

unrest as a part of youth's timeless revolt against the Establishment. His awareness of political actuality, of problems still with us today under the names of generation gap and communication difficulties, makes his unquestioning acceptance of youth's traditional characteristics all the more anomalous.

Balzac's recognition of youth's legitimate discontent with the existing political and social set-up has provided the basis for one of the lengthiest Balzacian theses of recent years, namely Balzac et le Mal du siècle by P. Barbéris. In his thesis Barbéris studies the political dilemma of nineteenth century youth. He gives Balzac credit for sensing that 'le mal du siècle' was not peculiar to inexperienced, irresponsible youth, but to the whole of society. For Barbéris Balzac is a Marxist 'avant la lettre', the first French writer to proclaim 'la conscience des entraves et des limites qu'impose au progrès une civilisation bourgeoise libérale' and to acknowledge that a whole generation was experiencing 'le sentiment profond d'avoir été flouée'.¹

Barbéris' analysis of nineteenth century youth is interesting, but his conclusion seems to me quite erroneous. Balzac does not recommend opting out of a capitalistic society but out of an Orleanist one. The students in Z. Marcas plan to leave France because competitiveness, surely a capitalist trait, has been stifled and superior and active people have been crushed by envious and insatiable mediocrities.² Balzac expresses faith in youth's ability to free itself from its servitude, but expects it to continue acting within the existing monarchical, capitalist framework. Barbéris cites as evidence of Balzac's awareness of the degradation of the modern world by money his division of youth into two categories

1. P. Barbéris. Balzac et le Mal du siècle, pp. 1934 - 1935.

2. ZM p. 426.

in the essay Le Bois de Boulogne et le Luxembourg.¹ The members of the two categories have diametrically opposed preferences: the essential and the superficial, work and idleness, knowledge and pleasure. The serious type puts life to good use and the flippant type just enjoys it.

I disagree with Barbéris' interpretation of this division, because Balzac's conclusion hardly suggests deep revulsion against a bourgeois society. He remarks facetiously that the serious type is 'doubtless' the wisest 'mais elle salue bien mal'. Moreover, elsewhere in the Comédie humaine, he defines the two types differently: 'le côté studieux des méconnus, le côté ardent des passionnés',² or, which amounts to more or less the same thing, two stages of youth: 'la jeunesse durant laquelle on croit, la jeunesse pendant laquelle on agit'. Balzac considers that greatness is a synthesis of these two qualities.³ Benassis believes that these qualities co-exist when a young man is resolute, for he has amazing power: 'quand il sait concevoir; et quand, pour exécuter, il dispose de toutes les forces vitales, augmentées encore par les intrépides croyances de la jeunesse'.⁴ Balzac does not see firmness of purpose and charm as antithetic, but suggests that ideally they should be combined. Furthermore, in his metaphor: 'La jeunesse éclatera comme la chaudière d'une machine à vapeur',⁵ Balzac implies that no doubt the said machine will continue to exist.

The other feature of the historical importance of the young men in the Comédie humaine is their assault on Paris. In the nineteenth century thousands of young provincials came to Paris in the hopes of making their fortune there. The population of France rose from twenty-nine million in 1815 to nearly thirty-six million in 1851 and the bulk of the increase

1. OD II, p. 55.

2. PrB p. 368.

3. Dr n. 22.

4. MC p. 198.

5. ZM p. 425.

took refuge in the towns, particularly Paris.¹ Joseph in Le Vicaire des Ardennes foreshadows the many Balzacian heroes who come to Paris from the provinces and struggle to survive, both materially and socially.

Such heroes are Louis Lambert, Félix de Vandenesse, Rastignac, Rubempré and Benassis. This has given rise to the criticism that they are merely aspects of 'ce complexe moral du collégien de Vendôme, de l'étudiant'.² There is a lot of truth in this, but nevertheless the career of these young men was by no means uncommon in the nineteenth century as Thiers, Flaubert and Zola, to name but a few, demonstrate.

Despite Balzac's accurate situation of many of his fictional young men in their historical context, he clearly regards them as adults and pays more attention to their 'éducation sentimentale' than to their transition from adolescence to maturity. For instance, he dwells very little on their physical development, about which he must almost certainly have read in medical works besides having experienced it himself. His presentation of male adolescence and youth is curiously limited, providing a useful, but rather weak, counterpoise to his depiction of the young girl. The following chapter will show that the latter is bold and progressive, in strong contrast to the former which is based mainly on current social and literary 'idées reçues' and coloured by Balzac's own direct experience and personal nostalgic cult of youth. This relatively unsatisfactory state of affairs may be explained by the curious void in his own life. He felt that he had not grown up before his meeting with Mme de Berny; in other words he had been unmothered and unloved. Despite this plausible hypothesis it is undeniable that in no other area of his interest in childhood and adolescence is Balzac so disappointingly narrow.

1. A. Cobban. A History of Modern France, p. 118.

2. P. Bertault. Introduction à Balzac, p. 15.

CHAPTER V

THE YOUNG GIRL

There are many young girls in the Comédie humaine and they have been the object of several critical comments or studies. Faguet, for instance, declares that Balzac's portraits of young girls are a total failure, but destroys any validity of this argument by continuing: 'Quand on les compare à la moindre paysanne de George Sand ... on saisit toute la différence'.¹ M. Bardèche has pointed out that Balzac's young girls are largely in the tradition of the English 'roman sentimental', exponents of which are Mistress Opie and Catherine Shirley.² Félicien Marceau devotes a chapter to scrutinising the most important 'young ladies' in the Comédie humaine in his Balzac et son monde. Other studies which are important in this regard are J. Bertaut La jeune Fille dans la littérature française, H. Garret Balzac's Theories on the Education of Girls for Marriage, M-H. Faillie La Femme et le Code civil dans la Comédie humaine and two theses presented recently: V.A. Ohayon Les jeunes Filles dans la Comédie humaine, mythe ou réalité? in 1970 and M. Boisvert La jeune fille de province dans la Comédie humaine in 1971. A brief examination of these works reveals the lacunae in the present state of Balzac studies concerning the young girl.

J. Bertaut places the Balzacian young girl in the context of French literature from the seventeenth century to the present day. He justifiably sees in Balzac and Musset the only two Romantic writers to give a realistic depiction of the young girl. Graziella, in Lamartine's novel of that name, is a transfiguration of a young Neapolitan whom Lamartine had loved. George Sand's young girls, like Marie in La Mare au diable,

1. E. Faguet. Balzac, pp. 126-127.

2. M. Bardèche. Balzac romancier, p. 11.

tend to be figures in a pastoral idyll. Hugo's Cosette, (like most of Dickens' young girls) will be a vapid incarnation of girlish innocence and virtue. Bertaut concludes that, in comparison with these writers, Balzac's young girls are realistically portrayed because he sees in them the potential wife, Mother and Mistress. Bertaut does not deny that they are uniform, nearly all being charming, simple, modest and proper and only really beginning to exist for Balzac from the day they fall in love. He attributes this uniformity to the fact that the young girl's status in the nineteenth century was insignificant and concludes: 'Si un observateur comme celui-là a laissé échapper une espèce entière sans la disséquer, c'est que, vraiment, cette espèce n'était pas encore constituée'.¹ This argument is specious, as the status of old maids, to whom Balzac devotes a lot of attention, was little superior. In any case, Les Français peints par eux-mêmes has several articles dealing directly or indirectly with the young girl: La Grisette, La Demoiselle à marier, L'Institutrice, Le Pensionnat de filles en province and a poem entitled La jeune Fille. Bertaut is correct in emphasising the comparative realism of the young girls in the Comédie humaine, but he does so for the wrong reasons. However romanticised and uniform Balzac's view may appear to the modern reader, it conforms to the early nineteenth century medical prototype of the young girl.

M. Boisvert also insists on the realism of Balzac's presentation of the young girl. His subject is the provincial young girl and he studies her milieu, clothes, physiognomy, pastimes and education, be it public or domestic. He discusses the preparation of girls for marriage, a subject which has already been treated by Dr. Garrett and M.-H. Faillie who both conclude that Balzac's advocacy of feminine emancipation is strictly

1. J. Bertaut. La jeune Fille dans la littérature française, p. 127.

dictated by the exigencies of the institution of marriage. In order to prove that provincial young girls are true to the actuality of France in the first half of the nineteenth century Boisvert cites memoirs, correspondence and literary works, but no medical treatises.

V.A. Chayon approaches the figure of the young girl from a completely different angle. In her competent thesis she convincingly demonstrates that Balzac's prototype young girl is a myth rather than reality. She places Balzac in the line of writers for whom, since Antiquity, young girls have incarnated man's yearning for faith and purity - in a word, the Absolute. She considers the young girls in the Comédie humaine to be elements of Balzac's mysticism: their virginity is both a source and a manifestation of energy and will and their love represents Balzac's (spasmodic!) aspiration after platonic love, an angelic state. Her approach is both unusual and valid, but not complete.

In the present chapter, then, there is no need for me to analyse in detail the characters of individual young girls, their historical and social realism, education and upbringing or symbolic value. Instead I shall attempt to fill two gaps in critical studies of Balzac's treatment of the young girl by endeavouring to indicate its medical accuracy, and then by analysing that unromantic species 'la fille à marier', whom Zola was to treat with such virulence. As with the two preceding chapters I shall divide this one into sections, using as a guide DSM's article Fille, which is that dictionary's chief source of information about young girls. The sections will be as follows: General characteristics, parent-daughter relationship with special emphasis on the mother-daughter aspect, puberty, 'pudicité' and finally 'la fille à marier'. As corroboration I shall use other articles in DSM and DM's De l'Adolescence.

At this stage it is imperative to define the young girl. Her age spans the years from puberty, which occurs at ages twelve to fourteen according to DSM and DM, until the age of twenty-one.¹ Legally, however, a girl reached her majority when she was twenty-five. For men the situation was reversed. Their adolescence was thought to end at twenty-five, but they were considered adults at twenty-one. In the Comédie humaine Balzac adopts the legal definition of a young girl, referring to Eugénie Grandet and the young Mme Claës as 'la jeune fille' even though they are twenty-three and twenty-five respectively.

General Characteristics

The author of the article Fille claims that from childhood little girls display finesse acute perception, tact and docility and are not oblivious of the gentle art of coquetry. (There is something of a pre-Freudian sound to this latter comment.) DM lists more or less the same qualities, terming them finesse of observation, tact, flirtatiousness, feminine guile and timidity. However DM considers that a girl acquires these only at puberty.

Balzac shows very little interest in small girls as such, the three whose childhood alone he describes being Pierrette, la Péchina and la Fosseuse. Pierrette dies at fifteen having experienced a brief period of happiness with her grandparents and her childhood companion Jacques Brigaut and a long period of misery with her cousins, a misery intensified by ignorance, illness and retarded puberty. La Péchina disappears from the pages of the Comédie humaine after Nicolas Tonsard's attempt to rape her has been foiled. The last we see of la Fosseuse is the announcement of her inheritance on the death of Benassis. One may deduce, though, that Balzac considered that girls possess the above-mentioned qualities before

1. DSM, Adolescence, p. 159; Fille, p. 500; Age, p. 178.
DM, Age, p. 594.

puberty, but that they only flowered at and after puberty. Pierrette lacks neither docility, perceptiveness or delicacy, albeit 'sauvage'.¹ She dislikes her rebarbative cousins at first sight² and her natural finesse enables her to realise instinctively that their charity should be unconditional.³ La Péchina cannot help responding to Nicolas' animal advances, despite her fear and moral training, so close to womanhood is she.

The fact that most of the young girl heroines in the Comédie humaine are obliged to persevere to obtain what they want does not mean they lack tact and docility. Ursule Mirouët has to overcome Mme de Portenduère's prejudice. Marguerite Claës endeavours to ensure the stability of her family by assuming, with humility and remorse her father's functions which he has abdicated through his monomaniacal pursuit of Science. Modeste Mignon must surmount her own inner resistance to her parents who, in their wisdom and prudence, have seen that Ernest de la Brière, and not Canalis, is the right man for her. Rosalie de Watteville, a girl of iron will, struggles in vain against the indifference of Albert Savarus. Examples could be multiplied. However, in the best of these girls will-power is enhanced and reinforced by a kind of docility. All are obedient to authority. Ursule's docility shows itself in her mystical faith, Marguerite's in her sense of duty, Modeste Mignon's in her filial love and Eugénie Grandet's in her probity. Girls without this docility come to grief however strong-minded they may be. To prove this one only has to mention the names of Emilie de Fontaine, Marie de Verneuil and Rosalie de Watteville. All

1. P p. 61 '... son coeur d'une délicatesse presque sauvage'.
2. P p. 58 'Pierrette éprouva soudain pour ses deux parents une invincible répulsion, sentiment que personne encore ne lui avait inspiré'.
3. P p. 73.

Balzac's virtuous young girls display the tact mentioned by DSM. Ursule, Marguerite, Eugénie and Modeste have a delicate regard for other people's feelings. The subdued Granville girls understand instinctively how emotionally bruised their father has been by his marriage.¹ The impetuous Juana Marana has 'le tact d'un coeur vierge'² which prevents her from compromising with corruption. She gives herself to Montefiore in all sincerity but, once she has realised how venal he is, she refuses to debase herself by marrying him merely in order to regularise her social position.

Most of Balzac's young girls have finesse and acute perception. Like Molière's Agnès (to whom, in fact, Rosalie de Watteville is compared³) their finesse is a blend of ruse and innocence. It is almost an axiom for Balzac that a young girl is 'aussi naïve que rusée'.⁴ Although this notion is rather a literary commonplace Balzac had had direct personal experience of it. He told Mme de Berny in 1822 that her daughters had almost certainly guessed the nature of their relations for 'l'oeil perçant des jeunes filles nous devine'.⁵ There are several echoes of this in the Comédie humaine. Charles Grandet warns his mistress that her daughter of eighteen will be both a companion and a spy.⁶ In Petites misères de la vie conjugale Balzac declares that a girl between the ages of twelve and fifteen is a terrible Argus.⁷ The idea of the ruse of innocence appears very early in Balzac's work. Wann-Chlore combines the finesse of a woman with the naïveté of a child.⁸ The Marquise de Rosann affirms that at fifteen and a half she possessed both the naïveté and 'cette finesse d'esprit' natural to young girls.⁹ Annette Gérard is able to

1. DF p. 76.

2. Ma p. 105.

3. AS p. 28.

4. Phy p. 94.

5. Corres. I, p. 182.

6. EG p. 394.

7. PMV p. 84.

8. Wann-Chlore, p. 1382.

9. Le Vicaire des Ardennes, vol. II, p 180.

separate her cousin Charles from a beautiful actress with 'sa politique profonde', despite the fact that she has been reared in total innocence according to Rousseauist principles.¹ In the Comédie humaine Balzac nuances his analysis of girlish finesse which ranges from the mystical to the astute. Dr. Minoret is the first father or guardian to recognise the angelic quality of a young girl's intuition when he acknowledges the rightness of Ursule's choice of Savinien. Of the unworldly Eugénie Grandet it is said: 'Instruite, la vertu calcule aussi bien que le vice',² and Hortense Hulot demonstrates this conclusively when she manages to ensnare Wenceslas unaided, guided only by the profound skill of young girls acting on instinct.³ Her mother ruefully but indulgently exclaims: '...la plus grande rouée de la terre sera toujours la Naïveté'.⁴

This finesse enables young girls to handle and judge their mothers. Dinah mollifies her mother by addressing her with the endearment of 'Maman', for 'ce mot était pour la sévère madame Piedefer une caresse qui ne manquait jamais son effet'.⁵ Rosalie de Watteville and Louise de Chaulieu discourage their mother's curiosity by feigning stupidity. Charlotte de Kergarouët is acutely embarrassed by her mother's ridiculous posturing.⁶ More rarely the situation is reversed and it is the mother who manifests the finesse. The austere and pious Duchesse de Grandlieu is adept at divining her daughter Clotilde's feelings,⁷ and her relative, the Vicomtesse de Grandlieu, displays the same perception.⁸

1. Argow le Pirate, p. 856.

7. S&M, vol. XVI, p. 280.

2. EG pp. 369 - 370.

8. Gob p. 379.

3. Be p. 105.

4. ibid., p. 112.

5. MD p. 251.

6. B p. 160.

As far as the last quality mentioned in the article Fille is concerned, the virtuous young girl heroines in the Comédie humaine display coquetry as modestly and unconsciously as befits those well-brought up models of chastity! In the less virtuous and more credible characters this coquetry is overt. The sensuous Julie de Chastillonest enjoys having an arm put round her waist and being jumped down from a carriage by her father.¹ Paméla, the fourteen-year-old caretaker's daughter in La Muse du département, already has the intelligence of a lorette² and knows that it is undesirable that three women rivals should meet in a bachelor's flat.³ Thus, although, Balzac recognises the existence of latent coquetry young girls, he prefers to keep his favourite heroines immaculate virgins who have not yet conceived love.

It is probable, then, that Balzac's young girls were largely modelled on the contemporary medical stereotype. They are seldom passive incarnations of virtue, however, as both good and bad have a will of their own, as well as a certain vigour even at their most tactful and docile.

