys dans la vallée shows that he conceived of the novel in four parts, the first of which was entitled Les deux Enfances.⁴ When Félix decides it is time for him to marry his choice is fixed as soon as he hears how Mme de Granville has raised her daughters, because he too experienced in childhood a mother's despotism.⁵

Balzac's veneration of childhood extends to childhood friendships. At first sight this seems a little odd as they appear to have played only a minor part in his own life. The sole childhood relationship of depth he seems to have formed is that with his sister. As late as 1849 we find

1. Lettres à Mme H. I, p. 181.

2. ibid., III, p. 29; see also p. 150, 543.

3. ibid., IV, p. 273; see also II, p. 593, III, p. 234, 599.

4. Lys, ed. Garnier, p. 419.

5. FE p. 89.

him terming Laure affectionately 'vieille compagne de ma triste jeunesse, des bons et des mauvais jours'.¹ Other longstanding friends like Dr. Macquart and 'le petit père' Dablin had originally been friends of the family. The origin of Balzac's cult of childhood friendships is most probably literary, for the Paul et Virginie theme recurs throughout his work. In the Oeuvres de jeunesse it is most blatantly expressed in Le Vicaire des Ardennes where the ties between Joseph and Mélanie are a 'roman noir' pastiche of Bernadin de Saint-Pierre's novel. In the Comédie humaine two obvious examples are Pierrette and Jacques Brigaut in Pierrette, and Etienne d'Hérouville and Gabrielle de Beauvaloir in L'Enfant maudit. Only once does Balzac permit himself to be gently sceptical about this theme. Mme Blondet is fully aware of the insecurity of her adulterine son, Emile's, future. While he is still a child she fosters a friendship between him and Virginie de Troisièmeville, eldest daughter of an influential family. Balzac heavily underscores the point, already suggested in Mlle de Troisièmeville's Christian name, when he remarks 'Cette liaison fut semblable à celle de Paul et Virginie',² but Mme Blondet goes further and ensures the permanence of 'cette mutuelle affection qui devait passer comme passent ordinairement ces enfantillages, qui sont comme les dinettes de l'amour'.² She is so successful that by the time we meet them again in Une Fille d'Eve and Les Paysans their relationship is adulterous, and they eventually marry after the death of Virginie's husband.

Usually, however, Balzac is less cynical and presumes that if people have been childhood friends a significant dimension is added to their relationship. Stéphanie de Vandières is doubly dear to her lover Philippe

1. Corres. V, p. 632.

2. CA p. 130.

de Sucy because she is 'sa compagne d'enfance et son bien le plus cher'.¹ A possible precursor of Philippe, Del Ryès in Sténie, gives an explanation: he justifies the strength of his love for Sténie, his childhood friend, on the grounds that it grew up with him and has been his life-long companion.² Although this myth may justifiably seem specious, it is so strong in the Comédie humaine that one critic has applied it to Balzac's friendship with Zulma Carraud, proclaiming 'Amitié d'enfance, amitié forte de l'âge mûr' on the grounds that they first met in 1809.³ Balzac himself would not have accepted this interpretation for he remarked to Zulma 'Amitié sincère et tendre en 1838 comme toujours depuis 1819, voilà dix-neuf ans'.⁴

In view of the importance Balzac ascribes to childhood experiences and friendships it is not surprising that he should regard attitude to childhood as a touchstone of character in just the same way as attitude to maternity, as we have seen. Both constitute 'les liens si puissants qui attachent les jeunes coeurs à leur famille ... à tous les sentiments primitifs'.⁵ It is well known that Balzac regarded the Family as the nub of Society, existing only by the children.⁶ Hence a person's respect, or lack of it, for his mother, who gives birth to the Family, and for the child, who continues it, reveals immediately whether or not he is god-fearing and civic. This is proclaimed from Balzac's early works onwards.

1. Ad p. 24.

2. Sténie, p. 156.

3. AB 1969, Notes by Thierry Bodin.

4. Corres. III p. 367

5. IP, vol. XI, p. 330.

6. Bou p. 16 '... la famille n'existe que par les enfants'.

Charles Gérard demonstrates his total unworthiness when he is unfaithful to his cousin and sweetheart Annette, 'celle qui depuis l'enfance lui avait prodigué les marques de la plus tendre amitié'.¹ In the Comédie humaine denial of one's background is an indication of either moral decay or weakness. Oscar Husson denies his mother in the 'coucou'; the Goriot daughters attempt to eliminate their father from their lives, and as B.N. Schilling has perspicaciously analysed,² Mme de Bargeton offers Lucien three temptations of 'lèse-famille' which he accepts. He acts as if his father had never existed by assuming his mother's name, he renounces family and friends and he leaves home for Paris. When he departs his cry of protest at having to miss his sister's wedding is 'le dernier soupir de l'enfant noble et pur'.³ From now on he is doomed to failure. There is a similar gesture from Rastignac before he compromises with Paris. When he writes to his mother and sisters to ask for money he takes a last look back at his childhood and what it stands for, and 'Quelques larmes, derniers grains d'encens jetés sur l'autel sacré de la famille, lui sortirent des yeux'.⁴

Balzac's acceptance of the Romantic myth of the sanctity of childhood is often facile and uncritical. There are, however, three mitigating factors. The first, as we have seen, is that Balzac was attempting to compensate for shortcomings in his own childhood. Secondly, the myth is given medical approval in DSM, although DM shows that this approval is somewhat old-fashioned. The nineteenth century recognised an ailment

1. Argow le Pirate p. 878. cf. Jean-Louis, p. 497, Jean-Louis says 'righteously' to the heroine: 'Vous rougissez de l'ami de votre enfance!'

2. op. cit., pp. 98 - 112.

3. IP, vol. XI, p. 330.

4. PG p. 310.

known as Nostalgie. DM defines it as basically homesickness, and notes that although it is not an illness in itself it can be the cause of other illnesses.¹ DSM is far more nebulous and poeticising, declaring 'le souvenir des lieux témoins des jeux de notre enfance ... conserve toute la vie, quelque charme à nos yeux, et leur vue ... nous cause toujours, la plus douce émotion'.² Dr. Nacquart evidently agreed with this, often prescribing a rest cure in Touraine for Balzac who considered it 'mon pays natal'.³ Although medical opinion recognised that nostalgia affected people of all ages, émigrés and soldiers in particular,⁴ Balzac remains close to the spirit of the conservative DSM which claims that young people are particularly susceptible to nostalgia, and we are strongly reminded of Rastignac and Rubempré when we read the affirmation: 'Au moindre chagrin ... il (i.e. le jeune homme) se rappelle le bonheur domestique'.⁵ Thus Balzac's support of the myth has qualified, even dubious, medical approval. The third mitigating factor is that Balzac's desperate insistence on the sanctity of childhood is an expression of 'le mal du siècle'. He is emphasising young people's widespread regret at the premature loss of their innocence and illusions, a loss occasioned chiefly by the gerontocratic governments and social attitudes of the first half of the nineteenth century.

The second Romantic myth much in evidence in the Comédie humaine is that expressed by the Wordsworthian dictum 'the child is father of the man'.

1. art. Nostalgie, p. 125.

2. art. Nostalgie p. 266.

3. e.g. Lettres à Mme H. I, p. 254.

4. M. Le Yaouanc. Nosographie de l'humanité balzacienne, p. 418.

5. DSM art. Nostalgie, p. 271.

Many of the great Romantics thought they could detect in their childhood signs of their future vocation, irrespective of whether that childhood had been one of material poverty (Michelet), melancholy (Chateaubriand), alienation and solitude (Vigny) or carefree joy (Hugo). Although the young Balzac appeared quite unexceptional to onlookers, he read avidly and widely during his years as a lawyer's clerk and 'plus que jamais aussi, sans que rien justifiât cet espoir, il se croyait destiné à la gloire, à la richesse et à l'amour'.¹ Balzac was later to declare proudly that in order to create and even to judge his Livre mystique, which he considered his masterpiece, 'Il a fallu s'être passionné dès l'enfance pour ce magnifique système religieux, avoir fait à l'âge de dix-neuf ans une Séraphita'.²

Like their creator, although more strikingly, genius is hatched in many of the characters in the Comédie humaine during their childhood. Joseph Bridau recognised his artistic vocation at the age of twelve when he saw an art student drawing a caricature on a wall.³ Louis Lambert's angelicism is dramatically and less credibly revealed when, at six years old, he sees electricity flashing from his mother's hair⁴ - electricity presumably signifying energy and Will - and is confirmed by his apprehension of Swedenborg's doctrines at the age of nine, when his grandfather has a vision of his dead wife.⁵ Less important characters also evince talent in their childhood. Bixiou 'déjà fin et malicieux au lycée est devenu dessinateur et homme d'esprit'.⁶

1. A. Maurois. Prométhée ou la vie de Balzac, pp. 40 - 41.

2. Pléiade XI, p. 270.

3. R p. 27.

4. LL p. 91.

5. LL p. 102.

6. R p. 263. cf. Desplein shows his taste for dissection from an early age (Ath p. 112).

Closely allied with the conviction that vocation is latent in childhood is the Romantic myth that suffering is vital for the emergence of an artist. Balzac believed in this implicitly. In the Analyse des corps enseignants he dogmatically affirms 'la souffrance doit être la substance même de toute bonne éducation'¹ and further on he illustrates with numerous examples that all great men were poor at first.² Laure probably took her cue from him when she asked rhetorically: '... question ... insoluble, n'est-ce pas le malheur qui développa son talent?'³ Balzac himself was obscurely aware that his adherence to the idea of the necessity of suffering was a form of compensation: he had suffered emotionally at Vendôme and had lived, if not in poverty, at least in straitened circumstances, during his apprenticeship in Paris. It is not surprising that a man who believed: 'Après une enfance comme la mienne, il faut croire à un soir resplendissant ou se jeter dans la rivière'⁴ should multiply examples of suffering or poverty bestowing greatness of character on their victim. Marguerite Claës has to endure the 'affreuse éducation de souffrance qui n'a jamais manqué aux natures angéliques'.⁵ Poverty gave to Fritz Brunner 'cette forte éducation, qu'elle dispense aux grands hommes, tous malheureux dans leur enfance'.⁶ In short, most of Balzac's favourite characters from the austere, upright Dr. Desplein to the hypersensitive and, to some, extremely irritating Félix de Vandenesse are indelibly marked by their suffering as children. The

1. J. Crêpet. Pensées, sujets, fragmens, p. 158.

2. ibid., p. 161.

3. L. Surville. Balzac: sa vie et ses oeuvres d'après sa correspondance, p. XIX.

4. Lettres à Mme H. II, p. 129.

5. RA p. 236.

6. CP p. 70.

Romantic aura of this myth is particularly evident in Etienne d'Hérouville. Chateaubriand was truly 'le fils de la mer'¹ and we are told that Etienne is melancholy because he is in constant contact with the sound of the sea.²

In one way, however, Balzac turns to good account the Rousseauist concept of the child being father of the man, and comes into his own as an acute observer of human behaviour and development. He unsentimentally and effectively shows the formative influence - conscious and subconscious - of childhood on the adult and summarises it in the statement: '... les lieux, les choses, tout ce qui frappe les sens, prépare l'entendement, forme le caractère'.³

There are numerous examples of characters whose behaviour and psychology Balzac explains by their childhood and adolescence. To name but a few: Félix de Vandenesse,⁴ Félicité des Touches,⁵ Gobseck,⁶ Rabourdin,⁷ and Philippe Bridau.⁸ I shall analyse only two in detail: the diabolical Lisbeth Fischer and the effete Paul de Manerville because they are so strongly contrasting.

Bette Fischer's inhuman and superhuman ruthlessness originates in her bitterness at having been sacrificed to her cousin Adeline. She, 'le fruit âpre',⁹ worked in the fields, whereas Adeline, 'la fleur éclatante',⁹ was pampered and cherished by reason of her beauty. Adeline herself is devoid of malice and conceit, but Bette's resentment is unreasoning and unyielding. Despite Adeline's disinterested kindness in bringing her

1. A.Thibaudet, op. cit., p. 25.

2. EM p. 369.

3. ibid.

4. Lys p. 4 ff.

5. B p. 65 ff.

6. Gob p. 385.

7. E p. 6.

8. R p. 270.

9. Be p. 42.

to Paris in an attempt to find her a husband or a social position, Bette always remains at bottom the child who tried to pull her cousin's Greek nose in a paroxysm of jealousy.¹ Both Bette and Balzac analyse the cause of her jealousy in similar terms. He informs the reader: 'La famille qui vivait en commun, avait immolé la fille vulgaire à la jolie fille',² whereas she remarks 'depuis l'âge où l'on sent j'ai été immolée à Adeline'.³ The pivot of the novel's plot is Bette's ineradicable childhood resentment of her cousin which motivates her to destroy the whole family.

Paul de Manerville is the antithesis of Bette, being well-meaning and weak. His father had been so alarmed by his own youthful excesses that he determined to prevent the same thing happening to Paul. He tyrannised his son from early childhood to such an extent that he made of the latter 'un métis social'.⁴ As in La Cousine Bette Paul's character traits, acquired in early childhood, are the breeding ground for tragedy, but in his case the tragedy is his own. This moral helot is no match for the independent, self-seeking Mme Évangélista and her wayward daughter.

Balzac's pre-Freudian, matter-of-fact awareness of the importance of antecedents is so basic to his psychoanalysis of characters that the omission of background data about any of them is significant. Part of the secret of Vautrin's mysteriousness and Bianchon's ubiquity as ministering angel is that little is known about their youth. All we are told of Vautrin's is that he - surprisingly - spent a happy boyhood in an Oratorian college,⁵ and of Bianchon's that he was the son of a country doctor from Sancerre.⁶

1. Be p. 42.

2. ibid.

3. ibid., p. 125 (my underlining).

4. CM p. 205.

5. S&M, vol. XVI, p. 74.

6. PG p. 362; MD p. 55.

Balzac's pre-Freudianism is further evident in his perception of the reappearance of the childhood subconscious in adult life. When under stress, certain characters in the Comédie humaine revert to expressions or intonations used in childhood and later discarded. Athanase Granson asks his unsuspecting mother to keep him company the evening of his projected suicide in the following manner: 'Maman, dit-il en reprenant sa voix d'enfance, tant sa voix fut douce, de même qu'il reprenait ce mot abandonné depuis quelques années'.¹

Furthermore, Balzac is realistic in that he accepts that childhood experiences may be indelible only because they are confirmed by adulthood. He says as much when he hypothetically asks: 'Avez-vous remarqué comme, dans l'enfance, ou dans les commencements de la vie sociale, nous nous créons de nos propres mains un modèle à notre insu, souvent? Ainsi le commis d'une maison de banque rêve, en entrant dans le salon de son patron, de posséder un salon pareil. S'il fait fortune ... vingt ans plus tard ... il intronisera chez lui ... le luxe arriéré qui le fascinait jadis'.² Balzac then proceeds to give a concrete example in the person of Crevel, César Birotteau's successor. Crevel imitates César in taste and civic functions³ and nurtures all his life the desire to have a society woman as his mistress, a desire born of his ignominious beginnings as a shopkeeper.⁴ Thus his youthful ambitions, confirmed by his progress in the same career, have made of him the vulgar social climber he is, an easy prey for Valérie Marneffe. Similarly, despite his rising social standing, Thuillier in old age 'était redevenu, moralement parlant, fils de concierge',⁵ which is manifested by 'le retour des habitudes, de

1. VF p. 384.

2. Be p. 136.

3. ibid.

