

have been able to find either in or outside the Comédie humaine is that of a young girl 'qui s'amuserait à fouetter l'eau de son bain'.¹ This conveys admirably the idle pleasure a young girl can find in a futile action, although the whole metaphor is incongruous in context as it describes Napoleon's treatment of Europe.

More serious than the unremarkable and restricted nature of the young girl images are Balzac's lapses into cheap 'roman noir' sensationalism. Chesnel, the faithful notary for the d'Esgrignon family, trembles 'comme une jeune fille qui se sauve de la maison paternelle pour n'y revenir que mère et désolée',² and later is as distraught as a man who sees his house burning, his child's cradle in flames - and, to pile on the agony! - 'se consumer leurs cheveux en sifflant'.³ Both these images are turgid and highly unsuitable as descriptions of a sexagenarian, childless widower. In the first Balzac attempts to create pathos by means of the picture of a defenceless girl, victim of a vile seducer and cast from her parents' door. In the second he achieves the horrific, and plays on contemporary bourgeois veneration for family solidarity. At other times his attempts at pathos result in the ludicrously melodramatic. Minna Becker utters the cry of a child on meeting a tiger.⁴ Etienne d'Hérouville's fear of his father is even more absurdly compared to 'l'agonie qui fait tomber une jeune fille à genoux devant un tigre'.⁵ In similar tone is Esther who looks at Europe imploringly 'comme un enfant aurait regardé sa mère

1. AEF p. 395.

2. CA p. 82.

3. CA p. 101.

4. Ser p. 187.

5. EM p. 376.

de qui quelque assassin le séparerait pour pouvoir le tuer'.¹ Sometimes the accent is on the mother who is facing the disaster. In La Recherche de l'absolu there is the image of a cying mother forced to leave her children 'dans un abîme de misères'.²

This sort of image is, alas, far from uncommon in the Comédie humaine and is a form of laziness on Balzac's part, a careless use of the same banalities rife in the Oeuvres de Jeunesse - tigers, fires and despairing mothers in incredibly fearsome situations. In Wann-Chlore Smithson's sorrow at Landon's departure is likened to that of a mother watching her last surviving child perish in a fire.³ Marianne begs the Centenaire for mercy 'd'un son de voix qui eût attendri un tigre'.⁴ Del Ryès' piano-playing rather incongruously reminds Sténie of 'les regrets d'une mère au tombeau de son fils'.⁵

Balzac's bad taste is not always so pronounced. However he is often guilty of exploiting the child figure for the purpose of pathos. He achieves this in extended images and Greuze-like tableaux. Jules and Clémence Desmarets behave like 'deux enfants, frère et soeur, qui veulent traverser une foule où chacun leur fait place en les admirant'.⁶ Just before tragedy strikes Balzac depicts them in similar terms: 'semblables à deux enfants qui, dans un moment de peur, se serrent, se pressent et se tiennent, s'unissant par instinct'.⁷ Sentimental touches like this

1. S&M, vol. XV, p. 230.

2. RA p. 124.

3. p. 1389.

4. Le Centenaire, vol. IV, p. 183. cf. Le Vicaire des Ardennes, vol. IV, p. 228 'une expression de supplication, qui aurait attendri un tigre'.

5. Sténie, p. 199. cf. Le Vicaire des Ardennes, vol. III, p. 86 'cette voix déchirante d'une mère espérant voir son seul enfant pour la dernière fois de sa vie'.

6. F pp. 30 - 31.

7. F p. 77.

are fairly frequent¹ and are meant to invoke the reader's pity.

The presence of children in the world of the Comédie humaine may give the seal of purity to certain characters. Popinot is clearly a man of integrity because among those seeking his advice is a young woman breast-feeding her babe and holding her five-year-old between her knees.² Bluff Gênestas realises at once what a virtuous region Vercors is when the first person he meets proves to be a peasant woman with her adopted children.³ The former 's'était faite mère comme Jésus-Christ s'était fait homme'³ and the latter are in the Romantic mould of mischievous innocence: 'hardis, tapageurs, aux yeux effrontés, jolis, bruns de teint, de vrais diables qui ressemblaient à des anges'.³ Alternatively the effect of a character's actions on a child may impress on him or on others the extent of his sinfulness. Benassis changed his way of life when his child smiled at him after his mother's death, unaware that Benassis was in fact her murderer.⁴ Benassis saw in this smile a symbol of pardon, and through repentance and devotion to the child he came to reflect on social injustice and then to translate reflection into action. He was given hope of succeeding when, in the house of the first person to trust him, he found a clean, neat woman suckling 'un gros enfant rose et blanc'.⁵ The havoc Lucien wreaks has the immediate effect of drying up his sister's milk and Balzac dwells on 'le beau sien ... tari par la douleur, et cette mère au désespoir de ne pouvoir accomplir son oeuvre maternelle'.⁶ Lucien himself seems obscurely aware

1. e.g. l'ys p. 266 - Félix; MCP p. 47 - Schmervieux.

2. In p. 332.

3. MC p. 10.

4. MC p. 208.

5. MC p. 40.

6. IP, vol XII, p. 398.

of the sanctity of childhood for he leaves his suicide note in the baby's cradle.

Were this iconography the only image of childhood in the Comédie humaine the latter were poor indeed. However Balzac is able to discern the hypocrisy latent in it. He describes adults ruthlessly exploiting the pity aroused by children. The unscrupulous Petid poses as 'le défenseur de la veuve, le tuteur de l'orphelin'.¹ The Code des gens honnêtes contains a tale of an aristocratic thief who dupes a doctor by pretending to be a 'mère éplorée, au désespoir'.² Moreover Balzac rarely takes high-flown child symbolism as far as Zola. Caroline Crochard suckling her baby³ is not as blatantly and insistently triumphant and symbolical as Clothilde in Zola's Docteur Pascal, although quite as sentimental.

Balzac's images of childhood are of extremely variable standard. Many give a fairly accurate picture of the life of nineteenth century children. Others are slipshod clichés and deserve to be dismissed with the scant attention he probably paid to their creation. On balance, however, they encourage the reader to conclude affectionately that children are 'cette mauvaise marchandise-là, qu'on aime tout de même'.⁴

1. IP, vol. XII, p. 578.

2. OD I, p. 77.

3. DF p. 255.

4. F p. 110.

Conclusion

In the preceding sections I have attempted to show that in the Comédie humaine there is a large body of observations about children and their characteristics. These are conveyed mainly in the form of similes and with reference to adult characters. I shall not elaborate on this stylistic aspect, as J.M. Burton has already done so in his Honoré de Balzac and his Figures of Speech. Mr. Burton expresses his surprise at the insistence on child life in Balzac's imagery, 'considering the very small place that the child holds in the Comédie humaine'.¹ He goes on to say that the number of images concerning the child indicates that 'Balzac had observed rather closely the good and bad sides of child nature'.¹ I am in full agreement with these remarks, but would go further and insist that the small number of child characters in the Comédie humaine is no proof that Balzac was not interested in children. Furthermore, I would enlarge on Mr. Burton's second comment and say that, except for his lapses into a 'roman noir' atmosphere, Balzac manifests a vigorous understanding of the child character, an understanding which is both medical and pictorial.

Balzac is a pioneer in the treatment of the child in literature, both because of his insistence on the child's complexity and because of his depiction of the child from a semi-medical rather than conventionally literary viewpoint. That the former is indebted to Rousseau does not make it synonymous with the latter which, although it could be described as Rousseauist, is unashamedly roseate. In fact, in Balzac's work we see him fumbling from the Rousseauist clichés of the Oeuvres de Jeunesse to present finally the not unalloyed perceptiveness of the Comédie humaine.

1. p. 11.

His lasting achievement is that he does not under-rate the complexity of the child, as did certain of his contemporaries. The concept of the child which may be culled from the Comédie humaine is one of an intricate, energetic being who is innocent yet capable of cruelty and greed, heedless yet persistent, helpless yet insatiably curious and depressingly logical, ignorant yet intuitive and wily. Balzac himself conveyed this complexity in simple and moving terms when he reflected that: 'Ceux qui n'ont pas d'enfants ignorent bien des plaisirs, mais ils évitent aussi bien des souffrances'.¹

1. R p. 279.

CHAPTER III

TYPES OF CHILDREN

The cult of youth seems to be mainly a twentieth century phenomenon. In the nineteenth century under the influence of patriarchal Roman law the Code's concern with children was limited to questions of guardianship, tutelage and duty to parents. The only specific categories of children in the Code were 'enfants adultérins', 'enfants naturels' and 'enfants trouvés'. Its attitude was summed up by Renan: '...la Révolution a créé ... un code de lois qui semble être fait pour un citoyen naissant enfant trouvé et mourant célibataire; un code qui rend tout viager, où les enfants sont un inconvénient pour le père'.¹ The limitations of these categories are further corroborated by the entries under Enfant in the index of the Bibliothèque historique de Paris, which houses most of the historical documents about Paris, and by J. Bonzon, author of a history of legislation for children.² Before 1850 the index names only 'l'enfant trouvé' and 'l'enfant abandonné'. Bonzon lists illegitimate children, both natural and adulterine, foundlings with whom a decree of 1811 equated orphans, 'l'enfance insoumise et coupable' and apprentices. He shows that it was only in the second half of the century that the law gave children rights and a certain amount of protection. For example in 1851 a law governing apprenticeship contracts was drawn up; in 1889 parents were divested of their authority if they exploited or ill-treated a child and in 1894 it was made possible for an illegitimate child to be legitimised in the 'acte de naissance'. Thus differences in types

1. quoted by R. Pernoud. Histoire de la bourgeoisie en France, p. 341.

2. J. Bonzon. Cent ans de lutte sociale: La législation de l'enfance. 1789 - 1894.

and conditions of children do not seem to have been a nineteenth century preoccupation. The only other social types then recognised may be culled from Les Français peints par eux-mêmes, and include the 'rat', 'gamin', 'enfant de fabrique' and 'rapin'.

All categories, both legal and literary, make some appearance in the Comédie humaine. In addition Balzac studies the only child, child prodigy, step-child and, obliquely, the adopted child. The size of each category was determined by his personal preoccupations. Thus he virtually ignored 'l'enfant trouvé', one of the great sociological problems of his time and adopted one of the current social prejudices by equating it with the illegitimate child rather than the orphan. He examined in greatest detail both the latter, and the spoilt child. This examination derives from his lasting resentment of Henry, his brother, who was inadvertently guilty of being both adulterine and spoilt. The adopted child was extremely rare in law in the first half of the nineteenth century and it was as late as 1923 that the law sanctioned the adoption of minors. Nevertheless, Balzac's relentless hankering for a substitute mother and his longing for vicarious paternity (primarily expressed in his artistic creativity and secondarily in his not unmotivated affection for Anna Hanska) led him to create by extension the adopted child, object of substitute parenthood.

I shall examine the categories of children I have been able to detect in the Comédie humaine in order of importance, beginning with the only child as a curtain-raiser to the spoilt child, and then going on to the illegitimate child, the adopted child, and in one section the child prodigy, orphan, step-child, 'gamin' and 'rat'. Discussion of these categories should show that, although their size was dictated by Balzac's personal bias, their very existence defies the assertion that children are absent from the Comédie humaine. I shall omit the 'rapin' or art student,

the 'enfant de fabrique' and the apprentice. 'Le rapin dénué, frétilant'¹ is sketched in the figure of Mistigris in Un Début dans la vie. Balzac entirely lacked interest in the exploitation of the child worker, and in this he was of his time for even Hugo mounted this particular hobby-horse only towards 1850. The 'enfant de fabrique' makes a minor appearance in the person of Europe who was an 'enfant de filature'.² The apprentice's existence and conditions of employment are relegated to the status of titbits of general information in novels like César Birotteau, which mentions César's employees, or Illusions perdues, which rapidly glosses over Cérizet's career as a printing works' apprentice.

Only Child

It seems logical to begin with this species as a sort of introduction to the major theme of the spoilt child because so many people regard the former as synonymous with the latter. For Balzac, however, unless a child is spoilt as well, his 'onliness' is merely one aspect - and then not the most important - of his character. This is evident from the Oeuvres de Jeunesse onwards. Annette Gérard, a precursor of Véronique Sauviat in that she is the cherished only child of a chaste couple, is a model heroine just as Tullius, an only son, is the epitome of manliness. The indulgence of Louis Lambert's parents in no wise affects his character adversely.³

This absence of prejudice about the only child was probably due to Balzac's lack of experience. There were no only children in his immediate circle, for bourgeois families of the time tended to have more than one child, feeling instinctively that only one indicated either lack

1. CSS p. 300. Pernoud, op. cit. p. 341.

2. S&M, vol. XVI, p. 200.

3. LL p. 45, 'D'ailleurs le tanneur et sa femme chérissaient Louis comme on chérit un fils unique et ne le contrariaient en rien'.

of confidence in the future or an obsession with the heir's enrichment and social ascension.¹ On the other hand, spoiled and illegitimate children were very near home for Balzac in the person of the aggravating and, one feels, rather pathetic Henry. These were types which obsessed Balzac from his youth, and as early as 1822 he announced his intention to give full-length treatment to Le Râtard, a plan unrealised.²

For these reasons Balzac names but one thing common to all only children: parents almost inevitably idolise them either from motives of vanity or family pride. Calyste du Guénic is dear to his parents because he is their sole heir and only scion.³ Diane de Maufrigneuse dotes on her Georges because he flatters her vanity,⁴ and Eugénie Grandet is the one human being to mean anything to her father for she is his only heir, and hence an extension of his monomaniacal avarice.⁵

Parents may make great sacrifices for only children from less venial motives. Godefroid's parents send him to an aristocratic school from the age of seven in order to give him the best possible chance in life.⁶ Mme Poulain willingly gives all she possesses for the education of her only son, her Esculapeus.⁷

The two exceptions, fathers who do not idolise their only child, are old Séchard and Lecamus. The latter secretly adores his son but is too proud to show his feelings.⁸ The former is a thorough-going villain,

1. A. Daumard. La Bourgeoisie parisienne de 1815 - 1848, p. 339.

2. Introduction to EM in CH 'Aux Editions du Seuil', vol. VII.

3. B p. 24, 'l'attachement ... pour le fils unique, pour Calyste, l'héritier, le seul espoir du grand nom des du Guénic'.

4. SPC p. 306. 'Georges de Maufrigneuse est d'ailleurs un de ces enfants qui peuvent flatter toutes les vanités d'une mère'.

5. EG p. 286, 'le seul être qui lui fût réellement de quelque chose, sa fille Eugénie, sa seule héritière'.

6. EHC p. 218.

7. CP p. 175.

8. Cath p. 248.

epitomising (for Balzac) peasantry at its worst and most typical. He treats David harshly so that his son will exact as little as possible from, and give as much to, him both financially and emotionally.¹

But for this general advantage of unmitigated parental adoration, the only child is not an independent, easily recognisable type in the Comédie humaine. The representatives of both likeable and unpleasant only children are many. The angelic genius Louis Lambert, redeemed sinner and martyr Véronique Graslin, and the incarnation of both real maternity and 'maternité d'amour' Henriette de Mortsauf, were all only children. Unpleasant only children like Cécile Camusot, Anaïs de Nègrepelisse and Désiré Minoret are antipathetic because they are first and foremost spoilt. They have exactly the same characteristics as spoilt children, being cold and selfish,² and able to exploit their parents' indulgence with skill. For example, Désiré Minoret obtains money from each parent by pretending to prefer each in turn.³ Like spoilt children antipathetic only children tend to be egoistic and unfeeling like Anaïs and Désiré, or immature, easily influenced and somewhat effete like Calyste du Guénic.

Therefore the shadowy outline of the 'only child' type is distinguishable in the Comédie humaine, but the 'onliness' is highlighted only when such a child is spoilt as well.

Spoilt Child

In the eighteenth century painters like Greuze shamelessly exploited domestic dramas, among which were the pathetic scenes of punished or ungrateful sons and spoilt children. The latter is the only specific type of child singled out by Rousseau. Balzac also gives prominence to

1. IP, vol. XI, pp.130, 174.
2. ibid., p. 210. Anaïs' solitary upbringing in the company of inferiors and 'des gens empressés de lui obéir' results in her losing 'l'habitude de se gêner pour autrui'.
3. UM p. 8. cf. Amaury Lupin who never exhausts his father's patience, although he abuses the advantages of being an only son by his frequent calls for money. (Pay p. 277)

these types - not so much because they provide a convenient stereotype but because of his family background and in particular his brother Henry. I shall merely summarise this background because it has been competently treated in two articles: Henry le trop aimé by M. Fargeaud and R. Pierrot,¹ and P. Citron's Psychologie de Balzac.²

Henry, the last-born of Honoré's siblings, was almost certainly the illegitimate son of Mme de Balzac by M. de Margonne. In any case this was what Honoré believed and he told Mme Hanska that 'M. M(argonne) est le père de Henri',³ regretting the fact that Henry had never been as dear to Margonne as the latter's illegitimate daughter Alix.⁴ Many years earlier Honoré had written wistfully to his mother that he envied Margonne for having been the first person to make her happy.⁵ That Margonne was in fact Henry's father seems to be substantiated by his bequest of 200,000 gold francs to Henry, and by Honoré's tact in transferring the dedication of Les deux Frères, the first version of La Rabouilleuse, from Margonne to Delacroix.⁶ He probably did this out of respect because openly planned the theme of the book to be the following: 'N'est-ce pas ... important pour l'histoire de l'Humanité d'expliquer pourquoi deux frères nés du même père et de la même mère peuvent un jour se trouver non seulement indifférents mais encore étrangers, et pis que cela, peut-être, ennemis'.⁷

1. AB 1961.

2. AB 1967

3. Lett. à Mme H. IV p. 395.

4. Ibid. p. 387.

5. Corres. II, p. 30.

6. P. Citron's introduction to R. Garnier, p. 419.

7. ibid.