Parent-daughter relationship

According to DSM a young girl's frailty provokes her father's tenderness and her mother's criticism. Mothers see in her 'une rivale d'autant plus redoutable que leurs attraits baissent, tandis que ceux de leur fille éclatent dans toute la fraîcheur du bel âge'.⁴ Balzac speciously summarised this by claiming that from a sort of instinctive gratitude to their spouse, fathers prefer daughters and mothers prefer sons.⁵ Variations on the two aspects of DSM's comments recur throughout the Comédie humaine.

1. F30 p. 4.
2. MD p. 197.
3. MD p. 193.
4. Fille, p. 499.
5. PMV p. 243.

My treatment of the father-daughter relationship will be perfunctory for several reasons. Firstly, our subject is the child and the adolescent and Balzac tends to highlight the rôle of the father, whereas his analysis of the mother-daughter relationship is noticeably less partial. Moreover, he usually depicts the clash between paternal and filial wills as occurring when the daughter is virtually an adult and hence at 'cet âge qui succède à l'adolescence'.¹ (my underlining) Secondly, the father-daughter relationship always remains basically mythical as it is treated on a high level of abstraction with almost cosmic significance. The mother-daughter relationship is more human and tells us more about ordinary young girls in the first half of the nineteenth century. A possible explanation is that Balzac considered that paternity, although indispensable to law and order in Society, was something which had to be consciously fostered and which derived in any case from the mother: '... peut-être ... les pères n'aiment-ils que les enfants avec lesquels ils ont fait une ample connaissance ... la paternité est un sentiment élevé en serre chaude par la femme, par les mœurs et les lois'.² He declared more explicitly and less doubtfully in the Analyse des corps enseignants: 'Le père et la société sont les continuateurs DE LA MERE' (sic).³

Thus in the Comédie humaine the father-daughter conflict is a structural and dramatic device which brings about the completion of a girl's growth to maturity.

1. F. Davin's introduction to the Etudes de mœurs au XIXe siècle, Pléiade XI, p. 238.

2. FVO p. 340.

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

Balzac's own list of different types of fathers indicates the lengths to which a study of types of fathers should be pursued, a study which would far exceed the limits of our present subject. The variety is astounding and the proportion of daughters who are the object of paternal feeling is significant: 'Il y a la paternité jalouse et terrible de Bartholoméo di Piombo, la paternité faible et indulgente du comte de Fontaine, la paternité partagée du comte de Granville, la paternité tout aristocratique du duc de Chaulieu, l'imposante paternité du baron du Guénic, la paternité douce, conseillère et bourgeoise de Monsieur Mignon, la paternité nominale de M. de la Baudraye, la paternité noble et abusive du m^{is} (sic) d'Esgrignon, la paternité molle de M. de Mortsauf, la paternité d'instinct, de passion, et à l'état de vice du père Goriot, la passion partielle du vieux juge Blondet, la paternité bourgeoise de César Birotteau, celle de Balthazar Claës, Sauviat, marquis d'Espard, certes pour les lecteurs intelligents de la Comédie humaine, il est patent qu'il n'y a pas une nuance de sentiment depuis le sublime jusqu'à l'horrible qui n'ait été saisie, qui n'ait été représentée'.¹ Clearly the emphasis is on the father figure and this is corroborated in Le Père Goriot, Balzac's study of paternity par excellence. As Guyon has observed the novel describes the pathology rather than the physiology of paternity.² Thus the focal point of interest is the pathological father rather than the physiology of the relationship.

Balzac's concentration on the father does not, of course, mean complete disregard of the daughter. The former influences the latter's

1. quoted in CB, ed. Garnier, p. cxlvii.

2. B. Guyon. Balzac psychologue de la paternité, p. 441.

character and destiny. I have mentioned some of the effects in the section on incest. In addition, using Balzac's list, incomplete though it be, it is clear that a loving bourgeois paternity like César Birotteau's will produce an enchanting yet self-disciplined daughter like Césarine, and that a detached aristocratic paternity like the Duc de Chaulieu's facilitates the emergence of a headstrong, irresponsible girl like Louise. On the whole Balzac uses a crucial moment in a girl's relationship with her father as a means of signposting her future or completing her maturation. Julie de Chatillon's destiny is sealed by her 'désobéissance folle'.¹ Eugénie Grandet reveals her accession to emotional maturity by her unwilling and remorseful judgement of her father when he displays indifference to both his brother's death and his destitute nephew's plight.

In the Comédie humaine the father-daughter relationship is ambivalent. It is a structural device for catalysing the daughter's growth to maturity, but it is as well symbolical. The daughter occasionally represents divine pardon for a sinful father. Clémence gave Ferragus a 'raison d'être',² and Lydie Peyrade in life symbolises redemption for her father, and in death expiation, 'un otage qu'on donne au malheur'.³ More frequently, however, it is the father who is regarded as the earthly representative of divine authority. As we have seen,⁴ disregard or contempt of him entails dire consequences even though he personally may not be worthy of respect. Such almost fanatical respect was a reflection of a contemporary social attitude. Already in Rétif de la Bretonne's Mon Village the father is regarded as a visible god and the Code re-inforced the Roman concept of the father as family head and high priest.

1. F30 p. 47.

2. F pp. 116 - 117.

3. S&M, vol. XIV, p. 318.

4. see Chapter III, Adopted child

Of most interest to this thesis are those occasions in the Comédie humaine when Balzac deserts the realms of abstract mystique for more tangible legal and physiological considerations.

Two critics have examined these. M-H. Faillie has analysed the girl's position both legally and emotionally. M. Bardèche¹ and P-G. Castex² have shown that Balzac invokes heredity to explain such conflicts as those between Balthazar and Marguerite Claës or old Grandet and Eugénie.

M-H. Faillie has shown that the Comédie humaine demonstrates repeatedly that, as in the case of La Vendetta, 'Le père est comptable à Dieu de ce malheur. Ne l'a-t-il pas causé par la funeste éducation donnée à sa fille ...? La fille est coupable de désobéissance, quoique la loi soit pour elle'.³ Her conclusion is that Balzacian heroines feel ill-used by the Code but are averse to using the few articles in their favour. Ginevra del Piombo is an isolated case and moreover she is a foreigner. Eugénie Grandet spurns Cruchot's attempts to protect her financial interests, as does Marguerite Claës those of Pierquin. Mme Faillie's scrupulous work renders any further discussion of this point unnecessary.

M. Fargeaud has felicitously pinpointed the rôle of heredity in many of the father-daughter relationships in the Comédie humaine. Her remark about the hereditary Claës monomania could apply to the Grandets and even the Comte de Mortsauf and Madeleine: 'C'est ici l'hérédité qui joue le rôle de signe précurseur du drame, tandis que l'héritage représente un élément dramatique en puissance'.⁴ At the time the introduction of the concept of heredity in the novel was still a novelty although not an

1. in Balzac romancier, p. 416.

2. in EG, ed. Garnier,

3. F. Davin's introduction to the Etudes de moeurs au XIXe siècle, Pléiade XI, p. 239.

4. M. Fargeaud. Balzac et la Recherche de l'Absolu, p. 472.

innovation.¹ It must be admitted that Balzac mentions it almost cautiously and does not attempt to define its limits.

It may fairly be said, then, that Balzac's discussion of the father-daughter relationship is largely symbolic and structural or dramatic, except insofar as he introduces legal considerations or hereditary influences. The breadth of the subject is too great and to a certain extent too irrelevant to this thesis to be studied here. Of more immediate bearing is the mother-daughter relationship, the nuances of which Balzac treats realistically and of which he had more personal experience.

His own mother was devoted to Laure and indifferent to Laurence. As we shall see in the section on 'la fille à marier' Mme d'Arneuse's behaviour to Eugénie is probably a caricature of Mme de Balzac's to Laurence. Their relationship may also be prefigured, in a minor key, in that between Henriette de Mortsauf and her mother, the Duchesse de Lenoncourt-Givry. This latter originates as well, and more importantly, in Balzac's relationship with his mother. Mme de Balzac must have shown her son how a mother's influence can affect her daughter's marriage, because she imposed both financial and emotional strains on the Surville ménage. Mme Evangelista is a frightening distortion of how a mother can wreck her daughter's marriage, although in fairness to Mme de Balzac it must be said that Balzac was not thinking specifically of her, or indeed at all, when he wrote Le Contrat de Mariage. He must have gleaned some information about the mother-daughter relationship from Mme de Berny, his sister Laure and Eve Hanska. It was through giving lessons to Mme de Berny's daughters that his relationship with their mother flowered. Laure reported to her brother the pleasure and pain she derived from her daughters. In 1823 he teased her about her despondency: 'Est-ce que Sophie n'irait

1. For a fuller discussion of the problem of novelty versus innovation see M. Le Yaouanc's Nosographie de l'humanité balzacienne, p. 102 ff.

pas bien, qu'elle n'aurait plus dit 'ga', qu'elle aurait déchu de la gentillesse que tu lui devinais in futurum?¹ Later he was to be witness to Laure's feverish attempts to marry Sophie off. Mme Hanska gave him an example of a wise and devoted mother when she took 'une résolution d'une sublimité maternelle' to make her fortune over to Anna when the latter married, keeping only a small income for herself.² His veneration of her maternity did not, however prevent him from giving her advice about bringing up³ and marrying⁴ off young girls.

There is little evidence that Balzac's family circumstances directly prompted him to repeat so insistently DSM's comment about a mother's jealousy of her daughter, although this does seem to be something of an obsession with him. Mme Balzac was very close to Laure and seems to have treated Laurence with contemptuous indifference on the whole. Possibly the theme of maternal jealousy springs from the author's own bitter resentment towards his mother. As early as 1818 he reflected: 'Quelle différence d'orgueil d'une mère de nos jours accompagnant une fille moins belle qu'elle, à celui d'une mère spartiate, etc.'⁵ The theme of the jealous mother appears in the Oeuvres de Jeunesse and is amplified in the Comédie humaine. Mme d'Arneuse in Wann-Chlore is vexed at the thought that she has a daughter of marriageable age,⁶ and is resentful because her daughter has committed the unpardonable sins of having been born and having a pretty face.⁷ The Comtesse de Morvan in L'Héritière

1. Corres. I, p. 222.

2. Corres. V, p. 735, see also ibid. p. 445.

3. Lettres à Mme H. II, p. 330.

4. ibid., pp. 588, 601.

5. CH ed. Club de l'Honnête Homme, vol. 25, no. 16, p. 537.

6. p. 1205.

7. pp. 1210 - 1211.

de Birague is hostile to her daughter Anna and wishes to marry her to her own lover. Both Mme d'Arneuse and the Comtesse use their maternal authority as a conclusive argument for their contumely,¹ as will Julie d'Aiglemont.² Other mothers in the Comédie humaine are variations on the character of Mme d'Arneuse. Mme d'Aubrion's daughter is said to be as ugly as a pretty mother of thirty-eight with pretensions could desire.³ Like Mme d'Arneuse, Mme Colleville is jealous of her daughter Cécile's radiance when she first falls in love.⁴ Mme Roguin, who wishes to pursue unencumbered her liaison with Du Tillet, 'exiles' her daughter Mélanie by marrying her off to a provincial.⁵ Julie d'Aiglemont resents and fears her daughter Hélène from two possible motives, neither laudable.⁶ Hélène may suspect her well-kept secrets, such as her liaison with Charles de Vandenesse, or she is a rival. In Les deux Rencontres Hélène herself suspects Julie of wanting to deprive her of her father's love when she is obliged to disobey the General by discovering the identity of the midnight visitor.⁷ Sometimes this jealousy can result in almost criminal negligence. The Duchesse d'Uxelles maliciously enjoys prolonging Diane's sexual ignorance because this prolongs her own youth and freedom.⁸ She marries her to her own lover, the Duc de Maufrigneuse, and Diane's subsequent discontent launches her on an almost nymphomaniacal career. Diane comments that her mother's behaviour would be bad enough on a woman-to-woman level, but that it is appalling in the mother-daughter context. She recalls from the vantage point of experience: 'Ma mère ... s'est mal conduite envers moi, de femme à femme, en sorte que ce qui est mal de femme à femme devient horrible de mère à fille'.⁹

1. Wann-Chlore, p. 1298, L'Héritière de Birague, vol. III, p. 142.

2. F30 p. 161.

3. EG p. 466.

4. Bou p. 124.

5. P p. 31.

6. F30 p. 149.

7. F30 p. 161.

8. SPC p. 352.

9. SPC p. 350.

This mother-daughter conflict reaches its most savage proportions in Albert Savarus, where the duel between Rosalie and her mother is a fundamental, if minor, theme. Mme de Watteville finds an outlet for the frustrations of a rigid, bigoted life-style by tyrannising over her daughter. That these frustrations may have sexual causes seems to be indicated by her speed in marrying Amédée de Soulas, the young man rejected by her daughter. Both mother and daughter are punished by having to live together for a time after the Baron de Watteville's death. Rosalie, however, suffers more because her mother inundates her with hypocritical, effusive commiseration on her father's death.

It is to his credit that Balzac does not depict only this one unpleasant aspect of a mother-daughter relationship. Firstly he remarks at one point that young girls only think that their mothers are uncomprehending and jealous.¹ Secondly, he alludes to a mother's loyalty to her daughter expecting an illegitimate child. De Marsay, that experienced rake, has never known a mother desert a daughter in that condition.² This is borne out by Mme Piédefer who loves Dinah enough to cover her shame with maternal protection.³ Although Dinah is over twenty-five, I have as my excuse for citing her as an example Balzac's declaration that mothers never cease to consider their daughter a child.⁴ Thirdly Balzac describes mother-daughter alliances, of which there are two types: the virtuous and the diabolical. The relationship between the Marana women is unclassifiable. The mother is one of a long line of courtesans and the daughter is a 'fallen woman'. Nevertheless their relationship is probably closest in mystic intensity to that of Balzac's myth of paternity. La Marana tries to make of her daughter 'une planche de salut'⁵ and redeem

1. BS p. 92.

2. CM p. 346.

3. MC p. 208.

4. Lys p. 100, CP p. 86.

5. MA p. 73.

the Marana line from its hereditary vocation. She succeeds, for Juana's last words to her dying mother are: 'Mourez en paix, ma mère, j'ai souffert pour vous toutes'.¹ Among the many pairs of mothers and daughters in the Comédie humaine there are four memorable virtuous diptyches: Eve and Mme Chardon, Eugénie and Mme Grandet, Hortense and Mme Hulot and Marguerite and Mme Claës. In each case the angelic nature of the alliance throws into relief the baseness of an offender. Lucien's fall from grace is measured against the sanctity of his mother and sister, who pray together for him.² Grandet's avarice and severity are emphasised by his wife and daughter's uncomplaining devotion to domestic duty. Hulot and Wenceslas's infidelities are highlighted by the virtue of Mme Hulot and Hortense.

These virtuous diptyches tend to be uniform and more than somewhat mawkish. In all, the daughters are stronger editions of their rather colourless mothers. Balzac indulges in sentimentality in his descriptions of their mutual devotion. Mme Chardon works in order to give her daughter financial help. Eugénie 'steals' light from her father in order to embroider a little collar for her mother.³ When Hortense realises the extent of her mother's self-sacrifice she kisses her skirt 'dans un accès de piété filiale'.⁴ Etienne and Marguerite's unspoken betrothal is consecrated by their joint presence at Mme Claës' death-bed.⁵ Although Balzac is unsuccessful in his treatment of these virtuous diptyches, he does at least show that he realised that the mother-daughter relationship need not necessarily be one of strife.

There are two evil diptyches: Nathalie and Mme Evangélista and Cécile and Mme Camusot. The former bankrupt Paul de Manerville morally

1. Ma p. 131.

2. IP, vol. XI, p. 334.

3. EG p. 292.

4. Be p. 277.

5. RA p. 223.

and financially, and the latter hasten Pons' death.

The Evangélistas plot together to ensnare Paul in matrimony, lay hands on his money and then get rid of him. Nathalie may be found guilty with extenuating circumstances, for she is young and her sheltered upbringing has made her blindly obedient to her mother. She is not strong enough to resist the combination of her superficial education and her family's hereditary motto 'odiate e aspettate'. She offers some resistance to her mother when she disobeys her injunction to flirt with Paul in order to enmesh him.¹ Nevertheless, Balzac seems to indicate that heredity is very little to blame for behaviour. Mme Evangélista behaves as ruthlessly as she does because she knows that Nathalie does not love Paul.² Soon after marriage, and while she is busy despoiling Paul, Nathalie takes Félix de Vandenesse as a lover, without, apparently, a qualm of conscience. The whole novel is masterly in its analysis of how a skilful mother can mould a daughter for her own ends. Paul's ineptness proves the validity of Balzac's dictum that a clever husband will neutralise a mother-daughter coalition: 'Mais généralement, les maris qui ont quelque peu de génie conjugal, savent opposer leur mère à celle de leur femme, et alors elles se neutralisent l'une par l'autre assez naturellement'.³

A more ordinarily nasty pair, whose actions, notwithstanding, have even direr effects, are Mme Camusot and her darling 'Lili'. The unpleasant twenty-three-year-old 'fillette' is the object of her mother's idolatry. Both take a malicious delight in snubbing Pons. When he

1. CM p. 251.

2. ibid., p. 314.

