

THE ROLE OF THE CHILD AND THE ADOLESCENT
IN BALZAC'S COMÉDIE HUMAINE

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I hereby declare that this work is entirely
my own and has never been submitted to any
other University.

Johannesburg,
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For
Pookie.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to correct the widespread misconception that children and adolescents are of small importance in the world of Balzac's Comédie humaine.

My method of procedure was not the traditional one. Instead of making individual characters the focal point of my study, I culled relevant information from the Comédie humaine and then proceeded to group related concepts. Afterwards I consulted Balzac's private correspondence, the Oeuvres de Jeunesse, the Oeuvres diverses and various editions of his works, as well as literary and social criticism.

The present thesis consists of an Introduction, eight Chapters and a Conclusion. It is divided into two parts. Part I is concerned with the child and the adolescent per se. Part II outlines Balzac's view of their growth and development.

Chapter I aims to show that Balzac was not only a pioneer in the history of the French novel, but also a pioneer of the treatment of the child therein.

Chapter II studies those characteristics which he considered typical of the child personality. They tend to be clinical rather than literary, although there is inevitably some overlap and even conflict.

Chapter III examines types of children mentioned in the Comédie humaine. Personal considerations motivated Balzac to place most emphasis on the only child, the spoilt child and, obliquely, the adopted child who then had minimal importance in French Law. Nevertheless an appearance is made by all types known at the time to literature, society and the law, although not all are dissected.

Chapters IV and V deal with the adolescent, male and female. Balzac's treatment of the young man is disappointing in contrast to his detailed and perceptive handling of the young girl. Although he situates the former in the historical context, he is more interested in his 'éducation sentimentale' than in his transition from adolescence to adulthood. On the other hand, he explores the young girl's subconscious, especially her relationship with her parents, her latent sexuality and the ambiguous nature of her 'pudicité'.

So much for the prototypes of the individual child and adolescent. The next three chapters, which make up Part II, consider them as developmental beings. Chapter VI is concerned with procreation and shows that Balzac was the first to raise the subject in the novel. Chapter VII deals with the process of maturation. Here Balzac is both unthinkingly traditionalist and prophetic of modern psychology, especially as regards his awareness of the childishness vital to the healthy adult psyche. Chapter VIII presents Balzac's attitude to education, an attitude which is almost wholly illiberal and unconstructive. It is, however, undeniable that he omitted no stage in a child's development.

My conclusion is that, contrary to popular belief, children and adolescents are vital to the ethos, structure and content of the Comédie humaine.

List of abbreviations used in the footnotes :

1. General

AB	<u>L'Année balzacienne</u>
CH	<u>La Comédie humaine</u>
<u>Corres.</u>	<u>Correspondance</u>
ed. Garnier	Classiques Garnier edition - see Bibliography
<u>Lettres à Mme H.</u>	<u>Lettres à Madame Hanska</u>
O de J.	<u>Oeuvres de Jeunesse</u>
OD	<u>Oeuvres diverses</u>

2. Titles of novels (as used by F. Lotte in the Index de la Comédie humaine)

Ad	Adieu
AEF	Autre Etude de femme
AR	L'Auberge rouge
AS	Albert Savarus
Ath	La Messe de l'athée
B	Béatrix
Be	La Cousine Bette
Bo	La Bourse
Bou	Les petits Bourgeois
BS	Le Bal de Sceaux
CA	Le Cabinet des antiques
Cath	Catherine de Médicis
CB	César Birotteau
Ch	Les Chouans
ChO	Le Chef d'oeuvre inconnu
CM	Le Contrat de mariage