Honoré always seems to have ferociously resented Henry more because he was the unworthy favourite of Mme de Balzac than because he was illegitimate. It is well known how friendly Balzac remained with the Margonne family all his life, enjoying and putting to good use their hospitality at Saché despite his gibe at Margonne's meanness.¹ Moreover, Balzac does not seem to have exaggerated the extent of his mother's preference for Henry, as her will shows. Both the designation of her sons and their respective inheritances indicate a bias in Henry's favour: 'Je donne et lègue à honoré (sic) Balzac mon fils aîné tous les livres de métaphysique qui se trouvent chez moi, le bougeoir d'argent qui me servait tous les jours et ma petite cafetière d'argent.

....

Je donne et lègue à mon cher fils henry (sic) ma bibliothèque et les livres qu'elle contiendra (hors ceux de métaphysique), ma petite montre et ma cafetière d'argent'.²

Until about 1836 Balzac alternated between open avowal of his resentment against Henry and emphatic protestations of his indifference towards him. His comments are worth quoting for their heartfelt vigour of expression. As early as 1821 he was parodying Mme de Balzac's expression of fondness for Henry, '... on tanne cet enfant-là, il ne fera rien, il faut le changer de pension, ce sont des cafards, c'est une éducation manquée; on les retient, on les accable de punitions pour des riens etc.'³ In the following letter he sarcastically describes 'une soirée ousqu'il (sic) y avait ... autres friandises, parmi lesquelles il faut compter Henri'.⁴ Then, shortly afterwards in another letter, the offhand comment, 'Henri, un bijou ou un écervelé comme tu voudras.

1. Lettres à Mme H. II, p. 471.

2. quoted by P. Citron, AB 1967.

3. Corres. I, p. 108.

4. Corres. I. p. 111.

Je déclare n'avoir aucune opinion sur lui'.¹ To his mother he complained 'J'ai vu Henri, mais je n'ai rien de bon à t'en dire';² to Zulma Carraud 'Henri est pour nous tous une cause de larmes et de désespoirs';³ and 'ma mère meurt des chagrins que lui cause Henri';⁴ and to the mysterious Louise 'la situation et tout de lui nous fait le plus vif chagrin'.⁵ With time, however, Balzac became more tolerant. In 1834 he comments to Mme Hanska, a shade smugly, that his brother has made a bad marriage, and that 'le pauvre enfant n'a ni esprit, ni énergie, ni talent. Les hommes de volonté sont rares!'.⁶ As early as this date we find him making one of several exasperated attempts to help Henry. He speaks of trying to do something for his brother, but asks his mother not to mention it in case Henry thinks that he will always be able to rely on him.⁷ In 1835 he tells Mme Hanska that, despite his intention never to stand godfather to anyone, he has agreed to do so for his nephew, Henry's son, because it was impossible to refuse his unfortunate brother.⁸ In 1843 he wrote to the Governor of l'Ile Bourbon on Henry's behalf. His increasing tolerance may have been encouraged by the fact that after Henry's return from Mauritius Mme de Balzac, profoundly disillusioned, came closer to Laure and to Honoré. However, it was really too late to do Henry any good or to erase Honoré's bitterness which exploded in a letter he wrote to her the year before he died: 'Dieu et toi savez bien que tu ne m'as pas

1. ibid., p. 117.
2. Corres. II, p. 756.
3. ibid., p. 662.
4. Corres. III, p. 109.
5. ibid., p. 25.
6. Lettres à Mme H. I, p. 237.
7. Corres. II, p. 577.
8. Lettres à Mme H. I, p. 318.

étouffé de caresses ni de tendresses depuis que je suis au monde, et tu as bien fait, car si tu m'avais aimé comme tu as aimé Henri, je serais sans doute où il est'.¹

Balzac's sharp criticism of Henry was not without foundation. When the latter was twelve his masters at the Collège Sainte-Barbe judged him as follows: 'Tête légère, capricieuse, et qui sans une tenue ferme se livrerait à de fréquents écarts.... Elle est d'ailleurs facile à ramener. Le fond du caractère est bon'.² Henry himself acknowledged to Laure his laziness, frivolity, instability and lack of application.³ All his life he was to be a boasting, lazy ne'er-do-well. He died a pauper in Mauritius.

This 'running sore'⁴ in Honoré's heart was bound to have repercussions in the Comédie humaine. In the article referred to above, P. Citron has analysed some of these. After observing that Mme de Balzac may have been courted by a Spanish refugee as well as by M. de Margonne, M. Citron continues: 'Les fautes de la mère, la préférence pour le cadet adultérin faible et nul, les brimades à l'égard du bon fils légitime, tout cela se retrouvera comme une constante à travers une bonne partie de la Comédie humaine, avec des variantes diverses'.⁵ Components of these diverse variants are the six pairs of opposed brothers listed by M. Citron, namely Francisque and Georges d'Aiglemont, Charles and Félix de Vandenesse, Felipe and Fernand Hénarez, Philippe and Joseph Bridau, Etienne and Maximilien d'Hérouville, Francisque and Juan Diard. In three pairs

1. Corres. V, p. 12.

2. quoted in AB 1961, p. 34.

3. ibid., pp. 35 - 37.

4. Corres. II, p. 741, 'Là est la plaie incurable'.

5. op. cit., pp. 4 - 5.

out of six one brother is illegitimate, even if it be only in the mind of the father, as in the case of Etienne d'Hérouville. It is interesting that in two pairs one brother is called Francisque, which M. Citron suggests derives from Bernard-François (Balzac) and that, significantly, the d'Aiglemont couple originally consisted of two brothers, the elder of whom pushes the younger into the river. In the final version of Le Doigt de Dieu it is, of course, the elder sister Hélène who does this. These six pairs of brothers are not the only illustrations of Balzac's resentment against Henry. Citron thinks that in Le Contrat de mariage Paul de Manerville may be modelled on Henry, and that de Marsay may represent Honoré, the strong man who is not defeated. Mme Gérard finds in the Lucien/David relationship in Illusions perdues a possible reflection of the Henry/Honoré relationship. David takes the role of the gifted, misunderstood surrogate elder brother and Lucien that of the charming, spoilt, over-valued n'er-do-well.

In the course of the six novels referred to, Citron has traced a gradual resolution of Balzac's inner conflict, culminating in La Rabouilleuse where the good brother Joseph triumphs over the bad brother Philippe, almost certainly a parallel with good Honoré versus bad Henry. In his preface to La Rabouilleuse Citron notes the irony of the situation, for at the time of composition Balzac was behaving more like Philippe in his egoism, self-indulgence and insatiable demands for money, which he was then loath to repay.¹ I am in agreement with Citron's chronological study of Balzac's feelings about Henry, for an examination of the Comédie humaine shows that an analysis of spoilt children's characteristics as well as the

1. R, ed. Garnier, p. xxv.

four full-length portraits of main characters who are spoilt children appear in the novels written before 1841. Nevertheless it must not be forgotten that although Honoré's virulence about Henry seems to have diminished gradually after 1836 when the latter left Europe, it was never eradicated, as the 1849 letter to his mother shows.

Balzac's attitude seems to have been largely, although by no means wholly, determined by his home situation. He sometimes attempts to transpose elements of the latter, and makes the elder son the spoiled child, as is the case with the Vandenesse and Bridau brothers. He betrays himself, however, by using 'Benjamin' as a synonym for 'spoilt child',¹ even when such a child is the elder as is the case with Philippe Bridau.²

All the 'Benjamins' are good-for-nothings, and that in Le Médecin de campagne is scrofulous and sickly as well. Balzac devotes some time to analysing the reasons for a mother's preference for an undeserving Benjamin, and finds them either in her personality or in her state of mind at the time of conception. A mother's reluctance to have her children become independent of her³ may lead her to prefer the weakest or least talented child, one of those children who 'infailliblement repoussés de la vie tiennent au coeur des mères par des liens plus forts que ceux des enfants heureusement doués'.⁴ She may also have a preference for one child because she feels for him both 'la maternité de la chair' and 'la maternité du coeur'.⁵ The reader may justifiably consider this an indictment of Mme de Balzac, and in chapter VI we shall see how it was one

1. BS p. 82, MC p. 11.

2. R p. 311.

3. B p. 58, 'les véritables mères... aiment mieux leurs enfants petits et protégés'.

4. F30 p. 85.

5. F30 p. 96.

of the starting points of Balzac's meditation on the mysteries of procreation.

Henry must have obliged Honoré to admit that spoilt children are not necessarily pitiable physical specimens. Balzac was fully aware that children are often spoilt because they are attractive. Lucien de Rubempré's aristocratic beauty is shown to advantage by his winning ways and his charming manner of expressing impatience.¹ Nathalie Evangélista has the charm of spoilt children who have never suffered.² Emilie de Fontaine hides her faults under a veneer of youthful charm and bewitching social graces.³

Balzac does not only criticise the spoilt child because of, and in the light of, sibling jealousy. He gives four full-length portraits of spoilt children - Lucien de Rubempré, Oscar Husson, Emilie de Fontaine and Victurnien d'Esgrignon - two of whom are only children while the remaining two provoke no sibling jealousy. Balzac's analysis of the characteristics of spoilt children probably originates in his own experience but also seems to be an enlargement on DSM's disapproving definition of a spoilt child: 'On voit ... combien l'enfant gâté prodigue ses facultés morales et corporelles en se livrant, sans contrainte, à toute la vanité de ses désirs. L'expérience a prouvé que ces enfants idolâtrés devenaient toujours ingrats envers des parens trop indulgens dont la faiblesse les a rendus méprisables aux yeux mêmes de ceux qui en sont l'objet. C'est qu'il en résulte d'immenses désavantages pour ces jeunes individus eux-mêmes'.⁴ All these strictures are emphatically presented in the Comédie humaine.

1. IP, vol. XI, p. 308.

2. CM p. 230.

3. BS p. 90.

4. DSM p. 243.

A recurring theme in Balzac's work from early on is that spoiled children fritter away their talents. In *Sténie* Del Ryès reflects that man can only exploit his full potential in an inhospitable environment for where Nature is indulgent 'on jouit de ses bienfaits et le moral se ressent du bien-être; c'est l'histoire des enfants gâtés'.¹ In the *Comédie humaine* a spoiled child is *ipso facto* one who quickly tires of any study requiring assiduity and application.² Spoiled children waste their moral faculties in self-indulgence and capriciousness. Sabine du Guénic resents her husband's tendency to treat whatever she does for him as his due, just as the spoiled child he used to be would accept everything from his parents.³ Emilie de Fontaine's moodiness is that of all spoiled children who 'semblables à des rois, s'amuse de tout ce qui les approche'.⁴ Similarly that of Moïna d'Aiglemont is an expression of 'les capricieux vœux de l'enfant gâté'.⁵

Balzac endorses DSM's belief that over-indulgence rebounds on the parents, for it renders them the object of ingratitude and contempt. Goriot is, of course, the supreme example. He admits that he is to blame for his daughters' selfishness for he has abdicated his God-given position of authority and 'les meilleures âmes auraient succombé à la corruption de cette facilité paternelle'.⁶ Even when Balzac does not adopt the tone of a prophet of doom he shows that at the very least spoiling is 'une tendresse malentendue',⁷ for the parents will either be despised by their

1. *Sténie*, p. 141.

2. *Phy* p. 65, '... comme un enfant gâté, il se lassa d'une étude qui demandait une habileté trop longue à acquérir'.

3. *B* p. 262.

4. *BS* pp. 90-91.

5. *F30* p. 209.

6. *PG* p. 498.

7. *E* p. 7.

children or loved for the wrong reasons. Victor Grandet forfeited any hope of lasting gratitude from Charles once he had made his son's desires his command. The latter loved him, not from genuine filial affection but because he had been denied nothing.¹ Both Goriot and Victor Grandet are, in the ultimate resort, failures as fathers, just as their children are failures as people. Balzac underlines this moral lesson throughout the Comédie humaine, going far beyond DSM's relative moderation. Julie d'Aiglemont impoverishes herself so that Moïna may make a good marriage, and is repaid with scorn and indifference.² Lucien de Rubempré does worse: he brings his loving family to financial ruin, and the tragedy is that their sacrifice is futile because it is given in the service of an illusion.³ Indulgence of offspring morally enervates the parents. Goriot does much to redeem himself by his admission of guilt, but Victor Grandet and Julie d'Aiglemont die unsung. For Balzac, just as the consequences of spoiling for parents far surpass those envisaged by DSM, so are the 'immenses désavantages' for children almost catastrophic. These include inevitable encounter with misfortune or a fate of mediocrity. Désiré Minoret's death is Providence's punishment of himself and his parents. Valérie Marneffe's ruthlessness, acquired in her spoilt childhood, gives her the power to realise any whim but even she is finally defeated and dies a repulsive death. Where spoilt children are not diabolical or antipathetic, they are at best weak like Lucien and Victornien, inept like Oscar Husson or self-interested like Charles Grandet.

1. EG p. 396.

2. cf. Don Juan who loves his father because of his expectation of a large inheritance (Elv p. 85).

3. cf. Victornien d'Esgrignon who avoids bringing ruin and disgrace on his family only through the good offices of Diane de Maufrigneuse.

Balzac firmly held that spoiling a child is equivalent to crippling him emotionally, because it renders him selfish and unfeeling. Julie de Chatillon rewards her father's sacrifices with patronising affection,¹ and Emilie de Fontaine is as condescendingly affectionate as those children who always seem to be saying to their mother 'Dépêche-toi de m'embrasser pour que j'aie à jouer'.² Like them Charles Grandet is incapable of sustaining lofty sentiments because he was made too continuously happy by his parents.³ Such shallowness of feeling can degenerate into cruelty. When Hélène d'Aiglemont is discovered dying in a Pyrenean hotel, Moïna's only reaction is curiosity.⁴ It can sink lower into downright perversity or even corruption. Emilie de Fontaine tyrannises those who love her and reserves her 'coquetteries' for indifferent outsiders.⁵ Charles Grandet's gestures resemble those of a 'petite maîtresse',⁶ and Don Juan and the Goriot daughters behave like courtesans deigning to permit their fathers to love them. Ultimately Charles Grandet and the Goriot girls turn on their fathers and blame them, committing one of the greatest sins in Balzac's code, 'lèse-paternité'. Perversity turns into perversion in Un Drame au bord de la mer which is a moral tale recounting the punishment of a spoilt child turned pervert and incorrigible criminal.

1. F30 p. 16.

2. BS pp. 90 - 91.

3. EG p. 397.

4. F30 p. 200.

5. BS p. 83.

6. EG p. 350 *cf.* Moïna has 'toutes les vanités de la petite maîtresse'.
F30 p. 209

This emotional crippling means that spoilt children are incapable of making a happy marriage. Balzac considers Julie d'Aiglemont's marriage doomed from the start because both she and her husband were spoilt children, and therefore tyrannical and uncompromising.¹ Spoilt children tend to be embittered, unfaithful or generally unsatisfactory spouses. Emilie de Fontaine is so discontented in her second marriage to Charles de Vandenesse that she spitefully tries to sabotage the happiness of her sister-in-law in Une fille d'Eve. Julie and Moïna d'Aiglemont, the Goriot daughters and Calyste du Guénic embark on violent extra-marital affairs. Rabourdin has difficulty in controlling his wife, née Célestine Leprince, for her mother's 'gâteries continues' have made her insufferably conceited.² Balzac makes a spoilt child the pivotal cause of Pons' downfall: Fritz Brunner refuses to marry Cécile Camusot because he had suffered under a stepmother who had been spoilt as a child. She grew up to be a wilful woman who made an enchanting fiancée and a diabolical wife.³

Balzac is - for him! - unusually logical and uncontradictory in his concept of the spoilt child, even in his purely metaphorical use of the term 'enfant gâté'. Maxence Gilet has been treated as a spoilt child by Nature who has lavished on him her gifts of courage, self-command and political acumen.⁴ His vanity, however, makes it easy for Philippe Bridau to pick a quarrel with him and provoke him to the duel in which he is killed. Henriette de Mortsauf treats her husband like a spoilt child,⁵

1. F30 pp. 17 - 18.

2. E p. 7.

3. CP p. 66.

4. R p. 543.

5. Lys p. 193.

but he is none the better for it. Antoinette de Langeais and Diane de Maufrigneuse are two of several society queens who are the spoilt children of civilisation, but neither is fundamentally a happy person. The Comte de Sérisy treats his wife like a spoilt child and ignores her amorous escapades, but his lenience does not prevent her unbridled passion for Lucien, which almost drives her mad. The perversity of spoilt children is conveyed in the comparison of a Parisian to a spoilt child who is sulking.¹ Even when Balzac uses this metaphor affectionately with regard to Mme Hanska he remains true to his basic concept of the spoilt child. He tells her she is a spoilt child because she is too well loved ever to be considered guilty of the least fault.² She commits little sins which, like a spoilt child, she only admits long afterwards.³

As we have seen, there are many spoilt children in the Comédie humaine, but I shall not discuss each in detail. Characters like Charles Grandet, Moïna d'Aiglemont, Désiré Minoret and Cécile Camusot are not main characters and I have mentioned above their common traits. Although Philippe Bridau is a scoundrel and Julie d'Aiglemont self-willed, and both owe these traits directly to their indulgent upbringing, Balzac focuses attention on their adulthood rather than their childhood. Often the fact that a character has been spoilt as a child is one brushstroke in a composite portrait, as is the case with Marie de Verneuil and Célestine Rabourdin, née Leprince. Nathalie Evangelista and, even more so, Valérie Marneffe are more 'femmes fatales' than spoilt children. In essence Balzac gives four full-length portraits of spoilt children: Lucien de Rubempré

1. MC p. 181.

2. Lettres à Mme H. 1, p. 60.

3. ibid., p. 383.