3. PMV p. 300.

presents Mme Camusot with a valuable Watteau fan the two exchange glances indicative of their cold contempt of him.¹ Cécile gets rid of Pons by pretending that the family is going out and takes great pleasure in re-enacting this 'lâche mystification' for her mother's amusement.² The failure of the projected marriage with Fritz Brunner inevitably generates in the two a formidable desire for vengeance,³ and Mme Camusot has no hesitation in sacrificing Pons to Cécile's 'honour'.⁴ His consequent banishment leads to his decline and ultimately his death.

In addition to the virtuous and evil mother-daughter diptyches there are the banal ones, like the Du Brossard pair in Illusions perdues. I shall discuss these in the section on 'la fille à marier'.

Thus, in the Comédie humaine Balzac presents the aspect of the mother-daughter relationship mentioned in DSM, but he goes further and analyses the different kinds of such a relationship. His depiction of it is that of a social historian and not a muddled visionary. It is refreshingly 'pot-au-feu', except for his sorties into oversentimentalisation.

Puberty

In the articles Fille and Puberté DSM outlines the symptoms of puberty. According to the former puberty takes place at any time between the ages of twelve and eighteen, and just before it a young girl loses 'cette gaieté folâtre et insouciance de son enfance.... Elle cherche le silence et la solitude; devenue languissante et décolorée, elle a des caprices, des inégalités d'humeur inconnues; elle surprend des larmes

1. CP p. 41.

2. CP p. 46

3. CP p. 85.

4. CP p. 102.

involontaires qui roulent dans ses yeux ... elle s'ignore elle-même'.¹

DM mentions the same symptoms, but regards them as characteristic of the whole of adolescence and not merely of puberty. Balzac appears to adopt the view of DM. There is very little allusion to the onset of menstruation in the Comédie humaine, and what there is is couched in discreet, barely discernible terms. M. Le Yaouanc notes that the menstrual crisis is salutary for Madeleine de Mortsauf, Pierrette suffers because the menses do not come and Ursule Mirouët experiences discomfort.² On the other hand, there are many young girls in the Comédie humaine who display the above symptoms in late adolescence, just before they fall in love. It seems to me that Balzac's description of this crisis indicates his realism. Most young girls can testify to the accuracy of DSM's list of symptoms, although today they do not have to wait until late adolescence or the threshold of marriage to feel them.

Nature's demands make Hortense Hulot melancholy and moody by turns. Her rapid change of temper and her nervous laughter indicate her state of mind.³ That Balzac devoted some thought to the crisis of an adolescent on the brink of maturity is shown by the most important variants concerning Hortense in Balzac's revisions of the text of La Cousine Bette.⁴ Modeste Mignon is capricious and rebellious, displaying an understandable resistance to her parents' choice of a young man 'aux vertus positives qui plaisent aux parents'.⁵ Rosalie de Watteville takes refuge in sullen solitude, which provides her with the time to hatch plans to conquer Albert Savarus.

1. p. 500.

2. M. Le Yaouanc. Nosographie de l'humanité balzacienne, p. 110.

3. Be p. 30.

4. For more detail see A. Lorant. Les Parents pauvres d'Honoré de Balzac, vol. I, p. 41.

5. MM p. 166.

Her adolescent crisis takes the form of unprincipled plotting, rather than disobedience - as Balzac summarises it: 'une phase quasi morbide de l'exaltation amoureuse'.¹ Even the saintly Ursule Mirouët becomes introvert, but without the concomitant moodiness of Hortense or Modeste.

In the early nineteenth century there seems to have been an embryonic Freudian intuition of latent and repressed sexual desire. DSM affirms that a young girl rejects love which she is unconsciously seeking, and that she does not know the true nature of her feelings.² Balzac repeats this when he says that a young girl can be made ill by 'cet amour qu'elle appelle et qu'elle ignore'.³ Victorine Taillefer's awakening sensuality shows itself in her momentary attraction to Vautrin and her more permanent infatuation with Rastignac who haunts her dreams. This confers on her mien a sickly chlorotic pallor. Again and again Balzac alludes to a young girl's repressed desire. Like Victorine Lydie Peyrade is assailed by dreams of the man she loves, in her case Rubempré. Louise de Chaulieu fights against the sexual attraction she feels for Don Félippe.⁴ Modeste Mignon's contrariness is partly due to her unconfessed sexual urges, for she is 'sublime de naïveté froide, de virginité contenue'.⁵ Marguerite Claës experiences the fermentation 'du premier plaisir reçu dans un coeur vierge'.⁶ Emmanuel awakens in her dormant feelings and inert thoughts,⁷ just as the dark stranger will cause Hélène d'Aiglemont hitherto unknown agitation.⁸ Rosalie de Watteville is driven forward by her unassuaged

1. AS p. 82.

2. Fille, p. 500.

3. LL p. 74.

4. MJM p. 207. 'Je me sens le besoin d'être remuée par l'horrible sensation que j'éprouve en voyant cet homme'.

5. MM p. 47.

6. RA p. 216.

7. RA p. 210.

8. F30 p. 163.

infatuation for Savarus. Her physical passions are so strong that Savarus himself, without knowing of her obsession with him, terms her 'une jeune fille acharnée de se faire aimer'.¹ Balzac occasionally pays lip-service to convention and plays down the sexual aspect of a young girl's first love. He hastens to say that, like those of any young girl, Modeste Mignon's dreams are of platonic love.² Eugénie Grandet, who may fairly be considered a retarded adolescent emotionally, experiences palpitations which 'fondent les idées en un vague désir',³ but we are told that this desire is innocent of sensuousness.⁴ Despite these qualifications, however, the only truly sexual young girl is Séraphita, whose sphere, in any case, is not of this world.

This lip-service should not blind the reader to Balzac's startling (for his time) frankness about repressed desires. It seems to me a measure of his realistic, progressive attitude that Le Feuilleton should have criticised Annette et le Criminel for its depiction of Annette's first feelings of love. The newspaper rebuked Balzac because 'nous ne comprenons pas l'invasion brusque et violente de l'amour dans ce coeur innocent'.⁵ This criticism is laughable in view of Balzac's later analyses of young girls. Annette Gérard appears to the modern reader as the epitome of stereotyped virtue. The other heroines of the Oeuvres de Jeunesse display only the most inoffensive aspects of the crisis of adolescence, and are far more ethereal than the heroines of the Comédie humaine. Anna de Chanclos becomes absent-minded and dreamy when she first falls in love,⁶ as does Clotilde de Lusignan.⁷ Catherine in La dernière Fée grows silent and

1. AS p. 132.

2. MM p. 53.

3. EG p. 332.

4. EG p. 351.

5. quoted by P. Barbéris. Aux sources de Balzac, p. 278.

6. L'Héritière de Birague, vol. II, p. 117.

7. vol. II, p. 242.

melancholy.¹ Once the heroine of Falthurne, Cynbeline, has set eyes on the man she loves she cannot sleep,² and Clotilde, too, finds her virginal couch uneasy.³ As Balzac makes special pleading in the Comédie humaine for the platonic nature of his young girls' love, so also are we told that Clotilde does not think beyond embracing her beloved Nephtaly for 'son chaste coeur ne devina pas de plus suaves voluptés'.⁴

If this sort of comment was too daring for Le Feuilleton, one can only guess at what its reaction to some of the observations in the Comédie humaine might have been. Balzac believes that an ignorant virgin and an experienced courtesan have in common violent desires.⁵ Juana Marana is 'impatient' to love⁶ but Balzac ascribes her 'fault' to the virtue of sincerity rather than to the vice of lust.⁷ He holds that latent sexuality emerges more clearly in country girls,⁸ but even his young urban girls tend to be obsessed by the idea of love. Modeste nurtures her idealisation of love with maternal care⁹ and Rosalie de Watteville is so preoccupied by her passion for Savarus that when she sees a lake she concludes that assuredly a lake is full of love.¹⁰ Although Balzac's belief in the marked sensuality of peasants is questionable, his observation of girlish obsession with love is acute. He does back up his assertion with one dubious explanation and two examples. The explanation is that country girls are easily overwhelmed by passion because they have nothing else with which to occupy their excitable imaginations.¹¹ The examples are la Péchina and Flore Brazier. La Péchina

1. vol. IV, p. 71.

2. Falthurne, p. 39.

4. ibid., p. 29.

6. Ma p. 77.

8. Pay p. 206.

10. AS p. 92.

3. Clotilde de Lusignan, vol. II, p. 252.

5. S&M, vol. XV, p. 50.

7. Ma p. 78.

9. MM p. 146.

11. see note 8.

is a likeable thirteen-year-old virgin consumed with hero-worship for Michaud. Nevertheless, her instincts nearly betray her and allow her to succumb to rape by Nicolas Tonsard. Flore Brazier is another country girl who early gives an intimation of the voluptuousness she will display as a woman. Balzac uses anodine terms to describe her - naiad, nymph and medieval statuette,¹ but he conveys her sensuality by her uncle's insistence that, she is 'innocente comme l'enfant qui vient de naître'.²

A young girl's lack of understanding of the physical changes she is undergoing leads her to hide her emotions and needs, according to DSM's article on Pudeur.³ This was probably truer in the nineteenth century, where there was far more reticence about sex than there is today. This reserve may also have been an attempt to disavow her supposedly shameful sexual urges, for as DSM says 'elle s'ignore elle-même'. These very words are repeated with reference to Clotilde de Lusignan 'ignore à l'amour et s'ignorant elle-même'.⁴ In any case, many young girls in the Oeuvres de Jeunesse and in the Comédie humaine evince this secretiveness. La Péchina is unable to confide her instinctive and justifiable fear of Nicolas Tonsard's pursuit to her grandfather.⁵ Emilie de Fontaine thinks she can conceal her love for Maximilien from her family.⁶ Marguerite Claës hides her love for Emmanuel under a flippancy, which Balzac says is typical of all young girls and which he characterises accurately as motivated 'par friandise ou par pudeur'.⁷ Even Ursule Mirouët is unable to tell her beloved guardian of her feelings for Savinien and he learns of them through

1. R pp. 389 - 390.

3. p. 81

5. Pay p. 203.

7. RA p. 214.

2. R p. 395.

4. vol. I, p. 28.

6. BS p. 122.

a somnambulist. Already in the Oeuvres de Jeunesse Balzac was aware of this characteristic. Eugénie keeps her love for Landon from her mother because of her 'chaste pride'.¹

For poetic effect Balzac frequently accepted the Romantic notion that a young girl's first love should be the man she marries. In this regard Marguerite Claës and Ursule Mirouët show impeccable propriety. However, Balzac the realist was aware of the illogical, often misguided nature of a young girl's calf-love. It was a tenet of his that young girls imagine their ideal man and proceed to adore as this ideal the first presentable man who comes along.² As Vautrin picturesquely says, an unhappy girl's heart is like a dry sponge needing to be filled with love and expanding as soon as it receives a drop of sentiment.³ This is why some of the virtuous young girls in the Comédie humaine give their hearts to the most unsuitable men. Julie de Chatillonest falls in love with the insensitive and limited Victor d'Aiglemont. Victorine's 'confused desires' converge on the first attractive being she meets,⁴ the opportunist Rastignac. Hortense Hulot is overcome by a vague desire for the unknown which, Balzac says, is familiar to all young girls, and fastens itself on the first man to appear by chance.⁵ Modeste's curiosity first attracts her to the charlatan poet Canalis, and it is largely her wise family's careful handling of the situation which shows her the error of her ways. Balzac was certainly no idealist about a young girl's instinctive rightness of choice. He advised Mme. Hanska most emphatically not to leave Anna with complete freedom of choice of a husband for, he said, no young girl can judge people

1. Wann-Chlore, p. 1330.

2. F30 pp. 17, 118.

3. PG p. 335.

4. PG p. 360.

5. Be p. 58.

as she is ignorant of life,¹ and someone like Anna judges men by their exterior with no thought to the future.²

A fallacy which Balzac seems to have accepted is DSM's belief that at puberty the activity of a girl's uterine organs stimulate her love of song.³ DM expresses roughly the same idea. It states that a girl's voice tone changes at puberty and she acquires a soft, clear, silvery voice. Therefore singing is one of her favourite forms of expression.⁴ These ideas are ludicrous to the modern reader, but Balzac took them fairly seriously. The angelic Ursule pleads with her guardian to allow her to learn music. When the somnambulist sees her in a dream she is at the piano, hoping to bring the doctor to God by means of her beautiful voice. Later she occupies herself with the study of harmony and composition. This notion was especially prevalent in the Oeuvres de Jeunesse. Nearly all the heroines play music at one stage or another. In Wann-Chlore Jane plays the harp all day and Eugénie the piano.⁵ It seems a little odd that they should have naught else to do! Mercifully Balzac outgrew his adulation of young girls playing music, and in the Comédie humaine he is not above ridiculing those bourgeois who make their daughters learn music as a social grace. There is a delicious description of Mlle Matifat who is termed a young person 'sans manières ... jouant tant bien que mal une sonate, ayant une jolie écriture anglaise, sachant le français et l'orthographe, enfin une complète éducation bourgeoise'.⁶ There is similar verve in a number of other pen-pictures. Cécile Colleville also

1. Lettres à Mme H. III, p. 588.

2. ibid., p. 601.

3. p. 502.

4. p. 599.

5. p. 1364.

6. MN p. 391.

receives the most polished education according to bourgeois lights and this includes, among other things, music and dancing.¹ In Béatrix we find the scathing comment that the average young girl is a beautiful doll who makes herself agreeable by singing and playing the piano.² In the sketch Entre Savants is the terse observation that in the early days of the Empire the eighteen year old Mlle Flore Hansard passed for an exceedingly well-brought up girl because she played the harp.³

Balzac's view of puberty conforms therefore to early nineteenth century medical notions, fallacies and all. It is, however, to his credit that he could be frank about mentioning a young girl's repressed desires and the obsessional nature of her calf-love. His intuition of latent sexuality is pre-Freudian, although he puts its occurrence at a later stage of development than we would today. This is extraordinary, especially if one considers that at the time girls were expected to be decorous ninnies.

Pudicité

Contemporary doctors' awareness of the sexual undertones of a young girl's emotions was not, apparently, admitted by writers, except of course for Balzac himself. Where medicine and literature definitely converged was in their belief that purity is the appurtenance of young girls. DSM is emphatic that exercise and the retention of innocence are the best safeguards of health, and that once a girl has lost her 'pudicité' (a word extremely difficult to translate, combining the idea of modesty, chastity and virginal instincts) she is no longer worthy to be called a woman. DM echoes these sentiments in its view that at puberty a girl acquires the characteristically feminine qualities of reserve and 'pudeur' or sense of shame. In DSM's article Défloration the writer recalls that poets have compared an ingenuous girl to 'la fleur du matin: elle brille du plus vif

1. Sou p. 33.

2. B p. 70.

3. OD III, p. 624.

éclat; un voile de pudeur couvre ses traits et sa personne ... un aimable coloris orne son visage'.¹ The writer of the article Fille pronounces dire warnings against loss of this innocence through masturbation and (in the wake of Rousseau) novels and idleness. The article Puberté is even more Rousseauist in its deprecation of the influence of theatres, novels, erotic poetry and certain pictures.²

In this respect, then, medicine seems to have been greatly influenced by Rousseauism. DSM, the more old-fashioned work, shows this most, as DM is content with decrying the practice of masturbation.³ When it suited him Balzac, too, adhered to the well-worn notions of a girl's 'pudicité', her likeness to a flower and her tendency to blush. He also sermonised about the nefarious effect of novels. His uncritical conformity is, however, redeemed by his healthy intuition of repressed sexuality (discussed in the last section) and his inconsistent advocacy of limited feminine emancipation.

Most of the respectable young girls in the Comédie humaine are chaste. Vautrin, a sort of Mephistopheles, holds that innocence and chastity are the attributes of young girls.⁴ Variations on this theme recur throughout the Comédie humaine. In Béatrix it is said that a young girl has a purity, innocence and fresh beauty.⁵ In La Recherche de l'absolu her charm is held to come from her innocence.⁶ In Le Médecin de campagne her movements are described as having 'pudique simplicité'.⁷

1. pp. 200 - 201.

2. p. 51.

3. p. 601.

4. S&M, vol. IV, p. 34 '... l'apanage de l'adolescence ... les délices de la chasteté, les délicatesses de la pudeur, ces deux gloires de la jeune fille'.

5. B p. 54.

6. RA p. 213.

7. MC p. 144.

In his attempts to convey the celestial purity of his young girls Balzac shows a lamentable lack of imagination from the Oeuvres de Jeunesse onwards. Sometimes it is sufficient for him to say vaguely 'la jolie vierge' as he does for Clotilde de Lusignan¹ and later for Augustine Lebas.² Otherwise he has recourse to the Virgin Mary or to a specific number of representations of her in European art. Annette Gérard in Argow le Pirate,³ and later Agathe Bridau are likened to St. Mary.⁴ Véronique Sauviat is first almost a madonna⁵ and then a Raphaëlesque madonna.⁶ Balzac had already used the latter simile in Sténie.⁷ Eugénie Grandet is the Virgin mother who has conceived love.⁸ Balzac is at pains to tell us that Modeste Mignon is like a Virgin in Spanish art rather than Raphaëlesque.⁹ Marguerite Clèves, by an 'image de proximité' resembles a Virgin in Flemish painting.¹⁰ Victorine Taillefer is like 'one of those naïve medieval paintings',¹¹ and Madeleine de Mortsauf and Flore Brazier are like medieval statuettes.¹² Balzac surpasses himself in banality of style when he says that Flore Brazier has 'une des plus jolies têtes de vierge que jamais peintre ait pu rêver'.¹³ There are several rare variations on these comparisons which are not particularly noteworthy. The two Granville sisters are as innocent as Eve when she left God's hands.¹⁴ Balzac succeeds in producing an incongruous mixture of metaphors when he compares Laurence de Cinq-Cygne to a statue of Judith, who was a murderess, and to Scott's Diana Vernon.¹⁵

1. vol. IV, p. 139.