4. ibid., p. 181.

5. Bou p. 59.

l'esprit, des manières de la primitive condition'.¹ Pons, on the other hand, is a man whose youthful potential was not confirmed in adult life. He had possessed originality which had been stifled by routine,² and when we meet him in Le Cousin Pons he exercises his originality in the relatively uncreative occupation of acquiring 'objets d'art'. Thus Balzac recognises that childhood usually, but not inevitably, marks one for life.

Obviously, then, Balzac does not question the validity of the twin Romantic myths about the sanctity of childhood and its importance as the seed-time of the soul, for they provided a form of compensation for the fact that he considered himself to have been an unhappy, misunderstood child. As a writer he can only be judged by his approach to the myths and not by the myths themselves. Where he approaches them nostalgically he is banal. His vigorous originality manifests itself when he treats them in a sceptical, unidealistic fashion, psycho-analytical in short.

Virility

Certain critics, like Faguet and Wurmser,³ have reduced the small number of full-length portraits of children in the Comédie humaine as proof of Balzac's lack of interest in the child character. It is indeed undeniable that a large proportion of Balzac's characters have attained virility, which was then considered the most important period of life.⁴ However, even in his approach to this period Balzac is a precursor of modern psychology in that he would have agreed with the anonymous psychiatrist who said in 1962: 'In one sense, we need our immaturities. Although we may present an adult mask to the world, in most of us there

1. Bou p. 59.

2. CP p. 43.

3. E. Faguet. Balzac, p. 55; A. Wurmser. La Comédie inhumaine, p. 256.

4. cf. art. Ages in DM p. 602.

is a child who never quite grows up. We may deplore our childishness; but we need it to keep us alive'.¹ Balzac believed this in connection with himself and applied it to many of his characters, particularly lovers. Nevertheless, he would have concurred in the view that it is dangerous to be so strongly impressed by one's adolescence that one remains 'more or less arrested in a permanent adolescent condition'.² In the Comédie humaine he examines both aspects - the likeable childish traits which are a precious part of the adult personality, and the undesirable, even harmful, emotional immaturity which some people never lose. Both aspects appear in Balzac's creation of a new type, 'l'homme-enfant', and its female counterpart. The first aspect alone appears in sentimental totality in lovers, whom I shall discuss at the end of this section. In this regard Balzac seems to lose contact with reality.

Throughout his correspondence Balzac indicates clearly why he thought himself an endearing 'child who never quite grows up'. He obviously felt that such qualities made him the vibrant human being he was. His letters to Eve furnish a complete list of these: timidity and idealism,³ uninhibited gaiety,⁴ trustfulness,⁵ freshness and receptivity,⁶ and a great capacity for feeling, proof of which he found in his ability to give

1. 'What is psychological maturity?', author anonymous, 'The Listener', BBC publications, 14/6/1962.
2. J.B. Mays. The Young Pretenders : a Study of Adolescence in Contemporary Society, p. 100.
3. Lettres à Mme H.I., p. 26: 'un pauvre enfant victime ... de sa timidité, de ses croyances'.
4. ibid., p. 67: 'Je suis ... un enfant plus frivole que vous ne le croyez'. cf. p. 324, 307; IV, p. 446.
5. ibid., I, p. 397: 'Il ya ... dans mon caractère, une confiance d'enfant'.
6. ibid., I, p. 551: 'ce sur quoi je compte, c'est sur une jeunesse de coeur'; II, p. 88: 'Dites que vous entendez tout ce qu'il y a de fraîcheur et d'enfance et de grâce dans mon coeur'.

way to tears when under emotional stress.¹ One finds allusions to these traits in all four volumes of Lettres à M. Hanska. He cherished the image of himself as a child and expressed it in several extended similes of the kind found in the Comédie humaine, which we have examined in the chapters on children's characteristics. Two at least are worth quoting as indicative of the indulgence with which he regarded his childishness. He excused his extravagance in furnishing a house worthy of his Eve on the grounds that he was a child running after 'des sculptures, des soieries, des fanfreluches pour bâtir cette maison de cailloux que tous les enfants ont construite'.² He conveyed his ardent anxiety to see her again in the following terms: '... voici huit jours que j'avance la tête pour vous voir comme les enfants qui tendent la main à leur mère avec ardeur, pendant qu'elle leur coupe du gâteau'.³

That Balzac considered childishness a satisfactory explanation of most of his virtues and faults is shown by his enthusiasm in mentioning it to all and sundry, whether bare acquaintances close friends or mistresses. He remarked to Stendhal, with whom he was never on intimate terms: 'je suis un lecteur si enfant, si charmé, si complaisant'.⁴ He assured the generous and reliable Dablin that the reason he saw him seldom was overwork and not lessening affection, for 'je suis resté bien

1. e.g. II, p. 615: 'Si je ne savais nous revoir, j'aurais pleuré comme un enfant'; (after Eve's miscarriage) IV, p. 15: 'je pleure constamment quand je suis seul, comme un enfant'.

2. ibid., III, p. 593.

3. ibid., IV, p. 558; cf. p. 526: 'je tremble nerveusement, comme les enfants, lorsqu'on leur présente un bonbon désiré'.

4. ibid., III, p. 584.

plus enfant que je n'ai pu acquérir de ce qu'on nomme de la réputation'.¹ He extenuated certain actions which had shocked Zulma Carraud, such as his mercenary attitude to his work, on the grounds that they were 'toutes enfantines, comme bien des choses que je dis et fais'.² Moreover, on the eve of a visit to the Carrauds, he asked them to fetch him from the station because he claimed to be as unpractical as a child in need of a nursemaid.³ It is amusing to find him giving a justifiably jealous Mme Hanska the same excuse for the continuing presence of 'la Chouette' as his housekeeper.⁴

The urge to act as a child is apparent in most of his liaisons beginning with Mme de Berny, of whom he said: 'Mme de Berny n'était que mon immense filialité trompée à qui une mère avait souri'.⁵ He wrote deliriously of a man's first sexual experience: 'Nuit capricieuse et pleine de suavité! nuit dont ne peut jouir qu'une fois l'homme-enfant assez heureux pour la rencontrer dans la vie'.⁶ Most of the women he loved were psychologically, if not actually, more mature than he, witness Sarah Guidoboni-Visconti and Mme Hanska. Even in superficial or ephemeral relationships he could not resist posing as a lovable child. In 1834 he addressed an apparent bid for sympathy to Mme de Castries, who had already disabused him: 'Le caractère rieur et enfant que vous me connaissez est un aubier qui m'a bien préservé souvent, mais plus souvent

1. Corres. IV, p. 771. cf. remark to Delphine de Girardin about his supposed obliviousness of public reaction to his writing, Corres. II, p. 477.
2. ibid., II, p. 129.
3. ibid., II, pp. 48 - 49: 'je suis toujours comme un enfant qui a besoin d'une nourrice'.
4. Lettres à Mme H. III, p. 336: 'quand je suis venue à Passy ... je devais me mettre à l'état d'enfant qui a une bonne'.
5. ibid., II, pp. 361 - 362; cf. ibid., I, pp. 9, 64, 67, 150, etc.
6. Une Passion au collège, OD II, p. 287.

aussi le coeur a reçu de vives blessures'.¹ Even with the mysterious 'Louise' whom he never met he tried to create a mother-child relationship. In 1836 he effusively thanked her for a letter and concluded 'je voudrais plus, je le dis comme un enfant'.² A letter written to Mme Hanska in 1844 was to be strangely reminiscent of this: 'Oh! pendant dix ans au moins, je te dirai comme l'enfant, je crois:- Donne-m'en trop!'.³ The one exception was the extraordinary Caroline Marbouty whom Balzac described paternalistically as having enjoyed their escapade 'en véritable écolier'.⁴

It is impossible to say whether the image of Balzac as an 'homme-enfant', accepted by many contemporaries and subsequent critics up to the present day, originated solely with the author himself, or whether they would have spontaneously made the comparison in any case. Possibly the answer lies somewhere between the two. However, the universality of the notion is noteworthy. Intimates like his sister and Mme Hanska, good friends like Gautier and acquaintances such as Baudelaire all endorse it. In view of Balzac's description of himself as 'l'homme-enfant, sans soucis',⁵ it is significant that Laure should observe that although he was like a schoolboy on holiday when relaxing,⁶ 'l'homme-enfant, remis au travail, redevenait le plus grave et le plus profond des penseurs'.⁷ After Mme Hanska had been corresponding with Balzac for just over a year, and had

1. Corres. II, p. 559.

2. Corres. III, p. 54.

3. Lettres à Mme H. II, p. 526.

4. Corres. III, p. 171.

5. Lettres à Mme H. I, p. 407.

6. L. Surville. Balzac : sa vie et ses oeuvres d'après sa correspondance, p. lxxvi.

7. ibid., p. lxxv

been informed of his self-image in no uncertain terms, she told her brother that he was 'un véritable enfant' by reason of his often indiscreet frankness.¹ Gautier, who was extremely fond of him, picturesquely depicted his extravagant impulsiveness: 'Désarçonné par une chimère, Balzac en remontait bien vite une nouvelle et repartit pour un autre voyage dans le bleu avec une naïveté d'enfant',² and aptly and sympathetically described the corrected proofs of his novels as 'le bouquet d'un feu d'artifice dessiné par un enfant'.³ Baudelaire, less indulgent, pinpointed the qualities which have made Balzac beloved of, or exasperating to, generations of readers when he called him 'ce gros enfant bouffi de génie et de vanité'.⁴ One has only to page through M. Blanchard's Témoignages et jugements sur Balzac to see how many of Balzac's contemporaries and immediate post-contemporaries compared him to a child because of his engaging frankness, gregariousness, vanity and thoughtless extravagance.

Twentieth century critics, whether hostile or favourable to Balzac, have tended to use the metaphor of 'l'homme-enfant' in describing him. Quotations from two critics with opposite viewpoints will suffice. Wurmser compares Balzac to Hans-Christian Andersen's 'enfant révélateur' and concludes dismissively: 'Ce fut pourtant presque tout son génie que cette franchise ingénue'.⁵ For B.N. Schilling Balzac 'is specially

1. Lettres à Mme H., I, pp. 139 - 140.

2. quoted by S.J. Bérard. La Genèse d'un roman de Balzac, vol. I, p. 165.

3. ibid., p. 3.

4. Corres. III, pp. 30 - 32. For further comments of contemporaries on this theme q.v. Ch., ed. Club de l'Honnête Homme, Jugements sur Balzac, especially vol. IV, Balzac jugé par Gautier; vol IX, Balzac jugé par G. Sand, Balzac jugé par Lamartine.

5. A. Wurmser. La Comédie inhumaine, pp. 97 - 98.

equipped to deal with the theme of Illusions, his whole life having been strewn with the defeated schemes and foolish enterprises of an incurable dreamer, the enfant that Lucien never ceases to be'.¹

There seems to be little doubt in the mind of either Balzac, his contemporaries or many later critics that he was indeed an 'homme-enfant'. The phrase is essentially Balzacian, although it is found in Emile, where it designates a hypothetical child. Rousseau suggests: 'Supposons qu'un enfant eût à sa naissance la stature et la force d'un homme fait, qu'il sortît, pour ainsi dire, tout armé du sein de sa mère, comme Pallas sortit du cerveau de Jupiter, cet homme-enfant serait un parfait imbécile, un automate, une statue immobile et presque insensible'.² This is certainly not Balzac's 'homme-enfant' nor is the Romantic 'enfant du siècle', an expression which had most likely originated with Cousin. He had applied it to those who were experiencing the malaise of the early nineteenth century.³ It was later, of course, popularised by Musset and came to symbolise 'le jeune homme malade de corps et d'âme, malade du mal du siècle: le Poète mourant de Lamartine, le Joseph Delorme phthisique de Sainte-Beuve, le Rolla suicidé de Musset, les gémissements de poètes obscurs qui ne se résignent pas au rôle de minores'.⁴ Balzac's 'homme-enfant' has little in common with such melancholy ailing creatures. At his best he is vigorous, single-minded and idealistic with a youthful, open, catholic interest in life. At his worst he is immature, a failure

1. B.N. Schilling. The Hero as Failure, p. 187. For similar comments by other modern critics q.v. G. Hanotaux et G. Vicaire. La Jeunesse de Balzac, p. 17, E.J. Oliver in Balzac the European, p. 23; B. Beck in Balzac (ed. Bertaut), p. 35; H.J. Hunt. H. de Balzac, pp. 99, 180.

2. Emile, p. 35.

3. P. Barbéris. Balzac et le mal du siècle, p. 31.

4. A. Thibaudet. Histoire de la littérature française de 1789 à nos jours, p. 196.

through his own fault. We shall now examine these two extremes as represented by both sexes in the Comédie humaine.

In the Comédie humaine the best type of 'homme-enfant' is naturally a projection of Balzac's self-image. For him childishness ideally signifies sincerity, and a naivety consisting in the retention of high ideals and noble illusions. Hence it is the appurtenance of the true genius. As Mme Rabourdin says fondly to her husband 'un homme de génie est toujours plus ou moins enfant, et tu es un enfant, un enfant bien-aimé'.¹ Léon Gozlan credits Balzac with having introduced this idea into French literature,² in which he is probably correct. Baudelaire was to inherit this notion from him, as Borel's perspicacious comparison of Bénédiction with the first pages of Le Lys dans la vallée bears out,³ but he was to sum up far better than Balzac himself the quintessence of the Balzacian 'homme-enfant' as 'un homme possédant à chaque minute le génie de l'enfance, c'est-à-dire un génie pour lequel aucun aspect de la vie n'est émoussé'.⁴

Balzac expresses his sympathy for many of his gifted characters by emphasising their childishness. The thinker, D'Arthez, for example, is depicted as a near-saint, trusting and artless, whose chaste and sober life has left him with 'une fleur de jeunesse'.⁵ Adrien d'Hauteserre, fearless

1. E p. 208.

2. L. Gozlan. Balzac en pantoufles, p. 132: 'Balzac, qui a dit le premier avec un sens exquis: "Dans tout homme de génie il y a un enfant", était la preuve vivante de cette juste et jolie pensée'.