Oscar Husson, Victurnien d'Esgrignon and Emilie de Fontaine. I shall discuss Lucien's character in a later section on 'l'homme-enfant' and deal with the other three here.

Victurnien d'Esgrignon illustrates perfectly how not to bring up a child. Motherless in infancy, he has always been idolised by his father and his maiden aunt, both because his beauty and intelligence flatter their vanity,¹ and because he will continue the d'Esgrignon name.² Balzac tells us that as soon as Victurnien was able to reason he was inculcated with the dogmas of his personal superiority and that of the aristocracy.¹ His elders have unwittingly nurtured in him the defects of selfishness, self-will and hedonism. His princely egoism was firmly rooted in him during his happy childhood and halcyon adolescence, for he never met with opposition. He judges anything by the pleasure it is capable of furnishing, and is quite happy for others to repair his mistakes, heedless of the cost to them.³ This effete young man is a sitting target for Du Croisier's machinations.

Oscar Husson, on the other hand, is a figure of fun - farce almost. It has been rightly said that the beginning at least of Un Début dans la vie has all the elements of excellent vaudeville.⁴ The relationship between Oscar and his doting mother is delightfully delineated in the scene of the departure of the 'coucou', a small horse-omnibus.⁵ The over-anxious Mme Clapart mortifies her son by pressing on him bread,

1. CA p. 29.

2. ibid., p. 51.

3. ibid., p. 54.

4. Dictionnaire Larousse, p. 84.

5. Dlv p. 329.

chocolate and advice. Oscar gets rid of her, pretending concern for her health, and later denies to his travelling companions that she is his mother.

Balzac continually contrasts Oscar as seen by his mother with Oscar as seen by others. In the same 'coucou' scene Balzac himself comments that 'Oscar a une bonne dose de sottise, d'outrecuidance que ne soupçonne pas sa mère'. Count Sérisy says that Oscar is vain, not proud, in refusing to beg his pardon for a proud man is capable of humbling himself.¹ When Oscar returns home in disgrace, his step-father Clapart judges him as 'vantard, menteur, paresseux, incapable', whereas his mother coos that he is 'plein de bonnes qualités, d'une douceur d'ange'.²

Therefore Oscar is a figure of fun, whereas Victurnien is almost one of tragedy. Despite his light treatment of Oscar, Balzac remains a sociologist, and his analysis of the causes of Oscar's faults is sound. These causes are his over-anxious, coddling mother and his Napoleonic upbringing. Mme Clapart is unaware of the incongruity of telling an adolescent to go and look at the flowers in the garden without touching them.³ Oscar's education left him with vivid memories of Imperial splendour, and his consciousness of France's past glory developed 'la jactance naturelle aux collégiens... outre-mesure'.⁴

Le Bal de Sceaux is mainly the study of a spoilt child, Emilie de Fontaine, who throws away the chance of marrying the man she loves by her selfishness, which Balzac believes to be natural to spoilt children,

1. Dlv p. 416.

2. ibid., p. 418.

3. ibid., p. 429.

4. ibid., p. 329.

and by the arrogance and pride which her fond mother has encouraged in her since childhood. Like Oscar and Victurnien her every whim has been satisfied. She is despotic and self-centred, and the reader will not be surprised to meet her in *'Une Fille d'Eve'* as the soured, mischief-making, discontented wife of the unpleasant Charles de Vandenesse. The pointed warning against the effects of an indulgent upbringing on a defective character makes the laconic dedication of the book 'A Henri de Balzac - Son frère Honoré' seem more than a coincidence.

These four spoilt children, then, corroborate Balzac's theory of the spoilt child as an undeserving, selfish, indifferent creature, the object of a misguided exaggeration of parental love. All four inflict pain on their family, and all come to grief because of their contempt of a father or mother. Oscar is the only one who redeems himself by an act of courage which enables him to live comfortably, if obscurely, as a collector of taxes in the Oise district.

In conclusion it must now be obvious that Balzac's detailed attention to the spoilt child was chiefly motivated by his home situation. The spirit animating him is that of a prophet vindicated, the sombre ascertainment that: 'Ma mère ... semble reconnaître ... les torts énormes de son peu d'affection pour moi et ma soeur. Elle est punie dans l'enfant de son choix d'une affreuse manière. Henri n'est rien, ne sera rien, et il a gâté l'avenir ... par son mariage'.¹ The reader may jib at the fact that all the spoilt children in the *Comédie humaine* conveniently come to grief either permanently or temporarily, but one cannot deny that Balzac's analysis of spoilt children is comprehensive and trenchant despite its didactic intent.

1. *Lettres à Mme H.* I, p. 268.

Illegitimate Child

Illegitimate children constituted a dual problem in the nineteenth century, both sociological, as the Index of the Bibliothèque Historique indicates, and legal, as the Code shows. Bonzon's Cent ans de lutte sociale is illuminating on the legal aspect, and a work of interest, mainly on the sociological, is F. Desportes' Essai historique sur les enfants naturels, published in 1857. Desportes, a near contemporary of Balzac, appears to have been a conservative 'bien pensant' advocate, whose work is representative of what right-minded bourgeois thinking was at the time.

A study of the legal history of children reveals that during the Revolution it was decided to give illegitimate children the same rights as legitimate ones. However, when the Code was formulated, a distinction was made between 'enfants naturels simples' and 'enfants naturels adultérins ou incestueux'. The first category could be legitimised, but the second could only be adopted provided that the adoptant had no children or legitimate descendants of his own. Desportes declared that these provisions aimed at safeguarding the institution of marriage for people should be discouraged from producing adulterine children, supposedly the unhappy fruits of the misdemeanor of adultery or the crime of incest - 'ces désordres révoltants'.¹ He also thought that a distinction between natural and illegitimate children was proper and Christian, and that legitimization was a favour not a right. This sort of prejudice was long in disappearing. Illegitimate children were regarded as tainted from birth, and were excluded from many creches,

1. F. Desportes. Essai historique sur les enfants naturels, p. 110.

even when the latter were officially recognised in 1862.

Balzac had personal experiences of both natural and adulterine children. His brother-in-law Surville was an 'enfant naturel simple' who had obtained the right to his father's name and inheritance. His father had written a Mémoire sur le scandaleux désordre causé par les jeunes filles trompées et abandonnées dans un absolu dénuement. Balzac himself had probably had two natural children of his own: a presumed adulterine son by Sarah Guidoboni-Visconti, and a daughter by Maria du Fresnay. He admitted the existence of the latter to Eve.¹ As we have seen Henry was almost certainly the adulterine son of Mme de Balzac by M. de Margonne, and although Citron has amply demonstrated how much of his resentment Balzac worked out in the novels, a lot remained. Autre Etude de femme, barely completed in 1842, is an expression of Balzac's disgust at his mother's adultery. In 1847 he sketched a plan of Le Père, a melodrama about a father who saves his son who has killed his mother's lover.²

Possibly because of his family circumstances and the greater tolerance of the Code in this respect, Balzac was fairly sympathetic towards 'enfants naturels simples'. M. Regard may be right in suggesting that the reason for Balzac's gradual detachment from Hélène de la Valette was not his discovery of the existence of her natural son but the death of Count Hanski which renewed his hopes as regards Eve.³ Be that as it may, Balzac is unprejudiced about such characters as Benassis' son and Adrien Genestas, and admiring of Albert Savarus and Juan Diard. He is also sympathetic towards adulterine children when they have no co-heirs

1. Lettres à Mme H. IV, p. 273.

2. J. Crépet. Pensées, sujets, fragments, pp. 142 - 143.

3. Balzac, ed. Garnier, p. xxxvi.

to disadvantage, like Lady Brandon's sons or Diane de La Baudraye's children. By registering his wife's children by Lousteau as his own, La Baudraye is punishing her (deservedly according to Balzac), safeguarding the future of his name and rendering a service to the children. Most of Balzac's courtisanes 'with a heart of gold' are illegitimate like Coralie (at any rate Balzac never gives her parents' name and only mentions that her mother 'sold' her¹), Esther, Josépha and even the ambiguous Malaga of La fausse Maitresse, who was a foundling - stolen perhaps (!) There are few dislikeable 'enfants naturels simples' like Du Tillet, Cérizet and Mouche, the natural son of one of Fourchon's natural daughters, but they are in the minority.

Balzac is curiously indifferent to the question of foundlings, which constituted a major sociological problem of the first half of the nineteenth century, so much so that under the heading Bâtard DSM refers the reader to its long article on Enfants trouvés. The problem was the subject of numerous Parliamentary debates, regional conferences and fact papers. I have, however, been able to find in the Comédie humaine only two references to foundlings as a sociological entity, and then the second reference is debatable. As was the custom, Butscha remains with the person who first takes him in - in his case Mme Latournelle. Terme and Montfalcon, the authors of a sociological study published in 1840, tell us that foundlings often become criminals because of 'cet affranchissement de toute responsabilité de famille'.² Du Tillet's behaviour verges on the criminal, first when he steals from César Birotteau's cash-till and later when he aids the shady bankers, Keller and Nucingen.

1. IP, vol. XI, p. 93.

2. J-F Terme and J-B Montfalcon. Histoire des Enfants trouvés, p. 309.

On the whole, however, Balzac has a sentimental, romanticising attitude to foundlings. Two at least have a literary origin. Balzac hints that Butscha was inspired by Scott's 'Black Dwarf',¹ and surrounds him with a certain atmosphere of mystery, telling us that his effective father is the public prosecutor and his mother public charity,² for his real father was a Swedish sailor and his mother died of sorrow in the poorhouse.³ Du Tillet's literary antecedent is Emile, the hero of Girardin's autobiographical novel of that name.⁴ Du Tillet is Emile 'en noir', possibly because by then Balzac had begun one of several protracted feuds with Girardin.

Balzac may mention the fact that a character is a foundling to increase the reader's sympathy for him. Presumably Colonel Chabert's vicissitudes are rendered more pathetic because he was 'un enfant d'hôpital' and has no family to support him in his tribulations.⁵ Balzac's compassion for Butscha, 'Enfant bercé par le Malheur',⁶ echoes his self-pitying remark about himself as having been 'bercé sur le sein de Dame Misère'.⁷ Despite this sentimentality about foundlings, Balzac is somewhat indifferent to the inferior position of 'enfants naturels simples', rather as our advocate Desportes will be. He records prejudice against such children without special pleading or much personal comment.

1. MM p. 8.
2. MM p. 202.
3. MM p. 123.
4. Introd. to CB, ed. Garnier.
5. Col. p. 26.
6. MM p. 123.
7. Lettres à Mme H. IV, p. 408.

He describes Dr. Rouget's bigoted vengefulness towards Agathe almost conversationally: 'une fille qu'il ne regardait pas comme la sienne, et qui croyez-le bien, lui appartenait légitimement'.¹ One of the chief obstacles to the angelic Ursule Mirouët's union with Savinien is Mme de Portenduère's prejudice about the origins of Ursule's father, a bastard. Balzac waxes far more indignant, however, about the refusal of Ursule's relatives to recognise her saintliness. With neither Agathe nor Ursule does Balzac make it clear to what extent he shares this particular social prejudice.

On the other hand he mentions one advantage 'enfants naturels simples' often enjoy - namely the single-minded devotion of one parent. After his father's death Albert Savarus becomes the centre of his self-sacrificing mother's existence.² Hippolyte Schinner is idolised by his unmarried mother, who seeks in her maternal love a compensation for her rejection by Society.³ Peyrade adores Lydie whom he believes to be his natural daughter. She represents redemption for him, and when he can lunch with her on Sundays he resembles Satan, 'père d'un ange, et se rafraîchissant à ce divin contact'.⁴

Thus as far as 'enfants naturels simples' are concerned Balzac is inclined to be sympathetic, if a little wistful about the whole-hearted adoration they may receive. However, where it is a question of adulterine children Balzac is as self-righteous as any 'bien pensant'. Derville, the ideal lawyer, severely criticises mothers who impoverish legitimate

1. R p. 257.

2. AS p. 36.

3. Bo p. 395.

4. S&M, vol. XV, p. 139.

children in favour of adulterine ones.¹ Gobseck relates with relish how, thanks to the miser himself, the only legitimate son of the Comte de Restaud is not cheated out his rightful inheritance by his mother who hopes to advantage her two illegitimate children. In Les Chouans the Duc de Verneuil's son is clearly within his legal rights in contesting his father's will which provide for Marie, his illegitimate half-sister.² Balzac obviously approved of those articles of the Code which prohibit adulterine children from a share in their father's estate and which make severely limited provisions for natural children in certain circumstances. The Minorets hope to use these articles to Ursule's disadvantage by asserting that she is Dr. Minoret's natural child. This is, of course, a lie. Nevertheless, Bongrand, one of Ursule's three tutors (or guardian angels, rather) defends the law in principle because he claims its aim is to protect the institution of marriage.

Balzac's feelings about adulterine children seem to have been partly determined by his jealousy of Henry. For Balzac mothers who conceive adulterine children are iniquitous. He says sensationally of Clémence Desmarets that because she is 'le fruit de quelque terrible passion adultérine' she finds herself in 'une de ces circonstances affreuses où l'égoïsme a placé certains enfants'.³ He explains with envy that illegitimate children tend to be more beautiful and better loved than legitimate ones because they were conceived in love.⁴ He gives as examples Max Gilet, Henri de Marsay (is his christian name merely a coincidence?), Emile Blondet and Marie de Verneuil. It would seem that

1. Col pp. 78 - 79.
2. Ch p. 300.
3. F n. 31. see also Phy p. 309.
4. CA p. 128.

Balzac is sympathetic towards his foundlings because they are not modelled on his home situation: they have no parents and they arouse no envy - even vicarious - because they are ugly.

Balzac barely deals at all with the third type of natural child, 'l'enfant naturel incestueux'. Incest was not part of his experience; his relationship with his sister Laure may have had a quasi-conjugal character, but there was nothing incestuous about it despite Surville's jealousy. Incestuous love is a theme which makes only fleeting appearances in Balzac's work. It receives its frankest expression in the bawdy little Fabliau de l'enfant, de L'Amour et de la Mère which concludes: 'Or voyez combien eut de douleurs une dame qui tantôt mère et tantôt femme se trouva plus femme que mère, et pour ne pas céder à son fils qui la requéroit d'amour, se mit promptement en terre'.¹ The theme receives its most ample treatment in Le Vicaire des Ardennes which, as Professor Hunt has so pertinently commented, 'hovers over the theme of incest and degenerates into melodrama'.² When Joseph discovers that Mélanie is not his sister he realises with relief that by marrying her he will only be guilty of breaking his priestly vows and not of committing incest. In any case there are no offspring of the incest. In the Comédie humaine there is the union between Moïna de Saint-Hélerin and her adulterine brother Alfred de Vandenesse. Another possible example is the semi-incest between Arabella, Lady Dudley, and her son-in-law de Marsay, for her children suspiciously resemble him.³ However, there

1. CH. Club d l'Honnête Homme vol. 32, p. 742.

2. H.J. Hunt. Balzac's CH, p. 6

3. Lys : 322.

appear to be no offspring of the first liaison, and no further mention is made of those of the second. The most dramatic evidence of incestuous passion in the Comédie humaine is Pacquita's lesbian and incestuous love in La Fille aux yeux d'or. For the reader the true horror of it lies more in the former, and the De Marsays shrug off the latter nonchalantly: 'Elle était fidèle au sang'.¹

Although Balzac is even more reticent about incest than about Vautrin's probable homosexuality he seems to have had an embryonic intuition of Freud's discovery of unconscious repressions² because he occasionally alludes to the almost incestuous nature of parental love. In the Comédie humaine there are several examples of fathers who live solely for their daughters: Ferragus for his Clémence, Peyrade for his Lydie, Bartholoméo de Pioambo and, of course, Goriot. The love of Jeanne d'Hérouville for her son Etienne is almost that of a woman for her lover.