Col	Le Colonel Chabert
Cor	Maître Cornélius
CP	Le Cousin Pons
CSS	Les Comédiens sans le savoir
CT	Le Curé de Tours
CV	Le curé de village
DA	Le Député d'Arcis
DF	Une double Famille
DL	La Duchesse de Langeais
Do	Massimilla Doni
Dr	Un Drame au bord de la mer
DV	Un Début dans la vie
E	Les Employés
EF	Etude de femme
EG	Eugénie Grandet
EHC	L'Envers de l'histoire contemporaine
Elv	L'Elixir de longue vie
EM	L'Enfant maudit
Ept	Un Episode sous la Terreur
F	Ferragus
FA	La Femme abandonnée
FC	Facino Cane
FE	Une Fille d'Eve
Fir	Madame Firmiani
FM	La fausse Maîtresse
F30	La Femme de trente ans
FY0	La Fille aux yeux d'or

Gan	Ganbara
Gau	Gaudissart II
Gb	Gobseck
Gr	La Grenadière
H	Honorine
IG	L'illustre Gaudissart
In	L'Interdiction
IP	Illusions perdues
JCF	Jésus-Christ en Flandre
LL	Louis Lambert
Lys	Le Lys dans la vallée
Ma	Les Marana
MCP	La Maison du chat-qui-pelote
MD	La Muse du département
Me	Le Message
MJM	Mémoires du deux jeunes mariées
MM	Modeste Mignon
MN	La Maison Nucingen
MR	Melmoth réconcilié
P	Pierrette
Pay	Les Paysans
PCh	La Peau de chagrin
PG	Le Père Goriot
PGr	Pierre Grassou La Physiologie du mariage
PMV	Petites Misères de la vie conjugale
PrB	Un Prince de la Bohême

R	La Rabouilleuse
RA	La Recherche de l'absolu
R&q	Le Réquisitionnaire
S	Sarrasine
Ser	Séraphita
S&M	Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes
SPC	Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan
TA	Une ténébreuse Affaire
Tre	Histoire des Treize
UM	Ursule Mirouët
Ven	La Vendetta
Ve	El Verdugo
VF	La vieille Fille
ZM	Z. Marcas

INTRODUCTION

Experience has shown that a common reaction to the affirmation that Balzac was interested in children is one of surprise and vigorous dissent, both from the casual reader of the Comédie humaine and from the Balzacian. It is cautiously acknowledged that Balzac is preoccupied with the rôle of the Family in society and that he cannot therefore totally ignore children, who are the nub and purpose of the Family. It is also acknowledged that he is intrigued by the figure of the young girl. Nevertheless, his concern with children is said to be minimal. Defenders of the first concession have been critics of the stature of Brunetière¹, and more recently B. Guyon², J.H. Donnard³ and P. Laubriet⁴. The last three have fruitfully exploited Balzac's categorical assertion 'Homme veut dire famille'⁵ to demonstrate respectively the socio-political, socio-economic and artistic rôle of the family in the Comédie humaine. Even A. Wurmser, author of the provocatively Marxist La Comédie inhumaine, does not deny the importance of the family although he maintains that children, being without possessions, are important in the Comédie humaine only as potential heirs.⁶ Defenders of the second concession will be mentioned in Chapter IV.

1. F. Brunetière. Honoré de Balzac, p. 176.
2. B. Guyon. La Pensée politique et sociale de Balzac.
3. J.H. Donnard. Balzac et les réalités économiques et sociales dans la CH.
4. P. Laubriet. L'Intelligence de l'art chez Balzac.
5. OD III, p. 692.
6. A. Wurmser. La Comédie inhumaine, p. 644.

Notwithstanding, most critics, from Faguet onward, have denied or minimised the presence of the child in the Comédie humaine. Faguet deplored the fact that 'il n'y a pas d'enfants dans l'oeuvre de Balzac. A peine apparaissent-ils et de profil dans La Grenadière. Sans enfants, un tableau de l'humanité est bien incomplet'.¹ For A. Wurmser Balzac's materialism and pragmatism are responsible for the absence of children and of 'presque toute enfance dans la vie des personnages' in his work.² Few writers have been prepared to defend the existence of children in Balzac's work. When they have it has been modestly and with reservations. For instance, M. Bardèche sees Balzac's introduction of children and young people in La Recherche de l'absolu and Eugénie Grandet as a matter of literary technique. 'Les enfants ont leur place dans le système dramatique de chaque roman' because Balzac had to reduce the age of his characters when he decided to depict the ravages rather than the effects of passion.³ J.M. Burton also sees the introduction of children in the Comédie humaine as a structural device. He expresses surprise at the insistence on child life in Balzac's imagery, 'considering the very small place that the child holds in the Comédie humaine',⁴ but believes that this imagery, like all Balzac's imagery, is his method of giving concrete