3. J. Borel. Le Lys dans la vallée et les sources profondes de la création balzacienne, p. 189ff.

4. L'Art romantique, p. 61.

5. SPC p. 332. cf. Joseph Bridau in R.

and stoical man of action, is intelligent and sensitive as well as brave, because in him 'le coeur était resté adolescent'.¹ The terms in which the Balzacian prototype of genius defines his development is significant: Louis Lambert declares that at school he was 'un enfant-homme et maintenant je suis un homme-enfant, avide de tout saisir'.² For Balzac one of the main reasons for the childishness of men of genius is their permanent spiritual chastity, 'l'élan des natures vierges'³ in Swedenborgian terms. This can imply the practice of physical chastity for a time: Louis Lambert and Félix de Vandenesse economise their energy in their way. However, Balzac is strongly against total celibacy, because the energy so accumulated can be perverted. Many of his men of genius form intimate relationships with women. Joseph Bridau marries one Mlle Léger and D'Arthez ends by taking Diane de Cadignan as his mistress and constant companion. Platonic love is permissible only for angelic creatures, whose sphere is not this earth, like the androgynous Séraphitus-Séraphita or Louis Lambert. Louis intends to marry Pauline de Villenoix, but before he can do so his soul breaks its earthly bounds and he goes mad.

Thus although Balzac devotes much attention to the childishness in us which keeps us alive, he is just as aware - in the Comédie humaine at any rate - of the dangers of physical and emotional immaturity. He is vicious in his condemnation of celibates, those who are too weak or twisted to come to terms with the physical side of adult life. The guiding principle of Pierrette is indeed 'la haine profonde de l'auteur contre tout être improductif, contre les célibataires, les vieilles filles et les vieux garçons, ces bourdons de la ruche!'⁴ However, hatred is

1. TA p. 158.

2. Ms. of LL, quoted by J. Pommier, AB 1960.

3. The phrase is Baldensperger's, Orientations étrangères chez Honoré de Balzac, p. 176.

4. Preface to the first edition of P, Pléiade XI, p. 388.

not Balzac's only attitude to celibates. His feelings range from pitying disparagement of the flaccid Pons and Abbé Birotteau to rank odium of their opposites, the malevolent Bette Fischer and the Gamard-Troubert combination. A truer expression of the nuances of his attitude is probably his remark to Eve: '... il faut beaucoup pardonner aux filles qui gardent leur virginité, si elles sont tracassières, etc., car cet état contre nature produit d'affreux ravages'.¹ P-G. Castex has highlighted Balzac's originality in examining how an individual's refusal to face physical maturity affects him: 'Refoulement, sublimation: ces mots du vocabulaire freudien ne nous paraissent hors de propos pour caractériser les mobiles secrets que Balzac, plus d'un demi-siècle en avance sur la psychologie de son temps, a discernés'.²

Balzac analyses in even more detail the nuances of emotional immaturity which dominates in negative, pliable or weak, although often headstrong, characters. Balzac regards the negative and pliable with contemptuous kindness. An example of the former is M. de Bargeton, whom Balzac presents - a little uncharitably - as a figure of fun. He is a cipher, the worst type of 'homme-enfant', puerile in behaviour and conversation and knowing no attitude other than sheep-like docility. Examples of the

1. Lettres à Mme H. IV, p. 339.

2. Introd. to ed. Garnier of VF, p. vi.

pliable are Pons and Schmucke who are compared with two children. For example, they are described as 'deux âmes fraîches, enfantines et pures'.¹ They virtually sign their own death-warrant when they allow Mme Cibot to act as their adoptive mother. Because they are childishly docile they are ultimately defeated. Here, as with the Abbé Birotteau, we have a genuine 'drame bourgeois'. That Balzac intended their plight to be pathetic, not contemptible, is shown by his alterations to the manuscript of Le Cousin Pons. He removed his satirisation of Schmucke, and emphasised his childish goodness, making three additions concerning his childish habit of touching Mme Cibot's dress or hands.²

Such men are Society's victims, and Balzac depicts them with a certain compassion. There are others whose immaturity earns them less sympathy because it is more wilful, and brings disaster to those around them as well as themselves. Notable in this category are Lucien de Rubempré, Calyste du Guénic and Victurnien d'Esgrignon. Balzac makes it clear that their youth cannot be held responsible for their immaturity, and that they are not 'hommes-enfants' simply because they are young. Lucien, for example, is all of twenty-three when he falls in love with Mme de Bargeton, and thirty-two when he dies. Moreover, other young men in the Comédie humaine, such as Bianchon, manage to remain firm of purpose and to develop normally into adults.

I shall analyse Lucien in detail because it seems that he is the character whose emotional childishness Balzac stresses most. The omniscient author, Lucien and members of his environment emphasise that his good and bad actions, as well as the reactions they provoke, almost

1. CP p. 24.

2. D. Adamson. The Genesis of 'Le Cousin Pons', p. 91.

all originate in his childishness. Schilling has already shown that the Rubempré cycle is an example of the 'bildungsroman', and that Lucien never becomes the mature man his self-imposed destiny calls for.¹ I feel, however, that Lucien as 'homme-enfant' needs a little more analysis.

Lucien's downfall begins with his relationship with Louise de Bargeton. She is attracted to him because he is 'un enfant sans fortune qu'elle voulait placer'² and he to her because he sees in her 'une bienfaitrice qui allait s'occuper de lui maternellement'.² She abandons him in Paris precisely because she cannot forgive him for having shown himself to be 'enfant, vain ou petit'.³ Because he is immature she falls in love with him, fosters his inflated ambitions and leaves him to degenerate into 'un enfant qui courait après les plaisirs et les jouissances de la vanité, leur sacrifiant tout',⁴ an easy prey for ruthless publishers, journalists and 'viveurs'. Their attitude to him is significant. Dauriat usually addresses him as 'mon petit';⁵ to Lousteau he is 'mon cher enfant'⁶ and the 'viveurs' find it easy to convince 'cet enfant' that his debts are the spur he needs to win fame.⁷ His political ambitions and manoeuvres end in total disaster because he is an over-optimistic child. Balzac observes, 'Cet enfant se croyait un grand politique'⁸ and informs the reader later that he is the dupe of Mesdames d'Espard, Bargeton and Montcornet who, by offering him the title of 'comte de Rubempré' as bait, 'le tenaient par ce fil comme un enfant tient un haneton'.⁹

1. B.N. Schilling. The Hero as Failure, p. 84.

2. IP, vol. XI, p. 228.

3. IP, vol. XII, p. 4.

4. ibid., p. 346.

5. ibid., also p. 138, 226, 240, 241.

6. ibid., p. 150; also p. 113 'mon pauvre enfant'.

7. ibid., p. 292.

8. ibid., p. 291.

9. ibid., p. 318.

Although Lucien is the may-bug rather than the child in this image, the latter is in keeping with his rôle of 'homme-enfant'.

Lucien's childishness makes it possible for his enemies to do him untold harm, and he himself comes to realise that he is 'le jouet d'hommes envieux, avides et perfides'.¹ Unfortunately it is this very childishness which makes it impossible for his friends to save him and which is destructive for both him and them. The kindly paternalism of the Cénacle is powerless to help him and Michel Chrestien can only pray, prophetically, that God will forgive him because he is a child.² As Chrestien might have guessed, Lucien later metaphorically demolishes d'Arthez's book like a child plucking the feathers of a beautiful bird,³ and d'Arthez forgives him with the simple words: 'Pauvre enfant, tu manges un pain bien dur'.³ Coralie's love is equally ineffectual in preventing Lucien's fall. Like Mme de Bargeton, she too has a strong maternal element in her love for him, but unlike Anaïs she becomes the victim and dies for him. Her faithful servant Bérénice is reduced to prostitution through Lucien whom she considers a poor child, innocent as a lamb.⁴ At the end of Splendeurs et misères, by which time Lucien has almost inadvertently destroyed or harmed his family, his friends and at least two mistresses, his puerility causes his death. He is unable to fulfil his 'pacte ... d'enfant à diplomate'⁵ made with Vautrin who has constituted himself, somewhat equivocally, Lucien's 'adoptive' father.

The evidence that Lucien's downfall is the inevitable outcome of his emotional immaturity is overwhelming. He has the childishness, but not the Will, required of men of genius. Balzac's recognition that both

1. IP, vol. XII, p. 346 (my underlining).

2. ibid., p. 91.

4. ibid., p. 189.

3. ibid., p. 336.

5. ibid., p. 547.

are essential to a balanced personality is realistic and prophetic of modern psychology. His indulgence towards his own self-image, his 'coeur d'enfant et de poète'¹ is counterbalanced by his astringent remark, worth quoting at length, in the Analyse des corps enseignants: 'Il y a des hommes qui à quarante ans ont encore le goût de leurs langes, d'autres qui se croient à cet âge mûr au collège. Ceux-ci restent dans la jupe de la première femme qu'ils rencontrent et portent le poids de cette jupe, ceux-là restent cloués dans une même idée'.² The first quotation indicates Balzac's equation of childishness with sensitivity and purity of mind, and explains his concept of men of genius. The second quotation reveals his condemnation of childishness when it stands for ineptness or contemptible stubbornness, and it summarises characters like the vacillating Lucien or the insignificant monomaniac, Pons.

In the Comédie humaine, then, Balzac draws up a balance sheet, as it were, of the attractive and harmful qualities of the 'homme-enfant', and makes a judicious, psychologically sound analysis of them. With the figure of the 'femme-enfant', however, he is less incisive and less fair. (For a start, the actual term does not appear in the Comédie humaine as far as I know, although this type of woman is clearly present and I shall use this designation for convenience.) His praise of the spiritual chastity of women is outweighed by his reprehension of their emotional childishness. In this he is probably a product of his age. Article 942 of the Code began with 'Les mineurs, les interdits, les femmes mariées'. DSM insists on the physical and mental resemblance between women and children.³ It likens both, unflatteringly, to eunuchs and affirms that woman is to man what the child is to the adult.⁴ Reliable characters in the Comédie humaine endorse this view. De Marsay, the successful politician, had

1. Lettre à Mme H. I, p. 114.

2. J. Crépet. Pensées, sujets, fragmens, p. 162.

3. art. Femme, p. 544, 546.

4. ibid., p. 544.

immense success with women, while remaining cynically detached, because he treated them like naughty children.¹ The lovable Marie-Angélique de Vandenesse declares almost proudly 'les femmes sont des enfants'.²

The bias of Balzac's concept of the 'femme-enfant' is the bias of his age, but his creation of this figure is original. As with the 'homme-enfant' it cannot be emphasised too strongly that the 'femme-enfant' is not synonymous with the young girl. For instance, both the nineteen-year-old Esther Gobseck and the widowed Agathe Bridau are 'femmes-enfants'. The Balzacian 'femme-enfant' may be young, but even then she has little in common with the Dickensian child-wife. For Balzac the genus 'femme-enfant' has several species: the virtuous, who is often sexually unawakened, the immature and frequently vulnerable or irresponsible, and lastly the pseudo-'femme-enfant', who is probably the most dangerous. We shall examine each species individually.

Balzac seems to admit - grudgingly, because he does so rarely - that 'le tact d'un cœur vierge'³ has the same laudable connotation for women as for men. Pauline Gaudin in *La Peau de chagrin*, for example, has the spontaneity of a child in her expression of joy and her frolicsomeness.⁴ Raphaël lovingly watches her playing with the cat, and describes her as 'plus jeune fille que femme'⁵ so absorbed is she in 'cette scène enfantine'.⁵ Nevertheless, she is no Dickensian Dora, for she is helpmate and support to Raphaël. Early in their acquaintance she gives him a bowl of milk,

1. DA p. 387: 'il les prenait ... pour des enfants méchants'. cf. R p. 518, Philippe Bridau: 'Les femmes sont des enfants méchants'.

2. FE p. 147. cf. Sabine du Guénic: 'nous autres femmes qui sont encore un peu jeunes filles' (B p. 270).

3. Ma p. 105.

4. PCh p. 105, 221, 242 - 243.

5. *ibid.*, p. 221.

and when he dies he tries to bite her breast. For once Balzac has the good taste not to insist on the symbolism of these actions.

Where Pauline embodies the prototype of the best 'femme-enfant' Camille Maupin, antithetically, demonstrates what happens to a woman who possesses no trace of the 'femme-enfant'. Because she has never known childish naïveté and hence lacks 'enfance au coeur', Balzac concludes categorically that she will never be able to be satisfied in love because she is incapable of surrendering herself to a man.¹

Most of Balzac's virtuous 'hommes-enfants' are virile men. Their feminine counterparts, however, tend to be physically or emotionally unfulfilled. Pauline Gaudin and Juana Marana are exceptions, and Camille Maupin is an anomaly in the Comédie humaine. The supposedly heroic Henriette de Mortsau is loved by Félix because she has remained a young girl at heart - 'châtelaine et bachelette'² - although she is the mother of two children. Ironically this is one of the grounds for her husband's dissatisfaction with her, for he insinuates that she denies him his conjugal rights: 'elle ... met tout son art à rester jeune fille'.³ Balzac does not criticise the unfulfilled 'femme-enfant', but rather, in Professor Hunt's happy phrase, describes her 'with a sort of regretful admiration'.⁴ The disadvantages of her state are few. Mme du Guénic, for example, can neither understand nor handle her son's passionate love for Béatrix, for she has been left 'aux timidités de la jeune fille en amour'.⁵ Balzac seems to suggest that such limitations are outweighed by concomitant virtue, for when 'femmes-enfants' lose their spiritual chastity through emotional fulfilment, moral deterioration can set in. Julie

1. B p. 142.

2. Lys p. 38.

3. ibid., p. 131.

4. H.J. Hunt. Balzac's CH, p. 231.

5. B p. 174.

d'Aiglemont's marriage does not alter 'sa pudeur de jeune fille'.¹

Arthur Grenville is the first man really to touch her emotions and his death firstly silences her maternal feelings for Héliène, whose innocent slumbers prevent the consummation of their passion, and then prepares her for her long affair with the ignoble Charles de Vandenesse. Her moral decline is in inverse proportion to the progress of the liaison, and she ends by lacking almost all sense of conjugal duty and maternal love for her first born.

Balzac, then, pardons the 'femme-enfant' whose innocence of mind stems mainly from ignorance of her physical desires, but he is less indulgent towards the immature 'femme-enfant' whose very immaturity makes her a victim of people or circumstances. Unlike her male counterpart she usually harms herself more than others, an outstanding exception being Nathalie de Manerville who, although 'si étourdie, si enfant',² manages to reduce her husband to penury, despatch him to India and continue her chequered career unhindered. The immature 'femme-enfant' is usually incapable of making a success of marriage. Renée de l'Estorade prophesies that because Louise is a child who treats life as a game, she will ultimately become the plaything (Balzac implies 'victim') of life.³ In the novel the cause of Louise's childlessness and final death is spelled out by Renée: 'tu ne te transformes point en ce que doit être une femme; tu gardes les volontés, les exigences de la jeune fille'.⁴ In other words, Louise kills one husband and dies of love for the second because she refuses to grow up.