3. p. 1043.

5. CV p. 27.

7. p. 151.

9. MI p. 20.

11. PG p. 412.

13. R p. 389.

15. TA pp. 71, 74.

2. MCP p. 13.

4. R p. 257.

6. CV p. 33.

8. EG pp. 422 - 423.

10. RA p. 196.

12. Iys p. 234: R p. 390.

14. FE p. 75.

To make things more incoherent his use of cognomology in the second syllable of her surname denotes her purity and innocence.

If Balzac's analogies of young girls with the Virgin Mary are hackneyed, his comparison of young girls to flowers is even more so. It dates back to Ronsard and before. Already in the Oeuvres de Jeunesse he uses this well-worn currency. Argow tells Mélanie to be careful of provoking him for she is a flower and he the storm which breaks oaks.¹ Clotilde de Lusignan is, somewhat bizarrely, 'comme une jeune fleur pleine de coloris et d'élégance'² and, more effusively, 'la rose vierge encore des baisers du zéphire'.³

At sixteen Florine is a bud full of promise⁴ and Nathalie Evangélista lives like a bird on the wing or a burgeoning flower.⁵ Céleste Colleville has the beauty of any young girl gathering the roses of an indirect declaration.⁶ Pierrette's first ideas are described as 'les fleurs de l'enfance'⁷ and 'les fleurs de son esprit naissant'.⁸ Victorine Taillefer is as sickly as a shrub planted in unsuitable ground.⁹ It seems to me that the conventional nature of these similes is underlined by Balzac's comparison of a young girl who loses her virginity to a flower which has been picked, in contrast to an adulterous wife who is like a flower trodden underfoot.¹⁰ This probably comes from the ideas suggested by the work 'défloration' and it is in DSM's article of that name that the image of a girl as a flower is mentioned.

The outward and visible sign of a young girl's innocence is a blush, and blushing is probably the 'voile de pudeur ... aimable coloris'

1. Le Vicaire des Ardennes, vol IV, p. 117.

2. vol. I, p. 26.

4. IP, vol. XII, p. 148.

6. Bou p. 124.

8. P p. 75.

10. H p. 380.

3. vol. I, p. 28.

5. CM p. 217.

7. P p. 64.

9. PG pp. 232 - 233.

referred to in DSM. In the Oeuvres de Jeunesse Balzac considers blushing a token of love,¹ and most of the heroines in the early works blush readily. When Landon first visits Mme d'Arneuse and Eugénie, the latter bends her head over her sewing to hide 'sa rougeur virginale'.² In Le Centenaire the heroine's Alpine pallor does not exclude 'les couleurs timides de l'innocence'.³ Clotilde de Lusignan's father tells her that modest blushing is all very well but should not be allowed to degenerate into an icy mien.⁴

In the Comédie humaine, however, there are more delightful and less simpering references to coy young girls. Pons blushes like a young girl caught in the wrong⁵ and Colonel Chabert like one whose mother accuses her of a clandestine love.⁶ The most piquant description is that of Blondet who, ashamed of having been duped, blushes like 'une vierge à qui l'on dit une histoire un peu leste dont le mot lui est connu'.⁷

For literary and sentimentalising purposes, then, Balzac accepted the tradition of a young girl's innocence, sincerely much of the time. He firmly adhered to the tradition that religious fervour is symbolised by this innocence, as V.A. Ohayon has shown in her thesis. He revered this innocence because he believed that a young girl's instinctive tenderness attracts her to mysticism,⁸ which for him was the most profound form of religion. Already in the Oeuvres de Jeunesse Annette Gérard is said to have a chaste, pure and contemplative soul.⁹ Some of the most upright young girls in the Comédie humaine owe their integrity to their pious upbringing. Hortense Hulot possesses reserves of fortitude partly because

1. Clotilde de Lusignan, vol. III, p. 107.

2. Wann-Chlore, p. 1269.

4. vol. III, p. 134.

6. Col p. 74.

8. P p. 79.

3. vol. II, p. 197.

5. CP p. 42.

7. Pay p. 79.

9. Argow le Pirate, p. 907.

of her chaste upbringing close to her mother.¹ Eugénie Grandet displays courage in adversity, so much so that her father grumbles that her 'disobedience' in loving her cousin stems from her 'jolie éducation, religieuse surtout'.² For Balzac, and contemporary Catholic moralists, a pious upbringing automatically makes of a woman a devoted and accomplished housewife. Agathe Rouget and Joséphine Claës bear this out, and we are told that Marguerite Claës will be a chaste wife because she has modesty, noble feelings and religious principles.³ Ursule Mirouët is a mystic thanks to her upbringing.⁴ Her comprehension of Christianity is described in lyrical, if slightly confused, terms as an Act of Creation: as the sun gives light to the earth, so religion gives food to her soul.⁵ At the other extreme, the demoniacal siren Valérie Marneffe declares that her mother had raised her in the Catholic faith and that she understands God. She adds prophetically: 'C'est à nous autres perverses qu'il parle le plus terriblement'.⁶

When Balzac descends from his ivory tower of moralising he is able to analyse the imperfections of this religious fervour with discernment. He realises that in some girls religion may be powerless against 'nature' (that is, sexual urges).⁷ In others it may act as a barrier against them, and help girls to solve the dilemma of 'les calculs d'une vertu prudente et les malheurs d'une faute'.⁸ He points out the absolutism of a young girl's ideal at this period, for she considers anything outside it dirty.⁹ Hélène d'Aiglemont, for example, loathes herself utterly, so vile does she feel after her brother's death. Balzac enlarges on this with his comment

1. Be p. 30.

3. RA p. 235.

5. UM p. 62.

7. Be p. 30.

9. Bou p. 182.

2. EG p. 434.

4. UM p. 61.

6. Be p. 357.

8. Ma pp. 78 - 79.

that at her age young girls tend to exaggerate the enormity of their faults.¹ Juana Marana despises Diard who, after all, makes an 'honest woman' of her because she has 'toute la consciencieuse pureté du jeune âge'.² Nevertheless she pays dearly for her laudably idealistic contempt for both her seducer Montefiore and her 'saviour' Diard. Possibly Balzac's early experience of his two sisters had given him his not uncritical attitude to girlish idealism. In Argow le Pirate he qualifies his heroine as 'la jeune et intolérante dévote'³ because she is a mixture of piety and intolerance, attaching extreme importance to an apparently simple action, word or thought.⁴

As well as indicating some of the drawbacks to girlish idealism, Balzac gives several examples of the disadvantages which accrue from a strict religious upbringing. He was already aware of these in the Ceuvres de Jeunesse. In Le Vicaire des Ardennes there is an exposé of the sad effects of a rigorously religious upbringing. The Marquise de Rosann is an easy prey for her seducer because her 'soul of fire' has been developed by her aunt's bigotry.⁵ Juana Marana, Augustine Lebas, Caroline Crochard, Honorine and the Granville sisters make unhappy marriages because their innocence has not equipped them with judgement of people or forewarning of life's pitfalls. The only one to escape permanent unhappiness or disaster is Marie-Angélique Granville, who is fortunate in her tactful and understanding husband, Félix de Vandenesse. Rosalie de Watteville is adamant, for her ignorance, due to her exclusively religious upbringing,⁶ allows her monomaniacal passion for Savarus to flourish unchecked.

1. F30 p. 150.

2. Ma p. 98.

3. p. 883.

4. p. 844.

5. Le Vicaire des Ardennes, vol. I, pp. 134 - 138; vol. II, p. 178.

6. AS p. 15ff.

Clearly the Comédie humaine reveals Balzac's oscillation between fulsome praise for religious upbringing and grim examples of the effects thereof. In the same way he swings between fierce warnings against the corruption of maidenly innocence and pleas for greater feminine emancipation.

Curiously, he does not repeat DSM's strictures upon onanism as practised by girls, nor those against the influence of theatres save for a brief remark in La Femme de trente ans: 'Quoique les mélodrames surexcitent les sentiments, ils passent à Paris pour être à la portée de l'enfance, et sans danger, parce que l'innocence y triomphe toujours'.¹ In Argow le Pirate Annette Gérard is actually encouraged to attend performances of the great French tragedies.² However Balzac echoes DSM's indictment of novels and enlarges on the dangers of an unsuitable milieu. Conversely, he was probably the first writer openly to discuss the notion of feminine emancipation, although this had first been aired in the eighteenth century.³ This line of enquiry has already been pursued, notably by H. Garrett and M-H. Faillie.

Condemnation of novels was commonplace in the first half of the nineteenth century. Writers blamed the emergence of the Romantic young girl on the dual influence of convent education and novels.⁴ In fact, one of the manifestations of feminine emancipation was the emergence of women writers. Catholic moralists waxed almost hysterical about the corruption of youth by '(de) mauvais livres'.⁵ From the Oeuvres de Jeunesse

1. F30 p. 135.

2. Argow le Pirate, p. 842.

3. Ohayon, op. cit., p. 175.

4. Boisvert, op. cit., p. 225.

5. R. Deniel, Une Image de la famille et de la société sous la Restauration, p. 35.

onwards Balzac demonstrates how wise reading fosters a girl's best qualities and novels attenuate them, be they ever so innocuous, for very innocent girls may be corrupted by something marginally less innocent. The Marquise de Rosann, for example, abandons her last remaining scruples about yielding to her seducer after reading La nouvelle Héloïse.¹ Similarly Véronique Sauviat will attain mental puberty after her discovery of Paul et Virginie.² Conversely, Annette Gérard grows up vigorous and high-principled because she reads nothing but the great French and Classical authors.³ Ursule and Pierrette retain mental and physical chastity because they are not exposed to novels. Ursule comes into contact only with her 'family of chosen spirits' and the Doctor's library provides her with books, which, classically, combine diversion and instruction and enable her to broaden her mind naturally and freely. Pierrette remains 'pudique' until her death largely, one suspects, because the crass impatience and incompetence of her cousins and teachers leave her an ignoramus. Modeste Mignon is probably the best example of Balzac's disapproval of the nefarious influence of novels. In the novel of that name he compares the innocence of young girls to milk which is easily soured, and advises a father not to allow the presence of unknown men, books or newspapers in his house - in that order!⁴ Modeste herself is an embryo Emma Bovary, and the influence of sentimental novels and her sister's dramatic and unhappy love is almost fatal for her.⁵ Not only

1. Le Vicaire des Ardennes, vol. II, p. 209.

2. CV p. 17.

3. Argow le Pirate, p. 842.

4. MM p. 31.

5. MM p. 71.

novels but milieu as well can exercise a corruptive influence. As we have seen it was her sister's example which encouraged Modeste in wilfulness. A servant maid is responsible for giving Augustine Lebas access to the novels which give her ideas above her station. Rosalie de Watteville is probably corrupted by her knowledge of the nocturnal meetings between her maid and 'Savarus' valet. Louise de Chaulieu and Renée de Maucombe are precocious virgins thanks to the conversations of their fellows in their convent boarding school. Occasionally Balzac didactically indicates how the elimination of undesirable associates benefits a girl. He praises Mme de Beauvisage for having had the courage to bring her daughter under her strict personal supervision and thus extinguish any nascent evil in her soul.¹ Mme de la Chanterie owes her perfect innocence and remarkable piety to her secluded girlhood spent close to her mother.

Nevertheless, by a contradiction typical of him, Balzac expressed great concern about the dangers of rearing a girl in total ignorance of life. He wrote vehemently to Mme de Castries: '... la jeune fille qui fait une faute est bien autrement sacrée que celle qui reste ignorante et grosse de malheurs pour l'avenir, par le fait même de son ignorance'.² He demonstrates the validity of this dictum in characters like Juana Marana and Augustine Lebas. In his preface to the 1830 edition of the Scènes de la vie privée he expressed the hope that mothers would allow their daughters to read the Scènes, for he could not see the advantage in delaying a girl's 'instruction' for a year or two.⁴ In fact, many of these Scènes illustrate the destruction of a young girl's amorous ideals.

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1. DA p. 340
 2. EHC p. 367.
 3. Corres. I, p. 591.
 4. Pléiade XI, p. 163.

Balzac's advocacy of feminine emancipation, however fluctuating and inconclusive it is, is important both in the development of his work and in the context of his age. Mme Faillie shows how his attitude became more flexible with time. In 1830 he is categorical: Augustine and Emilie are wrong to defy their parents. In Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées the rules are slightly relaxed: Louise de Chaulieu buys her liberty by renouncing her inheritance in favour of her brother. With Hortense Hulot in La Cousine Bette Balzac acknowledges a young girl's grasp of practicalities.¹ Thus the Code of Paternity becomes less rigid, but a girl's freedom remains bound to the institution of marriage.

Balzac, therefore, is a solid traditionalist who believes in the natural innocence of young girls, in their religious fervour and the indispensability of protecting their innocence. Nevertheless, there are numerous cracks in this granite wall of conservatism, chief of which is his consideration of feminine emancipation. His dilemma is shown by his avowed inability to define the upbringing a young girl should have. He shelves the problem by handing it over to the mother: a sudden event can instruct a naive girl swiftly and disastrously, but a girl enlightened too young may lose her purity of mind too soon.² His dilemma is also reflected in the characters themselves. Although he lauded the seduced young girl to the detriment of the adulterous woman, considering the former an unwitting defaulter and the latter a criminal, he did not fully calculate the consequences of premarital liberty. The few girls in the Comédie humaine

1. Faillie, op cit., p. 89.

2. AS p. 27.

who default either die for it, like Bettina Mignon and Ida Gruget, or spend the rest of their lives in voluntary expiation married to venal men, like Juana Marana and Félicie Berthier.

In the final resort, Balzac's depiction of young girls, like his depiction of children, is that of both a Romantic and a realist. It is Romantic because most of his young girls come direct from the 'roman sentimental', one category of which portrayed the young girl heroine triumphing over adversity by means of her modesty, prudence and constancy. Ursule Mirouët, Eugénie Grandet, Pierrette, Marguerite Claës, Césarine Birotteau, Hortense Hulot, Modeste Mignon and the Granville girls all represent persecuted innocence. However, realistically, not all are triumphant, and from the Oeuvres de Jeunesse onwards their virginal innocence is given another dimension because it contains elements of Balzac's mystic credo: energy, foresight and angelicism.

Balzac's depiction is realistic chiefly because he is deeply interested in the physical and psychological manifestations of nascent love in young girls. We have seen this in his ready reception of the pre-Freudian idea of latent or repressed sexuality. It is further borne out by his plans for works dealing with adolescent girls. From 1832 he thought of portraying 'les premières sensations de la jeune fille'. In 1843 he intended to write a story about young girls of fourteen and fifteen years old, and in 1845 he thought of dealing with the subject from the angle of Un Pensionnat de demoiselles.¹

Balzac is also a realist when he allows his young girls to escape from the mould of incredible virtue in which he has set them. Ursule Mirouët becomes a creature of flesh and blood when Balzac permits the reader to see her through her enemies' unsympathetic eyes. Mme Massin

1. Titres-projets pour les Scènes de la vie privée, CH, 'Aux éditions du Seuil', vol. 1, p. 58.

terms her 'cette petite sainte nitouche' and 'une petite morveuse ramassée dans la rue'.¹ Her husband calls Ursule a 'petite mijaurée'.² Goupil calls her 'la petite farceuse',³ Minoret 'cette maudite pécure',⁴ and his wife Zélie 'une petite ambitieuse'.⁴ Although Balzac records these insults merely to enhance Ursule's sanctity in the reader's eyes they do offset her sometimes saccharine angelicism. He uses the same technique, although far less fully, in Eugénie Grandet. Mme des Grassins, calls her 'une petite sotte, sans éducation commune, sans dot, et qui passe sa vie à raccommoder des torchons',⁵ and later 'une niaise, une fille sans fraîcheur'.⁶

These earthy aspects of Balzac's girl heroines are, unfortunately, revealed only too rarely. Although most of the girls have some realistic traits, very few are described with the concise vigour of the portrait of Charlotte de Kergarouët, who has a vulgar freshness, 'deux yeux noirs qui jouaient l'esprit, taille ronde, dos plat, bras maigres, parler bref et décidé des filles de province qui ne veulent pas avoir l'air de petite niaises'.⁷

On the debit side of Balzac's portrayal of young girls is his docile, yet wholly understandable, conformity to the mores of the time, when Society expected the young girl to be decorous and retiring, with the sole ambition of preparing herself for her future rôle of wife and mother. Balzac espoused the Rousseauist notion of a young girl's precious and easily corrupted innocence, which was common to both literature and medicine. On the credit side, however, is the fact that he picked up

1. UM pp. 10-11.

2. UM p. 127.

3. UM p. 168.

4. UM p. 254.

5. EG p. 318.

6. EG p. 324.

7. B p. 154.

and enlarged upon the pre-Freudian idea of latent or repressed sexuality suggested by the two dictionaries. That he seriously considered the question of feminine emancipation does much to extenuate his frequent tendency to conformism and illiberalism.