Balzac usually regards this love as natural. In Le Centenaire he had asserted that love for a mother 'tel énergique qu'il devienne n'aura jamais le nom de passion....C'est presque le seul sentiment parfait chez l'homme'.³ In the Comédie humaine M. de Nègrelisse, whose interest in his daughter was confined to ridding himself of her through a suitable marriage, looks at Lucien with 'le regard inquisitif d'un père, empressé de juger l'homme que sa fille a distingué'.⁴ The admirable Duc de Chatillonest feels towards his daughter's suitor a jealousy compounded of pity, envy and regret.⁵ There is, in fact, nothing abnormal in the

1. FYO p. 405.

2. B. Guyon. Balzac, psychologue de la paternité, p. 442.

3. pp. 129 - 130.

4. IP, vol. XI, p. 327.

5. F30 p. 4.

carnal links between a father and child, and in the Comédie humaine where paternal love reaches the point of perversion it is punished. Goriot, for example, manifests his slavish affection by rubbing his head against Delphine's skirts and kissing her feet.¹ Bartholoméo di Piombo tells Ginevra that he could not bear to see her love another man. Both these fathers suffer for their transgressions of the Balzacian code of Paternity, but their daughters, too, suffer for their disobedience to their fathers who, according to the same code, must be respected, however unworthy they may be. In the case of Balchazar and Marguerite Claës, Balthazar alone is chastised. He employs 'des câlineries ... presque serviles'² to extract money from her, and thus diminishes his already attenuated paternal standing. She, however, does not transgress her filial duty for she acts in the name of the Family.

Thus, although Balzac touches on unconscious repression, he does not explore it and there is no further evidence in the Comédie humaine of the legal category of 'l'enfant naturel incestueux'.

Balzac gave to illegitimate children the same bias as the Code, reserving his disapproval and qualifications for the adulterine child. Led by his resentment against Henry to concentrate his disapproval and qualifications on the adulterine child, he echoes the spirit and the letter of the Law through the person of Benassis. It is significant that Benassis describes the intention of the Code in the same words as Desmourets who declares that the Code 'regretfully' gave a legal existence to illegitimate children. Benassis considers that the Law has almost protected the errors of youth by 'regretfully' giving some legal status to natural children, but that social prejudice against such children increased the Law's reluctance in this respect.³ He himself was led to

1. PG p. 444.

2. RA p. 270.

3. MC p. 210.

revere the Family as the foundation of Society when he realised how his own son would suffer through being illegitimate.

With regard to the illegitimate child, then, Balzac is very much of his class, the bourgeoisie anxious to conserve its property and ensure the proper transmission thereof. His approach to the illegitimate child is almost a facsimile of the Code's, save for his sentimental and basically indifferent attitude to foundlings and his far-sighted intuition of unconscious repressions.

Adopted Child

Adoption was unusual in the nineteenth century. In 1889, for instance, only 109 adoptions were registered.¹ Not until 1923 did the Law sanction the adoption of minors. The Code had stated that adoption could take place at the majority of the adopted child, but there were several formidable restrictions. The 'adopté' had to have been cared for continuously by the 'adoptant' for six years, and the latter had to be over fifty years old, be at least fifteen years older than the 'adopté' and have no children or legitimate descendants.

This law, as well as custom, probably accounts for the low incidence of adopted children in the Comédie humaine. In fact, there are only two suggestions of it. In La Femme supérieure, the first edition of Les Employés, Mme Thuillier, who knows that she is barren, and her husband plan to adopt one of the little Collevilles when they turn fifty.² In somewhat unusual circumstances la Marana hands over her daughter to an adoptive mother, Dona Lagounia, in the hope that the latter's method of upbringing will conquer Juana's heredity.

1. Bou, ed. Garnier, p. xvi.

2. J. Bonzon. Cent ans de lutte sociale: la législation de l'enfance, p. 56.

Nevertheless, there are frequent references to what seems to me to be the equivalent of adoption: substitute paternity and maternity. Examples of both are numerous. Chesnel has a factitious paternity for Victurnien whom he regards as his 'adopted child'.¹ Pons is paternally protective towards Schmucke and hopes to continue to look after him from beyond the grave by leaving him his fortune.² On the female side there is the Duchesse de Verneuil whom Henriette de Mortsaufr regards as her adoptive mother, and the Comtesse Listomère-Landon whom Julie d'Aiglemont cherishes as a substitute mother.³

Balzac emphasised both concepts because each represented a fundamental emotional need for him. He had a Promethean longing for vicarious fatherhood, which is why he was more interested in the substitute father than the adopted child. The figure of the substitute mother, on the other hand, is an expression of his dissatisfaction with his own mother and his life-long search for a 'mère-amante'. Hence he centres attention on the 'mothered' child he saw himself to be. The two concepts are obviously related. His love for Eve spurred him to work 'avec une énergie de père et de mère'.⁴ He could exclaim that he was 'hébété de travail et de conception'⁵ and fiercely assert his right of 'priorité et de paternité' over the manuscript of La Cousine Bette.⁶ Balzac often speaks of the maternal feelings of substitute fathers for their protégés, such as those

1. CA p. 103.

2. see also Abbé de Sponde and Rose Cormon (VF p. 137), Rabourdin and Sébastien de la Roche (E p. 70), Count Octave and Maurice de l'Hostal (H p. 33).

3. see also Mme Descoings and Joseph Bridau, Mme Hochon and Agathe Bridau in R.

4. Lettres à Mme H. III, p. 257.

5. ibid., II, p. 453.

6. ibid., p. 474.

of Bourgeat for Desplein, and Butscha for Modeste Mignon, among others.¹ However the concepts originate in such different personal needs that one is justified in considering them separately.

Balzac periodically showed a longing to play the part of substitute father. In 1822, at the age of twenty-three, he somewhat incongruously offered himself as a father to Mme de Berny's children who, he said, were reaching the age when a faithful friend would be their most valuable treasure and safeguard.² He seems also to have taken a paternal liking to Anna Hanska, but this was probably as much out of desire to please his Eve as anything. His grief at the miscarriage of Victor-Honoré was immense: he never recovered and was unable to finish Les Paysans. Several critics have been sceptical about the reality of Balzac's frustrated paternal instinct. Wurmser declares his wish to have a child by Mme Hanska superficial.³ Ducourneau concludes: 'Chez l'homme Balzac la paternité restera à l'état de mythe'⁴ on the grounds of his lack of interest in Lionel Guidoboni-Visconti and his discretion about his child by Maria du Fresnay. Notwithstanding, Balzac's excitement about the prospect of having a son and the plans he made for his future seem genuine, especially when he concerns himself with such trivial details as his intention to care for 'his' Victor 'l'enourrissant au biberon avec du bon lait de vache'.⁵ Probably neither Eve nor certain critics subsequently fully appreciated the sincerity of his cry: 'Si vous saviez ce que je donnerais pour avoir à moi, un enfant'.⁶ In any case the ramifications

1. including those of the Comte de Sérisy for his wife; Thaddée Paz for Clémentine Laginski and Hulot for Atala Judici.

2. Corres., I, p. 168.

3. A. Wurmser. La Comédie inhumaine, p. 664.

4. J-A Ducourneau. Balzac et la paternité, p. 200.

5. Lettres à Mme H. III, p. 398.

6. ibid., II, p. 15.

in the Comédie humaine of the theme of paternity - whether real or substitute - are vast, and would require a thesis to themselves. As Bardèche has observed: 'L'idée de la paternité ... chez Balzac ... annonce ... le mythe qui embrasse et explique toutes sortes de relations humaines'.¹ It would be foolish to deny that there must be excellent psychological grounds for the magnitude of such a theme.

Substitute paternity is found in several forms in the Comédie humaine, both pure and equivocal. It can be a symbol of the Gospel in action as in Le Médecin de campagne. The first person Gênestas meets is a woman who has taken in four children despite her straitened circumstances. Later he sees the old woman caring for a dying cretin. Benassis himself cares for children in memory of his dead son² and regards this mission as his offering to God whose son died on the Cross.³ Popinot and Dr. Minoret sublimate their paternal instincts in the same way, the former by becoming the father of a whole neighbourhood⁴ and the latter by substituting the poor for the child he never had.⁵

Conversely, substitute paternity can represent the ambiguous love of old men for young girls. Hulot is like a mother to fourteen-year-old Atala Judici.⁶ Coralie and Esther manage to tolerate Camusot and Nucingen respectively only because they regard them as sugar-daddies. Léopold Hannequin is the only 'father' of ladies of easy virtue who is not suspect. He teaches his 'rats' economy and watches over them disinterestedly.⁷

These two forms of substitute paternity, the pure and the perverted, are best represented by Dr. Minoret and Vautrin. Dr. Minoret is father, mother and doctor to Ursule,⁸ and follows her growth with a mother's feelings.⁹

1. M. Bardèche. Balzac, romancier, p. 440.

2. MC p. 236.

3. MC p. 246.

4. In p. 398.

5. UM p. 269.

6. Be p. 489.

7. CP p. 274.

8. UM p. 38.

9. UM p. 56.

When she cuts her teeth he experiences tooth-ache with her, thus experiencing a sort of 'couvade', it seems to me. Balzac analyses the reason for the Doctor's devotion. It is chiefly a cult of remembrance, both to the oath which the Doctor made to Ursule's father and to her resemblance to the late Mme Minoret. In addition, his affection for Ursule is quite simply the natural reaction of a childless man, 'une revanche de sa paternité trompée'.¹

Like Dr. Minoret, Vautrin regards himself as both father and mother to his 'adopted' child, in this case Lucien. Outsiders suspect that both Ursule and Lucien are the natural children of their substitute fathers. Dr. Minoret's affection, however, is natural and healthy. He understates his devotion to Ursule, describing himself as 'un vieillard qui doit avoir pour cette chère enfant toute la sollicitude d'une mère'.² Vautrin's affection for Lucien verges on the homosexual. He addresses him as 'mon cher enfant, mon cher amour',³ and declares 'j'aime tant cet enfant ... cet idole de mon coeur'.⁴ In Illusions perdues Lucien was presented as an 'homme-enfant', but in Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes it is his weakness and femininity which are emphasised. Vautrin's grief at Lucien's death reaches blasphemous proportions, culminating in his outburst over 'ce corps que je baisais ... comme une mère, comme la Vierge a dû baiser Jésus au tombeau'.⁵

In his allusions to substitute paternity, Balzac focuses on the 'adoptant' rather than the 'adopté'. All the substitute fathers in the Comédie humaine are childless, and usually the 'children' they adopt are adults. Thus although Balzac is more interested in the substitute father

1. UM p. 56.

2. UM p. 137.

3. S&M, vol. XVI, p. 253.

4. ibid., p. 87.

5. ibid., p. 253.

than in the 'adopted' child, he is nevertheless aware of the latter, and gives him the rôle of an 'homme-enfant'. The importance to Balzac of this theme of substitute parenthood is seen in the fact that several of the major novels are 'Bildungsromans', that is, novels describing the sentimental education of a young man, usually undertaken by an initiator or guide. Examples of such novels are Le père Goriot, where Rastinac's education is undertaken by Mme de Beauséant and Vautrin, and the Rubempré cycle, where Lucien's mentors are first Parisian society and then Vautrin again.¹ It is significant that Mme de Beauséant should consider Eugène her adopted child. When he begs her to accept him 'comme un pauvre enfant qui désire se coudre à votre jupe' she replies: 'Enfant! Oui, vous êtes un enfant'.²

Substitute paternity, a form of adoption, is vital to the creation of the Comédie humaine. Balzac appears to have partly fulfilled his paternal feelings in his magnum opus for, as Picon has noted, the latter was like his child in that it extended his personality and existence.³ The crucial nature and omnipresence of the concept in Balzac's work indicate a certain measure of reflection about the category of the adopted child, albeit from the necessarily limited vantage point of his own experience.

The counterpart of substitute paternity is substitute maternity, originating in a different area of Balzac's experience, namely his relationship with his mother. It is well-known how unsatisfactory this was. Mme. Balzac seems to have been a cold yet highly-strung woman. Even when Laurence was ill, eight months pregnant and in financial straits, she insisted on the repayment of a debt, and refused to help her

1. cf. PCh - Raphael's education is completed by Foedora, and Béatrix-Calyste's is undertaken by Camille Maupin and Béatrix.
2. PG p. 294.
3. G. Picon. Balzac par lui-même, p. 123.

although she was the cause of Laurence being threatened with distraint. Balzac more than once accused his mother of having killed Laurence.¹ She was a woman who showed extremes of feeling: indifference to Honoré and over-indulgence to Henry. Her letters to the former make one suspect her of having been a highly irritating, superficially sentimental woman. She tells him, for instance, how much she prays God to grant her children happiness,² and how her last years will be happy if her children are able to say that their mother loves them 'autant qu'un cœur de mère peut aimer'.³ Honoré always felt bitterly rejected, and, in 1846, in a letter to Mme Hanska we find him going over ground he had covered in Le Lys dans la vallée, telling her in detail about his deprived childhood. Mme Balzac was not however as black as Honoré painted her. She lent him a lot of money, which he was piqued at having to repay, and went to great pains to prepare the house in the Rue Fortunée for Honoré and his new wife. Nevertheless, her son's resentment was well-founded. Mme Balzac wrote him one letter during his six years at school, and that detached and moralising. Even Laure could not entirely exculpate her mother and had to admit that 'Cette sévérité comprima les tendres expansions d'Honoré, à qui l'âge et la gravité de son père inspiraient aussi la réserve'.⁴ More frankly Laurence flung the following reproach at her mother in 1832: 'Tu as épousé mon père par raison presque ... mais tu ne l'as peut-être pas aimé'.⁵

1. Lettres à Mme H. II, p. 115, III, p. 275.

2. Corres. V, p. 277 and 414.

3. ibid., p. 550

4. L. Surville. Balzac: sa vie et ses oeuvres d'après sa correspondance, pp. viii- xi.

5. quoted by S.J. Bérard, La Genèse d'un roman de Balzac: Illusions perdues, vol. I, p. 59.

Therefore when the Romantic and aggrieved Balzac of twenty-two met the forty-five-year-old Laure de Berny he was more than ready to find in her 'une soeur trop aimée ... une mère secrètement désirée'.¹ Although he was probably emulating Rousseau when he made of her a Mme de Warens, even referring to her as 'ma pauvre maman',² he sincerely believed that she was a maternal compensation for his deprived childhood. As he expressed it: 'Mme de B(erny) n'était que mon immense filialité trompée, à qui une mère avait souri'.³ Although Balzac may be accused of special pleading in his frequent reiterations to Mme Hanska that Mme de Berny had been chiefly a mother to him,⁴ he was frank enough to admit that she had been 'une amie, une famille, un ami, un conseil', and had formed the writer and the man.⁵ The sincerity of this feeling is shown by a letter to 'Louise' where he exclaims that Mme de Berny had meant more to him than a mother, a friend or any other being.⁵

Balzac's affair with Mme de Berny was thus crucial for his emotional and artistic development. Although she formed both the writer and the lover, the latter was always to remain immature, seeking in the loved one a substitute mother. In his letters to 'Louise' Balzac frequently emphasises the fact that he is a child - credulous, impatient and naïf.⁶ He even confides in her: 'Je vous dis ces choses comme un enfant parle à sa mère'.⁷ He uses almost the same words to Mme Hanska, saying that she

1. Lys p. 182.
2. Corres. I p. 181.
3. Lettres à Mme H. III, pp. 361 - 362.
4. ibid., I, p. 9, 64, 67, 150, 193, 510 ; II, p. 58, 101, 151, 197.
5. ibid., I, p. 526.
6. Corres. III, p. 131.
7. Corres. III, p. 31, 54, 63.

talked economy like a mother talking to her 'brat',¹ and that he loved her as a child loves his mother.² Shortly after the beginning of their correspondence he was exclaiming: '... que douce eût été cette journée où j'aurais pu jouer en liberté avec toi comme un enfant joue avec sa mère'.³ Much later, in 1846, he told her that she was the healing balm for the wounds inflicted by his real mother.⁴ His relationship with her was more egalitarian than his one with Mme de Berny or 'Louise'. He sometimes treated her as the little girl, and himself (more rarely) as the parent. One of his favourite terms of endearment was 'little girl', and he begged her to have in him the absolute confidence he had in her, which was that of a child in his mother.⁵

Seeing that substitute maternity was fundamental to all Balzac's important liaisons, it is not surprising that it should play a great part in amorous and conjugal relationships in the Comédie humaine. Balzac accepts it as natural in the former, but has reservations about it in the latter. For Balzac it is an axiom that women like to behave almost maternally towards their lovers,⁶ and there is no dearth of examples to prove this. Dinah de la Baudraye, on leaving Lousteau, admits that she will always secretly retain a maternal attitude towards him.⁷ Eugénie Grandet gazes at the sleeping Charles like a mother.⁸ Pauline Gaudin

1. Corres. III, p. 74.
2. Lettres à Mme H. II, p. 593.
3. ibid., III, p. 234.
4. ibid., I, p. 87.
5. ibid., II, pp. 171 ; III, p. 396.
6. EM p. 379.
7. MD p. 239.
8. EG p. 392.

buys milk for Raphaël. This action seems curiously symbolic, but Balzac does not elaborate on this symbolism. There are four principal variations on this theme, and they are the couples formed by Félix de Vandenesse and Henriette de Mortsauf in Le Lys dans la vallée, Camille Maupin and Calyste du Guénic in Béatrix, Louise de Bargeton and Lucien de Rubempré in Illusions perdues and Bette Fischer and Wenceslas Steinbock in La Cousine Bette. All four couples seem to demonstrate that substitute maternity is not a charge to be lightly undertaken.