Not all immature 'femmes-enfants' live and die as dramatically as Louise or Honorine. The tragedy of Augustine de Sommervieux is on a lower

1. F30 p. 52. cf. p. 45 'Toujours jeune fille, en dépit du mariage'.

2. CM p. 307.

3. MJM p. 270.

4. ibid., pp. 368 - 369.

plane because she behaves like a sort of retarded child, unable or unwilling to learn how to handle her husband. Sometimes the fault lies with the husband who does not encourage his wife to grow up. Félix de Vandenesse and Count Octave willingly acknowledge their share of the blame. Few of the women themselves, however, have the courage of Sabine du Guénic who realises that her girlishness is useless in her battle against Béatrix and resolves to grow up quickly: 'je suis une pauvre enfant naïve ... il faut que je m'instruise de ... tous les calculs des filles'.¹

The immature 'femme-enfant' is unsuccessful or vulnerable outside marriage as well as within. Antoinette de Langeais destroys her relationship with Montriveau, and eventually herself, by her temerity, the nature of which she defines with perspicacious candour: 'je suis un enfant qui ne connaît pas le danger, et vais danser sans crainte au bord de l'abîme'.² Vautrin plans to make Esther a stepping-stone for Lucien's social ascent. He brain-washes her, as it were, into docility by sending her to a convent school, where she is converted to Christianity and her childhood innocence is restored. The scheme rebounds on him for Esther, 'l'enfant tout changée',³ is unable to resume her old rôle of courtesan, and poisons herself rather than give herself to Nucingen. Her death occasions the arrest of both Lucien and Vautrin, and thence Lucien's suicide. Esther is an ambiguous example of the immature 'femme-enfant' for, unlike the other members of this group whom I have quoted, Balzac does not hold her up as a moral lesson. Although her personality is remoulded into that of a 'femme-enfant', she dies more because she has regained possession of childish innocence than because she is immature.

1. B p. 310.

2. DL p. 259.

3. S&M, vol. XV, p. 56.

The most redoubtable species of 'femme-enfant' is the third and last, which one could term the 'femme-enfant voulue'. This is the woman who deliberately assumes the rôle in order to dominate men. She is often, but not always, a woman of thirty who has realised that her greatest advantage is that 'elle peut se faire jeune fille'.¹ On the whole Balzac seems to regard this as woman's deadliest and most unfair weapon. Life quickly divests Diane de Maufrigneuse of her genuine 'femme-enfant' characteristics, and thereafter she becomes one of the most formidable sirens in the *Comédie humaine*, deploying the infinite versatility which makes her so desirable to men. She can either be 'fôlâtre, enfant, innocente à désespérer' or the complete opposite.² She wins d'Arthez by exploiting the former rôle in a way which forces the reader's unwilling admiration. Valérie Marneffe does the same thing on a more sordid and evil level. She informs her lovers that marriage has left her virtually undefiled, 'la plus sage jeune fille'³ in fact. She uses this tactic with old and young, firstly with Hulot³ and then with Steinbock, opening her seduction campaign of the latter by taking his hand with 'la précaution d'une jeune fille amoureuse'.⁴

The lesson Balzac seems to be trying to teach through the figures of the 'homme-enfant' and, less successfully, the 'femme-enfant' is that it is an adult's use of his childishness which is of consequence, and not the childishness itself which is frequently attractive. Balzac's acumen regarding this fails him when he comes to discuss lovers. Here the realist turns sentimentalist, and his consideration of childishness in love is dulcet and indulgent, possibly because his presentation of love is so deeply

1. F30 p. 113.

2. SPC p. 325.

3. Be p. 172.

4. *ibid.*, p. 266. cf. B p. 340.

rooted in his own experience with Mme de Berny. In the section concerning the 'homme-enfant' I discussed Balzac's ceaseless search for a 'maternité d'amour'. Here it will suffice to mention that in his letters to Mme Hanska he frequently alludes to their meeting at Neufchâtel as the day of his birth,¹ and he emphasises that love, and more so marriage, will increasingly rejuvenate him.² His delight in the puerility of love-talk is apparent in his wish to call his beloved by a special name, a wish which he justifies in a letter to 'Louise' by asserting that pet names are 'si près de l'enfance du coeur'.³ Balzac's admiration for the works of Swedenborg probably increased his idealisation of love. For Swedenborg love was spiritual fire, and Balzac communicates the same belief when he terms love a sort of human religion,⁴ 'l'image de la vie des anges'.⁵

Notwithstanding these statements, an examination of Balzac's feeling that an adult's amiable childishness is nowhere better seen than when he falls in love, especially for the first time, is useful in disproving the notion that Balzac ignored children. Therefore we shall now turn to such an examination.

In the Comédie humaine Balzac draws a close parallel between the development of the emotions and that of the body: 'Après l'enfance de la créature vient l'enfance du coeur'.⁶ In other words he compares the various stages of the growth of love to that of a child.

Firstly, love is said to be a rebirth. Many characters in the Comédie humaine - men and women, pure and corrupt - attest to this. The ardent,

1. e.g. Lettres à Mme H. II, p. 210; III, p. 93, 593.

2. ibid., e.g. II, p. 243, 498; III, p. 608, 626.

3. Corres. III, p. 45.

4. AS p. 53; SPC p. 320.

5. EG, ed. Garnier, p. lxvi, quoted from Le Prêtre catholique

6. F30 p. 87.

idealistic Savarus asks rhetorically: 'Faire d'une femme sa religion humaine ... n'est-ce pas une seconde naissance?'¹ The sage Benassis says in similar, although more sober, vein: 'Le premier amour n'est-il pas une deuxième enfance jetée à travers nos jours de peine et de labeur?'² The gentle Eugénie Grandet perceives that love is a human being's second transformation,³ and the hardbitten Balthazar rediscovers her childhood with Calyste.⁴ Even simulated virginity is forgivable, because it is the homage women pay to their love.⁵ Marie de Verneuil claims that when she met Montauran she was a simple and naïve child, and wistfully confesses that she was hoping to find in love 'un baptême d'innocence'.⁶

Balzac refers several times to the analogy between first love and the stages in an infant's development. In a long passage in Eugénie Grandet, overloaded with rhetorical questions, he pushes the analogy to its limits. I shall quote the passage in detail because the style is typical of Balzac's philosophising about love. 'N'y a-t-il pas de gracieuses similitudes entre les commencements de l'amour et ceux de la vie? Ne berce-t-on pas l'enfant par de doux chants et de gentils regards? Ne lui dit-on pas de merveilleuses histoires qui lui dorent l'avenir? Pour lui l'espérance ne déploie-t-elle pas incessamment ses ailes radieuses? Ne verse-t-il pas tour à tour des larmes de joie et de douleur? Ne se querelle-t-il pour des riens, pour des cailloux avec lesquels il essaie de se bâtir un mobile palais, pour des bouquets aussitôt oubliés que coupés? N'est-il pas avide de saisir le temps, d'avancer dans la vie?'⁷ In a similar passage in La Recherche de

1. AS p. 53.

2. MC p. 201. cf. UM p. 162 Savinien considers a lock of Ursule's hair more precious than a rebirth.

3. EG p. 408.

4. B p. 227.

5. Ch p. 137 'leur dissimulation est toujours un hommage qu'elles rendent à leur amour'.

6. ibid., p. 302.

7. EG p. 408.

l'absolu, which is almost as grossly inflated, Marguerite's reaction to her first experience of love is likened to a child's first response to music. Balzac generalises wildly about the latter, and tells us that a child will first laugh and think, think again and then laugh and finally listen with an expression 'où point la curiosité de l'infini'.¹ Balzac's conclusion is yet another rhetorical question: 'Si nous aimons irrésistiblement les lieux où nous avons été, dans notre enfance, initié aux beautés de l'harmonie ... pourquoi se défendre d'aimer l'être qui, le premier, nous révèle les musiques de la vie?'² This whole passage appears to be redundant, and it is not made any more convincing by our knowledge that DSM insists on the importance of music as a factor contributing to the harmony of the soul and the development of moral sensibility.³

Time and again lovers, either individually or as couples, are compared with children in extended comparisons which recall those discussed in Chapter II. Eugénie Grandet's happy smile when she becomes aware of love is like a baby's smile when it begins to see. Balzac underlines the parallel with the conceit: 'Si la lumière est le premier amour de la vie, l'amour n'est-il pas la lumière du cœur?'⁴ Gaston de Nueil's first love-letter is amusingly compared to the drawings children prepare in secret as a birthday present for their parents, 'présents détestables pour tout le monde, excepté pour ceux qui les reçoivent'.⁵ Le Message is presented as the tale of two lovers who cling to each other like two children meeting a snake in their path.⁶ Indeed Balzac considers that true lovers

1. RA p. 214.

2. RA pp. 214 - 215.

3. art. Enfance, p. 249.

4. EG p. 332.

5. FA p. 286.

6. Mes p. 205. cf. Julie and Arthur are like two children who anticipate the collapse of their house of cards. (F30 p. 67)

are ipso facto children. The ruthless Mmed'Espard can still perceive 'cette joie enfantine' which is inseparable from falling in love.¹ A love relationship is usually unsatisfactory when only one of the partners has the rôle of a child. Félix de Vandenesse, for example, is unable to handle either Henriette or Arabella Dudley. Both regard him as a child: for Henriette he is 'cher enfant de mon coeur'² and for Arabella 'cher enfant'.³ When Henriette abandons him to the latter, Félix feels like a child who has descended into an abyss while playing and picking flowers, and who realises with anguish at nightfall that it is impossible to get out.⁴ At the end of Le Lys dans la vallée Nathalie de Manerville advises him, in effect, to grow up.

Balzac's concept of love as a second childhood is rose-tinted because he postulates that both participants should be equally child-like. It is also thoroughly Romantic as we have already seen. In this matter Balzac, like Rousseau and then Hugo, views childhood with nostalgia as a state of innocence. He affirms that first love is a time of total, hence childlike, happiness.⁵ He demonstrates this assertion in the figure of Etienne d'Hérouville, whose only taste of happiness is his childhood and his love for Gabrielle. In his comparisons of love and childhood Balzac is unashamedly sentimental. His frequent rhetorical questions indicate an appeal to the reader's emotions, and are certainly not the mark of an analytical realist. A glimmering of the latter appears in his references to the childish elements in love-play. In Petites misères de la vie conjugale he supplies a list of amorous endearments which include 'ma mère' and 'ma fille'.⁶ Later in the same work he expands on these and

1. FE p. 139.

2. Lys pp. 149, 315.

3. ibid., pp. 260, 261.

4. ibid., p. 266.

5. MC p. 201.

6. PMV p. 145.

caustically describes 'le langage enfantin, câlin de la lune de miel ... on parle en youyou, on parle en lala, on parle en nana, comme les mères et les nourrices parlent aux enfants',¹ but unfortunately Balzac cannot resist concluding triumphantly that this is one of the reasons why the creators of Greek mythology depicted Love as a child.¹ The glimmering of realism remains a glimmering, and all too often a perfectly valid reference to the 'enfantillages de l'amour'² is qualified by an emotive adjective usually 'délicieux',³ or expressed by a diminutive circumlocution such as 'ces petites félicités enfantines qui donnent tant de charme et de violence aux premières amours'.⁴

Balzac's study of the traits of the 'homme-enfant' and the 'femme-enfant' as found in lovers is easily the weakest part of his sound analysis of an important aspect of the adult psyche. It cannot be ignored, however, and will have to be regarded as belonging to the traditional and backward current of Balzac's thought.

Old Age

The last stage of man's development to be discussed is old age. Its connection with childhood might seem to be tenuous, were it not that Balzac tends to view it as a second childhood. This aspect of old age is the only one of relevance to this thesis, but other researchers will find more material in the two directions which Balzac's interest in senescence takes, namely the senile and presenile dementias. Balzac's interest in, and awareness of, the effects of old age were far greater than the slender proportions of this section of the thesis would seem to indicate.

1. PMV p. 190 cf. Lys p. 101 'L'amour est un divin enfant'.
2. ibid., p. 181.
3. e.g. MD p. 197, RA p. 222.
4. BS p. 124.

B-F. Balzac's concern with longevity is notorious. His son was quick to notice signs of ageing in himself and others. As regards himself he remarked sadly to Laure in 1849 that he felt himself to be an old man for his two front teeth had fallen out, but he lacked the compensation of spouse and children.¹ His letters to Mme Hanska are scattered with references to Laure's growing and depressing resemblance to her mother as she grew older. In 1846, for example, he commented that Mme de Berny's prophecy that 'votre soeur sera comme votre mère'² has been realised.

Today the notion of old age as second childhood is a trifle outdated as there is a greater tendency to consider puberty and adolescence, rather than childhood, as analogous to old age.³ In the nineteenth century, however, the notion had contemporary medical as well as popular support. DM vigorously underlines the parallel between old age and childhood,⁴ and so does DSM to a much lesser extent.⁵

In general, however, Balzac does not seem to have followed the dictionaries very closely, although he probably consulted them occasionally. When Félix de Vandenesse asks whether all dying people cast aside social disguises 'de même que l'enfant ne les a pas encore revêtus',⁶ he communicates the same impression of the wheel coming full circle as DM's section De la Vieillesse. The dictionaries concentrate on old people's weakness, inertia and lack of interest in sex. Balzac ignores most of this, except for physical weakness which he mentions both sympathetically

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1. Corres. V, p. 484.
 2. Lettres à Mme H. III, p. 129.
 3. D.B. Bromley. The Psychology of Human Ageing, p. 67, 291.
 4. Age, section V, De la Vieillesse.
 5. Age, Vieillesse.
 6. Lys p. 293 cf. 'J'ai la mémoire de l'enfant, celle qui se trouve aux abords de la tombe'. (H p. 382)

and contemptuously. On the one hand he claims that old people's physical weakness endows them with a maternal tenderness and compassion, and enables them to empathise with children.¹ On the other, he indicates Chabert's disintegration when he remarks his 'crainte de vieillard et d'enfant'.²

In his approach to old age Balzac branches off and explores senile dementia, cursorily mentioned by DM,³ and the not uncommon sexual deviations in late maturity which often manifest themselves as a form of presenile dementia. I can find no mention of the latter in either DSM or DM, and it seems to me evidence of Balzac's often astonishing psychological intuition.

Three of the great monomaniacs in the Comédie humaine display symptoms of senile dementia as defined by DM, namely imperiousness and intractability, for 'Les déterminations de la vieillesse se rapprochent ... de celles de l'enfance; elles sont absolues mais changeantes'.⁴ Grandet spends hours looking at his gold like a baby who stares stupidly at an object when he first learns to see.⁵ Gobseck, likewise, cannot think beyond his sole preoccupation, money, and when he first sees Mme de Restaud's jewels, he leaves his other toys and becomes 'vieillard et enfant ensemble'.⁶ Claës, the would-be chemist, is so isolated by his scientific experiments that he is as timid as a child in coping with life in general.⁷

As well as giving detailed case histories of senile men, Balzac breaks right away from the traditional approach to old age by ignoring DSM's division of senescence into three distinct stages according to

1. UM p. 58.

2. Col p. 58.

3. art. Age p. 618, 'l'état d'enfance ou de démence sénile'.