1. E. Faguet. Balzac, p. 55.

2. A. Wurmser, op. cit., p. 256.

3. M. Bardèche. Balzac romancier, p. 466.

4. J.M. Burton. Honoré de Balzac and his figures of speech, p. 11

expression to abstract conceptions.¹ Other critics have attempted to deduce the importance of children from the few full-length portraits. J. Borel believes that there are many children in the Comédie humaine who are rarely seen but whom their creator follows with 'un oeil apitoyé dans les positions si diverses, souvent malheureuses ou le sort les a fait naître'.² He gives as examples Jacques Cambremer, the child pervert in Un Drame au bord de la mer, Pierrette, the child martyr, and Juana Marana, the courtesan's daughter. He concludes triumphantly that the Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées disproves Faguet because it is in effect a course in puericulture 'où l'on trouve le nouveau-né, le nourrisson, l'enfant du premier âge'.³ J. Borel's evidence seems thin and he oversentimentalises Balzac's attitude to children. In contrast, one of the objects of this thesis will be to show that Balzac marks a sharp movement away from a Romantic idealisation of children and childhood. A work even less convincing than Borel's, in spite of its promising title, is E.M. Senn's thesis The Development of the Child Character in the Comédie humaine.

Because at first sight it might seem to cover the subject of the present study, I have thought fit to give a detailed summary and analysis of it in an appendix. Here it suffices to remark that the author deals

1. J.M. Burton. Honoré de Balzac and his figures of speech, p. 29
2. J. Borel. Le Lys dans la Vallée et les sources profondes de la création balzacienne, p. 187.
3. ibid., p. 188.

mainly with Balzac's factual descriptions of children under fifteen years. Her conclusions tend to be truisms or worse. She attests Balzac's frequent mention of exact age as proof of his psychological approach because it is 'one of the realistic details upon which modern psychologists base their realistic studies'.¹ She appears to regard one of his greatest contributions to the presentation of the child in literature as the fact that 'Balzac, first of all ... made them worthy of the attention of the serious author. The child appeared as himself, not as a little adult The childhood of Balzac's characters helped to explain their actions as adults and therefore strengthened and rounded out the picture Balzac gave of ... many other reappearing characters in his novels',² The first part of this conclusion sounds like an appreciation of Emile. The second ignores the fact that it was a widespread Romantic belief that the child is father of the man, a belief for whose popularity Balzac can certainly not be held responsible. Mrs. Senn's final proof does not bear close scrutiny. She refers to a public opinion poll of 'avourite authors held by the 'Jeunesses littéraires de France' in 1956, 1957, 1958 in which Balzac held tenth, fifth and seventh place respectively and deduces sweepingly that 'his friends the children attest the lasting qualities of his works;

1. E.M. Senn. The Development of the Child Character in the CH, p. 208.
2. ibid., pp. 301-302.

the dozens of fictional children of the past century and the early twentieth are direct descendants of one of the outstanding characters he created, Louis Lambert'.¹