La fille à marier

In the first half of the nineteenth century marriage was prized for the material advantages which it bestowed on both partners. For men it could mean increased wealth and advancement in their chosen career. For women it brought social status and comparative independence. Catholic moralists of the time, too, did not cease to thunder that marriage and procreation were, and should be venerated as alone fulfilling, a woman's destiny.

In his thesis M. Boisvert has analysed the provincial young girl in the Comédie humaine with regard to marriage. He indicates the importance of education, class, name and especially dowry in arranging a marriage.¹ He concentrates chiefly on the external procedures involved: the age of the girls when they marry, the agents who undertake the search for a husband, the couple's first introduction and subsequent meeting, the marriage contract and the ceremony itself. He concludes that a fat dowry could permit marriage into a superior social stratum and that very few girls in the Comédie humaine find happiness in marriage.

All this is accurate and adequate. However, M. Boisvert has not shown how Balzac's attitude to, and presentation of, the marriage market stem from Balzac's direct personal experience, although he does remark

1. cf. also M-H, Failla, op. cit., for a more detailed discussion of the dowry and for Balzac's and contemporary attitude to the suppression thereof.

on the parallel between the contemporary social situation and that in the Comédie humaine. Furthermore it does not seem to me that he has paid enough attention to Balzac's dynamic stylistic treatment of the subject. Hence it is these factors that I shall study in this section.

Balzac's first major confrontation with the sordidness of the marriage market came with Laurence's marriage. Since Laure's marriage Mme Balzac had made Laurence's life wretched. She disliked her and loftily declared: 'Je ferai toujours tout le bien que je pourrai à ma fille, mais ne suis plus maîtresse de l'aimer'.¹ She may have resented Laurence's perception, for the latter accused her of having married B-F. Balzac from duty, not love.² In any case she was delighted to discover a prospective son-in-law who was skilful at flattering her vanity. She and B-F. Balzac glossed over Armand Michaut de Saint-Pierre de Montzaigle's reputation for dissoluteness because they were willingly blinded by his dual and authentic 'particule' and his pretensions to wealth. They proceeded with negotiations with almost indecent haste, irresponsibly marrying Laurence to someone whose dissipation and neglect were to lead to her early death three years and two children later. In this family tragedy can be found the protagonists of several 'dramas du gendre' in the Comédie humaine: an authoritarian unloving mother, overjoyed at finding a titled, supposedly rich son-in-law and consequently indifferent to his real faults or even vices, and a predatory bachelor, avid for money, adept at pleasing a future mother-in-law and a consummate hypocrite before marriage.

1. quoted in AB 1961, p. 25, art. M. Fargeaud. Laurence la mal aimée.

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

Balzac's second great confrontation with the realities of the marriage market came with Laure's desperate attempts to marry off her elder daughter, Sophie. Laure became almost neurotic about her lack of success and reproached herself for failing in her maternal duty.¹ In his letters to Mme Hanska Balzac gives a running commentary on the proceedings from the discovery of 'le phénix des maris'² through limping progress to ultimate failure. He castigated Laure (and the nineteenth century bourgeois spirit in général) for emphasising money rather than character,² and expressed horror at her 'sale' of her daughter: 'Ma soeur commet la bêtise d'aller flâner aux environs du pays où est le prétendu -prétendu. C'est offrir sa fille!'³ As Balzac probably could have foreseen, Laure's anxiety ultimately led her to accept a wholly unsuitable son-in-law, a widower twenty years Sophie's senior, who decamped early in the marriage.

Balzac himself was well qualified to observe the viewpoint of the bachelor in search of a wife. He was something of a 'coureur de dot' and regarded marriage as a last resort and panacea for debts particularly. Laure admits that the family hoped that 'un beau mariage' after Honoré's legal apprenticeship would get him out of debt.⁴ In 1841 - 1842 she was trying to arrange a good marriage for him.

Thus, besides his own position, Balzac had had two direct personal experiences of the venality of the husband hunt: the first at the beginning of his literary career and the second towards the end. In his work he reproduces the situations both in toto and in part.

1. Corres. V, p. 658.

2. Lettres à Mme H. III, p. 270.

3. ibid., p. 310.

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

His reproduction of the first situation in toto is in Wann-Chlore. Although not part of the Comédie humaine, it is worth analysing because it shows the coherence and steadiness of Balzac's attitude to the 'fille à marier' throughout his life. Like Mme Balzac, Mme d'Arneuse has pretensions to youth and seductiveness. She behaves towards Eugénie with the contemptuous authoritarianism of Mme Balzac to Laurence and evinces the same snobbish delight at finding a titled son-in-law. Balzac was to tell 'l'Etrangère' that his mother had killed Laurence,¹ and he transposes this idea in the novel when he makes Mme d'Arneuse cause Wann's death by revealing Landon's bigamy. Perhaps the influence of Balzac's personal resentment is best seen in his revisions of the text from the manuscript to the final published edition. In the latter he makes Eugénie more plaintive and passive, whereas Laurence had always been prepared to defend herself vigorously. When Mme d'Arneuse tells Eugénie that Landon is already married Balzac insisted on changing 'Elle mourra ... et elle sera heureuse' to 'elle mourra et elle ne sera pas heureuse'.² It seems, then, as if Balzac was trying to cover his tracks, to obscure the startlingly clear parallel between the Arneuse pair and Mme Balzac and Laurence. However the biographical imprint is too pronounced to be denied,³ especially as Barbéris has shown that the grandmother, Mme Guérin, is modelled on old Mme Sallambier. Both regret having married their daughters to men who have rapidly dissipated their fortune and consequently both are a little craven in the presence of their daughters, timid of displaying their

1. Lettres à Mme H. III, p. 128: see ibid., p. 275 'Où est ma soeur Laurence, cette pauvre persécutée qui a succombé!'
2. P. Barbéris. Balzac et le mal du siècle, p. 573.
3. see P. Barbéris. Aux sources de Balzac, pp. 78 - 79; p. 307ff. Balzac et le mal du siècle, p. 566ff.

affection for, and support of, their grandchildren. There is a faint echo of this situation in La Maison du Chat-qui-pelote. Like Laurence, Augustine Guillaume marries a titled husband and dies young. In fairness to the Guillaumes, however, it must be said that they oppose the marriage although their upbringing of Augustine causes it to founder.

Laure's difficulties in finding a husband for Sophie are reflected in La Cousine Bette, where Mme Camusot is driven to obsequious ruthlessness in her attempts to find a husband for her spoilt, unattractive Cécile. Both Cécile and Sophie are twenty-three, have ambitious mothers obsessed with marrying them off and fathers with mediocre positions, and are provided with roughly the same dowry.¹ One cannot help thinking of Laure when Mme Camusot gives voice to the 'doléances particulières aux mères qui sont en puissance de filles à marier'.² One is reminded of Balzac's sceptical comments about Laure's tendency to exaggerate the merits of any suitor for Sophie's hand³ when Mme Camusot indulges in the vanity of proclaiming Cécile's marriage to be superb, despite the fact that she has failed to capture a man of good family.⁴ The Camusot/Surville parallel is not as patent as the d'Arneuse/Balzac one, for Balzac was fond of Laure and attached to his niece and the Camusots are definitely obnoxious. Nevertheless the parallel exists.

The figure of the ruthless and predatory mother is a constant in Balzac's whole work, and is an element of his experience which he frequently transposed. Like Mme Balzac, Sténie's mother considers that all earthly happiness lies in wealth and she forces her daughter to marry the worldly opportunist de Plancksey, fearful lest some other mother steal him.⁵

1. AB 1963, p. 246.

2. CP p. 44.

3. Lettres à Mme H. II, p 270, p. 273.

4. ibid., p. 93.

5. Sténie, p. 162.

In L'Héritière de Birague the Comtesse de Morvan tries to make her daughter marry the infamous Villani because her pride rejects an alliance with the poor but honourable Adolphe d'Olbreuse.¹ In the Comédie humaine, as in the Oeuvres de Jeunesse, it is a truism that mothers with a marriageable daughter consider the short-term profits rather than the long-term misery of a union. Mme Fischtaminel, one of the characters in Petites misères de la vie conjugale, a case-history of a marriage, was forced into marriage by her mother who did not want to lose caste or leave Paris: 'La fortune, cette raison suprême, parlait d'ailleurs assez haut'.² Balzac affirms elsewhere that such mothers deliberately exploit human feelings and failings.³ They are amazingly skilful at setting traps and resemble the formica-leo at the bottom of a cornet of sand.³ Mme Evangélista both confirms this and acknowledges the ferocity and consummate skill of a mother in this position.⁴ Rastignac, one of the shrewdest rakes in the Comédie humaine, observes that the girls themselves, their mothers and grandmothers are hypocrites, for they play on sentiment when all they have in mind is social position.⁵

One of the bitter truths taught by the Comédie humaine is that far-sighted mothers are those who cultivate well-to-do bachelors.⁶ Victournien d'Esgrignon is warmly received by mothers with marriageable daughters in tow by reason of his marquisate and family domain,⁷ and Maximilien de Longueville is the object of 'de coquettes avances' from such mothers.⁸

Balzac is bitter because the mothers covet money and position for their daughters and are indifferent to their future happiness. From the Oeuvres de Jeunesse he conveys his derision of this covetousness in frank, sometimes

1. Vol. II, p. 186.

3. MR pp. 333 - 334.

5. MN p. 392.

7. CA p. 60.

2. PMV p. 140.

4. CM p. 282.

6. CP p. 81.

8. BS p. 144.

scathing terms. Catherine in La dernière Fée sadly reflects that the little fairy consents to marry the genie, however ugly, because he offers her a diamond wand.¹ A fairy's parents tell her that it is a disgrace not to be married by twenty and that she must 'cast her nets' and catch a husband.² In the Comédie humaine metaphors for husband-hunting are many and varied, ranging from fishing to prostitution. Family and friends rally round the Camusots because, says Balzac: 'En France on porte volontiers secours aux mères de famille qui pêchent un gendre riche',³ and Vautrin uses the same expression to describe Rastignac's search for a rich wife 'aller dans le monde, y pêcher des dots'.⁴ In Béatrix husband-hunting is described as a lottery,⁵ and in La Femme de trente ans as 'notre bazar humain' where a young girl is sold for life to a man she has known three months. The speaker, Julie d'Aiglemont, takes little comfort from the thought that the price of the purchase is high.⁶ The same idea is implicit in Gaudissart II when Balzac evokes 'les piquantes physionomies et toilettes des jeunes filles qui doivent attirer les acheteurs'.⁷ Julie d'Aiglemont is even more blunt about this: she declares that marriage in the middle and upper class is equivalent to prostitution in the lower, and ironically underlines this with her antithesis: 'une prostitution publique et la honte, une prostitution secrète et le malheur'.⁸ De Marsay has much the same idea when he describes marriage in general as the most stupid of social immolations.⁹

Balzac considers, then, with justification, that the young girl is a pawn in the game of marriage making. The mother is the prime mover, and

1. p. 53.

2. p. 51 - see also Jean-Louis, p. 510. The heroine speaks of one of her suitors as 'un homme qui la marchanda comme un sac de blé'.

3. CP p. 95. 4. PG p. 322. 5. B p. 256. 6. F30 pp. 100 - 101.

7. Gau II p. 283. 8. see note 6. 9. CM p. 206.

this is seen in the reaction of many bachelors in the Comédie humaine: they pay court to the mother in order to win the daughter. Villani, in L'Héritière de Birague, tells the Comtesse de Morvan that the sole reason for his proposal to her daughter is to bring him closer to the Comtesse.¹ Théodors de La Peyrade in Les petits Bourgeois and Goddet in La Rabouilleuse undertake the 'corvée' of wooing the middle-aged Mmes Colleville and Fichet respectively, in the hope of achieving possession of their daughters with their fat dowries. Lousteau does his best to prepare the ground for his marriage to Félicie Cardot, for '(il) fit l'homme religieux et monarchique avec la mère, il fut sobre, doucereux, posé, complimenteur',² and he only fails through the unhappy accident of Mme Cardot finding Dinah in his flat.

The predominance of the mother in this situation is shown by the rarity of pen-pictures of 'filles à marier'. Balzac does occasionally surprise them in places. Bathilde de Chargeboeuf possesses all the tricks of the 'fille à marier', like prinking her hair and asking Rogron, her prey, to adjust her sleeves.³ Grandet dismisses the affectation of the 'fille à marier' with: 'ça ne mange ni frippe ni pain'.⁴ Balzac's vigour and originality in treating 'la fille à marier' become evident if we contrast his presentation with that given in Les Français peints par eux-mêmes, where she is defined as inert, artificial, colourless and devoid of personality. Many of his 'filles à marier' have this passivity. Mlle de la Rodière might have stepped out of the pages of Les Français peints par eux-mêmes being 'assez insignifiante, droite comme un peuplier, blanche et rose, muette à demi, suivant le programme prescrit à toutes les jeunes filles à marier; mais ses quarante mille livres de rente en fonds de terre parlaient suffisamment pour elle'.⁵ Mlle d'Aubrión has been

1. vol. II, p. 94. 2. MC p. 189, cf. also DA p. 359.

3. P p. 83.

4. EG p. 338.

5. FA p. 300.

moulded into 'un parti très-satisfaisant'¹ by means of maternal schooling in dress and behaviour. However, Balzac's presentation of 'la fille à marier' is dynamic by virtue of his skill in depicting the manoeuvring of the young girl's better half and indeed other self, her mother. This is illustrated by his satirical, quasi-tragic delineation of the du Brossard pair in Illusions perdues: 'Madame de Brossard vantait fort maladroitement et à tout propos sa grande et grosse fille, âgée de vingt-sept ans, qui passait pour être forte sur le piano: elle lui faisait officiellement partager tous les goûts des gens à marier, et, dans son désir d'établir sa chère Camille, elle avait dans une même soirée prétendu que Camille aimait la vie errante des garnisons, et la vie tranquille des propriétaires qui cultivent leur bien'.² The almost malicious acuity of the last remark is worthy of Zola describing Mme Josserand and her daughters in Pot-Bouille.

Avid mothers and daughters do not have matters all their own way. Bachelors demand financial gain, name and position in marriage. Already in Sténie Plancksey justifies his persistence in marrying an obviously unenthusiastic Sténie with the reflection that everyone marries for fortune and advancement.³ Some of the most admirable men in the Comédie humaine marry partly for material reasons. Savinien de Portuendière loves Ursule for her physical and moral beauty, but also because Dr. Minoret framed his verbal portrait of her with the magic words 'sept à huit mille francs'.⁴ Athanase Granson's sincere and unrequited passion for Rose Cormon originated in his desire for material and financial security.⁵ Less

1. EG p. 467.

2. IP, vol. XI, p. 263.

3. p. 171.

4. UM p. 138.

5. VF p. 291.

admirable men, of course, deliberately demean themselves to secure a good match. Adolphe, the specimen bachelor in Petites misères de la vie conjugale, proposes to Caroline for four reasons, none particularly laudable: she comes of good family, is well brought up and pretty, and has three hundred thousand francs in ready money.¹ Charles Grandet may not acquire beauty in Mlle d'Aubriion, but he finds name, title and brilliant position. Balzac generalises that civil servants often improve their position by marrying a defiled girl or the natural daughter of a Minister.² In La Muse du département Lousteau attempts the former: Félicie Cardot's father is prepared to increase her dowry because she is not a virgin, Rastignac criticises women for seeking financial security from a husband,³ but De Marsay supplies the converse of this criticism when he advocates that a man marry a rich heiress who will be able to support the children.⁴ Moreover, Balzac does not necessarily think the institution of the dowry a bad thing. He is scathing about Mme Evangélista's attempts to evade providing Nathalie with a dowry, and in a delightful scene he mocks her airy assertion that her own dowry consisted in beauty, virtue, happiness, good birth and education.⁵

Nineteenth century bachelors appeared to believe in moderation in all things except dowries. Célestine Leprince is dressed more richly and elegantly than becomes a 'fille à marier' because a husband will only be able to aspire to give her happiness, for he will never rival her parents' material generosity.⁶ More crudely, the interest on her dowry will not cover the expenses of her wardrobe. Possible suitors for Nathalie Evangélista's hand have the same reaction: 'Il n'y a qu'un prince qui

1. PMV p. 3.

3. MN p. 392.

5. ibid., p. 256.

2. E p. 68.

4. CM p. 206.

6. E p. 7.

puisse épouser Mlle Evangélista'.¹ Crevel prophesies dourly that it may be impossible to find a husband for Hortense Hulot for: 'On ne marie pas aujourd'hui, sans dot, une fille aussi belle que l'est mlle Hortense'.² Such celibatarian prudence may have been astute, but hardly admirable.