4. ibid.

5. EG p. 457.

6. Gob p. 413.

7. RA p. 305 'timide et enfant dans toutes les questions étrangères à ses occupations favorites'.

chronological age.¹ He seems to have realised that ageing is a gradual process which progresses at different rates in different people. For instance a number of characters in the Comédie humaine demonstrate that 'the onset of degenerative changes ... may lead to a temporary loss of (sexual) self-control'.² Such men are Crevel, Camusot, Jean-Jacques Rouget, Hulot and Nucingen, whose ages range from about fifty in Crevel's case to over sixty-six in Nucingen's.³ All are seized with a passion for much younger women, sometimes mere girls, and this passion is usually described as childish. Rouget's love for Flore 'ressemble étonnamment à l'enfance'.⁴ With all, their passion is a form of presenile dementia, in other words 'a gradual but systematic and profound disintegration of ... personality'.⁵ Hulot represents this disintegration the most completely, for he ends by living for nothing besides the satisfaction of his physical needs, often with little girls like Atala Judici. The phenomenon is analysed in most detail in the person of Nucingen. The second of the four parts of Splendeurs et misères is entitled 'A combien l'amour revient aux vieillards', and Balzac's thesis is that the combien is second childhood. Nucingen behaves like a child,⁶ and Esther treats him like one, even threatening him with her finger when he is naughty.⁷ Balzac occasionally anticipates some of the tentative conclusions of modern gerontology. He sometimes compares Nucingen to an adolescent instead of a child, and says

1. Vieillesse, p. 1.

2. Bromley, op. cit., p. 124.

3. There is some confusion about Hulot's birth date which is either 1771 or 1778, making him either 70 in 1841 or 60 in 1838.

4. R p. 522.

5. Bromley, op. cit., p. 143.

6. S&M, vol. XV, pp. 187, 215.

7. ibid., p. 257.

that his love for Esther is the adolescence he never had time to experience as he became a clerk at the age of twelve.¹ Modern gerontologists have not yet ascertained whether senility is a biological or pathological (disease) condition.² Balzac is astonishingly close to them in his generalisation that Nucingen's state is one of those social phenomena which can most easily be explained by physiology.³ For the purposes of this thesis, then, Balzac's insistence on this particular manifestation of presenile dementia as 'cette éclosion subite de l'enfance'⁴ is relevant as an indication of the virtual omnipresence of children and childhood in the Comédie humaine. Of more general interest would be Balzac's analysis of the psychology of old age which evinces his profound intuition of some elements of modern psychiatry.

Conclusion

Balzac's idea of man's growth and development reveals the same dichotomy as his approach to children's characteristics. On the one hand it is both traditional and Romantic, for example the comparison of old age with second childhood and nostalgia about childhood. On the other hand, it is realistic and acutely intuitive of modern psychology, especially as regards the two aspects of childishness present in us all. Balzac's originality is apparent when we realise that his motto would not have been Goethe's observation 'Age does not make us childish as people say; it only finds us still true children',⁵ but rather 'Age should not make us childish ... but should only find us still true children'.

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| 1. S&M, vol. XV, p. 188, 327. | 2. Bromley, <u>op. cit.</u> , pp. 233 - 234. |
| 3. S&M, vol. XV, p. 188. | 4. <u>ibid.</u> |
| 5. quoted by J.D. Tedder. <u>The French Novel of Palingenesis</u> , p. vii. | |

CHAPTER VIII

EDUCATION

It is impossible to deal with Balzac's approach to the education of children in a single chapter, due to the wide ramifications of the subject. Firstly, it can only be understood in the socio-political context of the nineteenth century, when it was a highly controversial issue. Secondly, the French word 'éducation' denotes both pedagogy and upbringing, and it is not always clear which one Balzac is emphasising. Thirdly, Balzac's approach is not completely consistent and, in any case, has to be gleaned from observations scattered throughout the Comédie humaine for he never finished his proposed works on pedagogy.

What follows, then, is of necessity a historical summary and a brief attempt at evaluating Balzac's position in the controversy. I shall outline the history of education in France from the eighteenth century to 1848 and the main ideas of the pedagogues who probably influenced Balzac, then look at Balzac's view of education, explain why there is no cause for me to deal with feminine education in this thesis, and finally discuss the importance Balzac attributes to education by society and experience.

Education was one of the chief elements of the socio-political crises of eighteenth and nineteenth century France. In the eighteenth century, for example, the dissent about education was an expression of bourgeois hostility to aristocratic privilege and of the struggle between Church and State, although of course its origins were intellectual, its prime innovator and spokesman being Rousseau. The dissent was reinforced by the course of events, such as the expulsion of the Jesuits and the dissolution of their schools. The added burden on the Oratorians, who assumed their functions, demonstrated the unworkability of the existing unco-ordinated educational complex.

Before the Revolution there were two approaches to reform: the first was purely administrative and the second pedagogic. The former concerned itself with debating such matters as the desirability of State-controlled or regional schools. The latter derived from Rousseau who inspired a whole series of educationalists, notably Froebel and Pestalozzi. Under the Restoration and the July Monarchy Guizot was to combine both approaches: administrative in his capacity as Minister of Education, and pedagogic in that he was editor, writer and teacher. Together with Pauline de Meulan he produced an education journal, Annales de l'Education, from 1811 - 1814. One of the aims of the journal was to introduce French readers to the methods and beliefs of Rousseau and subsequent reformers. He collaborated with Cuvier to produce an Essai sur l'histoire et l'état actuel de l'instruction publique en France in defence of the centralised University. Guizot was also, intermittently, a history lecturer at the Sorbonne, proving himself to be one of the three intellectual regents of his time according to Sainte-Beuve,¹ as well as 'un véritable maître de l'histoire-discours'.²

The Revolution achieved nothing for education in practice, but Article 22 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man in 1793 affirmed that education was the need and right of every individual. The inherent idea of public, compulsory, universal and secular education was to prove impossible to eradicate from men's minds. An ulterior motive behind this Article was the realisation that the school system could be used for ideological dissemination. Henceforth all political parties bore this in mind, and the struggle between Church and State for control of education intensified. Napoleon restored official recognition to the Church, but he maintained authority over education by means of a national system, centred in his

1. quoted by A. Thibaudet. Histoire de la littérature française de 1789 à nos jours, p. 264.

2. ibid., p. 268.

Imperial University, which was a State organisation responsible for all departments of education and designed to support and preserve his régime. The Church's one remaining loop-hole was its retention of control over primary education. By 1815 secondary education was being provided by authoritarian lycées or equivalent institutions, like the Collège de Vendôme where Balzac was a pupil. The lycées represented an almost complete return to Ancien régime syllabus and methods, for the subjects taught were Latin, Greek, rhetoric, logic, morals, mathematics and physical science. Both uniforms and discipline were semi-military.

Towards the end of the Imperial period a body of educational specialists, including Guizot, was preparing some kind of reform, but this was sabotaged by the Restoration which proved to be a period of reaction in education (as in other ways) thanks to the close co-operation between State and Church. Many ecclesiastics believed that the Revolution had originated in the diffusion of knowledge among the lower classes, and that Providence had sent the Restoration to repair the crime of incredulity. Education provided a focal point for the quarrel between clericals and anti-clericals, since the former feared that education would again cause the masses to forget their place and the latter desired a lay education which would promote the rise of the middle classes. Like Napoleon before them, both were fully aware that the political future belonged to the party which could indoctrinate the most children in the shortest time. The struggle was neatly summarised by Matthew Arnold who wrote: 'Theocracy in France, with Monsieur de Bonald for its organ, may desire to entrust education to a clerical corporation; Modern Society in France, with the first Napoleon as its organ, may desire to entrust it to a lay corporation; but both are agreed not to entrust it to itself'.¹ The history of education during the Restoration is one of oscillation between giving the Church more power over education, exemplified by the appointment of

1. quoted by D. Johnson. Guizot - Aspects of French History, p. 102.

Bishop Frayssinous as Minister of Education in 1824, and retracting such power, exemplified by Martignac's re-appointment of Guizot and other Liberals (by Restoration standards) to their university posts in 1828 - 1829.

By the end of the Restoration the central University still existed, but in a modified form. Although it tended towards legitimacy and Catholicism, both clergy and anti-clericals regarded it as an instrument of despotism, the former because they considered it a lay institution preventing direct Church domination over education and the latter because of its royalist sympathies. In addition the political importance of university students had gathered momentum between 1820 and 1830. Also of importance was the fact that the distinction between 'éducation' and 'enseignement' had been emphasised, and Frayssinous attacked those who counted 'l'instruction pour tout et l'éducation pour rien'.¹ Reaction had its way in the marked lack of improvement in national elementary and secondary education, although a boost had been given to technical education, and the concentrated 're-education' and disciplining of Imperial lycées which were regarded as foyers of Bonapartism and Jacobinism. Balzac himself did not react kindly to the royalist indoctrination by the Pension Lepitre, as his hasty and somewhat inexplicable departure from it indicates.

Under the July Monarchy education continued to be a contentious issue. In 1832 Guizot took over the Ministry of Public Instruction and made it an integral part of the government. His law of 1833 was the first Charter of primary education in France. It provided for the establishment

1. R. Deniel. Une Image de la famille et de la société sous la Restauration, p. 149.

of an elementary school in each commune and a Normal college for teachers in each département, but neither institution was compulsory, free or wholly secular. Guizot's aim as an educational reformer was that Church and State would collaborate and that the 'instituteurs' would have a moderating, conservative rôle in French society. Both aims failed. In 1847 the Church dissociated itself from the Government because its aspirations concerning secondary education had been repeatedly disappointed. Far from proving moderates, the 'instituteurs' became increasingly radical, thanks to their predominantly rational and scientific training in the Ecoles Normales. Their opposition was consequently directed towards clergy as well as the Government, because ecclesiastical schools stressed belief and ritual and virtually ignored the intellectual movements of the nineteenth century. The differences between the Church and Government were irreconcilable. The former clung to the notion that only religion per se could build a society safe from upheaval, whereas Guizot and his colleagues believed, in Cousin's phrase, 'The less we desire our schools to be ecclesiastical, the more ought they to be Christian'.¹ Despite Guizot's valiant efforts the problem of education did not begin to be solved until mid-century. The system ignored the economic needs of France for it was entirely directed towards the liberal professions which were overcrowded. Young men of average middle-class origin found themselves frustrated and without adequate employment. Les Employés is a faithful reflection of this situation. Rabourdin is 'déclassé' because he is the product of 'l'éducation vulgaire et incomplète qui produit tant d'ambitions et si peu de capacités'.² The novel in which he figures is an invective against the inadequacy of this education for it drives 'les gens d'esprit à la raillerie et le génie au désespoir'.³

1. quoted by Johnson, op. cit., p. 130.

2. E p. 7.

3. ibid., p. 21.

Both these effects are further illustrated in Z. Marcas.

Before turning to a closer study of Balzac's treatment of education one must analyse the main currents of pedagogic thought which probably influenced him, namely Montaigne, Rousseau and Bonald.

Montaigne expounded the concept that education is a direct preparation for the life of a 'man of the world', to whom formal morality and pedantic scholarship will be useless. Instead education should aim to teach virtue through the training of the senses, that is through behaviour and physical education. We shall meet this idea again in Balzac's praise for the superiority of education through experience over formal scholarship.

Montaigne's ideas were enlarged and adapted by Rousseau. Rousseau felt that education had a social rather than an intellectual purpose, and Emile's education teaches him the art of living with his fellow-men. The aim of education is therefore not erudition, but wisdom, goodness and love of truth, for 'Vivre est le métier que je lui veux apprendre'.¹ Rousseau was the first writer to recognise the complexity of the child mind and to advocate that a child's education should be tailored to his individual and unique nature and to the normal activities of his age group. He protested against the rigidity of the existing school system, both because of its formal, unpractical curriculum and the excessive importance it placed on religious instruction. It is only when Emile is eighteen that he is introduced to Christianity and allowed to choose whatever religious denomination he pleases. Until then he acquires his moral training from the consequences of his own wrongdoing. Rousseau's first criticism was to gain increasing popularity in the nineteenth century, but not his second. For instance DSM, which generally tends to be much in favour of him, declaims against the aridity of grammar and syntax, and advocates that a child be taught through the world around him and not through abstract

1. Emile, p. 8.

principles, which are foreign to his receptive but inattentive mind.¹ Nevertheless, the dictionary warns against 'le malheur de négliger le développement de la sensibilité morale durant le premier âge'.² Rousseau's chief and lasting contribution to pedagogic theory lies rather in the 'honour of deriving his educational theories from the nature of the child. It may be admitted that Rousseau had little knowledge of child life and child nature and that his sympathy for children was pure sentimentalism which was never converted into actual practice. It is true, nevertheless, that here for the first time education finds its purpose, its process and its means wholly within child life and child experience'.³

Bonald, the Ultra spokesman, represents a sharp reaction against the freedom of thought expounded in Emile. Although no pedagogue himself, he saw in education a means of reinforcing the association between Throne and Altar. The ideal education is that given by the Family, nucleus and prototype of the State. Closest to this in public schools is a religious education, the best protection against social upheaval for it resigns each man to his place in the inevitable and God-given social hierarchy. Therefore, while religious education should be available to all classes, what Bonald called literary and political education should be dispensed only to the élite. Only they should be given a prolonged 'instruction' so that they may take their place as leaders of society once they are old enough to dominate their passions. The proletariat, on the other hand, should be given 'éducation' and no 'instruction' for the worker should be prepared for his future from the age of five.⁴

1. art. Enfant, p. 247.

2. ibid., p. 249.

3. P. Monroe. A brief course in the history of education, pp. 294 - 295.

4. For much of my information about Ultra attitudes to education I am greatly indebted to R. Deniel, op. cit., Chapter VI.