Both opponents and defenders of Balzac's interest in children have unwittingly demonstrated the need for a more positive evaluation of the rôle of the child and the adolescent in the Comédie humaine, as well as a change of approach. To seek for conclusive proof in his full-length portraits of children has been seen to be unsatisfactory for their number is small. Moreover, the fact that he never wrote Les Enfants, although the title probably dates back to 1832 or 1833, cannot be explained away and it is not easy to refute P. Citron's assertion: 'Balzac avait un besoin très vif de la paternité, mais son rêve ne se réalisa jamais pleinement: s'il donna peut-être la vie à deux enfants ... il n'eut pas à les élever. Il adorait ses nièces Surville, les fils de Zulma Carraud ... mais toute expérience suivie lui manquait; l'enfance n'occupe dans son oeuvre qu'une place restreinte; et les Enfants, projetés durant dix-sept ou dix-huit ans, n'ont jamais été même esquissés'.² On the other hand an examination of the Comédie humaine reveals a large body of random observations on all aspects of child life from gestation to adulthood, including an awareness of the residual puerility essential

1. E.M. Senn. The Development of the Child Character in the CH, p. 303.

2. CH, Aux éditions du Seuil, vol. 1, p. 58.

to the normal adult personality and the pathetic spectacle of a senile 'second childhood'. The fact that these observations are scattered and uncoordinated does not invalidate their worth. Repetition of ideas or style in any one author cannot be dismissed as accidental even though it may be unconscious, and the reader of Balzac cannot but take seriously W.G. Moore's warning that 'what has been easily dismissed in the past as ... "padding" is a product of considerable literary talent and as such is ... to be examined with all the care and sympathy which great art demands'.¹ Thus our task will be to group and analyse the repetitions and discover what they reveal of child life despite the rarity of child figures.

Two problems face the writer of any work on Balzac. Firstly, whether to concentrate on the Comédie humaine or include Balzac's entire production. Secondly, whether to evaluate the given data chronologically or synthetically. Two other problems faced the present writer. These were how to determine the limits of childhood and adolescence and how to arrange Balzac's groups of ideas.

The first problem was soon disposed of. The area of study is the magnum opus, although the Correspondence, Oeuvres diverses and

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

Oeuvres de jeunesse are used for corroboration or contrast. The second problem was more difficult. I found that the large number of observations and their ubiquity made a chronological analysis of each one impossible, and that inconsistencies seemed to be the product of Balzac's personal tendency to self-contradiction rather than to a maturation in thought. Where a noticeable change in attitude is the result of age I have pointed it out, and I have frequently used the Oeuvres de jeunesse to show how the approach of the writer of the Comédie humaine often demonstrates a semi-medical, unflinching attitude far removed from the spirit which animated his brash, yet strangely coy, youthful self. A further reason for choosing the synthetic approach is that I have had to recreate, possibly arbitrarily, a synthesis of the elements of Balzac's haphazard meditation on children and childhood. The only feasible method of doing this was to consider his thought on a given element as an entity, just as he considered the Comédie humaine as an entity.

Balzac himself provided me with the answer to the third problem. He describes man's formation as 'tout ce qui influe sur l'homme avant sa conception, pendant sa gestation, après sa naissance, et depuis sa naissance jusqu'à vingt-cinq ans, époque à laquelle un homme est fait'.¹

1. Pléiade XI, p. 160.

This justifies my rejecting the Judao-Christian concept of childhood as lasting from birth to the age of twelve, or E.M. Senn's arbitrary limitation of childhood from birth to the age of fifteen. Moreover, in one of his philosophical notes Balzac summarised his view of the whole of man's development. It is substantially the same as the above but it reveals his awed curiosity as well as a pre-Freudian awareness of latent passions in children: 'Il naît. Ce mystère est un vrai néant pour l'esprit humainJusqu'à l'âge de 10 ans, sa raison ... ne fait que poindre. Arrive 15 ans ... les germes des passions sont semés, mais le terrain est inculte. Jusqu'à 21 ans, l'incertitude la plus déchirante s'empare de lui-mêmeA 30 ans c'est le roi de la natureAvant la mort, il est enfantEt toujours ... le néant sur tout'.¹

The solutions to some of the preceding problems facilitated that to the fourth. There are clearly two distinct currents in Balzac's approach to children and adolescents. The first is his appreciation of their universal characteristics and conditions, and might be termed static. The second is his interest in their growth and development from before birth to adulthood, and might be termed dynamic. I shall correspondingly divide the thesis into two parts. Part I will be devoted to an

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

examination of the child and adolescent as individuals: the characteristics and different types of children, the young man and the young girl.