Henriette de Mortsauf is a paragon of maternity and substitute maternity - in spite, or because, of the fact that she sacrifices the latter to the former. In any case, she is Félix's guardian angel - 'la fille des cieux, l'ange adoré'¹ - and uses for his benefit her maternal second sight which Balzac believes to be instinctual in good mothers. Félix's relationship with her is an idealised, although fairly accurate, transposition of Balzac's with Laure de Berny, even if Balzac may have been emphasising the platonic aspect of it for Mme Hanska's benefit. Like his creator Félix believes himself to be an 'homme-enfant', and his ideal is a substitute mother-cum-mistress. In this novel then, Balzac uneasily reconciles his own experience with, and longing for, a substitute mother with his idealisation of maternity per se, to which he was ever prone.

Félix - and presumably Balzac - defines the rôle of women in relation to artists, poets and men of destiny in no uncertain terms. They should be a combination of sister of charity and 'la mère qui pardonne à son enfant'.² This is what Henriette shows herself to be. Camille Maupin also assumes this role for Calyste du Guénic - misguidedly, because he is not worth it. She is the mother of his intelligence,³ and like

1. Lys p. 239.

2. Lys p. 323.

3. B p. 89, 116.

Like Henriette her maternal love is really passion disguised, and she too is grieved when she really has to play the role of a mother to the full and is expected to applaud Calyste's amorous triumphs.

Louise de Bargeton fails in her role because she encourages her man of genius, Lucien, in ill-founded pretensions. She deserts him in Paris where he most needs her, because she discovers that he actually behaves like the child she has affectionately been calling him. Balzac allows the reader to share and approve the comments of her coterie, who consider her behaviour 'frightfully' ridiculous because she could be his mother.¹

Bette's adoption of Steinbock is more beneficial to him than is Mme de Bargeton's of Lucien. It is, however, vindictive, and sinister because it is monomaniacal. She has a mother's tenderness, a woman's jealousy and a dragon's mind.² The first and last qualities enable her to concentrate single-mindedly on Wenceslas' material well-being and force him to produce works of art. Once the second quality is aroused, when Hortense steals Wenceslas and marries him, Bette transfers her maternal feelings (with lesbian overtones³) to Valérie Marneffe, and uses the latter to bring about his moral disintegration. The importance of the theme of the perversion of substitute maternity is shown by the fact that Balzac stressed the pathological aspect of Bette's love during the course of his revisions of the text.⁴

Thus Balzac gives a wide spectrum of the action of substitute maternity in extra-marital love, ranging from the immaculate to the monomaniacal. In most of the examples I have quoted the 'homme-enfant' is at least as

1. IP, vol XI, p. 316.

2. Be p. 245.

3. Be p. 192 'Elle adorait ... Valérie, elle en avait fait sa fille, son amie, son amour ... Valérie offrait ... à Lisbeth cette beauté ... bien plus maniable que celle de Wenceslas qui, pour elle, avait toujours été froid et insensible'.

4. P. Lorant. Les Parents Pauvres d'Honoré de Balzac, vol. II, p. 38.

important as the substitute mother, sometimes more so. This is probably because Balzac was drawing directly on his own experience. There is not nearly as much detail about the maternity of wifehood, and what there is appears to be skimpy and a trifle secondhand.

Balzac appears to believe that a wife's maternal treatment of her husband may be harmful to both. Long-suffering, blind devotion does not seem to be the way to hold a wayward husband. Hulot ignores his wife who is bound to him by an admiring, cowardly and maternal love. His son-in-law will unwittingly imitate him by deserting Hortense who has 'la lâcheté maternelle d'une femme qui pousse l'amour jusqu'à l'idolâtrie'.¹ The only two wives who do not suffer for their maternal behaviour towards their husbands are Renée de l'Estorade and Anaïs de Bargeton. Renée's mothering restores her émigré husband's self-confidence. Mme de Bargeton's maternal treatment of her husband is the kindest way of handling that mindless nonentity.

In marriage, then, Balzac seems to caution against substitute maternity. In love he considers it virtually essential, although he warns against undertaking it flippantly or obsessively.

In addition to substitute maternity as found in love - be it in or out of marriage - Balzac analyses the natural reaction of a childless woman with strong maternal instincts. He probably used DSM as a starting point, for the latter declares that old maids who become substitute mothers are acting wisely in the interests of their health.² Balzac has a good deal of sympathy for such old maids as Mme Dumay with her 'maternité d'occasion'³ for Modeste Mignon, and Mlle d'Esgrignon's 'entraîlles

1. Be p. 245 cf. Sabine du Guénic who regards Calyste with the blind devotion of a mother who would praise her son even if he struck her (B p. 262) and Mme de Mortsauf who treats her husband like a spoilt child (Lys p. 193).

2. Fille, p. 538.

3. MM p. 32.

maternelles' for her nephew Victurnien.¹ His pity is tinged with patronage when, apropos of Rose Cormon's 'maternité rentrée' for her horse, he affirms that almost all lonely people give themselves a fictitious family of cats, dogs or canaries.² Although a generalisation, this is a fairly accurate observation.¹

Balzac's psychological insight is more noticeable when he explores the shadier side of substitute maternity. Mme Cibot demonstrates the perversion of the maternal instinct, the demands of which she lucidly describes by saying that Nature meant her to be a rival to Maternity and that she has to place her affection somewhere.³ This does not prevent her from scheming against her 'adopted' children, Pons and Schmucke, in order to inherit from them. Balzac's sociological documentation is apparent when he remarks that courtesans are fallen angels in the sense that they have a strong maternal drive, for he had clearly consulted the authority in this, Parent-Duchâtelet. The latter had recorded courtesans' immense capacity for love and nostalgia for bourgeois life.⁴ With regard to both Coralie and Aurélie Schontz Balzac observes that 'ces sortes de femmes' have a maternal goodness,⁵ and Esther gazes wistfully after a mother accompanied by her daughter, the visible image of virtue and respectability.⁶ Thus substitute maternity may also symbolise a consciousness of a fall from grace.

1. CA p. 87 cf. Mme Thuillier's 'maternité factice' for Céleste Colleville (Bou p. 33).

2. VF p. 37.

3. CP p. 183.

4. S&M, ed. Garnier, p. xix.

5. IP, vol. XII, p. 199; B p. 340.

6. S&M, vol. XV, p. 44.

Balzac's presentation of substitute parenthood contains flashes of insight, but as a whole it is not profound. It is lifted almost wholly from his own experience, and both aspects of it are imbalanced. Balzac concentrates on the father figure in substitute paternity and on the child figure in substitute maternity. However, he had the foresight to conceive of the adopted child long before it was common in law, and the evidence of this in the Comédie humaine shows the pervasiveness of children in his thought-world. His 'adopted' children are nearly all in post-adolescence, but the adoptive relationship is structured as a parent-child one.

Miscellaneous

In this section I include the child prodigy, orphan, step-child, 'gamin', 'raç' and 'rapin'. The common feature to all is that Balzac gives them but scant attention. Nevertheless, they deserve mention as evidence of the breadth of his interest in children.

a) Child Prodigy

There are only two child prodigies in the Comédie humaine, and three in the whole of Balzac's work, namely Séraphita, Louis Lambert and Tullius in Le Centenaire. All three constitute myths.

Séraphita is the product of a mystical union sanctified by Swedenborg. From the age of nine she is in a constant state of prayer. At ten she has the faculties of an adult, and embodies the alliance of the Spirit of Love and Wisdom.

Louis' development is traced in more detail. From his childhood onwards he is accustomed to intense mental activity and can gain satisfaction only from this. At the age of fourteen he has the intellectual capacity of an adult. At fifteen he already possesses the depth of a man of genius. He is misunderstood at school because of his almost divine imagination and his capacity for giving himself up entirely to his inner being. He is

a later development of Tullius who, from his early childhood, was fascinated by the extraordinary, was well-versed in the Classics by the age of twelve, at fifteen had penetrated the mysteries of social life (whatever Balzac may mean by that) and at sixteen had discovered his military vocation.¹ Tullius is a somewhat earthy 'génie' (sic),² whereas Louis embodies the myth of the angelic being who is too good for this earth. They have one thing in common, however: both are far superior to their teachers, and both probably represent Balzac's wish-fulfilment of himself as the child-prodigy he had certainly never been.

It is difficult to judge the veracity of Balzac's presentation of the child prodigy because, after all, there are few generalizations which one can make about a phenomenon mainly defined by its rarity. Balzac is a realist when he describes the precocious mental development of these prodigies while they are physically still children. He may be touching obliquely on the modern theory of psychosomaticism - the relationship between the physical and the psychological - when he ascribes Louis' joy in intellectual activity to physical causes,³ but he remains of the nineteenth century when he supposes that these causes are either illness or the perfection of the organs. Le Yaouanc has pointed out that, although Balzac was not consistent in his observation of the relationship between physiology and pathology, he mentioned it often enough for originality not to be denied him.⁴ Moreover, though he remarked on it most in connection with the adult character, it is significant that he should have extended it to include the child, even if obliquely.

Despite the above-mentioned realism, Louis and Séraphita represent Balzac's search for a myth to express his brand of mysticism, for as he himself asked '... qu'y a-t-il de plus près de Dieu que le génie dans un

1. Le Centenaire, p. 130.

2. ibid., p. 139.

3. LL p. 111.

4. M. le Yaouanc. Nosographie de l'humanité balzacienne, p. 107.

coeur d'enfant'.¹

b) Orphan

There are many orphans in the Comédie humaine, both the good, who are in the majority, and the bad. Outstanding among the former are Ursule Mirouët, Pierrette, Emmanuel de Solis, Honorine, Popinot, Laurence de Cinq-Cygne, la Pêchina and la Fosseuse. The latter range from questionable to villainous and include Lousteau, François Hochon and Baruch Borniche, Flore Brazier and Du Tillet. P. Citron has remarked that between 1838 and 1842 Balzac seems to have been pre-occupied by the theme of an orphan girl taken in by a widower or bachelor, and that this must denote some hitherto unidentifiable psychological obsession. I suggest that this obsession is Balzac's sense of motherlessness, of being alone in the world without being able to rely on his real family: '... ma douleur de me savoir sans famille ... je ne te la dirai pas'.³ A frequent theme in his letters to Eve is: 'Nous nous serons nos familles l'un pour l'autre'.⁴ Balzac may have largely resolved his feelings about Henry, but he always felt vaguely aggrieved at being a semi-orphan. For instance, Pons' isolation and betrayal by his relatives may well reflect Balzac's situation and his disillusionment with 'Laura soror' and Surville, his 'frère de coeur'.

Balzac's grievance was, however, vague enough for him not to have created a definite abstract of the orphan as he did with the spoilt child. He makes no generalisation about orphans, nor does he explicitly show how their characters are moulded by their orphaned childhood. Orphanhood seems to have diminished in importance for Balzac once he had passed the

1. LL p. 66.

2. R, ed. Garnier, p. 11.

3. Lettres à Mme H. III, p. 174.

4. ibid., p. 129.

first flush of youth. In most of the Oeuvres de Jeunesse at least one of the chief characters is an orphan: the Marquise de Rosann in Le Vicaire des Ardennes, Del Ryès in Sténie, Minna in Le second Falthurne and a veritable plethora in Wann-Chlore - Horace Landon, his friend Annibal and Jane herself, all of whom find a spiritual affinity in the fact that they are orphans. It is significant that in the Comédie humaine Balzac should have discarded the original title of La Grenadière, Les Orphelins. The theme of the tale is: 'Une mère mourante soignée par deux fils',¹ and Balzac probably became aware that the mother, not the subsequent fate of her children, is uppermost.

Thus in his early works Balzac exploits orphanhood for its pathos, whereas later he merely mentions it without highlighting its attributes and effects. This may simply be because he had outgrown the need to use orphanhood as a vehicle for creating suitably Byronic melancholy. It is also tempting to hypothesize that his personal self-pity had been partly assuaged by Mme de Berny in whom 'Du même coup, il retrouvait sa mère et l'amour; il était fils, il était homme'.² Whatever the reason one cannot deny that the figure of the orphan in the Comédie humaine is insignificant.

c) Step-child

This type of child is almost non-existent in the Comédie humaine. There is only one representative of it, Fritz Brunner in Le Cousin Pons. He is presented in an unashamedly melodramatic way. His step-mother hated him so much that she hoped to kill him by encouraging him in 'des dissipations anti-germaniques'.³ He was eventually expelled from Francfort and went to Strasbourg where, unlike the Biblical prodigal son, he met

1. E. Preston Dargan and B. Weinberg (eds.). The Evolution of Balzac's CH, p. 99.

2. P. Barbéris. Balzac et le mal du siècle. p. 490.

3. CP p. 66.

with disinterested friendliness from strangers.¹ He learnt economy and courage from suffering and poverty, 'cette divine marâtre'.² The reader will remember him as one of the few normal, ordinary people in the novel. It appears that Balzac provides information about Brunner's background simply in order to present a symbol of a reformed prodigal son and a man whose judgement of the spoilt child, Cécile Camusot, is sound because it is founded in his personal suffering.

d) 'Gamin' and 'Rat'

In the Comédie humaine there is a shadowy outline of the figure of the 'gamin' and several fully-rounded portraits of his feminine counterpart, the 'rat'. Nevertheless, the former is by far the most original conception even though the latter is more vividly drawn.

R. Dagneaud has outlined the lexical history of the word 'gamin' in his thesis Les Eléments populaires dans le lexique de la Comédie humaine d'Honoré de Balzac. Before 1820 the word was a technical term for an apprentice in a glass-works. Then it came to signify a street urchin, which connotation it retained even after the 1830 Revolution, when it was baptised with the meaning of street fighter. The latter meaning received, of course, its best-known embodiment in Hugo's Gavroche, symbol of the Revolutionary spirit and the best qualities of the proletariat. During the first half of the century the phrase 'gamin de Paris' had a pejorative nuance which has now disappeared.

All these meanings appear in the Comédie humaine, including the original one, a fact Dagneaud does not mention. Cérizet is David Séchard's apprentice, 'son gamin, son page typographique'³ and David boasts 'c'est mon

1. CP p. 68.

2. CP p. 70.

3. IP, vol. XII, p. 380.

gamin, je l'ai formé'.¹ Cérizet is also 'un gamin de Paris' in the pejorative sense described by Dagneaud, for 'Son esprit vif et railleur, sa malignité l'y rendaient redoutable.... Sa moralité... prit l'intérêt personnel pour unique loi',² and his swiftness to use Eve's well-grounded suspicions of him as an excuse for betraying her is said to be typical of the 'gamin de Paris'.³ The 'gamin' as a political figure has a walk-on part in the Comédie humaine. In 1830 Michel Chrestien saves Diane de Cadignan from death by a 'gamin's' hand.⁴ Dagneaud observes that the dominant meaning of 'gamin' in the Comédie humaine is 'polisson' or 'voyou', but that it is already in the process of losing its unfavourable overtones, and is sometimes used as a synonym for 'collégien', as in 'le premier gamin sorti du collège'.⁵

This information is relevant as far as it goes. However, Dagneaud has not examined why Balzac virtually ignores the political rôle of the 'gamin', nor emphasised the originality and vividness of Balzac's 'gamin'. The latter qualities are unfortunately found mainly in his creations outside the Comédie humaine.

Balzac was fully aware of the 'gamin's' function as an urban guerilla, and praised 'quelques gamins de Paris qui font une révolution en un tour de main'.⁶ He evolved, nevertheless, a different symbolism, which becomes

1. IP, vol. XII, p. 384.

2. ibid., pp. 380 - 381.

3. ibid., p. 385.