Both the motives behind, and the negotiations for, a marriage tended to be mercenary. Social pressure on a girl was strong. Cécile Camusot is humiliated to see her friends marry before her,³ and even the likeable Hortense Hulot comments wistfully that a 'fille à marier' who does not find a husband is a heavy cross for her parents to bear.⁴ Balzac reflects the spirit of his time by depicting marriage as an association of interests, which might or might not include love. He declares cynically that every young girl permits herself the luxury of viewing her marriage as the substance of a romantic novel,⁵ and that young girls like to dither about choosing a husband as long as they have a certain choice.⁶ Nevertheless he sourly indicates the speciousness of the romantic element when he observed: 'Les grosses dots font faire aujourd'hui de grosses sottises sans aucune pudeur'.⁷

'La fille à marier' is a well-defined species in the Comédie humaine, interesting because Balzac analyses it from a sociological point of view. His disillusioned attitude was rooted in events in his family circle and merely confirmed by his observation of contemporary life. His social realism in this regard is undeniable, and the reader need make no effort to disentangle the Romantic from the realistic as he has to do in

1. CM p. 216.

3. CP p. 44.

5. CP p. 90.

7. Bou p. 48.

2. Be p. 30.

4. Be p. 104.

6. VF p. 308.

studying Balzac's depiction of the young girl in general. The species is one of the most wholly convincing in Balzac's gallery of children and adolescents.

Conclusion

It is a fact not generally recognised that the so-called banality of the young girls in the Comédie humaine is medical, and not purely Romantic or literary. This is clear from the ease with which I was able to use the structure of DSM's Fille as a guide to the plan of the present chapter. Not only does Balzac endow his young girls with the qualities mentioned by DSM, but he displays a pre-Freudian perception in his exploration of their subconscious. This comes to the surface in their relationships with their parents and their mothers in particular, their latent sexuality at puberty and the ambiguous nature of their 'pudicité', to which Balzac gives only qualified approval. His intuition of repressed sexuality is a landmark in French literature: until then doctors alone, and not writers, had realised that a child's character is not pure innocence.

Balzac's 'fille à marier' is yet another counter-argument to the charge that his young girls are trite. She is one of the most historically accurate of his types of children. His depiction of her sometimes borders on the caricature, but it is always competent and three-dimensional, including as it does the chief parties involved in the transaction of which she is the object.

The young girl is one of the least elusive and most coherent of Balzac's categories of child and adolescent. She is often stereotyped and Romantic, but the richness of her subconscious more than compensates for this.

PART IICHAPTER VIPROCREATION

In Part I we considered children and adolescents from the point of view of their universal characteristics and conditions. The three chapters constituting Part II will be devoted to their growth, development and education. As the Comédie humaine purported to study man as a social animal from all aspects, it is logical that Balzac should have looked at children's state of becoming, as well as their state of being. He jotted down a revealing synopsis of the former in one of his philosophical notes. Part of this has already been quoted in my Introduction, but it will be useful to reproduce it more fully here: 'Il naît. Ce mystère est un vrai néant pour l'esprit humain ... il est ... une production d'une production dont la nature nous a caché la source. Jusqu'à l'âge de dix ans, sa raison qui manifeste ce qu'on appelle notre âme ne fait que poindre. Arrive quinze ans ... les germes des passions sont semés, mais le terrain est inculte. Jusqu'à vingt et un ans, l'incertitude la plus déchirante s'empare de lui-même.... A trente ans c'est le roi de la nature.... Avant la mort, il est enfant.... Et toujours ... le néant sur tout'.¹

The importance of procreation in this global view of man's growth and the fact that by its mysteriousness it prefigures his whole development indicate the depth of Balzac's interest in it, as well as its significance to his concept of man. In this chapter I shall study the sources of this interest, the main aspects of procreation in the Comédie humaine and Balzac's interest in the whole procedure of pregnancy, giving birth and nurture.

1. CH ed. Club de l'Honnête Homme, vol. 25, p. 556.

The origins of Balzac's interest are several: his insecurity with regard to his mother and his puzzled resentment of her preference for Henry; the 'most excellent'¹ family's frankness about sexual matters, especially that of Bernard-François with his passion for eugenics, his admiration for Sterne, Rousseau and his collection of DSM; the contemporary Establishment cult of the Family and finally Zulma Carraud's single-minded devotion to her maternal vocation. I shall discuss each source in turn and then show how it appears in the Comédie humaine. However, I shall reserve the influence of Rousseau for the section on breastfeeding and, above all, for the chapter on education. On the contrary I shall give examples of Sterne's influence straight away, as this is seen almost entirely in works outside the Comédie humaine, although it was probably the starting-point for most of Balzac's paramedical consideration of procreation. I shall not give isolated examples of the influence of DSM as it tends to be mainly corroborative, but I shall make frequent use of it as such.

Balzac's unsatisfactory relationship with his mother has been fully and competently analysed by Balzacians of the stature of B. Guyon, A. Lcrant, P. Barbéris and S-J. Bérard, who all agree that it is the basis of any study of Balzac. There is therefore no need for me to go over this ground. Suffice it to recall that Mme Balzac appears to have been a cold, authoritarian, sanctimonious woman with a tendency to extremes of feeling as demonstrated by her indifference to Honoré and her indulgence to Henry,

1. Translation suggested by Norman Denny for 'la céleste famille' in the English version of Maurois' biography.

her callous and unmaternal treatment of Laurence and her predilection for Laure, and her irritating plaintiveness about herself.¹ Honoré always felt a mixture of reverence and exasperation towards her, and the latter became more evident as his courtship of Mme Huska progressed. The chief cause of his bitterness was obviously her preference for Henry. Balzac freely admitted the endurance of this, writing to Eve in 1848: 'Comment des parents font-ils trois filles comme tes soeurs et une qui est un ange? C'est là mon étonnement perpétuel'.² In 1846 he had told her of Mme de Berny's prediction that he had been an eagle's egg hatched by geese,³ and he repeated this to his mother, although less bluntly, declaring that she would always resemble 'une poule qui a couvé l'oeuf d'un volatile étranger aux basses cours'.⁴ His knowledge of his dissimilarity to his siblings, his belief in Eve's extraordinariness and Zulma's acknowledgement of a preference for her first-born, Ivan,⁵ all contributed to keep alive his curiosity in this respect. He regarded the problem as one of philosophical magnitude, observing some time between 1830 and 1835 'pourquoi une mère préfère-t-elle un enfant à un autre? Il y a dans ce fait tout un traité sur l'âme et les sentiments'.⁶ He intended to dedicate Les deux Frères, the first draft of La Femme de trente ans, to M. de Margonne in these terms: '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. e.g. Corres. IV, p. 298: 'Tu me refuses peut-être le triste privilège de la sensibilité'.

2. Lettres à Mme H. IV, p. 466.

3. ibid., III, p. 129.

4. Corres. IV, p. 679.

5. Corres. III, p. 416.

6. J. Crépet. Pensées, sujets, fragmens, p. 87.

7. quoted by Allem, F30, ed. Garnier, p. 419.

Clearly Balzac never ceased to long for his mother's love and approval, and his resentment at not having obtained them was evident throughout his life.

The second source of Balzac's interest in procreation, almost equal in importance to his relationship with his mother, is the influence of his father. Bernard-François Balzac was more interested in the related problems of genetics and longevity than in keeping a young and attractive wife from straying. He was a disciple of Sterne, and his daughter Laure even compares him to Uncle Toby.¹ Balzac was well aware of his debt to Sterne, transmitted through his father. In a letter to Mme Hanska he praised his father for his solicitude about his paternal duties (making the reader immediately remember the opening chapter of Tristram Shandy) and went on: 'mon père avait fait de grandes études à ce sujet; il me les a communiquées (je veux dire les résultats), de bonne heure, et j'ai des idées arrêtées qui m'ont dicté la Physiologie du mariage La question est immense, elle a d'innombrables ramifications, elle m'absorbe souvent ... je m'en réfère à Sterne dont je partage entièrement les opinions, le Tristram Shandy est, dans cette partie, un chef d'oeuvre'.² Besides this passage there is other evidence that Sterne was the basis of Balzac's cogitation about procreation. He credited Sterne for having been the first to dare mention the grave importance of 'l'acte sur lequel on plaisante'³ and he held that Sterne was right in putting 'l'art d'accoucher en avant de toutes les sciences et des philosophies'.⁴ In fact, in Petites misères de la vie conjugale

1. L. Surville. Balzac: sa Vie et ses oeuvres d'après sa correspondance, pp. 7 - 8.
2. Lettres à Mme H. I, pp. 408 - 409.
3. J. Crépet. Pensées, sujets, fragmens, p. 158.
4. OD III, p. 161n.

he quotes Shandy's letter to Toby, thereby indicating his concern for the ideal conditions for sexual union.¹ Certain critics have already touched on Sterne's influence, but none seems to have explored it in depth. Le Yaouanc has catalogued most of Balzac's avowals of his literary legacy in the domain of procreation.² Baldensperger and Laubriet³ have concentrated mainly on Balzac's stylistic debt to Sterne and their common habit of being 'plaisamment philosophique et philosophiquement plaisant'.⁴

The above-mentioned letter to Mme Hanska also contains the interesting piece of information that Balzac planned to complete the Physiologie du mariage by his 'great' work on education in the broadest sense, which would include factors present before conception.⁵ He mentioned that plan again in the 1838 Preface to the Physiologie du mariage, in which he announces the title of the said work, namely Analyse des corps enseignants. If one examines his intentions it becomes clear that his chief mentor was Sterne and not Rousseau. Significantly Balzac is unambiguous about his plan to outdo the latter whose Emile 'n'a pas ... embrassé la dixième partie du sujet'.⁶

He intended it to be one of two parts of a Pathologie de la vie sociale, a sequel to the Comédie humaine. Although he never succeeded in writing it, he clearly meant it to contain a philosophical examination of all possible influences on a man prior to conception, during gestation and

1. PMV p. 75.

2. M. le Yaouanc. Nosographie de l'humanité balzacienne, pp. 97, 99, 100.

3. in Orientations étrangères chez Honoré de Balzac and L'Intelligence de l'art chez Balzac, respectively.

4. P. Laubriet. L'Intelligence de l'art chez Balzac, p. 71.

5. Pléiade XI, p. 160.

6. Loc. cit.

after birth until the age of twenty-five.¹ He recorded some of his ideas in the form of notes and questions, and among the most notable points he raises are his refutation of the notion of chance, a discussion of the ideal physical condition of prospective parents and the strength of the sperm, and meditation on the extent to which food and environment can alter a child's genetic psyche.

Isolated fragments outside the Comédie humaine indicate how para-scientific an approach Balzac possessed. Rose Fortassier has analysed an 'inédit' of Balzac's entitled Sur Brillat-Savarin et de l'alimentation dans la génération². She has found that the text, probably produced in 1830, shows that Balzac must have been acquainted with contemporary works on genetics. I believe, moreover, that one such work, which she does not mention, was DM for it advises against the consumption of 'les excitants alcooliques et narcotiques' while nurturing children.³ Balzac's conclusion is that a people's destiny is determined by its diet. More important than educating the masses is research into the environment into which they are born: 'L'élément des générations est la nourriture de leurs pères'.⁴ In the same year, 1830, Balzac took up this very theme in Traité des excitants modernes, in which he denies the right of parents to prejudice the future of their unborn children by an inordinate use of stimulants.⁵ Also in 1830 he touched on the advantages of Caesarean birth.⁶ Two years later, he questioned French anti-abortion laws in Echantillon de causerie française,⁷ where he alludes to an actual abortion with

1. Crépet, op cit., pp. 156 - 162.
2. AB 1968.
3. art. Paediatric p. 19.
4. ibid., pp. 117 - 118.
5. OD III, p. 180.
6. Traité de la vie élégante, OD II.
7. OD II.

reticent clarity, although he does not indulge in mucuous descriptions as Zola was to do in Pot-Bouille. These thoughts, apparently random and certainly extraneous to the Comédie humaine, indicate Balzac's startling modernity. A case in point is his grasp of the importance of diet which DSM flatly denies.¹ His latent yet long-standing concern with procreation was to come to the surface in his monomaniacal desire to have a child by Eve and his subsequent anguish at her miscarriage.

Balzac's correspondence shows his wide-ranging interest in the matter of procreation. In 1840 Desnoyers, editor of Le Siècle, supplied him with information about the dangers incurred by elderly primipare and 'la blessure que peut faire aux jeunes filles l'action de frotter'.² In 1848 we find Balzac advising Georges Mnischech that Anna should not have a child before the age of twenty-two, for he alleges that it is the age when 'les muscles ont reçu tout leur développement, où les tissus ont toute leur force de résistance, il y a moins de dégâts'.³

It is clear, then, that in the 1830's at least Balzac was very much concerned with the question of procreation, and that the impetus for his concern derived primarily from Sterne. His writings outside the Comédie humaine show his potential for a scientific approach to a subject which remains partly unexplored today. However, inside the Comédie humaine his views on procreation seem to be more determined by his social and political preoccupations, which may fortuitously be pseudo-medical when they are corroborated by DSM, and more rarely by DM. Hence an outline of these preoccupations is necessary.

1. Accouchement, p. 93.

2. Corres. IV, p. 690.

3. Lettres à Mme H. IV, p. 477.

The first half of the nineteenth century seems to have been preoccupied with a cult of the family, especially in regard to its utilitarian value as a stabilizing element of Society. Napoleon regarded the family and hereditary property as the two factors most likely to stabilize France after the upheaval of the Revolution. His attitude was crudely and concisely summed up in his remark: 'La femme est donnée à l'homme pour qu'elle fasse des enfants.... Elle est donc sa propriété comme l'arbre à fruits est celle du jardinier'.¹ After the unrest of Revolution and Empire, the family came into its own during the Restoration. This was a natural reaction to a long period of disturbance, and it also happened to be useful propaganda for the monarchy. Ultra Traditionalists showed themselves concerned to restore families to their supposedly pre-Revolutionary rectitude. They desired to found the State on, and make it an enlarged image of, the Family, the King being regarded as father and his subjects as children. Hence Bonald, politician and spokesman of these 'prophets of the past',² could declare that Nature had placed the mother between father and children, ruler and subjects. He thundered that a woman's destiny is to be a good wife and mother and that the purpose of marriage is the production and care of its offspring. The same concern with the Family continued on a less exalted plane during Louis-Philippe's reign, when a favourite anthem was 'Où peut-on être mieux qu'au sein de sa famille?'³ The spirit of the régime was exemplified in the king's remark that a good family man is ready to do anything for his children,⁴ a readiness he demonstrated himself by his Ministers' haggling with Parliament over endowments for his children.

1. quoted by R. Pernoud. Histoire de la bourgeoisie en France, p. 496.

2. B. Guyon. La Pensée politique et sociale de Balzac, p. 31.

3. quoted by G. de Bertier de Sauvigny. La Restauration, pp. 242 - 243

4. quoted by D.W. Brogan. The French Nation from Napoleon to Pétain, p. 60.

Nevertheless the popularity of Malthusianism was spreading, and one of Balzac's points of criticism of the Orleanist monarchy was the trend towards celibacy.

The last crucial formative influence of Balzac's thinking on procreation is that of *Zulma*. George Sand praised Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées as follows: 'Ainsi je trouve que vous lavez trop ces enfants devant nous! Et cependant avec quel art prodigieux vous nous faites malgré tout, accepter toutes ces éponges et tous ces savons! ... il faut, mon cher, que vous ayez, suivant nos idées de Leroux, un souvenir d'existence antérieure où vous auriez été femme et mère'.¹ The previous existence was, in effect, *Zulma*'s. Ten years earlier she had told Balzac: 'O vous qui savez tout, vous ne soupçonnez pas ce qu'est un fils pour sa mère'² and had then proceeded to contribute enormously to his knowledge of a woman's reaction to pregnancy and child-rearing by her letters, which describe a slightly pedantic yet infinite concern for her sons' physical, moral and intellectual welfare. She lived through, for and by her children, and provided Balzac with a ready-made prototype of the perfect mother.

Having established the chief sources of Balzac's interest in procreation let us now examine the form these sources take in the Comédie humaine.

Balzac's inability to sever completely the umbilical cord has two consequences: on the one hand he frankly transposed his resentment of his mother, and on the other he sublimated it. His anxious preoccupation with the question of why children of the same mother are so often physically and morally different appears often in the Comédie humaine.

1. Corres. IV, p. 406

2. Corres. II, p. 200;

We have seen how La Femme de trente ans was originally intended to depict two brothers, one of whom is the mother's favourite. La Rabouilleuse purports to describe the inexplicable dissimilarity between two siblings and the punishment of the mother for her unjust preference for the least deserving. For Balzac the question of the difference between children and the mystery of a mother's preference was so crucial that even such an obtuse character as Crottat can perceive that a parent often favours the child most disliked by his or her spouse.¹ Alternatively Balzac sublimated his bitterness by creating an archetype of the ideal mother, a 'mythe de la maternité'. I shall merely summarise the myth, because it deserves a thesis to itself. It is conveyed by means of full-length characters and scattered generalisations. The mothers in the Comédie humaine can be divided into a limited number of groups: perfect mothers like Mme de Mortsauf, Renée de l'Estorade and Lady Brandon; virtuous mothers like Mmes Chardon, Hulot, Grandet, du Guénic and Poulain; bad mothers like Mmes d'Aiglemont, d'Espard, Clapart and Granville, and monomaniacal ones like Agathe Bridau and Zélie Minoret. The archetype of the ideal mother which emerges from these characters and Balzac's ex cathedra pronouncements is that of a self-sacrificing, intuitive, perspicacious - in short, saintly - being. Balzac evidently believes that maternal love is the acme of a woman's feelings,² and, moreover, the most beautiful emotion.³ It is a manifestation of vital energy: as Louis de l'Estorade says to Renée: 'Quand seras-tu mère, pour que je te voie applaudir à l'énergie de ta vie ...?'⁴

1. F30 p. 140.

2. MC p. 118 'tous les sentiments qui surabondent chez elle s'épancheraient dans celui qui les comprend tous pour la femme, dans la maternité'.