Part II will deal with growth and development, including education which is the social means of guiding growth.

This work aims to fill a gap in the present state of Balzac studies, namely the widespread misconception that Balzac ignored children. By abandoning the traditional approach to the question of the child character in the Comédie humaine I intend to show that, despite the frequent and understandable intrusion of Romantic 'idées reçues' or old wives' tales in his work, Balzac's treatment of childhood and adolescence is astoundingly wide-ranging, clinical and pre-Freudian - at times even post-Freudian. His was no idle boast that 'il n'y a que les médecins et les observateurs comme votre mougick qui devinent l'affaire'.¹

1. Lettres à Mme H 1, p. 558.

PART I

CHAPTER I

BALZAC, A PIONEER OF THE TREATMENT OF THE CHILD IN THE FRENCH NOVEL

It is a justifiable commonplace of literary history that Balzac pioneered the modern French novel when he began publishing his Scènes de la vie privée in 1830. He was conscious that the contemporary novel consisted of a limited number of overworked genres, and that if it were to survive it would have to leave the realm of the most recent, the Scottian historical novel as such, for that of contemporary manners. Stendhal had already started moving in this direction: Le Rouge et le Noir can be fully understood only if considered in the context of the Restoration. It is, however, Balzac rather than Stendhal who is the first modern novelist because he was the first to base his novels on the belief that a minute description of 'l'homme extérieur' is vital for an understanding of 'l'homme intérieur'. Moreover, as E. Auerbach has remarked, 'Stendhal est un grand bourgeois aristocrate fils de l'Ancien régime, il ne veut ni ne peut devenir un bourgeois du XIXe siècle'¹, whereas 'le réalisme d'atmosphère qui est celui de Balzac est un produit de son époque, il est lui-même un élément et un produit d'une atmosphère'.²

M. Bardèche has demonstrated in some detail that there is a clear distinction between Balzac's treatment of the novel and that of his immediate predecessors and contemporaries, even though the Comédie humaine

1. E. Auerbach. Mimesis, p. 460.

2. ibid., p. 469.

is inevitably a watershed of existing trends.¹ He has charted both differences and similarities and has highlighted and emphasised Balzac's debt to Scott which was primarily structural. Scott inspired Balzac to improve upon, and remedy shortfalls in, the *Waverley* novels, and taught him the techniques of exposition, description, dialogue and dramatic presentation.

Balzac's proven originality as far as the novel as a whole is concerned is paralleled by his originality in the treatment of the child in the novel. In this he owes almost nothing to Scott or his Romantic contemporaries. Where the latter proclaim with Rousseauistic fervour the innocence and sanctity of childhood and tend to succumb to the ensuing temptation of regressive nostalgia, he displays a clinical interest in the process of procreation, growth and development. Thus our immediate task is dual: to prove Scott's lack of influence and to sketch the history of the child figure in French literature, comparing and contrasting Balzac with Rousseau and his disciples.

Balzac regarded Scott's puritanical ignorance of passion and feminine psychology as one of his greatest deficiencies.² Herein may lie the secret of Scott's lack of interest in children. His biographer, John Buchan, declares that he revered humanity too deeply to emphasise its animality,³ and was incapable of penetrating the sub-conscious because he would have considered it ill-bred.⁴ By reason of his personal conservatism and opposition to most of the basic trends of Romanticism, such as the cult of the ego and the unconscious, Scott, unlike other English Romantics, had no need of the child figure for probing these cults. One of his

1. See M. Bardèche, *Balzac romancier*, for a full discussion of these points.

2. *Avant-Propos*, p. xxxiii.