4. SPC p. 322.

5. IP, vol. XII, p. 185.

6. Lettres à Mme H. I, p. 627.

clear if we compare his approach with that of Janin's article Le gamin de Paris in Les Français peints par eux-mêmes. For Janin the 'gamin' is the product of the 1830 Revolution, is dominated by two basic urges, hunger and liberty, and is characterised by courage, ruse, naïveté, independence, generosity, mischievousness and gregariousness. Balzac's 'gamin' has some of these qualities. His mischievousness is part of his function of awakening 'dans les imaginations bourgeoises les jovialités les plus mirabolantes'.¹ His resourcefulness appears in Léon de Lora's gesture, 'le geste des gamins quand ils veulent exprimer l'action de chipper'.² He is less lovable than Janin's stereotype, being 'sans pitié ni frein, goguenard, avide, paresseux'.³ Moreover, he can be a symbol of loneliness and rejection, which drive him to be destructive. This is communicated in two images in Le Père Goriot. Apropos of human injustice which can force individuals to assert themselves Balzac says: 'L'être le plus débile, le gamin sonne à toutes les portes quand il gèle, ou se hisse pour écrire son nom sur un monument vierge'.⁴ He compares love's short duration to a 'gamin qui tient à marquer son passage par des dévastations'.⁵ In the little tale La Reconnaissance du gamin Balzac elevates the 'gamin' to a symbol of human ingratitude. The 'gamin' strikes the narrator with a bat which the latter has just bestowed on him. The narrator reflects: 'Dans cet enfant, il y a tous les hommes'.⁶ Balzac's criticism of the

1. CP p. 8.

2. CSS p. 367.

3. Col p. 1.

4. PG p. 237.

5. PG p. 450.

6. OD II, pp. 195 - 196.

'gamin' was accompanied by a compassionate understanding of the origins of his literal and figurative destructiveness. His remark about petty thieves probably includes the 'gamin', for both are 'un des sauvages de Paris ... orphelin avec toute une famille, sans liens sociaux, sans idées, un fruit amer de cette conjonction perpétuelle de l'extrême opulence et de l'extrême misère'.¹

The symbolism of the abstract 'gamin' in Balzac's work is peculiar to him. Although he never created a Gavroche, he did succeed in delineating several memorable pen-pictures. I have already quoted the one in Le Père Goriot describing a little vandal. In La Reconnaissance du gamin there is a sympathetically humorous candid camera shot, which deserves to be quoted in detail: 'Cheveux rougeâtres bien ébouriffés, roulés en boucles d'un côté, aplatis ça et là, blanchis par du plâtre, souillés de boue, et gardant encore l'empreinte des doigts crochus du gamin robuste avec lequel il venait peut-être de se battre ... puis un nez qui n'avait jamais connu de pacte avec les vanités mondaines du mouchoir, un nez dont les doigts seuls faisaient la police.... Ses yeux, pétillants à l'occasion, étaient mornes, tristes et fortement cernés....

Vêtu à la diable, insouciant d'une pluie fine qui tombait ... et laissant pendre ses pieds imparfaitement couverts d'une chaussure découpée ... il était là ... renflant sans cérémonie'.² In this description is revealed the author's unsentimental compassion.

Thus the 'gamin', though shadowy and incomplete, flashes disturbingly and tragically through the pages of Balzac's work, causing one to regret that he remains elusive, undeveloped and unparticularised.

1. Code des gens honnêtes, OD I, p. 72.

2. OD II, p. 195.

Balzac's interest lay rather with the female species of the 'gamin', the 'rat'. He created a number of examples and paid tribute to their individuality by giving them names, such as Coralie, Esther and Mariette Godeschal. The original titles of some of the chapters of the first half of Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes indicate the 'rat's' dynamic role in the work. There is a thread of unity between Chapter 6 in Part I, La confession d'un rat, and the second and fourth chapters of Part II, entitled respectively: 'Comment un loup-cervier rencontra le rat, et ce qui en advint', and 'Une souricière où se prend le rat'.¹ However, Balzac's 'rat' is a less original creation than his 'gamin', for it is probably a facsimile of that delineated by Gautier in his contribution Le Rat to Les Français peints par eux-mêmes. Balzac and Gautier agree in seeing in the 'rat' a female 'gamin': the former defines it as 'un gamin femelle',² and the latter as 'un gamin de théâtre qui a tous les défauts du gamin des rues, moins les bonnes qualités'.³ Janin, on the other hand, considered the 'grisette' to be the female of the 'gamin'.⁴ (The term 'gamine' was only to appear after 1842.) Balzac's debt to Gautier is confirmed by the fact that the latter's article was published in 1840, and Balzac only finished the first part of Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes, 'Esther ou les amours d'un vieux banquier', in 1843. The two lengthy definitions of a 'rat' in Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes and Les Comédiens sans le savoir were both published after 1840, and it was after this date that the most memorable 'rats' make their appearance.

1. Lovenjoul. op cit., p. 114.

2. S&M, vol. XV, pp. 15-16.

3. Les Français peints par eux-mêmes, vol. 3, p. 52.

4. ibid., vol. 1.

There is one slight difference between Balzac and Gautier's definition of the 'rat'. In Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes Balzac describes it as 'l'une des perversités maintenant oubliées, mais en usage au commencement de ce siècle. Un rat, mot déjà vieilli, s'appliquait à un enfant de dix à onze ans, comparse à quelque théâtre, surtout à l'Opéra'.¹ Balzac then adds smugly that 'peu de personnes savaient ce détail intime de la vie élégante avant la Restauration, jusqu'au moment où quelques écrivains se sont emparés du rat comme d'un sujet neuf'.² Gautier, on the contrary, dates the institution of the 'rat' as recently as 1830 and fixes its age at between eight and fourteen or fifteen. Balzac was never formally to antedate the 'rat', but in Les Comédiens sans le savoir, set in 1845, the 'rat' is by no means regarded as obsolete, and Léon de Lora, by circumlocution, gives the same age limits as Gautier: 'Ce rat a treize ans, c'est un rat déjà vieux. Dans deux ans d'ici, cette créature ... sera ... une grande danseuse ou une marcheuse.... Elle travaille depuis l'âge de huit ans'.³ In other respects Balzac's definition is identical with Gautier's. He holds that libertines school the 'rat' for vice and infamy and that a 'rat' incapable of making it to the top will become a 'marcheuse'.⁴ Gautier less explicitly says that a 'rat's' private life is difficult to describe 'dans un recueil pudibond' because it is licentious.⁵ Léon de Lora remarks on the 'rat's' lack of freshness and innocence: '... une petite fille svelte et mince dont les yeux bordés de cils noirs n'avaient plus

1. S&M, vol. XV, p. 15.

2. ibid., p. 16.

3. CSS p. 305.

4. CSS p. 307.

5. Gautier, op. cit., p. 255.

d'innocence, dont le teint annonçait une grande fatigue, mais dont le visage, d'une jolie coupe, était frais ... en deux mots un fruit vert'.¹

Again Gautier is more economical of words, complaining that a 'rat' loses the naïve grace of youth in the artificial indoors life she leads and 'sa mère lui donne des leçons d'oeillades et de jeu de prunelles, comme on apprend aux enfants ordinaires la géographie et le catéchisme'.²

Balzac alludes to the way mothers sell their daughters. He declares that only extreme poverty could induce a child to submit to the physical demands of ballet and to 'rester sage jusqu'à seize ou dix-huit ans, uniquement par spéculation, et de se flanquer d'une horrible vieille'.³

The substance of all this is in Gautier's article. He too qualifies a 'rat's' chaperone as 'une horrible vieille',⁴ and describes how a 'rat's' mother realises that her daughter is a saleable commodity and that a so-called virgin of sixteen is more profitable than a libertine of thirteen.⁵

The case-histories of the various 'rats' in the Comédie humaine are so similar that Marceau's assertion that Balzac modelled them all on one particular 'rat' is justified. Florentine and Coralie are both 'sold' by their mothers. When the former was thirteen her mother manoeuvred Cardot into installing her in a flat with her daughter. When the latter was fifteen her mother 'sold' her to De Marsay for sixty thousand francs. 'Les cinq doigts de la main', Coralie, Florine, Florentine, Tullia and Mariette,⁶ all begin as 'rats' and all have more or less meteoric careers.

1. CSS pp. 304 - 305.

2. Gautier, op. cit., p. 251.

3. CSS p. 305.

4. Gautier, op. cit., p. 252.

5. ibid., p. 256.

6. MD pp. 188 - 189.

Their common background and limited prospects are simply and pithily recapitulated in the words of an Italian 'immigrant' apropos of Atala Judici: 'Si au moins ce vieux libertin, qui, dit-on, aurait acheté la petite à sa mère pour quinze cents francs, épousait cette jeunesse ... la pauvre enfant ... échapperait ... à la misère, qui la pervertira ... il a quitté le quartier des Judici ... pour sauver cette enfant des griffes de sa mère. La mère était jalouse de sa fille, et peut-être rêvait-elle de tirer parti de cette beauté.... Une fois mariée, la petite sera libre, elle échapperait par ce moyen à sa mère, qui ... voudrait, pour tirer parti d'elle, la voir au théâtre ou réussir dans l'affreuse carrière où elle l'a lancée'.¹ Such is the prototype of a 'rat's' career.

There is a ring of accuracy about Balzac's depiction of 'rats', so close is it to Gautier's. One feels that it is sound, if not profound. Here he is comfortably in the tradition of the 1830 novel which gave the courtesan the excuse of a poor education or lack of maternal care. A frequent theme in these 'social' novels was a daughter sold by a depraved, impecunious mother.² Balzac diverges from this tradition in his rejection of the prostitute as a symbolic victim and martyr, but he diverges as a reactionary. His attribution of an anarchic potential to her is in line with the Ultra view that controlled poverty is necessary to the equilibrium and stability of the social system: 'il est une pauvreté qui est misère anarchique, qui offre au regard un spectacle insupportable, celui-là: spectacle effrayant des adolescents engagés tôt dans les sentiers du vice ...'.³

1. Be pp. 485 - 486.

2. Dr. W.H. van der Gun. La Courtisane romantique et son rôle dans la CH de Balzac, p. 24.

3. R. Deniel. Une Image de la famille et de la société sous la Restauration, p. 93.

The 'rat' is undoubtedly one of the most objective types in Balzac's categories of children. However, had he developed the 'gamin' it might have surpassed the 'rat' in originality.

Conclusion

Balzac's approach to types of children is distinctly partial, ranging from the detached to the prejudiced. He does not have preconceptions about only children merely because they have no siblings, yet he conforms to contemporary social prejudice about illegitimate children because of his attitude to Henry. Here experience and social climate coincide and his presentation of spoilt and illegitimate children gives the reader a deeper insight into his mentality. One is justified in feeling disappointment at his detachment from live issues of his time, such as the question of foundlings, and his lack of originality in the depiction of literary types, although some slight exception must be made for the embryonic 'gamin'.

Nevertheless, these criticisms should not obscure the fact that the breadth of his interest in types of children is indubitable. The categories of these in the Comédie humaine are many and varied, ranging from the sociological to the literary. Some of his insights are extraordinarily perceptive, such as his exploration of the adopted child who then had minimal medical and legal status, and his intuition of psychosomaticism as it appears in the child prodigy. The comprehensive nature of the range of types of children who appear in the Comédie humaine, unequal though the attention Balzac devotes to them may be, serves to underline his originality in presenting them all at a point in history 'où il n'était permis d'exister qu'à l'âge de la majorité légale'.¹ unless one were unfortunate enough to be illegitimate or abandoned.

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

CHAPTER IV

THE YOUNG MAN (MALE ADOLESCENT)

The basic concept of adolescence has not changed much since the nineteenth century, except that the terms 'adolescence' and 'youth' were often used interchangeably then, especially in the early years.¹ This is true in the Comédie humaine. Besides this difference, then as now, adolescence may be deemed to fall between the onset of puberty and its termination, roughly between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five.² Balzac appears to accept this approximate demarcation. He said of a twenty-two-year-old friend, 'Il est ce que j'étais à son âge, cet enfant.'³ Vautrin says much the same to the twenty-one-year-old Rastignac: '... dans ce temps-là j'étais un enfant, j'avais votre âge.'⁴ Moreover, in the Comédie humaine Balzac habitually refers to most of his young men as 'l'enfant', for example Sébastien de la Roche, Victurnien d'Esgrignon and Calyste du Guénic.⁵

So much for the limits of adolescence. At all epochs its dominant characteristics have been twofold: the physical crisis of puberty and a spiritual awakening. The Romeo and Juliet story epitomises the traditional romanticism about adolescence, which is a social rather than biological phenomenon. Medical opinion in Balzac's time did not under-rate either characteristic of this phenomenon. Articles in DSM and DM make this quite clear.⁶ DSM defines puberty as destined to 'parer l'homme de tous

1. DSM Age, p. 594.

2. Mark Abrahams. The Teenage Consumer, quoted in Mays, op cit, p. 48; DSM Age, p. 178; ibid., Accroissement, p. 105.

3. Corres. II, p. 718.

4. PG p. 328.

5. e.g. F p. 70 'ce pauvre enfant'; CA p. 53 'cet enfant'; B p. 224 'cet enfant'.

6. DSM Jeunesse, vol. XXVI; Puberté, vol. XLVI; Adolescence, vol. I; DM Age, vol. I.

ses attributs physiques et moraux',¹ and attributes youth's traits, chiefly its impetuosity and fiery passions, to the 'growth of energy in all organs of the body' and the rapidity of circulation.² DM corroborates this by qualifying the young man as 'bouillant' and youth as the time of 'l'exubérance du sang dans l'ensemble de la circulation générale et capillaire'.³

As for the moral aspect of youth both dictionaries define it in similar terms. DSM eulogises 'cet âge brillant et heureux que l'on a justement comparé au printemps et au matin', and continues with the following lyrical encomium: 'La jeunesse ... est toute volontaire, ennemie de la dissimulation et du mensonge, magnanime, extrême dans le bien comme dans le mal ... rebelle à toute soumission.... Le jeune homme préfère de beaucoup ses passions à son intérêt ... ne consulte que son impétuosité et son courage'.⁴ The tenor of DM is much the same: 'Cette époque, qui est surtout celle de la grâce et de la beauté, est aussi l'âge des illusions de la vie'.⁵ Although both emphasise the idealism of youth's illusions DM is less laudatory, remarking on the young man's tendency to be carried away by his vehement feelings and consequently to be precipitate and reckless.⁶

In view of the fairly modern concept of adolescence evinced by early nineteenth century doctors, it is a little surprising that writers only become properly aware of adolescence as a subject in the closing years of the century. True, Rousseau's Confessions had introduced the first adolescent in French literature, and there is no lack of memorable young men in the Comédie humaine. However, Balzac is most interested in the

1. Puberté, p. 33.

2. cf. Adolescence, p. 159; Jeunesse, p. 386; Circulation, p. 250.

3. Age, pp. 577 - 578.

4. Jeunesse, p. 384.

5. Age, p. 594.

6. Age, p. 598.

young man, not the teenager. He may refer to his young heroes as children, but he does so with affectionate condescension - '(les) grands enfants de vingt-cinq ans'.¹ Rastignac, Rubempré, Raphaël de Valentin and Félix de Vandenesse do not provide much data for case-histories of nineteenth century adolescents, in contrast with many of the young girls in the Comédie humaine like Hortense Hu. Modeste Mignon. A reason for this may be that contemporary medical opinion thought that puberty was more stormy for women than men because of the difficulties with the onset of menstruation.² However, it seems more likely that Balzac was simply content to draw on his own experience for his analysis of young men. He concentrates on three general aspects of youth, which I shall examine separately: its abstract traits - and here he is very traditional; its first 'sentimental education'; and its historical actuality. He seldom mentions an adolescent's physical awakening. His introspective, rather than empathetic, exploration of adolescence and youth is disappointingly conservative and rather lacks vigour and realism, save for the third aspect mentioned above.

In the Comédie humaine Balzac faithfully reproduces DSM's and DM's moral portrait of adolescents, which I have summarised above. He accepts uncritically that young people almost inevitably possess extreme idealism, intrepidity, impatience of authority and impetuosity. He espoused these 'idées reçues' probably because he regarded youth with wistful unrealism. He hated the idea of growing old, and his correspondence with Mme Hanska is full of reassurances about his perennial youthfulness of heart.³ He claimed that despite his forty years and greying hair he always remained a child, or at most a youth of twenty.⁴

1. FA p. 279.

2. DSM Age, vol. I, p. 178.

3. Lettres à Mme H.I., p. 551.

4. ibid., II, p. 70, p. 105, p. 122, p. 202.

Like DSM and DM, Balzac reflects on young people's grace and gaiety. He approves of their indulgence in the 'delightful' activities suggested by their 'arnal' nature.¹ Félix de Vandenesse bewails the fact that his 'verdant' youth was vitiated,² and describes his virility as burgeoning late.² Gaston de Nueil is presented as 'le jeune homme en sa fleur'.³ These images indicate the banality of Balzac's attitude to adolescence, traditionally the springtime of life. Balzac often alludes to youth's intrinsic charm, but cannot resist pedantically observing that it covers - temporarily - a multitude of sins. The inconsistent Charles Grandet, for instance, displays an affable, laughing exterior which, according to Balzac, becomes youth so well.⁴ Lucien de Rubempré attributes a talismanic power to his youth, for it endows him with the amenity which enables him to pose as an aristocrat. His career demonstrates that his youthful beauty and charm are merely 'ce fatal privilège (qui) perd plus de jeunes gens qu'il n'en sauve'.⁵ Lousteau pompously reflects that what can be dismissed as charming and easily excusable at twenty-two is considered dishonourable in a forty-year-old.⁶ The irony of this observation is that it is really true of Lousteau himself, although he is using it as an excuse to rid himself of Dinah.