3. Ma p. 73 'le plus beau de tous les sentiments humains, parce qu'il est le plus désintéressé'.

4. MJM p. 221.

It is well known to what extent Balzac gave priority to Will (i.e. vital energy) over Thought. As with his idealisation of paternity in Le Père Goriot, Balzac tends to verge on the blasphemous in his almost medieval cult of maternity: Renée de l'Estorade holds that maternal love is a contract between a mother and God, and even exclaims 'Dieu c'est un grand coeur de mère'.¹ And several are the mothers in the Comédie humaine who pledge themselves to a Calvary. Henriette de Mortsaufr believes that in becoming a mother she acquired the right to perpetual suffering.² Mme Lambert dies young after throwing all her faculties into the production of that angelic being, Louis.³ A mother's love can be redemptive: Athanase Granson is given a Christian burial, despite the fact that he is a suicide, because his mother's piety atones for his impiety.⁴

The influence of Bonald on Balzac's thinking about procreation is indisputable. The most authoritative moralists in the Comédie humaine expound his ideas, especially his belief that propagation is the aim of both nature and society. Renée de l'Estorade actually quotes Bonald in lauding the Family, sacred and strong.⁵ She accepts that Society, like Nature, sacrifices woman to the Family because only propagation ensures the Family's continued existence.⁶ She herself provides a demonstration of how much a woman can accomplish and fulfil herself by obeying her 'destiny'. The notary Mathias expresses the same ideas in a more down-to-earth, bourgeois way. He believes that the mark of a legitimate wife is her eagerness to produce children,⁶ and he decides that if he cannot

1. MJM p. 295 cf. MC p. 209 'j'ai donc eu dans le coeur tout ce que Dieu a mis de tendresse chez les mères'.

2. Lys p. 252.

5. MJM p. 239.

3. LL p. 91.

6. MJM p. 245.

4. VF p. 389 'la piété de la mère racheta l'impiété du fils'.

save Paul de Manerville from himself and the Evangélistas, he will at least try to save the future of his line.¹ Other characters who are not necessarily models of virtue recognise Bonaldien precepts with varying degrees of enthusiasm. The embittered Comte de Sérisy, rejected by his wife, sombrely declares that Nature's main aim is propagation.² The siren, Diane de Cadignan, is at one with the materfamilias, Renée de l'Estorade, in her belief that most women are torn between conjugal love and maternal duty.³ Not a few mothers in the Comédie humaine experience this conflict, notably Mmes Hulot and Claës and maternal duty is usually victorious.

The Bonaldien analogy between State and Family is expounded several times in the Comédie humaine, again by characters with vastly different viewpoints from the Ultra Comte de Chaulieu to the lay-saint Benassis. The former identifies the family with Catholicism, and self-interest with religious indifference.⁴ The latter holds that the Family will always be the basis of societies and that obedience to paternal power is not yet prevalent enough in either families or the State.⁵ Even Honorine, hopelessly seeking liberty, returns to the conjugal fold and dies fulfilling her feminine vocation as her last letter reveals: '... je meurs, quoique mère, et peut-être parce que je suis mère.... Je meurs pour la Société, pour la Famille, pour le Mariage, comme les premiers chrétiens mouraient pour Dieu'.⁶ So much agreement among such diverse characters surely indicates the socio-political importance Balzac attributed to procreation.

1. CM p. 322.

2. CM p. 267.

3. SPC p. 350.

4. MJM p. 204 cf. Modeste Mignon's suitor, Ernest de la Brière, who shows his integrity by his assertion 'la Famille c'est la Société'. (MM p. 81.)

5. MC p. 78.

6. Hpp. 394 - 395.

Balzac was obviously a disciple of Bonald, but it is possible that his cult of the Family and his attitude were reinforced by articles in DSM which echo Bonald's ideas. This supposition is all the more viable because, as we shall see, Balzac adheres to DSM's rather old-fashioned approach in his analysis of pre-natal influences. DSM is unlikely to have been an influence here, contenting itself as it does with the innocuous remark that the prosperity of family and State depend on healthy children.¹ DSM, on the other hand, surmises with no justification that the etymology of 'femme' is 'foetus' and concludes thence that woman's natural destiny is to beget.² It also traces the origin of 'famille' to 'foemina' and sees in this proof that a woman and her children are one, and that the maternal instinct is 'stronger than life itself'.³ A repeated theme in the dictionary is that the purpose of the sexual act is the increase of the species and not pleasure.⁴ Marriage is the most powerful social institution because a State is composed of families, that is, the products of conjugal unions.⁵ DSM's utilitarian emphasis may have encouraged Balzac in his rather Old Testament condemnation of sterility which, however, curiously contrasts with DSM's compassion in this respect.⁶ Renée de l'Estorade rails against infertility, calling a woman who is not a mother unfulfilled and a social misfit,⁷ a monstrosity even.⁸

The influence of Bonald and contemporary social attitudes is crucial to Balzac's theoretical appraisal of procreation within marriage, but that

1. Mariage p. 163.

2. art. Femme p. 503.

3. ibid., p. 544.

4. art. Génération p. 8.

5. art. Copulation p. 502.

6. art. Stérilité p. 503 - sterility should not be considered 'une espèce d'opprobre'.

7. MJM p. 298.

8. MJM p. 324.

of Zulma is just as important on a more personal and less abstract level. Her letters to Balzac are frequently transposed in Renée's descriptions of the development of her babies. Where Zulma declares 'je m'abîme dans mes enfants',¹ Renée determines to enjoy life vicariously through her children.² Zulma is also the most obvious model for Henriette de Mortsauf. Often the latter's dicta are an inflated rephrasing of the former's. For instance Zulma had exclaimed unaffectedly: '... soucis, toujours soucis! C'est donc là vivre? Peut-être même ne vit-on bien qu'à cette condition; car pour vivre il faut sentir',³ and Balzac beatifies Henriette when he gives her the lines: '... mes enfants sont mes vertus!.... Devenir mère, pour moi ce fut acheter le droit de toujours souffrir'.⁴ Zulma evinced extraordinary second sight, and foresaw that Yorick would become a man of action.⁵ In fact he was to be killed at Sedan. Henriette claims the same gift of second sight for her children, including her 'adoptive child' Félix.

Hence Balzac's many references to the traditional occupation of women, namely child-bearing and -rearing, are not surprising in view of his tenacious and compensatory adherence to a myth of maternity, the early nineteenth century cult of the Family and the extensive material provided by Zulma. Moreover his slightly imbalanced presentation of procreation in the Comédie humaine, which somewhat lacks the spirit of frank enquiry found in his other writings, may well be the outcome of his unsatisfactory, erratic and over-tense relationship with his mother and his inability to distance himself from her. It is to this presentation we shall now turn.

In the Comédie humaine Balzac considers three main aspects of procreation

1. Corres. II, p. 579.

2. MJM p. 180.

3. Corres. III, p. 459.

4. Lyr p. 252.

5. Corres. III, p. 777.

a person's attitude to it as indicative of his character; the ideal frame of mind and conditions for conceiving a child, the latter including the effect of a disproportion in age between the partners, and the rôle of heredity. The last two factors at least had contemporary medical approval, and the first is fundamental to Balzac's whole outlook on his work. I shall discuss each factor in turn.

The extent to which Balzac consciously shared Bonald's cult of the Family inevitably resulted in a moralising attitude to procreation and meant that he regarded a character's attitude to it as a touchstone of his nature. For this reason it seems unlikely that Balzac practises the doctrines of Malthus in the Comédie humaine from conviction as M. Boisvert¹ believes. Although Boisvert may be right in surmising that Balzac does so for literary convenience, it seems to me that the question of conviction can be ruled out. Z. Marcas criticises the Orleanist monarchy for the diminution in the number of marriages.² This was extraordinarily prophetic because a Belgian observer was to criticise the Third Empire for being ruled by 'un comité de célibataires dirigeant un pays qui se dépeuple'.³ In the Comédie humaine the truly upright, like Renée de l'Estorade, consider procreation a symbol of energy, and Balzac described the production of his literary works in precise and often minute similes of procreation. It might even be said that he considered art the supreme form of procreative activity for he termed it 'la création idéalisée'.⁴ That this was a literary servitude of the time does not invalidate its importance as proof of Balzac's interest in the child, for unlike most of his contemporaries

1. M. Boisvert. La jeune Fille de province dans la CH. p. 37.

2. ZM p. 245.

3. quoted by R. Pernoud. Histoire de la bourgeoisie en France, p. 8.

4. Be p. 248.

Balzac's metaphors are pseudo-medical. Where Delacroix spoke of 'l'enfantement de nos oeuvres',¹ Balzac compares himself to a pregnant woman who feels the first contractions of labour,² or says that he plans to relax like a woman who 'se relève de ses couches' once he has been 'delivered' of two novels.³ Where George Sand merely said 'ses créations ... comme on dit, ses enfants',⁴ Balzac describes the creation and care of a work of art as analogous to that of a child and evokes the ceaseless devotion and patience needed with blatant, almost vulgar realism. After the mad delight of generation and conception; 'mais accoucher! mais élever laborieusement l'enfant, le coucher gorgé de lait tous les soirs, l'embrasser tous les matins avec le coeur inépuisé de la mère, le lécher sale, le vêtir cent fois des plus belles jaquettes qu'il déchire incessamment; mais ne pas se rebuter des convulsions de cette folle vie'.⁵ The words Balzac uses to describe the artistic process are insistently clinical, and he justifies his lengthy descriptions on the grounds that one cannot appreciate 'des émotions sans en subir les principes générateurs ... l'enfant sans la gestation'.⁶ Fortunately, Balzac did not, on the whole, bombastically labour this symbolism as indiscriminately as Zola was to do in Le Docteur Pascal.

His obsession with the notion of 'cette maternité cérébrale si difficile à conquérir'⁷ explains his belief that a correct attitude to procreation

1. Corres, II, p. 249.

2. Corres, I, p. 427 'Prenez pitié des femmes grosses qui sentent déjà les grandes douleurs de l'enfantement!'

3. Corres, V, pp. 183 - 184 'délivré de deux de mes romans, et comme une femme qui se relève de couches, je crois que je me divertirai'.

4. CH, ed. Club de l'Honnête Homme, vol. IX, Balzac jugé par George Sand.

5. Be p. 243, cf. LL p. 98.

6. RA p. 114 (my underlinings)

7. Be p. 243.

is an integral part of right-mindedness. Members of the aristocracy, whom Balzac believed to be the legitimate leaders of the people, evince civic virtue by their desire to procreate. In El Verdugo Juanito Leganès is presented as a hero because in order to save his family name from extinction he agrees to execute his insurgent family, thus constituting himself the only survivor, in order to continue his line. He then - nobly and a little improbably - allows himself to live until he has guaranteed his line by producing a second male heir. Sabine du Guénic is encouraged to fight for the survival of her marriage after the birth of a son kindles her ambition to make the Du Guénic name historic.¹ She herein unconsciously emulates her father-in-law who had manifested his laudable Breton courage, so evident in Les Chouans, by refusing to die until he had extracted from Calyste a promise to beget children in order to continue his line.² At that time 'his' village, Guérande, which Balzac had already characterised as essentially Breton and fervently Catholic,³ further proved its feudal integrity by sharing the Baron's fear that death might herald the extinction of his ancient house.⁴ Examples of this sense of duty are not lacking in the Comédie humaine.⁵

So much for those who, rightly according to Balzac, regard procreation as a sacred duty. The weak or misguided, the unscrupulous or contemptible betray themselves by their attitude to it. Esther and Lucien enjoy a

1. B p. 290.

2. B p. 245.

3. B p. 7.

4. B p. 249.

5. e.g. Mathias in CM who attempts to safeguard the Manerville line; the Marquis d'Esgrignon who remarries at 53 in order to have an heir and make 'l'avenir solidaire du passé'. (CA p. 31.)

total, somewhat contemptible, happiness for they have no children. Hence Lucien can give himself wholly up to the political and social intrigues of Paris and Esther can devote herself entirely to her lover's hedonism. As Balzac ironically observes: 'la formule: Ils furent heureux, fut pour eux encore plus explicite que dans les contes de fées, car ils n'eurent pas d'enfants'.¹ Another dissipated weakling, the Chevalier de Valois, regards his new-born child as an impertinent intruder.² Camille de Maupin gives away her sadly misguided (according to Balzac) masculine education in her sneer at 'ces premières malices du mariage: l'enfant, les couches et ce trafic de maternité que je n'aime point'.³ More seriously, Foedora reveals her psychopathic personality by her avowal that she detests children and believes in no emotion.⁴ Less cold-blooded sirens like Valérie Marneffe, Béatrix Rochefide and Nathalie de Manerville either avoid motherhood or exploit it for their own ends. Nathalie arranges not to fall pregnant by her husband and later alleges her child by her lover as proof of her undying devotion and fidelity to Paul. Valérie uses her pregnancy to blackmail two of her lovers, Hulot and Crevel, simultaneously. Sabine du Guénic fears that Béatrix may deliberately fall pregnant by Calyste as a revenge on him for his 'infidelity' in making his wife pregnant.

Balzac's curiosity about the second aspect of procreation, namely why children of the same mother should often be so different, originated largely in his puzzled hatred of his mother's preference for Henry. We have seen earlier in this chapter how he transposed his resentment. It is worth mentioning here that this method of transposition was so necessary

1. S&M vol. XV, pp. 80 - 81.

2. VF p. 260.

3. B p. 100.

4. PCh p. 157.

to Balzac that he even applied it to Bette and Adeline Fischer who are not sisters, but cousins. Nevertheless, they are brought up as sisters and the ugly legitimate daughter Bette is rejected for the beautiful niece Adeline. Occasionally Balzac is satisfied by Sterne's explanation of unpredictable nature. He says more than once that Nature enjoys quirks. Clotilde de Grandlieu, for instance, is a caricature of her mother and Balzac observes: 'La nature se plaît à ces jeux-là'.¹ Similarly Augustine Guillaume is so much more beautiful than her awkward sister that she illustrates the maxim 'Dieu donne les enfants'.² Many characters give evidence of Nature's unpredictability. The dwarf Butscha is an anomaly. Bette Fischer and Wenceslas Steinbock seem to be the wrong sex.

Inevitably, however, Balzac looked further for a more convincing explanation of the differences between children. He found a possible reason in the mother's emotions and experiences during conception and pregnancy.

A vital catalyst for this orientation of Balzac's thinking may well have been DSM, which states that a child's life is simply an emanation of that of its parents, whereas DM does not mention the need for deep spiritual accord between partners. According to DSM the more ardent their love the more vigorous the child will be.³ In other words if the partners do not enter into the sexual union wholeheartedly their offspring will be delicate and feeble.⁴ In the Comédie humaine the frail health of Etienne d'Hérouville and Félix de Vandenesse indicates that they were not conceived in love: the Comte d'Hérouville felt only mutual lust for his passive, trapped wife and from the Marquis de Vandenesse's indifference, only less

1. S&M, vol. XV p. 105.

2. MCP p. 16. cf. also TA p. 159, re difference between Adrien and Robert d'Hauteserre: 'Les familles offrent de ces bizarreries dont les causes pourraient avoir de l'intérêt'.

3. Génération, p. 8, p. 56.

4. ibid., pp. 27 - 28; cf. Fécondation, p. 479.

reprehensible than his wife's frigidity, Félix himself surmises that he must have been a child of duty.¹ At one point Balzac slightly twists this idea, suggesting that if the mother has not conceived in love she will feel nothing for the child beyond an animal protectiveness which is the case with Julie d'Aiglemont. In one respect Balzac entirely disagrees with DSM which claims that men of genius are usually the product of a love match.² Because such a thesis would be unfavourable to himself he holds that they are mostly 'mal-aimés'. He bitterly remarked to his mother: 'si tu m'avais aimé comme tu as aimé Henri, je serais sans doute où il est'.³ He considered that an unhappy childhood tended to have a compensation in hypersensitivity.⁴ Nevertheless, his basic premise is the same as DSM's, namely that the mother's psyche at the time of conception predetermines the child's character and her attitude to it once it is born.

This whole concept is neatly summarised in Balzac's distinction between 'la maternité de la chair et la maternité du coeur'.⁵ Julie d'Aiglemont is the outstanding example of a mother who has for her first surviving child by her lover 'une de ces prédilections innées ou involontaires chez les mères de famille'⁶ to the detriment of her first-born Hélène. Julie is clear-sighted about the reasons for her preference, which, says Balzac with a dig at Henry, is all too easily explained by observers.⁷ She

1. Lys p. 5.

2. Génération, pp. 27 - 28.

3. Corres. V, p. 512.

4. Lettres à Mme H. I, p. 68: 'L'un et l'autre nous avons été maltraités par nos mères. Comme ce malheur développe la sensibilité!'