In the existing social context Guizot represented the most satisfactory compromise between Rousseau and Bonald, for he tempered a belief in freedom in education with opposition to freedom of education. It is unfortunate for his contemporaries that most of his theory was not implemented. As we shall see Balzac expounded, consciously or not, many of the ideas developed in the Annales. Here Guizot expresses agreement with Rousseau that the child's individual disposition should be the foundation of his education, and that his early training should be based on his natural love of activity and curiosity. Guizot diverges from Rousseau in his affirmation that religious and moral truths are the purpose of education, his denial of a child's innate goodness and his opinion that education can only turn to good account one's God-given character, and his call for a national system of education as a means of maintaining class barriers.¹

Balzac's interest in education was life-long. It appears from his earliest works. Le Centenaire depicts the utopian education of Tullius and Marianne; La dernière Fée portrays Abel's education in disillusionment and Argow le Pirate describes the heroine's Rousseauist education as well as her conversion of Argow, itself an educative process. Concern with education appears throughout the Comédie humaine. Benassis undertakes the education of his valley; Félix thinks of becoming a priest in order to devote himself to Jacques' education; in L'Enfant maudit there is a long passage contrasting the education of Maximilien and Etienne d'Hérouville, and in Le Curé de village Grégoire Gérard's letter to Grossetête is 'virtually a short treatise on technical education'.²

1. For Guizot I am similarly indebted to Johnson, op. cit., Chapter 3.

2. H.J. Hunt. Balzac's Comédie humaine, p. 250.

Discussion about education in all senses recurs throughout the Comédie humaine. In La Rabouilleuse there is a debate between Desroches, Bruel and Claparon: the first advocates strict parsimony, the second close guidance and the third is fatalistic.¹ Examples of different types of education abound. Dr. Rouget and Judge Blondet attempt to compensate for their sons' stupidity by making routinists of them and impressing certain basic values on their minds by force of repetition.² Lady Brandon annuls the disadvantages of her sons' humble origins with a lofty education.³ Père Fourchon gives Mouche 'eune fière éducation et solide', the art of making money illegally and with impunity.⁴ Nevertheless, Balzac's concept of education remained fragmentary for he never collated and compared different methods of education, despite his plans to do so. He intended to systematise his ideas in the Analyse des corps enseignants referred to in the preceding chapter. This manual was to cover all aspects of education from the influence of heredity and genetics to the care and teaching of small children and constitute, in short, 'la nomenclature de tout ce qui existe sur l'éducation'.⁵ Specific areas of Balzac's interest are revealed in the titles of other unwritten or unfinished novels: Les Enfants, Un Pensionnat de demoiselles, Intérieur de collège (first called Le Collège et l'écolier) and Entre Savants which was to depict different kinds of teachers.⁶ This might have filled a gap in the Comédie humaine.

1. R pp. 278 - 279.

2. R p. 402; C^h p. 132.

3. Gr p. 239.

4. Pay p. 91.

5. J. Crépet. Pensées, sujets, fragmens, p. 160.

6. CH, Aux éditions du Seuil, vol. I, Titres-projets

which tends to concentrate on who and what is taught rather than on the teacher.

Balzac's broad, lasting, albeit unco-ordinated, interest in education is not surprising in view of the fact that it was such a vital social and political issue at the time. Moreover, he was personally concerned with the education of his nieces and Anna Hanska. He deplored the effects of Sophie Surville's 'pensionnat' education, predicting 'Il faudra 5 ans avant de tuer chez elle la pensionnaire'.¹ He tried to influence his nieces by holding up Anna's education as an example to be followed for 'La règle, les devoirs accomplis ont été la loi de l'enfance de la jeune comtesse'.² He made enthusiastic attempts to supervise Anna's education, Rousseauistically advising Eve to allow Anna to frolic, for the age of serious cogitation comes all too soon.³

The existence of Balzac's awareness of educational matters is incontrovertible. The next question is: what political or pedagogic trends did he follow? The answer is that he was probably slightly to the Right of Guizot. Like him he followed Rousseau in his belief that the individual child's character and age should determine his education. Like him he denied Rousseau's notion of a child's natural virtue but he then diverged, adopting a Catholic and legitimist standpoint in his support of religious education. As far as one can see he seems to have been opposed to the power of the centralised University, which Guizot favoured, and highly critical of the existing system of public education. He offered no practicable alternative and did not even express support of innovations like the 'loi Guizot'. I shall discuss each of his above-mentioned attitudes separately, limiting most of my examples to the education of boys and citing that of girls only when applicable to both sexes.

1. Corres. II, p. 740.

2. Corres. V, p. 672.

3. Lettres à Mme H. II, p. 330.

Balzac's Rousseauisms are generally obvious, and can all be reduced to the need to suit education to the individual child and not vice versa. Like Emile, Balzac's blue-print for the ideal education is impracticable on a large scale because it necessitates a private education for, declares Balzac, 'l'art de donner aux leçons une forme appropriée à l'intelligence de l'élève ... marque la différence de l'éducation particulière à l'éducation publique'.¹ Balzac's blueprint is illustrated by Benassis' son, Lady Brandon's children, Ursule Mirouët and Emmanuel de Solis. All grow up far from the nefarious influence of society and lead simple, regular lives guided by a loving mentor who is either a parent or relative. It seems that isolation is required if a child is to learn through its natural love of activity. Ursule is able to learn through playing games,² and young Benassis acquires the correct pronunciation of foreign languages by speaking to the Englishmen, Germans, Italians and Spaniards whom his father employs just for this purpose.³ Although the boy learns the languages in succession, one may reasonably doubt the durability of his knowledge. Benassis and Lady Brandon emulate Emile's tutor by hiding nothing from their charges while preventing false or inaccurate ideas entering their heads.⁴ Balzac does not, however, explain how they accomplish this. In all his prototypes he appears to combine a natural with a Christian education. He expressed this uneasy combination in his advice to 'veiller avec scrupule aux jeux et aux caprices de l'enfant pour y diviner la route tracée par la Nature à l'homme'.⁵ In this he diverges slightly from Rousseau, especially in the case of Emmanuel. This angelic being is formed by semi-monastic discipline and hard work which, Balzac tells us, make him capable of strong natural emotions.⁶ Balzac does have the grace

1. P p. 74.

2. UM p. 59.

3. MC, p. 210.

4. Gr p. 239; MC p. 210.

5. Preface to Ch, Pléiade XI, p. 140.

6. RA p. 252.

to imply that his education is hardly realistic when he remarks that Emmanuel is fortunate in that his first love is another semi-angelic being¹, for his idealism thus remains unscarred.

A corollary of Balzac's praise of private education is his protest against the inadequacy of the school system. There is a Rousseauist ring to his claim that French education forms a powerful barrier against spontaneous receptivity to impressions.² Most of the schoolboys in the Comédie humaine are unhappy because their superiority and individualism make it impossible for them to adapt to an inflexible pedagogic system which allows for no deviation from the norm. Balzac is unconstructive, for he regards the inability of public education to solve the problem of co-ordinating physical and mental development as irremediable.³ According to Laure Balzac's nervous breakdown was caused by the fact that his intellectual growth was too far in advance of his physical,⁴ and this is certainly Louis Lambert's case. The extent of the influence of Emile on Balzac's approach to this problem is clearly seen in his advice to Henry Balzac on his son's education: '... ne t'occupe jusqu'à sept ans que de lui apprendre à lire et à écrire et forme-lui le corps - voilà l'essentiel'.⁵

Emile had made it fashionable to despise public education, but Balzac's criticisms are more likely to be due to his own experiences at school than to Rousseau. His life at school coloured his attitude to the education given in the Imperial lycées and their successors, the Collèges royaux. From 1807 to 1813 he was a boarder at the Collège de Vendôme,

1. RA p. 212.

2. Gam p. 43.

3. R p. 270.

4. L. Surville. Balzac: sa vie et ses oeuvres d'après sa correspondance, p. xii.

5. Corres. IV, p. 287.

run by two ex-Oratorians, where Bonapatism underlay an officially Catholic approach. He conveys the atmosphere of the Collège, with some over-emotional exaggeration, in Louis Lambert and Le Lys dans la vallée. There is no need here to trace the correspondence between the experiences of the writer and his heroes, because this has been more than adequately done by such critics as Guyon, Evans and Borel, to name but a few. Certainly the child whom, in 1872, the old porter was proudly to remember accompanying to the 'cachot' 'more than a hundred times'¹ and who left after a nervous breakdown, was unlikely to have much affection for the existing school system. The sixteen-year-old who left the Pension Lepitre suddenly and mysteriously (probably because his political loyalties conflicted with those of his royalist headmaster) was not to be any more sympathetic towards private schools. Le Yaouanc adduces another possible reason for Balzac's aversion to schools. While at the Pension Lepitre, and later at the Pension Ganser, it is almost certain that he attended classes at the lycée Charlemagne. Here he found himself one of a crowd, whereas at Vendôme and Tours he had obtained some recognition with a few prizes and 'accessits'. Thus in order to salve his wounded pride he minimised the value of scholastic attainment and determined to become famous in later life.² I believe this is to be reflected in his smug comment in Le Médecin de Campagne that certain men who do brilliantly at school are dull - if useful - mediocrities in later life.³

At least Balzac did not deny all value to erudition, unlike his contemporaries Dickens and, to a lesser extent, Hugo. The former, virtually self-taught, despised formal education. The latter was

1. quoted by M. Fargeaud. Balzac et la Recherche de l'Absolu, p. 112.

2. AB 1962, Balzac au lycée Charlemagne.

3. MC p. 8.

scathing about 'pédanterie' due to his unhappy school-days and his adult dislike of ecclesiastics.¹ He concerned himself chiefly with the related problems of poverty and instruction in his political career after 1849.² While offering no viable plan of reform Balzac, who had received a fairly solid education, expressed his approval of education in strong terms when referring to 'ceux qu'une éducation généreuse investit du domaine de la pensée'³ or to the number of men 'doués d'une certaine puissance de pensée par une éducation privilégiée'.⁴ On a lower level, even old Séchard considers David's education a financial investment.⁵

Biography and Rousseau jointly explain why Balzac should have put on trial the whole system of public education from pre-Revolutionary times to the advent of Louis-Philippe. Moreover, if the picture he paints of school-life is uniformly sombre, it is corroborated by Musset, Vigny and George Sand,⁶ and denotes the very real need for reform which then existed. Benassis, who was presumably educated before and during the Revolution, as he was born in 1779, found himself unable to withstand the temptations of the permissive turmoil of Parisian life after the boring, semi-conventual discipline of his Oratorian college.⁷ Napoleonic education has an unfortunate effect on Philippe Bridau. At the Imperial college he acquires 'cette hardiesse et ce mépris de douleur qui engendre la valeur militaire',⁸ although Balzac does not explain why his brother Joseph

1. J.P. De Boer. Victor Hugo et l'Enfant, p. 51.

2. ibid., p. 108.

3. Phy p. 79.

4. ibid., p. 97.

5. IP, vol. XI, p. 174, 301.

6. E.M. Senn. The Development of the Child Character in the Comédie humaine, p. 259.

7. MC p. 195.

8. R p. 270.

is not similarly affected. Athanase Granson reacts differently to the stoicism he learned at school. Balzac attributes his unflinching resolve to commit suicide to his fatalism, 'cette religion de l'Empereur' which descended from the throne and permeated schools.¹ Mme de Mortsauf utters a vague animadversion when she expresses her relief that Félix's Napoleonic education, 'prise en commun dans les collèges n'ait rien gâté chez lui'.² The animadversion is more specific in the case of Adrien Genestas who, at the end of the Restoration, has to be taken away from school because the atmosphere there is conducive to masturbation. In general Balzac disapproves of the school system because 'l'enseignement le plus perfectionné n'est pas celui que vend l'Etat'.³ Of this Adrien Genestas is conclusive proof. The same applies to girls. Louise de Chaulieu and Renée de Maucombe, for instance, know more about life and love than they should when they leave their convent. This may be related to Rousseau's insistence on the evil influence of Society.

In his contempt for public education Balzac is a Rousseauist, both fortuitously and by conviction. He is less of one, however, when it comes to the question of corporal punishment. Louis Lambert demonstrates the necessity for an official revision of the penitentiary system in schools,⁴ and Renée de l'Estorade discovers that the best way to handle a child is to exploit his natural passions and self-interest.⁵ On the other hand Balzac was a staunch believer in the notion that children both want and need discipline. He felt that a child is dangerous if not kept under control,⁶ and that terror is the most effective weapon for 'le peuple,

1. VF p. 378.

2. Lys p. 150.

3. Gam p. 43.

4. LL p. 70 - 'Aussi le régime pénitentiaire observé dans les collèges exigera-t-il l'attention des autorités de l'enseignement public lorsqu'il s'y rencontrera des penseurs qui ne penseront exclusivement à eux'.

5. MJM p. 329.

6. Pay p. 298.

les femmes et les enfants se gouvernent de même, par la terreur'.¹

Francis Graslin has a model tutor in Ruffin, whose vocation is private teaching and who possesses piety, patience, sensitivity and 'la sévérité nécessaire à qui veut conduire un enfant'.² In Un Début dans la vie Balzac manages to be both Rousseauist and traditionalist when he declares that corporal punishment is Nature's own method of reinforcing moral lessons in the inattentive minds of adolescents.³

Where Balzac turns right away from Rousseau is in his denial of a child's innate virtue and his call for a religious education. In one of his last fragments, the Catéchisme social, he declares that 'natural' man is neither wholly good nor wholly evil.⁴ In this he looks forward to Freud, but later on he regresses to the concept of original sin, exalting formal religion for its utilitarian value: 'La Religion a eu pour but de réprimer les mauvais penchants et de développer les bons'.⁵ Hence, like Bonald, he asserts that a religious education counterbalances man's innate sinfulness.⁶ The agnostic Dr. Minoret, who directs Ursule's largely Rousseauist education, does not deny her the benefits of Catholicism which, according to Balzac, is unique in that it teaches a child to do good as a pleasure rather than a duty.⁷ No Protestant in the Comédie humaine is converted to Catholicism from conviction - Dinah Piedefer's motives are wholly unspiritual - and one suspects that Benassis is able to become

1. Pay p. 145, cf. R p. 518.

2. CV p. 239.

3. Dlv p. 419.

4. OD III, p. 693.

5. ibid., p. 694.

6. ibid., p. 709: 'l'éducation est le contrepoids donné aux tendances innées'.