Balzac is less sententious about youth's capacity for gaiety. He describes it in the abstract and gives specific examples of youthful

1. Lys p. 16.
2. Lys p. 8.
3. FA p. 278.
4. EG p. 349 '... cet air affable et riant qui sied si bien à la jeunesse'.
5. IP, vol. XI, p. 308.
6. MD p. 227.

high spirits. He lauds it in a number of somewhat hyperbolic generalisations: young people are lively;¹ their jesting has an infectious grace;² their gaiety is exuberant and consists in 'les innocentes joyeusetés qui vont si bien à la jeunesse aimante'.³ There are many concrete examples: the japes of the art students in Chaudet's studio in La Rabouilleuse; the -rama puns of Mme Vauquer's lodgers in Le Père Goriot; the repartee of the clerks in Le Colonel Chabert; the endearing nonchalance of the two students in Z. Marcas; and, in Un Début dans la vie, the hoaxes of the young travellers in the 'coucou' and Mistigris' not always successful distortion of puns.⁴

Youth's grace and gaiety is not an inevitable cliché in the Comédie humaine. Balzac refuses it to those he intends to be thorough-going villains. For instance, in Ursule Mirouët Désiré Minoret has a certain attraction as the well-dressed tyrant and 'boute-en-train' of Nemours,⁵ but the sinister Goupil was guilty in his youth of 'une conduite presque crapuleuse',⁶ of having drunk of life to its dregs too young. Similarly Petit-Claud has no redeeming qualities. Spurned in childhood by his classmates, he appears to have 'une certaine portion de fiel extravasée dans le sang'.⁷

Balzac wholeheartedly endorses the notion of youth's idealism. He lauds the energy and purity of young people who have not yet compromised

1. Be p. 41 'un entrain de jeunesse'.

2. ZM p. 416 'La jeunesse a dans sa plaisanterie une grâce si communicative et si enfantine'.

3. RA p. 252.

4. e.g. Div p. 387: 'Voilà ce qui s'appelle faire plus de fruit que de besogne'. 'Chacun pêche pour son serin'.

5. UM p. 49.

6. UM p. 12

7. IP, vol. XII, p. 404.

with vice,¹ and whose beliefs are therefore 'fearless'¹ and 'delightful'.² He considers young people unyielding because they are ignorant of baseness,³ and intolerant because they assume that their magnificent beliefs are universally held.⁴ Montauran, for instance, is flabbergasted when he discovers how tepid and self-seeking most of the Royalist leaders are, because his own devotion to the Royalist cause is still aureoled by his youthful idealism.⁵ Exaltation and self-sacrifice come easily to the best of the young men in the *Comédie humaine*, like Louis Lambert, Emmanuel de Solis and Jacques Brigaut. Balthazar Claës, as a very young man, is typical of all young people because he follows the dictates of glory and science rather than vanity.⁶ Athanase Granson's reprehensible (we are given to understand) republican tendencies are explained by his twenty-three years, a time when, Balzac remarks pompously, a young man is ready to sacrifice all to liberty, be it never so ill-defined or misunderstood.⁷

For me Balzac's confidence in the idealism and energy of young people is epitomised in one of his inflated images: young people measure their future with an imaginary compass, and they alone determine the extent of their ultimate achievement by the size of the angle they venture to measure.⁸

1. MC p. 198.
2. LL p. 104.
3. Be p. 300.
4. IP, vol. XI, p. 249.
5. Ch p. 284.
6. RA p. 132.
7. VF p. 340.
8. Dr p. 286.

This confidence is not without moralising overtones. Benassis acknowledges ruefully the hesitancy and malleability of youth. A young man wavers between inner scruples and the temptations of bad examples;¹ his unsullied conscience indicates the strait gate to him, but he postpones going through it.² Young men like Rubempré and Rastignac demonstrate admittedly shaky virtue succumbing to vice, and the d'Arthez cénacle is too exemplary to be wholly credible. The transiency of youth's best qualities is emphasised by the miser Gosbeck who, sourly and evocatively, says that before the age of thirty probity and talent are still 'des espèces d'hypothèques' but thereafter a man can no longer be trusted.³ Gaston de Nueil is a textbook illustration of this remark. Mme de Beauséant tries to console herself with the thought that she will have been the only woman to have enjoyed in Gaston 'l'être jeune et pudique, toute grâce, toute beauté, toute délicatesse ... l'admirable cortège qui suit l'amour adolescent', because now that he is a man (that is, thirty) he will follow his destiny and be calculating.⁴ After such high-flown language it is something of a relief to find Benassis acknowledging the lack of confidence and dejection which can overtake an adolescent who perceives the difficulties and complexities of life: '... à cet aspect le courage parfois s'affaisse, encore neufs au métier de la vie sociale nous restons en proie à une sorte de niaiserie, à un sentiment de stupeur, comme si nous étions sans secours dans un pays étranger'.⁵

On a lighter note Balzac follows DSM and DM when pointing out that a drawback of youthful idealism is that it can be impetuous and irresponsible, resulting in either heroism or crime.⁶ In adolescence,

1. MC p. 200.

2. MC p. 199.

3. Gob p. 405.

4. FA pp. 298 - 299.

5. MC p. 199.

6. EHC p. 437.

Balzac tells us, young people are fanatical unto death,¹ and the loyalty of the fifteen-year-old Gothard and nineteen-year-old Catherine amply demonstrates this. Balzac is also aware that this courage is not necessarily of such an exalted nature: it is often mere foolhardiness, a gamble which can pay off. As he wryly remarks: young people are often both skilful and fortunate when they hurl themselves into an abyss.² Calyste manages to rescue Béatrix from the edge of the cliff because he uses the supernatural agility which Balzac believes common to young men in danger.³ Rastignac resolves to triumph over Maxime de Trailles, his 'rival' for Mme de Restaud, with the juvenile audacity 'qui fait commettre de grandes sottises ou obtenir de grands succès'.⁴ He commits the former, whereas Gaston de Nueil obtains the latter in his pursuit of Mme de Beauséant. Savinien de Portenduère's foolishness has greater consequences than Rastignac's, and his heedless irresponsibility brings him to a debtor's prison. His mother recognises the over-confidence peculiar to youth and declares herself ready to forgive him if his debts are the product only of 'l'entraînement de la jeunesse', and not of dishonesty.⁵

Balzac picturesquely rephrases DSM's description 'rebelle à toute soumission' with the metaphor 'on oppose le pistolet à un refus'.⁶ There are several examples of this youthful rebelliousness. Most of the young men in love in the *Comédie humaine* are peremptory and spurred on by opposition. Benassis revelled in his freedom from his first mistress

1. TA p. 80.
2. CA p. 74.
3. B p. 217.
4. PG p. 280.
5. UM p. 141.
6. IP, vol. XI, p. 237.

because she represented an obligation, albeit slight.¹ George Marest's boastful yarn-spinning about imaginary adventures is merely a reaction of someone who has recently acquired independence of paternal discipline.²

Most of the general characteristics of youth which Balzac mentions have the authority - even if unconsciously - of DSM and DM. Balzac mentions three of his own. He states, justly, that young people's exaltation may be mere effervescence³ or moodiness, for Benassis recalls 'les mille félicités et les mille désespérances qui se rencontrent plus ou moins actives dans toutes les jeunesses' and which lead young people to oscillate wildly between over- and under-estimating their capabilities.⁴ A textbook illustration of these tendencies is, of course, Lucien. He enters the world of journalism in a mood of capricious exaltation, determined to prove to the Cénacle that he alone will be able to remain morally unsullied while profiting from the material advantages to be found in his chosen career. He over-estimates himself as a man of the world and under-estimates his potential for producing great literature by abandoning it. The second trait Balzac mentions is young people's gullibility. They are attracted to someone like the infernal Bette Fischer because of her particular brand of 'patelinage'⁵ the prudhomme'sque Thuillier with 'cette apparence de succès qui trompe la jeunesse et l'étourdit sur l'avenir'⁶ or the lavishly spending Désiré Minoret.⁷ This trait is less general than Balzac would appear to think, and it seems that only the incorrigibly gullible of any age would be deceived about Thuillier and Désiré.

1. MC p. 203.

2. Dlv p. 453.

3. S p. 410.

4. MC p. 196.

5. Be p. 47.

6. Bou p. 15.

7. UM p. 49.

A third peculiarity of the young men in the Comédie humaine is their marked femininity: one only has to mention the names of Lucien de Rubempré, Etienne d'Hérouville, Raphaël de Valentin and 'Mademoiselle' Félix de Vandenesse. Effeminacy represents different things in different people - weakness in Lucien and Victournien d'Escrignon, chastity in Félix, angelicism in Etienne and Louis Lambert, or quite simply extreme delicacy of feeling as in Gaston de Nueil who, at twenty-three, is 'dominé par un sentiment de modestie: les timidités, les troubles de la jeune fille l'agitent'.¹

There seems to be no satisfactory explanation for the effeminacy of most of Balzac's young male heroes. Inevitably there has been speculation as to whether Balzac himself was homosexual. P. Barbéris concludes positively,² whereas P. Citron finds the evidence insufficient for a definitive conclusion either way.³ P. Citron advances a tentative hypothesis. After noting 'la prise de conscience, vers 1831, de ce "complexe du frère" ... avec, comme corollaire, la révélation probable de la trahison de la mère, et, plus hypothétique, la montée à la surface de tendances sexuelles qui, jusque-là, ou bien avaient été refoulées dans l'inconscient, ou bien se seraient satisfaites dans un sentiment de culpabilité ou du moins sans s'exprimer littérairement',⁴ he makes the supposition: 'Si Balzac découvre en 1833 la cohérence de son univers artistique, n'est-ce pas aussi parcequ'il a découvert, peu auparavant, la cohérence de son être ... la capacité ... d'assumer ses obsessions et de s'en délivrer par la création?'⁵ Thus Citron's hypothesis

1. FA p. 285.

2. P. Barbéris. Balzac et le mal du siècle, p. 193.

3. P. Citron. Psychologie de Balzac, AB 1967.

4. AB 1967, pp. 26 - 27.

5. ibid.

is that between 1830 and 1836 Balzac was coming to terms with his complex about Henry and his ambiguous feelings towards certain collaborators like Sandeau, and worked these out in the creation of feminine young men in his image, most of whom were conceived before 1836 with the outstanding exception of Lucien. This hypothesis is feasible, but I would take it further and suggest that through his effeminate young men Balzac was sublimating his resentment against his mother by attributing to mothers, the epitome of womanhood, an angelic nature. All his young heroes are searching for the key to life. For this they need intuition, acuity and perception, which qualities at their best constitute 'cette patiente résignation qui, chez les mères et chez les femmes aimantes, surpasse, dans ses effets, l'énergie humaine et révèle peut-être dans le cœur des femmes l'existence de certaines cordes que Dieu a refusées à l'homme'.¹

Amateur psycho-analysis can never entirely explain the reason for a characteristic peculiar to one author. Moreover, it seems as if the question of Balzac's homosexual tendencies is insoluble and of very little academic interest, except insofar as it may have contributed to his presentation of the psychology of Vautrin, Paquita Valdès and possibly Bette Fischer. There are two other explanations of the femininity of many of the young males in the Comédie humaine. One is that it is an expression of Balzac's mythology. As V.A. Ohayon suggests, femininity and bi-sexuality (as in Séraphitus-Séraphita) represent Balzac's aspiration to the ideal of platonic love and his concept of angelicism, and hence he may have been led to endow several of his characters 'de virtualités angéliques en les féminisant'.² Her suggestion is confirmed by several assertions in the Comédie humaine. Balzac claims 'Les grands hommes

1. MCP p. 70.

2. V.A. Ohayon. Les jeunes Filles dans la CH, mythe ou réalité, p. 200.

ont instinctivement des délicatesses presque féminines',¹ which are at their most sublime in virgin natures thanks to the purity of their nervous systems.² However little one may sympathise with Balzac's system of myths, this may be a viable explanation of male effeminacy in young men attempting to 'dénicher un symbole ... trier des mythes'.³ The second possible explanation is the belief that effeminate beings are the most passionate. As Rousseau declared: 'Toutes les passions sexuelles logent dans des corps efféminés'.⁴

The pseudo-fraternal relationships which exist between many young men in the Comédie humaine are sometimes cited as evidence of Balzac's homosexual tendencies. This is supposed to be corroborated by Balzac's fraternal affection for men like Sandeau, the latter writing to him in 1836: 'Vous avez toujours été pour moi le meilleur des frères'.⁵ In the Comédie humaine itself most of the pseudo-fraternal relationships are above reproach. Louis Lambert and the narrator are brothers in misfortune.⁶ David Séchard is Lucien's brother, father and friend.⁷ The same disinterested protectiveness imbues d'Arthez's Cénacle, and a measure of Lucien's corruption is that, Peter-like, he denies d'Arthez, 'son frère du Cénacle'.⁸

1. LL p. 52

2. E p. 91.

3. VF p. 269.

4. Emile, p. 24.

5. Corres. III, p. 41.

6. LL p. 122.

7. IP, vol. XI, pp. 236 - 237.

8. IP, vol XII, p. 100.

Moreover, pseudo-fraternity is not confined to young men or even to members of the same sex. Dr Minoret finds in his four friends a sort of 'fraternité d'arrière-saison'.¹ Balzac seems to emphasise the unambiguous nature of pseudo-fraternity when he speaks of Mme de Dey and her son being bound by 'de fraternelles sympathies... cette amitié rare d'homme à homme'.² The notion of spiritual fraternity was common at the time. George Sand often signed herself 'fraternally yours', and then, as now, the brotherhood of man was a rhetorical cliché.³

Thus rather than suspecting Balzac of latent homosexuality, it seems to me that we should give him credit for having noted the tendency of adolescents to move in groups, gangs even, as we have seen with regard to the Chevaliers de la Désœuvrance.⁴ His fluctuation between realism and wishful thinking is apparent in his attitude to 'amitiés de collège'. On the one hand he endows these with a sort of sentimental mystique. In L'Auberge rouge Taillefer's iniquity is intensified by the fact that it is a childhood friend whom he betrays and sends to the gallows. Monsieur Alain ruins himself for his friend Mongenod because the fact that they were at school together has created an unbreakable bond between them.⁵ On the other hand, Balzac gives several examples of old schoolfriends who let each other down in later life. Godefroid⁶ and Dr Poulain⁶ are snobbishly shunned by their contemporaries. The schoolboy friendship between Lucien and David does not seem to have been very strong at the time, for it is only when Lucien is on the verge of penury that 'le hasard fit rencontrer les deux camarades de collège'⁷ and their ensuing friendship

1. UM p. 38.

2. Réq p. 180.

3. cf. Corres. III, p. 29. E. Briffault, editor of Le Figaro, wrote to Balzac: 'l'époque actuelle réclame ... entre tous les hommes d'intelligence, une fraternelle et solide alliance'.

4. see Ch. II.

6. CP p. 181.

5. EHC p. 218.

7. IP, vol. XI, p. 194.

is rather 'une de ces passions qui ne naissent qu'au sortir de l'adolescence'.¹ Ironically Lucien provokes David's downfall when he betrays his hiding-place to Petit-Claud on the fallacious premise that 'en fait d'amis, il n'y a que les amis de collège'.² Thus, in this rather minor matter Balzac oscillates between reality and fiction.

Happily his powers of concrete description do not wholly desert him in his analysis of youth. His delineation of little Oscar shows how delightfully he could depict adolescence if he wished. Oscar's voice is breaking and resembles that of a hoarse cockerel.³ He is at that stage where 'de petites choses font de grandes joies ou de grandes misères', and where frivolities like clothes are the focal points of a young man's vanity.⁴ The older Gaston de Nueil is convinced that his success with Mme de Beauséant depends on his arrangement of a lock of hair.⁵ There is an even more picturesque example in the Oeuvres de Jeunesse where Balzac amusingly describes adolescents smoking cigars because it provides 'un ton prématuré, un moyen de se donner l'air homme' and like a modern parent he advises them to give up smoking for health and aesthetic reasons: it damages the lungs and is 'un pauvre genre là où elle n'est pas d'usage'.⁶

These rare examples of Balzac's realism concerning young people make it clear that his approach to the young man was not clinical. Contrary to DSM and DM he concentrates almost entirely on the intellectual development of the adolescent, to the detriment of the physical. In the Comédie humaine there are only a few rare pseudo-medical explanations of youthful traits. For instance Balzac explains that young people are prone to dangerous, even fatal, exaltations because of the simultaneous

1. IP, vol. XI, p. 194 (my underlining).

2. ibid., vol. XII, p. 497.

3. Dlv p. 381.

4. ibid., p. 341.

5. FA p. 270.

6. Physiologie du cigare, OD II, p. 440.

fermentation of their powers.¹ Benassis believes that idleness weighs most heavily on young people because at that age 'la vie ... est alors pleine de sève perdue et de mouvement sans résultat'.² This vaguely, but very vaguely, recalls DSM and DM's assertions, quoted above, that youth is the time of passions because circulation is then at its most vigorous.