5. F30 p. 99.

6. F30 p. 202.

7. loc. cit.

acknowledges that she cares for H       from instinct and duty, not love. After Victor's desertion her devotion to H       intensifies through pique and as a sort of compensation. Arthur Grenville's death makes her realise that she longs for a child 'que les d       ont con     avant qu'il ne f     engendr   ... cette d         fleur n     dans l'     avant de na     au jour'.¹ This is akin to Balzac's own frenzied wish to have a child by Eve, whom he loved more deeply than any of his other mistresses, but sadly Eve herself does not seem to have felt 'la maternit   du c      ' to the same degree.

Balzac seems to admit almost wistfully that children of a love union - 'le fruit de deux sentiments librement confondus'² - have a congenital advantage over the children of duty. Ren     de Maucombe, the pia mater familias of the Com       humaine, confesses a trifle ruefully that the former are usually more beautiful and wittier than the latter,³ and she admits that she will probably love her second child more than her first, because by the time of the former's conception she had learned to love her husband: '... je suis pour quelque chose dans la fa     de cette petite fille, qui fera peut-     tort    ... Armand'.⁴ In the Com       humaine there are a number of children, not necessarily illegitimate like Emile Blondet, who are unusually beautiful because they are children of love. Eve and Lucien Chardon have inherited the 'marvellous' beauty of their mother 'comme tous les enfants de l'amour'.⁵ Pierrette is an enchanting creature because she too is one of those children of love whom 'l'amour a dou     de sa tendresse, de sa vivacit  , de sa gaiet  , de sa noblesse, de

1. F30, p 96.

2. loc cit.

3. MJM p. 284.

4. ibid., p. 322.

5. IP, vol. XI, pp. 192 - 193.

son dévouement'.¹ Here Balzac is inconsistent because Lucien's vivacity and gaiety are certainly not accompanied by integrity and loyalty. However, there are others who, like Pierrette, possess these qualities because of the circumstances in which they were conceived. 'Rodolphe' (alias Albert Savarus) is sensitive and idealistic because he was the product of an equal and reciprocated passion.² Balzac tells us that it is evident that Hortense Hulot is the fruit of an honest marriage and a pure, strong and noble love.³ Presumably the merit is all her mother's because he forgets for a moment that Hector's infidelities have lasted twenty years, although a not very convincing explanation may be that the latter is a man capable of desiring other women while retaining affection for his wife. In any case it was clearly an unreasoned cliché of Balzac's that the children of love are more beautiful than those of duty, for already in DSM this fallacy is exploded with dry scepticism: 'On a surtout parlé en faveur des enfans de l'amour. Sans vouloir contester son influence dans la procréation, je ne croirai pas qu'il dicte toujours les choix les plus raisonnables.'⁴

Earlier in this chapter we saw that it was probably Sterne who initiated Balzac's musings on the ideal conditions for sexual union, but it was most likely DSM which suggested to him that the recipe for fertility is sincere love, not immoderate passion.

In the Comédie humaine several authoritative yet vastly different characters affirm that infertility is attendant on passion. Mathias, the cautious solicitor, holds that married couples who behave like lovers

1. P p. 61.

2. AS p. 37.

3. Be p. 41.

4. Education physique, p. 208.

will not have children.¹ The mephistophelian Vautrin prophesies, accurately, that Esther will die childless for: 'L'homme aux bosses a raison. Vous avez la bosse de l'amour'.² Louise de Chaulieu learns through experience that passion may be more conducive to sterility than disaffection.³ Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées, the novel in which she features, is meant to be a conclusive demonstration of how an ardent woman like herself can remain childless, even though twice married, whereas a conscientious, devoted, eminently sensible woman like Renée succeeds in giving birth to three children. In this, Balzac's personal experience and political bias coincide with the opinions expressed in DSM which were already old-fashioned at the time. DSM often warns that violent passions are cognate with sterility⁴ and seems to imply that as nature's aim is the increase of the species and not sexual pleasure, over-indulgence in the latter can militate against the former.

A corollary of this given in DSM is that too great a disproportion in the age of the partners, especially if an elderly husband has led a dissolute youth, may impair the husband's sexual prowess. A great age difference may result in the temporary sterility of a young wife, or else in the physical debility of her offspring.⁵ DM is more cautious, holding that this is true only for an extreme disproportion in age.⁶ As for the pernicious effects of youthful dissoluteness, DSM is adamant that

1. CM p. 322.

2. S&M, vol. XV, p. 75.

3. MJM p. 336.

4. Copulation p. 503; Fécondation p. 477; Génération p. 59; Sterilité p. 510.

5. art. Copulation p. 517; cf. Frigidité p. 19.

6. art. Mariage pp. 164 - 165.

a man who has been a libertine loses sexual vigour in later life.¹ This is corroborated by DM which holds that too early an experience of 'the pleasures of love' results in premature old age.² Several couples in the Comédie humaine bear out the truth of this. Both Dinah de La Baudraye and Emilie de Kergarouët are unable to have children by their husbands who are senior to them by approximately twenty-six and fifty years respectively. Dinah, however, manages to produce three children by her lover, Lousteau, without much difficulty and Emilie has a son, the infamous Alfred de Vandenesse, by her second husband. Balzac is blunt about the chief reason for the stunted La Baudraye's sterility, namely that he is the fruit 'd'un sang épuisé de bonne heure par les plaisirs exagérés de tous les grands riches qui se marient à l'aurore d'une vieillesse prématurée, et finissent par abâtardir les sommités sociales'.³ It is noteworthy that the key words in this passage, 'plaisirs', 'abâtardir' and 'vieillesse prématurée', are those used in both DSM and DM. Poor Rose Cormon is not as lucky as Dinah because, ironically, she is more virtuous. She does not take a lover and is condemned to die childless, for by the time she comes to marry Du Bousquier his youthful excesses have rendered him virtually impotent.

Balzac is a little too ready to accept DSM's postulation of the ideal frame of mind and conditions for generation. He is even more unpardonably credulous about old wives' tales concerning the influence of a mother's emotions on the foetus. These ideas had been in vogue from the end of

1. Vieillesse, pp. 19 - 20; Génération, p. 57; Copulation, p. 503; Récondation, p. 57.

2. Age, p. 578.

3. MD p. 57.

the sixteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth.¹ They are enthusiastically endorsed by DSM which declares: 'Des passions vives, comme la colère, la frayeur, l'amour trompé, le désespoir d'une mère, peuvent aussi contribuer à la difformité de son fruit'.² It does, however, take the precaution of warning that as long as the laws of generation are covered with 'an impenetrable veil', there is no positive proof and advises one essential precaution: 'éloigner tout ce qui peut frapper vivement et surtout désagréablement l'imagination d'une femme enceinte'.³ By the time DM appeared the obsolescence of these ideas was recognised: the author of its article Grossesse notes the growing scepticism about the action of the mother's emotions on the foetus, and especially about the belief that this action consisted in imprinting on the child an image of the object which had affected the mother. He totally refutes 'L'opinion qui attribue aux regards et aux envies de la mère les maladies et les vices de conformation que les enfans apportent en naissant'.⁴ Even the more credulous writer of the article Oeuf humain considers that physiological, not psychological, factors affect the foetus. Today this scepticism has been justified. Recently Dr. R. Pilkington⁶ declared that the mother's moods, frights and other experiences do not affect the unborn baby either physically or emotionally, and substantiated this by quoting the example of pregnant mothers in Nazi concentration camps whose babies were normal.

1. F. Germain's ed. of EM, p. 46.

2. Génération p. 59.

3. Grossesse pp. 512 - 513.

4. DM's art. Grossesse p. 395.

5. Oeuf humain, p. 581.

6. in 'How your life began', published by the British Medical Association, pp. 23 - 24.

He concludes: 'Its (i.e. the baby's) features and its proportions are determined, not by anything which may befall the mother, but by heredity from its two parents'.¹

Notwithstanding contemporary medical scepticism, Balzac adheres to the above-mentioned old wives' tales in the Comédie humaine. Jeanne d'Hérouville's premature son Etienne is the wholly legitimate offspring of her feared and brutal husband, but he closely resembles her cousin Chaverny, her first and only love. One might argue that this is valid for the story in question, being cognate with the superstitious mentality of the late sixteenth century, were it not that in novels with a nineteenth century background Balzac continues to take this old wives' tale seriously. The hero of Facino Cane, whose powers of second sight strike the reader, although not Balzac, as distinctly improbable, declares that his love of gold and his hypersensitivity to its presence are probably due to the fact that his mother was obsessed by it during her pregnancy.² Even more outlandish is Balzac's observation that the theatrical Henri Montès de Montéjanos has exotic eyes because his mother had been frightened by a jaguar when she was pregnant.³ In a novel as late as Les Paysans Balzac remarks of the highly-strung Péchina that having been 'conçue et portée à travers les fatigues de la guerre, elle s'était ressentie sans doute de ces circonstances'.⁴ This is less of an old wives' tale than the other examples quoted above, for the word 'fatigues' suggests that Péchina's mother suffered physical deprivation as well as psychological suffering. However, evidence that Balzac accepted the superstition in its entirety is given by the outline of

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1. in 'How your life began', published by the British Medical Association, p. 24.
 2. FC pp. 380 - 381.
 3. Be p. 204.
 4. Pay p. 208.

a novel he jotted down some time in the early 1830's: 'La femme et son enfant frappés de terreur de ce qu'un étranger l'examine et depuis ce jour en proie à un pressentiment et perdant son enfant'.¹

Balzac very rarely concedes that all this is unscientific. One infrequent concession is when the gossiping, bigoted townspeople of Issoudun ascribe Joseph Bridau's ugliness to a monkey which had looked at Agathe during her pregnancy.² It seems more than likely that Balzac believed in the superstition, both on the grounds of the evidence quoted above from the Comédie humaine and on those of his father's expressed opinion that the opprobrium attached to unmarried mothers results in the degeneracy of their children for 'la mère a transmis l'effet de toutes les cruelles impressions dont elle a été accablée'.³

The third and last aspect of procreation which Balzac considers in the Comédie humaine is heredity. I shall not analyse Balzac's thoughts on heredity here as Le Yaouanc has done so in detail, including Balzac's belief that the mother cannot possibly be considered neutral terrain and that talent jumps a generation.⁴ I find no quarrel with Le Yaouanc's conclusion that although Balzac's consideration of the problem of heredity was based on notions which were already dated in 1830, he has the merit of having been the first novelist to relate the pathology of certain characters to prenatal conditions. Moreover, the concept of heredity is a little nebulous

1. J. Crépet. Pensées, sujets, fragmens, p. 91.

2. R p. 438.

3. B-F Balzac: 'Mémoire sur le scandaleux désordre.. .' p.9.

4. q.v. Nosographie de l'humanité balzacienne.

in the Comédie humaine. Although Balzac was puzzled as to the extent to which 'l'âme' - that is, qualities like wit, courage, powers of memory - is hereditary¹ he does not systematically seek an answer to this.

A related topic of some importance, which Le Yaouanc does not seem to have mentioned, is inbreeding. This is raised in DSM which warns that the reluctance of the upper classes to 'croiser les races' results inevitably in their degeneration and facilitates revolution.² It also proposes that 'le croisement des familles et des races comme un moyen de perfectionner les générations est nécessaire'³ and gives many examples of the pernicious effects of inbreeding. DM is less dogmatic: it moots the question but decides that 'le mélange ou le croisement des races' is undesirable only in families with disadvantageous hereditary traits.⁴ Balzac is emphatic in following DSM on this point. We have seen earlier his contempt for men like La Baudraye who 'finissent ... par abâtardir les sommités sociales'.⁵ He goes further and even ascribes provincial stodginess to the fact that as no-one has thought to 'croiser les races, l'esprit s'abâtardit nécessairement'.⁶ He also utilises DSM's dogmatism for dramatic impact and not only as a political theory. Clémentine Laginski, for example, is struck by the difference between that fine figure of a man, Thaddée Paz, and her husband who evinces 'cette grêle nature qui ... indiquait la dégénérescence forcée des familles aristocratiques assez insensées pour toujours s'allier entre elles'.⁷ Other men suffer

1. CH, ed. Club de l'Honnête / me, vol. 25, Notes philosophiques, p. 533.

2. Enfance p. 255.

3. Copulation p. 520.

4. Mariage pp. 166 - 167.

5. MD p. 58.

6. MD p. 81.

7. FM p. 32.

less drastically, but they still suffer. Baron Macumer is ugly, small, round-shouldered and sickly, with a pock-marked and sour face. His moral qualities are above reproach, but he sadly describes himself as '(un) reste orgueilleux d'une race déchue'.¹ Sometimes Balzac is less flamboyant. He tells us that overwork has given the Comte de Sérisy a scrofulous disease, but I suggest that this disease may also be due to the fact that the Count is 'le rejeton de cette famille historique',² especially as DM holds that scrofula is hereditary.³

In the Comédie humaine Balzac's treatment of the three aspects of procreation seem to have been more determined by his socio-political and emotional pre-occupations, which usually happen to be corroborated by DSM, than by the direct influence of Sterne. The latter is not, of course, absent from the Comédie humaine, but is found mainly in works outside it. However Balzac's general approach to the subject of procreation indicates to what extent he had taken cognisance of medical factors, especially as expounded in DSM, even though certain elements, like his consideration of the adverse effects of a disproportion in the age of the partners, libertinage in youth and inbreeding are not vital themes in the magnum opus. Moreover, although Balzac concentrates on the process of generation he does not disdain the less abstract matters of pregnancy, labour and the nurture of infants. He gives these full-scale treatment in Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées, where Renée de l'Estorade seems to be a flesh-and-blood materialisation of precepts enounced primarily in DSM and secondarily in DM.

1. MJM p. 187.

2. Dlv p. 318.

3. Mariage, p. 165.

Her first pregnancy could be described as classic. She experiences morning sickness and listlessness. Her taste for rotten oranges is a good example of the 'pica' or 'malacie' which DSM believes to be common,¹ but which JM dismisses as neurotic, not even according it a separate article.² Renée mentions her heavy fatigue during the last two months of pregnancy and speaks of the movement of the child in her womb. The description of her labour is a curious mixture of Romanticism and realism: Romantic because of her vision of her suffering as an immense flower and her lyricism about the 'fiat lux' which is breast-feeding, and realistic because she bluntly admits that this horrible torture makes of her body 'une enveloppe tenaillée, déchirée, torturée'.³ Despite the dichotomy in this description one cannot deny Balzac's courage, originality and competence in presenting these ideas in a novel. For this he has received praise from such stern critics as the Goncourts⁴ and Henry James,⁵ and the reader may disregard Sainte-Beuve's spiteful gibe: 'Il y a chez lui du docteur à privautés'.⁶

That Balzac's presentation is far from salacious is evident from his Oeuvres de jeunesse onwards. In Le Centenaire Countess Beringheld falls pregnant by means of a sort of supernatural conception. She has no symptoms of labour, but experiences a sudden blinding pain, after which the Centenaire himself dexterously performs a Caesarean operation on her.

1. Femme, p. 623; Grossesse; Pica.

2. Grossesse.

3. MJM p. 293.

4. Journal, vol. VII, p. 156: 'Balzac a supérieurement compris la mère'.

5. quoted by H.J. Hunt. Balzac's CH, pp. 305 - 306. 'He bears children with Madame de l'Estorade... Big as he is he makes himself small to be handled by her with young maternal passion, and positively to handle her in turn with infantile innocence'.

6. CH, ed. Club de l'Honnête Homme, vol. XII, p. xv.

In La dernière Fée a birth is equally swift: Abel's mother screams once and then gives birth. Fortunately by the time Balzac came to write the Comédie humaine he had outgrown this fairy-tale approach, but he remained discreet. In 1830, in the Traité de la vie élégante he seriously considers the advantages of a Caesarean operation and of delivering a child feet first. In L'Enfant maudit he describes a premature delivery, albeit reticently. He does so for reasons of historical veracity, as premature births were an important medical and legal problem in the sixteenth century, and continued to be so in the nineteenth century. Several articles in both DSM and DM discuss the frequency of, and conditions surrounding, premature deliveries.¹ DSM may well have provided Balzac with proof of the credibility of someone in Jeanne d'Hérouville's position giving birth to a legitimate child at seven months, for it affirms that delicate, highly sensitive women - which Jeanne certainly is - tend to have very premature babies.²

The description is far less forthright than in Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées. Like Renée Jeanne is frightened, but for heroic, less credible, reasons. She fears not for herself but for the bleak future awaiting her unborn child,³ whereas Renée feels the natural apprehension of the unknown. Nor does Balzac describe Jeanne's suffering in realistic terms. He speaks Romantically of 'la douloureuse ivresse de l'enfantement'.

The only other birth described in the Comédie humaine is that of Dinah de la Baudraye's child. The account of it is succinct: the birth of the child, including labour, the naming of the godparents and the

1. DSM in Gestation, Accouchement; DM in Accouchement, Grossesse.

2. Gestation, p. 326.

3. EM p. 333.

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