7. UM p. 60.

a latter-day saint largely because his youth 's'était désaltérée dans les eaux pures de la Religion'.¹ Balzac's traditionalism is indisputable: he believes that education is not omnipotent, for it may be powerless against vice, innate or not, as the careers of the unregenerate Calyste and Victurnien demonstrate. Education can only try to improve the material it is given for 'L'éducation inculque les idées des grands hommes couronnés par la nature avant même d'être baisés par leur mère'.² Nevertheless, a religious education is essential, for like the Ultras Balzac believed that the Revolution was both a punishment for, and a perpetrator of, irreligion. He attributes the villainy or amorality of several characters to their pre- and post-Revolutionary upbringing. Julie d'Aiglemont is indifferent to religion as are all the 'enfants de ce siècle sans croyance'.³ Minoret is impervious to Ursule Mirouet's angelic nature for he is an atheistic son of the Revolution.⁴

Despite his utilitarian plea for religious education, Balzac occasionally appears to follow Cousin in advocating a Christian rather than an ecclesiastical education. He attacks pernicious 'Jigotry in no uncertain terms in his descriptions of the upbringing of the Granville girls in Une double Famille and Une Fille d'Eve. He also criticises the clergy's blindness to modern scientific progress. Calyste du Guénic receives an 'éducation complète et chrétienne',⁵ which excludes modern science and literature and is limited to 'la géographie et l'histoire circonspectes des pensionnats de demoiselles, au latin et au grec des séminaires, à la littérature des langues mortes et à un choix restreint d'auteurs français'.⁵ Like Victurnien d'Esgrignon this education does not equip him to cope with the life and 'esprit novateur'⁶ of nineteenth century France, which play havoc

1. MC p. 197.

2. I p. 378.

3. F30 pp. 9, 101: see also pp. 88 - 89.

4. UM pp. 6, 22. cf. Flore Brazier (R p. 398), Mme Cibot (CP p. 51), M. Bernard before his conversion (EHC p. 370).

5. B p. 54.

6. ibid.

with his innocence. Balzac ironically refutes Mme du Guénic's illusion that as her son knows religion he possesses the essentials of all education,¹ for Batrix destroys with ease 'ce chef d'oeuvre de l'éducation noble, sage et religieuse'.² Ultimately, however, Balzac opts for a religious rather than moral education. His declaration that 'L'enseignement, ou mieux, l'éducation par des Corps Religieux est donc le grand principe d'existence pour les peuples, le seul moyen de diminuer la somme du mal et d'augmenter la somme du bien dans toute Société'³ is closer to Bonald than to the 'juste milieu' represented by Charles de Rémusat who recommended that teachers develop in their pupils 'la foi dans la Providence, la sainteté du devoir, la soumission à l'autorité paternelle, le respect dû aux lois, au prince, aux droits de tous'.⁴

Another point of agreement between Balzac and the Right in the question of education is his belief that education should be graded according to social class. Like Guizot, he considered that secondary education must be dispensed with care, for it may give school-children social and intellectual ambitions which are impossible to fulfil in the outside world. In the Comédie humaine several characters are subjected to unnecessary suffering when their former class-mates treat them as inferiors. This is the experience of Godefroid, Dr. Poulain and Dinah Piedefer. The latter's education in an aristocratic boarding school makes her a social climber who in order to further her ambitions, ridiculous a 'bourgeoise', renounces her faith in school, and immediately she has left marries the impotent La Baudraye at the age of seventeen. Balzac moves from Centre to Right

1. B p. 62.

2. B p. 283.

3. Avant-Propos, pp. xxx - xxxi.

4. quoted by R. Pernoud. Histoire de la bourgeoisie en France, p. 477.

in his proposal for reducing the superfluity of qualified, but unemployable and often socially unacceptable, middle-class youths, a superfluity due to 'cette facilité de participation aux bienfaits de l'éducation'.¹

He advocates a return to the aristocratic institution of the 'Droit d'aînesse', for like Bonald he felt that a combination of correct education and family authority transmitted through, and embodied in, the eldest son, would guarantee the social hierarchy. The engineer Gérard reflects that much of his frustration and disillusionment comes from the fact that he abandoned his destiny as a carpenter,² and acquired specialised training which he was unable to use.

In the Comédie humaine Balzac frequently expresses concern that class structure is breaking down because the nobility's pre-eminence is being lost through its incomplete, superficial, insular and often obsolescent education. Few aristocrats have M. d'Espard's skill in making their children aware of the gulf between them and the commonalty while at the same time instructing them in the art of being both noble men and noblemen.³ There are several outstanding examples of young aristocrats ruined by their outdated education, including Calyste du Guénic, Victurnien d'Esgrignon and Paul de Manerville. Calyste has been mentioned earlier. Victurnien's pious education isolates him from his own century.⁴ Paul is equally incompetent in a different way for, like Victurnien, he has received an antiquated education comprising horsemanship, marksmanship, tennis and good manners.⁵ Zulma confirms Balzac's pessimism about this 'frivole instruction d'autrefois',⁶ writing in 1833 'C'est presque là l'éducation,

1. OD I p. 5.

2. CV p. 190.

3. In p. 379.

4. CA p. 54.

5. CM p. 203.

6. CM p. 203.

cette politesse exquise ... des hautes classes'.¹ Despite his righteous indignation Balzac offered no practical solution, and indeed always retained a parvenu's admiration for this exquisite politeness. Wistful phrases like 'cette grâce melliflue donnée par l'éducation aristocratique'² are frequent in the Comédie humaine.

As regards the peasants and workers, those at the extreme end of the social scale, Balzac was highly cynical about their educability. Dr. Rouget makes little progress with Flore's formal education because the almost animal life of peasants (sic!) has bred in her a dislike of knowledge.³ In any case Balzac was prepared to concede to them only such education as would teach them to know their place. He suggests that it is all very well for peasant girls to obtain an education through employment as ladies' maids, but they should not get any ideas about the equality of the classes. Olympe Charel has learned only as much as her mistress had deigned to teach her and very properly has acquired 'toutes les distinctions qu'une jeune fille née immédiatement au-dessus du peuple peut gagner',⁴ qualified praise indeed. She solicits her former position for la Péchina, but observes that the latter's greatest fault is her egalitarianism, a form of ignorance: 'Son éducation est à faire, elle ne sait rien du monde'.⁵ La Fosseuse is a tragic example of a peasant who rose above her station only to be cast aside at her mistress's whim and find herself a misfit in any society.⁶

1. Corres. II, p. 285.

2. e.g. IP, vol. XII, p. 25 'la hauteur native d'une femme noble'; B p. 258 'cette finesse innée, ces dons de race'. etc.

3. R p. 396.

4. Pay p. 185.

5. Pay p. 194.

6. MC p. 128.

Balzac's attitude to religious education and to the desirability of education graded according to class is Right-wing, even Ultra. Further evidence of his support for the clericals might be his opinion of the University, although one must remember that it was under attack from both liberals and conservatives who, for different reasons, regarded it as an instrument of repression. His chief point of criticism is that it is a lay institution, and he raised this point several times in the latter part of his life. In Le Curé de village Abbé Bonnet guesses correctly that Gérard is either atheist or Protestant for he believes that the Grandes Ecoles are 'des fabriques d'incrédulés'.¹ Théodose de la Peyrade dismisses Félix Phellion as 'tout-à-fait l'universitaire de notre temps, le produit d'une science qui a mis Dieu de côté'.² There is some justification in this as Balzac depicts Félix as an upright deist, but it is also suspect as the two men are rivals for the hand of Céleste Colleville and Félix is by no means the unprincipled atheist Théodose suggests. Although Balzac seldom took sides on the University issue his personal opinion is clearly given in the Preface to La Rabouilleuse, where he expresses the hope that society may turn speedily to Catholicism 'pour purifier les masses par le sentiment religieux et par une éducation autre que celle d'une Université laïque'.³

Balzac was no educational reformer. He vaguely criticised higher education for its lack of unity and direction.⁴ In Un Curé de village Gérard criticises technical education for being out of contact with the reality of the economic market. Although there are many students in the

1. CV p. 207.

2. Bou p. 64.

3. R p. 250.

4. quoted by P. Barbéris. Balzac et le mal du siècle, p. 657. 'Le haut enseignement est nul, sans idée générale, sans une idée d'avenir'.

Comédie humaine, Balzac concentrates on their growth to social maturity rather than on the content of University education and administration. For instance in Le Père Goriot we rarely see Rastignac studying, although he is frequently termed 'l'étudiant'.¹ He is indeed a student but life is his curriculum, and his conversations with Mesdames de Restaud and Beauséant are equivalent to 'trois années de ce Droit Parisien dont on ne parle pas, quoiqu'il constitue une haute jurisprudence sociale qui, bien apprise et bien pratiquée, mène à tout'.² Balzac tells us nothing of the training of the studious Bianchon before Desplein 'adopts' him. Even then the ensuing benefits are an introduction to Parisian high society and an initiation into the mysteries of Parisian life rather than medical. On the whole Balzac was content to adopt the negative attitude that a universal education was of more value than a university education.³ As de Marsay explains, 'l'éducation par le monde' may cost twice a university education, but at least it teaches one about life, business, politics, people and sometimes even love, whereas a university education teaches one nothing with all its 'maîtres d'agrément et de désagréments'.⁴

Balzac is as unconstructive about primary education as he is about secondary. In the figures of Bette Fischer and Rémonencq he demonstrates the drawbacks of ignorance which are usually the dogged pursuit of 'idées fixes' originating in animal, often brutal instinct.⁵ Balzac does not tackle the root cause of such ignorance which was the paucity of

1. e.g. PG p. 283 'le malicieux étudiant', p. 285 'le malencontreux étudiant'.

2. PG p. 294.

3. MN p. 411, apropos of Nucingen's financial wizardry.

4. UM p. 117.

5. CP p. 218. 'les idées fixes qu'inspire l'isolement dans les campagnes, avec les ignorances des idées primitives et les brutalités de leurs désirs qui se convertissent en idées fixes'.

primary schools, and describes it, without investigating it, in Les Paysans. Père Fourchon's instruction is most unorthodox and he is eventually dismissed from his post as 'instituteur' because all he teaches his pupils is how to make boats and paper birds out of their elementary reading books, and how to scale walls for the purpose of pilfering.¹ The Rogrons' treatment of Pierrette may largely be the result of their own upbringing which included much running wild, some whipping, a modicum of schooling for Jérôme and apprenticeship at thirteen for Sylvie.² Balzac does not seem to have even mentioned Guizot's law of 1833, except indirectly in Le Curé de village. Gérard suggests that there should be more primary schools, but like Bonald he believes that the masses should be given a religious education only and no 'instruction' for 'cette demi-instruction donnée au peuple ... tend à détruire les liens sociaux en le faisant réfléchir assez pour qu'il déserte les croyances religieuses favorables au pouvoir'.³ Here Balzac is very close to Nodier, another nineteenth century writer deeply concerned about education, who stated this point of view frequently in his works. It is probably no coincidence that he dedicated La Rabouilleuse to Nodier, and in his dedication called on Society to 'recourir promptement au catholicisme pour purifier les masses par le sentiment religieux et par une éducation autre que celle d'une Université laïque'.⁴

In conclusion it can justifiably be said that Balzac has no personal system of education, but that he reflects his contemporaries' concern with the question in the hodge-podge of ideas in the Comédie humaine which range from traditionalism to a modified Rousseauism. His criticisms of formal education from the Revolution onwards are justified, but he offers no alternative beyond postulating religious education as the only means of repressing the individual's innate vices and maintaining the social hierarchy.

1. Pay p. 47.

2. P p. 16.

3. CV p. 205.

4. R p. 250.

His unconstructive attitude is neatly summarised in his axiom: 'Les enfants ... sont des marchandises très difficiles à soigner'.¹

Education of Women

In this section I shall not analyse in detail Balzac's treatment of the young girl's education and upbringing, save to emphasise a point which has not been given sufficient attention. My reasons are twofold. The first is that in the nineteenth century furore about education in general, that of women was regarded as secondary. The second is that the whole subject has been more than adequately treated by critics.

French society's attitude to the education of women had changed little since the eighteenth century. Even Rousseau had blazed no trail for he declared apropos of Sophie: 'Toute l'éducation des femmes doit être relative aux hommes',² and went on to explain that girls should be taught from childhood that their natural vocation is to comfort and succour husband and children. I have already alluded to the gravity with which the nineteenth century from Napoleon onwards regarded this vocation,³ and also to the generalised attitude that women were inferior beings anyway because they were incapable of outgrowing childhood both physically and intellectually.⁴ In this matter Bonald had disciples throughout the century. Even anti-clerical bourgeois regarded woman's condition as fixed, inescapable and, most important, a guarantee of social order. Christianity enforced resignation to woman's condition and maintained the social hierarchy by teaching women their proper place in life. Desire for law and order has ever been a bourgeois characteristic, and so the cultivated bourgeoisie, whose interest in religion was more intellectual than spiritual,

1. CM p. 207.

2. Emile, p. 440.

3. q.v. my chapter VI.

4. q.v. section on La Femme-Enfant in Chapter VII.

continued to regard a domestic education as adequate for girls as long as it was basically Catholic. The idea of the 'mère-institutrice' was in vogue, and was enthusiastically promoted by Mme Guizot, for nineteenth century bourgeois continued to believe with Napoleon that there was no need to 's'occuper d'un régime d'instruction pour les jeunes filles: elles ne peuvent être mieux élevées que par leurs mères'.¹ There is therefore nothing anomalous in the fact that higher education for women scarcely existed, nor that Guizot did little about the primary education of girls. There was no lack of criticism of both domestic and institutional education, but it was only in the last twenty years of the century that legal and social change was implemented.

The four critics who have made a particular study of the education of the young girl in the Comédie humaine are E.M. Senn, H. Garrett, M-H. Faillie and M. Boisvert in the works to which I have already referred. E.M. Senn has done a superficial survey of girls' education as portrayed in the Comédie humaine and concludes, rightly, that Balzac had little originality and created no startling new theories.² The other three have studied the subject more deeply, and all find that the mature Balzac believed that feminine education should be directed towards marriage and motherhood, woman's traditional vocation, and hence should tend to be mainly moral and religious. All three, particularly Faillie and Boisvert, conclude that according to Balzac most young girls, whatever form of education they had received, were left ill-equipped for life and marriage. Like E.M. Senn they find that neither Balzac's attitude to women's education nor his criticisms are very original; as regards the former Balzac was a traditionalist, and as regards the latter he had been preceded most notably by

1. quoted by Senn, op cit., p. 250.

2. ibid., p. 284.

Stendhal and George Sand. Between them these three critics have thoroughly charted the education available to young girls in the nineteenth century and its reflection in the Comédie humaine. H. Garrett's method is an analysis of the education of certain individual characters. M. Boisvert and M-H. Faillie have categorised, slightly differently, three types of education. For Boisvert the categories are public, private and domestic, and for Faillie private, domestic and masculine. Boisvert gives factual detail about the teachers and teaching in both public and private institutions, and finds that there is nothing on public education in the Comédie humaine for the simple reason that State-run schools for girls were almost non-existent, but that Balzac's depiction of education in private institutions is fairly accurate, although most of the young girls in the Comédie humaine receive a domestic education. Faillie tends rather to concentrate on Balzac's attitude to the consequences of the various categories of education. She incisively summarises Balzac's opinions: he considered education in a private institution morally dangerous and intellectually useless, domestic education variable, because of its total dependence on the calibre of the parents, and masculine education defeminising, sometimes dehumanising, as Camille de Maupin and Anaïs de Bargeton illustrate. The ideal education is that of Ursule Mirouët, whom Faillie has aptly termed a sort of feminine Emile, which is impossible to realise on a large scale.

It would be repetitious for me to recapitulate the research of these four critics, especially as I am in full agreement with their conclusions. Moreover, in Chapter V, I have shown that although Balzac seriously considered the question of feminine emancipation, he oscillated between approval of religious upbringing and grim examples of the effects thereof. Ultimately he shelved the whole problem by leaving the decision to the girl's mother.