Balzac's presentation of adolescence is conventional and tends to be nebulous, veering between the laudatory and the moralising. A definition of youth by both the young Gaston de Nueil and the mature Benassis exactly sums up the spirit of DSM and DM's analysis of young people's moral characteristics. Gaston pleads with Mme de Beauséant that at his age 'l'ardeur, l'irréflexion, un vif besoin de bonheur sont ... des qualités et des défauts'.³ Benassis declares that a young man's qualities of hesitancy, generosity and 'pudeur' do him a disservice.⁴ Balzac would probably have been in agreement with those nineteenth century moralists who believed that youth is the age of passions, fire and impressionability, and therefore young people should be early moulded and broken in.⁵ His rose-tinted, often moralising presentation of adolescence and youth is unsatisfactory and unworthy of the realism of the author of the Comédie humaine.

Balzac is less interested in studying adolescent love 'per se' than in considering it as the 'éducation sentimentale' of an already essentially adult young man. Many of the novels deal with the love of a young man for an older woman, a love which brings him to maturity. Such young men are Rastignac, Félix de Vandenesse, Lucien de Rubempré, Calyste du Guénic and Gaston de Nueil. B.N. Schilling has already given an example in his The Hero as Failure of how a detailed study of a work like the Rubempré cycle reveals that it is basically a 'bildungsroman'.

1. EHC p. 437. 2. MC p. 198. 3. FA p. 278. 4. MC p. 199.

5. R. Deniel. Une Image de la famille et de la société sous la Restauration, pp. 275 - 276.

I shall not here study the sentimental education of these young men, whom Balzac considers as adults rather than adolescents, for that could be the stuff of a number of separate theses. The recurrence of the theme shows, however, how Balzac's own experience with 'la Dilecta' must have coloured his whole attitude to young love.

These portraits are not the only form in which Balzac expresses his concept of the nature of adolescent love. He depicts it sporadically in the Comédie humaine, paying lip-service to conventional morality by extolling the purity of adolescent love and yet covertly alluding to its sensual nature. He is able to laugh at the absurdities in calf-love. He is not as frank as one might have expected about the physical side of adolescent love and yet does not view it as a fall from grace, as H. Rolland's poem Le jeune Homme in Les Français peints par eux-mêmes suggests it might be.

DSM and DM both indicate the intensity and yet transiency of youth's passion. Balzac endorses the former quality, terming the age of fifteen as: 'cet âge ... souvent déjà le vestibule de toutes les passions'.¹ In his letters to Eve he frequently compares himself to a fourteen- or fifteen-year-old, hoping thereby to communicate the candour, force and abandon of his ardour.² In the Comédie humaine he occasionally exalts youthful love, going so far as to claim that young men are most passionate at twenty.³ He nostalgically regards youthful love as ecstatic and semi-religious, for, he says, a young man aspires to merit a woman's moral as well as physical love.⁴ Félix du Vandenesse betrays himself

1. OD II, p. 287.

2. Lettres à Mme H.I. p. 196; II, pp. 105, 396; III, pp. 593, 621.

3. PMV p. 55.

4. B p. 223.

when he repudiates his mystic bond with Mme de Mortsauf. The love of Balzac's most virtuous young male characters like Louis Lambert, Etienne d'Hérouville or Emmanuel de Solis is imbued with a certain religiosity. However, as early as 1830 Balzac had some reservations about the durability and value of youthful passion. In Une double Famille he observes that in love young men are gourmands rather than gourmets.¹ As his relationship with Mme Hanska progressed he naturally insisted increasingly on the worth of an older man's love. He asserted that where a young man falls in love casually a man of forty is discriminating.² The thirty-seven-year-old Claude Vignon criticises Calyste for behaving like all young men in love and metaphorically falling on fruit.³ From his experience Benassis regrets that at twenty-two one cannot yet distinguish between love and passion, and one's only yardstick is physical pleasure.⁴

DSM and DM are completely open about the physical demands of incipient virility and the consequent 'dangers' of masturbation. Balzac does not ignore these factors, but underplays them. Adrien Génestas is the only example in the Comédie humaine of a masturbating adolescent. From his fatigue and pallor Benassis concludes rapidly that the only thing wrong with him is that 'il est dans un mauvais moment, voilà tout' because of the bad habits he has acquired at school. This speedy diagnosis is made after two loaded questions: did his 'proviseur' read his breviary at night, and, after an affirmative reply, did the child therefore not fall

1. DF p. 278.

2. E p. 65.

3. B p. 122.

4. MC p. 203.

fall asleep immediately.¹

In the Comédie humaine there are other less 'reprehensible' references to latent sensuality. Balzac knew that school children of either sex are obsessed with love.² Already in La dernière Fée Abel bestows on his father the kiss of an ignorant adolescent, a kiss full of 'the secret fire which torments him'.³ Balzac believes that Calyste is typical of most young men who fall in love with the first woman to appear in the 'burning desert' of their desires,⁴ because schoolboys hanker after 'les parages défendus de l'océan des plaisirs'.⁵ Balzac conveys this more vividly in the picture of a schoolboy stirred by the sight of a streetwalker 'aux chairs nues et aux bas blancs'.⁶ This image recurs more chastely in some of the letters to Mme Hanska. For instance, Balzac describes himself as happy as '(le) lycéen qui croit avec délices à l'amour d'une femme'.⁷

These examples show that Balzac did not entirely ignore adolescent sensuality. His extreme discretion in this regard - far greater than with the young girl, as we shall see - is exemplified in Le Lys dans la vallée, which, as M. Le Yaouanc has observed, depicts the torments of Félix's sensibility and sensuality. His daring to kiss Henriette's bare shoulders is prompted by youthful ardour and his physical infidelity with Arabella Dudley can be explained by the increased demands of his virility.⁸ I agree with Le Yaouanc's assumption that Balzac draws on the theories of

1. MC pp. 248 - 249.

2. Lys p. 14.

3. Ch. III, p. 57.

7. Lettres à Mme H. I. p. 196.

8. Lys, ed. Garnier, p. lxxiv.

4. B p. 125.

5. Phy p. 82.

6. IP, vol. XII, p. 195.

the eighteenth century 'idéologues' and also heralds modern psychoanalysis by his suggestion that physiology determines psychology. Notwithstanding, in this novel Balzac never happily reconciles his 'psycho-analytic' understanding of the process of growing up with a beatific idealisation of Romantic love.

Fortunately Balzac's sense of humour does not always desert him as thoroughly as it did in Le Lys dans la vallée. He knows that calf-love can easily be fatuous and does not hesitate to qualify it as '(un) temps de délicieuse niaiserie'¹ because an adolescent in love is naïvely admiring and very touchy.² In his pursuit of Mme de Beauséant Gaston de Nueil suffers agonies lest he be mocked by his unwitting go-between, the Marquis de Champignelles, or disdained by the lady herself. Benassis, supposedly the voice of experience, twice uses the term 'niais' in describing a young man's first reaction to life and love. I have already quoted the passage in which he speaks of young people being prone to 'une sorte de niaiserie' on first entering society.³ He attributes the dilemma of any young man to his being impelled forward by his desires and restrained by 'sa niaiserie sentimentale'.³ When d'Arthez falls in love for the first time he adopts 'un petit air fat digne d'un écolier',⁴ and in his conversation with Diane de Maufrigneuse, he displays the impetuous eloquence of a schoolboy.⁵ It is this sort of eloquence, no doubt, which Balzac had in mind when he observed that everyone writes sentimental verse on leaving school.⁶

1. Théorie de la Démarche, OD II, p. 619.

2. B p. 89.

3. MC p. 199.

4. SPC p. 331.

5. ibid., p. 359.

6. IP, vol. XI, p. 271.

Although these manifestations of calf-love are indeed fatuous, Balzac analyses sympathetically the very real insecurity and diffidence experienced by adolescents. Sometimes he conveys these emotions in inflated generalisations which, superficially, detract from their relevance. He talks, for example, of 'les belles timidités de la jeunesse',¹ or the 'mille pudeurs qui font du jeune homme un être à part dont le coeur abonde en ... poésies, en espérances vierges ... profondes'.² Gaston de Nueil, typical of most young men of twenty-three according to Balzac, is dominated by a feeling of modesty; like a young girl he is timid and anxious, and over-estimates the size of the obstacles to his love.³ Balzac gives several concrete examples of this feeling of inadequacy. Félix de Vandenesse is humiliated by his lack of self-composure at his first ball, and is so overcome that he commits the unpardonable gaffe of kissing a strange lady. The villainous Don Juan acts like a young boy who shakes when opening conversation with his partner at a ball with the inevitable question 'do you like dancing?'.⁴ When he finally succeeds in gaining access to Mme de Beauséant's house Gaston cannot help trembling, despite his audacity.⁵

Although most of Balzac's presentation of adolescent love in general is credible, it is one-sided because it is not objective. Neither is it very novel. The relative significance of his healthy (if understated) acceptance of adolescent sensuality and his ability to see the humorous side of growing up is better appreciated if we examine another contemporary view of the adolescent. This appears in the poem published in Les Français

1. TA p. 158.

2. Bo p. 396.

3. FA p. 285.

4. Elv p. 97.

5. FA p. 271.

points par eux-mêmes, referred to above. This was composed by Henri Rolland who wrote the delightfully realistic sketch of the schoolboy referred to in a previous chapter. Rolland describes the innocent young man whose calf-love stimulates seraphic dreams and mystical exaltation, but whose subsequent over-indulgence in 'fecund pleasures' results in the squandering of his 'treasures of modesty'. Parts of the Comédie humaine are reminiscent of this, but on the whole Balzac's attitude is not as unrealistic or pseudo-pious, and his depiction of male adolescents falls unexcitingly somewhere between the medical and the nostalgically Romantic.

Balzac's presentation of adolescents and youths is obviously not strikingly original. We are therefore obliged to seek elsewhere for a quality which differentiates them from, say, the heroes of the novels of self-disclosure. We shall find this quality in their historical significance. Balzac gives an accurate picture of young men under the Restoration and July Monarchy.

The Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras had been the work of comparatively young men. Napoleon himself had provided an example of how much a single youth was capable of accomplishing. The officer cadre of his armies provided able and ambitious youths with a quick path to advancement, regardless of their social class. Restoration régimes were quite different: both those of Louis XVIII and Charles X were gerontocracies. Louis XVIII was personally something of an anachronism: he clung to the notion of kingship by divine right and refused to consider himself the king of a crowned revolution. His courtiers were mainly ageing émigrés and his chief ministers, like Fouché and Talleyrand, wily foxes approaching sixty who had been fortunate in possessing an enormous capacity for survival. Educated young men outside the aristocracy found themselves without employment, as 'ancien régime' families joined in the competition for

even the humblest administrative jobs and their ancestry and loyalty to the crown gave them certain unbeatable advantages. This situation continues under the July Monarchy, only in bourgeois guise. Louis-Philippe was already ageing when he became king. His régime quickly became one of vested interests and he himself swiftly settled into an attitude of stolid self-satisfaction. When we meet the two students in Z. Marcas they have already given up running in the 'rat-race', for they realise that fortune, intrigue and luck, not ability, promote one in the overcrowded legal and medical professions.¹ Despite the change in electoral laws - the age of eligibility as a deputy was lowered from forty to thirty - the status quo seems to have remained, for in 1837 Marcas criticises the fact that there are not as yet any deputies of thirty.² The short story, Z. Marcas, gives an oratorical, yet basically true, panorama of the attempted elimination of youth from the political life of the first half of the nineteenth century, and their consequently mounting grievances. Although the story is mainly an indictment of the July Monarchy it is not kind to the Restoration governments. There is little praise in the ambiguous remark 'Quel éloge de la cour de Charles X, que la cour actuelle, si tant est que ce soit une cour',³ and Marcas criticises both governments for looking to the past, the Restoration to the 'Grand Siècle' and the July Monarchy to the Empire.⁴ This is true: Louis XVIII clung to the notion of kingship by divine right and Charles X pursued an 'ancien régime' colonial policy; in 1833 Louis-Philippe arranged for the statue of Napoleon I to be placed on the Vendôme column and in 1840 his remains were brought back to Paris for a state

1. ZM pp. 406 - 407.

2. ibid., p. 426.

3. ibid., p. 408.

4. ibid., p. 428.

funeral in the Invalides. Marcas is also correct in reproaching the Orleanist government for its neglect of the young people who had contributed to bringing about the July Revolution. He prophesies a resurgence of republican feeling and yet another revolution.¹ Here Balzac displays those powers of political foresight which were to be evident again after the 1848 Revolution. He then prophesied that the Republic would only last three years,² and would be succeeded by 'la parodie de l'Empire'.³

Z. Marcas is not the only work in which Balzac emphasises the neglect of young people as a major cause of the inefficiency of government in the first half of the nineteenth century. Already in Wann-Chlore Landon and Mme d'Arneuse discuss the merits of pre- and post-Revolutionary youth.⁴ In Les Employés, which concerns the Restoration, Balzac complains that Louis XVIII's Ministers lack youthfulness, both literally and metaphorically.⁵ In Ferragus he blames their jealous conservation of power and contempt of young men as the indirect cause of the fall of the Bourbons.⁶ Even that conservative monarchist, Mme de Mortsauf, accepts that they did not give the young an opportunity to test their mettle.⁷ A product of this is the fatuous Canalis, apropos of whom Balzac says that aristocratic youth has dispensed with the duties of power because it has been left with only the shadow thereof.⁸ In Un Prince de la Bohême, set in 1834, Balzac compares

1. ZM p. 426.

3. ibid., p. 320.

5. E p. 151.

7. Lys p. 154, '... aujourd'hui la jeunesse possède une science de serre chaude ... elle tranche avec le fil d'une lame qui n'a pas encore servi'.

8. MM p. 286.

2. Lettres à Mme H. IV, p. 223.

4. pp. 1270 - 1271.

6. F p. 23.

the sluggishness of nineteenth century France to the dynamism of the country under Napoleon who, like Charlemagne, cultivated the young as his 'missi dominici'.¹ The 'nouvelle' itself describes the emergence of a libertine, indisciplined grouping of young 'Bohemians' and attributes their existence to the failure of the Orleanist régime to attract and use youthful talent. The theme of the government's neglect of youth and the latter's consequent moral deterioration is one which often reappears. Gaston de Nueil's suicide has poetic justice, but Balzac emphasises that it is wholly contrary to the habits of 'la jeune France'.² Balzac's pessimism is endorsed by two characters from opposite ends of the social scale. In 1823 the Duc de Chaulieu comments dismissively 'Oh! il n'y a plus de jeunesse ... en laissant échapper l'un geste d'homme d'Etat'.³ The seamstress Mme Gruget says more picturesquely in 1819 'qué jeunesse incohérente que celle que nous avons faite, c'est pas notre plus bel éloge'.⁴

Not only do characters in the Comédie humaine comment on the seriousness of the generation gap and the 'helotism'⁵ of young people, but two of them personify the effects of gerontocracy or middle-aged plutocracy on young people. The despicable Auguste de Maulincour attempts to dishonour the virtuous Clémence Desmarets and so causes her death. Balzac declares him to be typical of a young man moulded by the Restoration, vacillating and twisted by the prejudices of old and feeble men, notably the prejudice that women and not politics should be the preoccupation of young men.⁶ When we first see Victorin Hulot Balzac tells us in no uncertain terms that

1. PrB p. 361.

3. MJM p. 202.

5. ZM p. 407.

2. FA p. 305.

4. F p. 109.

6. F p. 23.

he is 'le jeune homme tel que l'a fabriqué la Révolution de 1830 ... (un) des cercueils ambulants qui contiennent un Français d'autrefois'.¹ His faults are grave: he is opportunist, arrogant, covetous and ingratiating.² His mental inertness shows that Balzac, like some modern psychiatrists,³ believed that adolescent rebellion is essential for social health. The words of Professor Mays, written over one hundred years later, are almost a paraphrase of Balzac's: '... in default of religion and politics, there is nothing left to give the educational process its dynamic other than egotism.... There is in fact no other dynamism to keep the institution going'.⁴ The Hulot family crisis forces Victorin to rise, phoenix-like, and seize on the latter dynamism to become one of the leading deputies for the Centre-Left and thus escape the political anaemia of his time.

Balzac's awareness of the serious problems arising from the generation gap is greatly to his credit, although he does not always assign the right causes to it. He was convinced, for instance, that the abolition of the 'Droit d'aînesse' had destroyed youthful incentive,⁵ whereas it is more likely that there were simply too many people for too few jobs. In the early nineteenth century the French nation was younger than it was to be in the twentieth, owing to the high birth and death rate. At the beginning of the century the under-forties accounted for sixty-seven per cent of the population, whereas a hundred years later it was for fifty-seven per cent.⁶ However Balzac does not simply dismiss youthful

1. Be pp. 63 - 64.

2. ibid.

3. J.B. Mays. The Young Pretenders : a Study of Adolescence in Contemporary Society, p. 160.

4. ibid., p. 174.

5. Le Droit d'aînesse, OD I.

6. G. de Bertier de Sauvigny. La Restauration, p. 237.

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