Notwithstanding, there is one thing which should be emphasised: Balzac is very much a conservative of his time in his approach to feminine education. His intransigence is in curious contrast to his treatment of the young girl's characteristics. His opinions were permanently fixed at an early age. In 1819 he discouraged Laure from attempting to make a deep study of history for 's'enfoncer ... cela demande un homme entier Cela convient à un savant; à une mère de famille! non'.¹ Thirty years later, in 1849, he attempted to dissuade her from pursuing what she believed to be a literary vocation.²

Balzac's attack on the genteel futility of most existing types of feminine education is quite as justified as his criticism of men's education, and quite as unconstructive, for Balzac offers no alternative beyond stipulating that a girl's education should prepare her for marriage, and thus preferably be basically religious and moral rather than intellectual. This conformism is disappointing from one whose intuition of a girl's physical and emotional development could so often be pre-Freudian.

Social Education

De Marsay's observation on the superiority of a universal over a university education, quoted above, is part of a pedagogic tradition dating tortuously back to Montaigne. He believed that the most essential and difficult thing to learn is how to live life well. Although Balzac by no means discounted the importance of a formal education, he himself had found that the most valuable lessons had been those of personal experience, which for brevity I have called 'social education' although Flaubert's 'éducation sentimentale' is a more felicitous term. He readily

1. Corres. I, p. 60.

2. Corres. V p. 483.

acknowledged that Mme de Berny had formed him, both as a man and as a writer, speaking of her as 'cette âme qui avait élevé, suivi, fortifié mes essais'.¹

His realisation of his debt to her is transparent in Le Centenaire:

Mme de Beringheld is delighted when her son, the hero Tullius, falls in love with a woman of between thirty and forty years old, who lives a league away, is a beautiful, witty and wise 'héritière des maximes d'une cour détruite',² and undertakes to complete his education (sic).³ He regarded it as axiomatic that men receive the last rudiments of education from women.⁴ In addition Balzac prided himself on having been self-taught, on having escaped from the shackles of the school curriculum. In Louis Lambert the author and Louis find the latter sterile but the author learns to use Thought from his exhilarating contact with a mind of the angelic calibre of Louis.⁵ In La Rabouilleuse he proclaims his faith in 'cette profonde et sérieuse éducation que l'on ne tient que de soi-même'.⁶

In view of the preceding it was inevitable that Balzac should develop his own version of the literary genre of the 'Bildungsroman', a 'roman d'apprentissage, d'éducation, d'initiation',⁷ established by Goethe with his portrayal of Wilhelm Meister. In his analysis of the form the genre takes in Illusions perdues, Schilling looks at Lucien de Rubempré's predecessors both outside and in the Comédie humaine. Notable among the former is Julien Sorel and among the latter Benassis, Victurnien, Calyste, little Oscar, Raphaël, Félix de Vandenesse and Paul de Manerville.

1. Lettres à Mme H. I, p. 501: cf. ibid. p. 526 'elle a fait l'écrivain, elle a consolé le jeune homme'.

2. Le Centenaire, p. 155.

3. ibid., p. 189.

4. Phy p. 163. 'J'ai eu le bonheur de plaire dans ma jeunesse à un vieil émigré qui me donna ces derniers rudiments d'éducation que les jeunes gens reçoivent ordinairement des femmes'.

5. LL p. 81.

6. R p. 33.

7. B.N. Schilling. The Hero as Failure, p. 2.

Barb ris has also touched on this aspect of Balzac's work,¹ although he does not mention the genre as such. He notes that the development of the theme of a young man's initiation into the secrets of life in the Oeuvres de Jeunesse becomes one of education in the Com die humaine,² and that Balzac used the term 'l' cole de d senchantement' to describe certain works he considered capital, among which is Le Rouge et le Noir.³ The repetition of the concept of social education in the 'Bildungsromans' would seem to bear out Barb ris's contention that Balzac revived the original connotation of the word ' cole' which the Romantics had distorted into meaning 'chapelle' or 'camaraderie'.⁴

Schilling in particular has skilfully and thoroughly explored this field of Balzacian study, and has encompassed the media through which this education is given: life in general, society, Paris and women. I have, however, one reservation: Schilling's list of Lucien's predecessors might indicate that Balzac is only concerned with the social education of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. The Com die humaine shows, however, that social education is meted out to all classes. Most of the great courtisans of the Com die humaine have similar histories. Crevel gave fifteen-year-old Jos pha 'de l' ducation'⁵ and Hulot raised thirteen-year-old Jenny Cadine '  la brochette'.⁶ There is a kind of dramatic irony in the fact that Jos pha abandoned Crevel for Hulot after receiving from Jenny, Mme Schontz, Malaga and Carabine 'les instructions ... sur la mani re de traiter les vieillards'.⁷

1. in Balzac et le mal du si cle.

2. ibid., p. 543.

4. ibid., p. 1419.

6. ibid., p. 23.

3. ibid., p. 1417.

5. Be p. 22.

7. ibid., p. 24 (my underlining).

The Romantic cliché of education through suffering appealed to Balzac for the same reasons as the 'Bildungsroman' genre. He stated categorically: 'La souffrance doit être la substance même de toute bonne éducation',¹ and illustrated this axiom in the figures of Marguerite Claës, Louis Lambert and Etienne d'Hérouville who all undergo 'cette affreuse éducation de souffrance qui n'a jamais manqué aux natures angéliques'.² Nevertheless Balzac does have the merit of highlighting the obverse side of this Romantic myth which has an ironic, almost tragic, ring in the words of Gobseck: 'le malheur est notre grand maître'.³ Gobseck attributes his obduracy and impassivity to his 'education' as a cabin boy.⁴ Many of the villains or sinners in the Comédie humaine have been schooled by their suffering. Max Gilet was completely depraved by his term on a Spanish prison-ship, 'cette école de douleur'.⁵ Julie d'Aiglemont becomes unmaternal and self-seeking after Arthur Grenville's death, for her grief proves 'un terrible apprentissage d'égoïsme qui devait lui déflorer le cœur et la façonner au monde'.⁶ Suffering, then, teaches an ineradicable lesson to weak and strong alike.

It is obvious that much of the foregoing discussion on social education has been a summary. Nevertheless it had to be given in this thesis because social education is an illustration of the wide range of Balzac's interest in all aspects of education. It shows once more his modern realisation that in all of us there should be a child who never

1. J. Crépet. Pensées, sujets, fragmens, p. 158.

2. RA p. 236.

3. Gob p. 436.

4. ibid., cf. Nucingen's early history and its effect on him, S&M, vol. XV, p. 188.

5. R p. 369.

6. F30 p. 83.

quite grows up, who always continues to be ready to learn.

Finally, what is the value of Balzac's treatment of education - masculine, feminine and social? Like procreation, Balzac's interest in education is probably the outcome of his veneration of the Family, for Bonald had declared that the aim of marriage is dual: the production and conservation of children, and by conservation Bonald means 'le soin de l'éducation de l'enfant'.¹ Balzac's attitude to procreation is diametrically opposed to his attitude to education, although both are unstructured. The former is para-medical and often pre-Freudian. The latter is traditionalist, illiberal and unconstructive. However, the very range of Balzac's interest in it shows that there was no aspect of children's growth and development which Balzac left untouched.

1. quoted by Deniel, op. cit., p. 107.

CONCLUSION

During the composition of this thesis I was often tempted to echo Gide's judgement on the Comédie humaine: 'A travers quel fatras parfois on y va chercher nourriture!... Mais il importe d'avoir lu Balzac, tout Balzac'.¹ The sustenance, however, has been rewardingly abundant. By abandoning the traditional approach towards the child-figure in Balzac and, instead, sifting through the large body of pertinent data contained in his work, I was able to disprove the large number of critics who have asserted that he had no interest in children. An examination and grouping of relevant ideas and images demonstrated his immensely wide, if uncoordinated, concern with children and adolescents, a concern embracing characteristics of children, types of children and adolescents, procreation, growth and development and education. It seems appropriate to recall the conclusions I reached first, and then to determine the rôle played by the child and the adolescent in the Comédie humaine.

Balzac's treatment of children's characteristics is original because he refuses to under-rate their complexity. His attitude, in part exasperatingly Romantic, tends to be medically accurate according to the lights of the nineteenth century.

The Comédie humaine includes all types of children known at the time to literature, sociology and the law, although they do not receive equal attention. The emphasis is on spoilt and illegitimate children, the types nearest to Balzac's own experience. Despite a certain conventionality he is well ahead of his time in two important fields: that of medicine, by his intuition of psychosomaticism, and that of law, by his analysis of the 'adopted' child, which antedates the statute book by almost a century.

1. A. Gide. Incidences, p. 148.

His treatment of the two types of adolescent, male and female, is unequal. The former is thin. Balzac sets him accurately in the socio-political context of his century and portrays his sentimental education, but does not explore his physical and emotional development in depth. This is in strong contrast to his treatment of the young girl. He is pre-Freudian in his analysis of her subconscious, especially her latent sexuality, her ambiguous 'pudicité' and her relationship with her parents, particularly that with her mother. His biting depiction of the 'fille à marier', foreshadows Zola's acerbity. Despite Romantic and Rousseauist elements, such as disapproval of the influence of novels, theatres and servants, Balzac was one of the first in the nineteenth century to advocate some form of feminine emancipation and to consider the adolescent girl as a full-blooded, rather than anaemic, creature.

Balzac was the first novelist to explore procreation, child-bearing and child-rearing and was amazingly bold for his time. The range of his sources are diverse and include family, friends and his 'real' and literary works.

In his depiction of growth and development there is again a dichotomy between facile Romanticism and real profundity. The former appears in his sanctification of the state of childhood and the comparison between old age and second childhood. The latter is evinced in his intuition, expressed via the figures of the 'homme-enfant' and the 'femme enfant', of the necessity of a modicum of childishness to the healthy adult personality.

Balzac's discussion of education gives a fairly comprehensive survey of the educational system in the first half of the nineteenth century, as well as some of the commoner objections to it. Balzac is no educational reformer. His belief in the primordial importance of 'social' education

dates back to Montaigne at least. His attitude to formal education is to the Right of Guizot. However, his very mention of it shows that he did not neglect this aspect of childhood.

Two main criticisms may be levelled against Balzac's treatment of childhood and adolescence. Firstly, his interest, albeit immensely wide, is uncoordinated, save in specific areas like his cult of the Family and its corollaries, the myths of Paternity and Maternity. My interpretation of his scattered ideas does not pretend to be anything more than a general arrangement, and one is entitled to ask why Balzac never satisfactorily accomplished this himself. Secondly, his thinking on any one subject is often a juxtaposition of inconsistencies. A pertinent example is his Romantic-cum-medical approach, in which a facile acceptance of certain conventions is coupled with revolutionary psychological insights far in advance of his time. This leads one to attempt to evaluate the relevance of the child and the adolescent to the Comédie humaine.

There is no wholly satisfying explanation of why Balzac never properly synthesised his ideas himself. Lack of ability may be totally discounted. Lack of direct personal experience and lack of time may be accepted with reservations. Of these two the former is partially invalidated by Balzac's well-known powers of intuition and divination, and the latter by the fact that the last novels suggest an expiration of interest in children as distinct from an expiration of time. The most convincing reason - and the one which simultaneously underscores his originality - is the contemporary attitude towards the child.

The first half of the nineteenth century was a period when 'il n'était permis d'exister qu'à l'âge de la majorité légale'.¹ The law,

1. R. Pernoud. Histoire de la bourgeoisie en France, p. 395.

sociology and literature tended to ignore the child as an entity. The Code was interested in him insofar as he was entitled, or not, to be an heir. Sociologists were almost exclusively concerned with the serious and increasing problem of foundlings. Romantic writers saw in the child an avenue to nostalgic regression or a symbol of quintessential innocence, the less laudable traits of Rousseauism.

Thus childhood and youth were far from constituting the cult they do today. Hugo has often been hailed as the pioneer of the child in literature because of his descant on that passive and debatable attribute, innocence: his children, be they happy or persecuted, are a constant reminder of man's condition before the Fall. The true pioneer is, however, Balzac. In an age indifferent to children he ascribed to them a dynamic rôle in the ethos, outline and body of the Comédie humaine. He firmly held that the process of artistic production was akin to procreation. He consciously based the Comédie humaine on the idea of man's growth, from gestation to adulthood. He repeats in the Avant-Propos¹ that the Etudes de mœurs were planned to follow a chronological order and that the Scènes de la vie privée in particular were meant to represent the periods of childhood and adolescence, the individual's progress in, and almost inevitable growth out of, the eternally youthful qualities of unselfishness, generosity and naïveté.

In addition, children and adolescents are as important to the content of the Comédie humaine as they are to its structure. They illustrate, whether in person or through metaphor, 'les événements principaux de la vie ... des phases typiques'.² They provide yet another means of expression for Balzac's astonishing gift for psycho-analysis. As Mauriac observed: 'Il y a là un sujet de thèse ... découvrir ce qu'il y a dans

1. Avant-Propos, p. xxxvi.

2. loc. cit.

Balzac que l'on ne connaissait pas du temps de Balzac'.¹ His prophetic insights more than compensate for his intermittent literary and social conformism.

Despite undeniable shortcomings of presentation, the rôle of children and adolescents is of crucial importance to the genesis, framework and substance of the Comédie humaine. Here one finds conclusive proof that Balzac, and no other, is the true pioneer of the child in the French novel, for he foreshadowed some of Freud's discoveries by demonstrating that 'un enfant ... n'est-il pas toute l'humanité'.²

1. quoted by W.G. Moore. The Balzac Centenary, p. 328.

2. Appendix note to first edition of EG, Pléiade XI, p. 202.

APPENDIXAnalysis and criticism of *The Development of the Child Character in the Comédie humaine* by E.M. Senn.

At first sight the title and subject matter of Mrs. Senn's thesis seem to be the same as those of mine. Upon closer examination, however, it will be found that they are almost completely different in content, approach and conclusion. I shall prove this last assertion by giving a critical summary of Mrs. Senn's thesis and ending with a discussion of my personal strictures.

Mrs. Senn's thesis is divided into three chapters. In the first she sets out her aims in the form of questions. In the second she discusses the child in pre-Balzac literature and Balzac's association with children's literature of the nineteenth century, answers the questions posed in Chapter I, and discusses the child character in French literature subsequent to Balzac.

Mrs. Senn's questions are the following:

1. Does the child character exist in the Comédie humaine?
2. Is Balzac a painter of lifelike portraits?
3. Does he explain adult behaviour by the psychological process of exploring childhood?
4. Was the child character introduced early in Balzac's literary career or was it used to pad out existing individuals?
5. Did Balzac use it to reveal certain aspects of French life or his own theories of education?
6. Are his children his own creation or are they prototypes?

Author Sahli J

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