3. J. Buchan. *Sir Walter Scott*, p. 349.

4. *ibid.*, p. 345.

early poems, To Childhood, shows how deeply his roots lay in the past. In its expression of a nostalgic regret for happy childhood it forms part of a minor tradition of 18th century verse. That he is a traditionalist in this respect is borne out by the novels. The ten year old Flibbertigibbet of Kenilworth like the jester Wamba of Ivanhoe, are instrumental to the denouement. The young heroines, like Rebecca in Ivanhoe, are unrealistic incarnations of pristine maidenhood. The symbolic figures are equally clichéd. Quentin Durward, the hero of the first Scottian novel to be acclaimed on the Continent, is the eternal younger son who goes out to seek a fortune, just as Louis represents the eternal treacherous step-parent. Brown in Guy Mannering is a foundling who only discovers his real name at the end of the book. As regards education, Scott was an arch conservative, untouched by Rousseau's theories, for in an address given at the opening of the Edinburgh Academy, he advocated the creation of true scholars, schooled in and by the Classics.¹ It was not from Scott, then, that Balzac acquired his wide-ranging interest in childhood. The rarity of credible child characters and an original attitude towards children in those of the Oeuvres de Jeunesse imitative of Scott would seem to bear this out, just as Les Chouans, a Scottian historical novel, proved to be one of the least profitable fields of my research.

The history of French literature indicates the length of time it took for the child to be deemed an acceptable subject. It was only with Rousseau that the child became more than a subsidiary element in the

1. Buchan, op. cit., p. 258

adult world. Changing attitudes to the child in French literature and society have been so comprehensively described by Jean Calvet in his L'Enfant dans la littérature française and P. Ariès in Centuries of Childhood that I shall merely summarise them here. From the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries the child was studied as a potential man who, it was hoped, would bring honour to his race and lineage. Calvet cites the example of the scene in Rabelais' Pantagruel II, where the father's orgiastic joy at the birth of a son who will continue his line neutralises his grief at his wife's death. Children are absent from the seventeenth century novel. In Télémaque, for instance, Fénelon considers the hero as a young adult, and not as a child or an adolescent. The appearance of children in Classical drama is rare. True, there is Joas in Athalie, but Astyanax in Andromaque does not even appear, although he is the pivot of the plot. In the eighteenth century the prevailing attitude to children changed and the child became a focus of literary interest simultaneously with alterations in sensibility and thought. In the seventeenth century churchmen and moralists had initiated a psychological interest in, and moral solicitude for, children. By the eighteenth century this interest and solicitude had permeated family life, and parents became increasingly concerned about their offspring's physical health and less afraid of manifesting their affection openly. The use of nicknames, which are a kind of hermetic language, indicated growing family solidarity and affection. Rousseau set the seal on these trends and his influence lies behind the increased concentration of interest in the second half of the eighteenth century and in the nineteenth century. By the time Paul et Virginie was published the worth of the child as a literary subject

was firmly established, and the later Romantics were to seize on it as a symbol of Nature, Imagination and Sensibility. Rousseau may be said to dominate the educational scene until Freud. He was the first to stress that the child is important in his own right and not merely as a miniature adult. Emile emphasises that education should be appropriate to the peculiar and individual nature of each child and to each stage of his development. Rousseau's postulation of a child's original innocence encouraged the desire to protect that innocence by wholesome reading and conversation. The essence of his contribution was indeed 'to give authoritative expression to the new sensibility, and to direct its interest towards childhood as the period of life when man most closely approximated to the "state of Nature"'.¹ An equally important contribution, not generally emphasised, was his tremendous impact on nineteenth century paediatrics. Moreover, 'the importance of Rousseau lies as much in what became Rousseauism as in the gospel of Emile itself'.² Unfortunately, this is often all too true. Jean-Jacques' association of childhood with primitivism fostered the image of the innocent, naturally virtuous child, which in turn was attended by the suave nostalgia of the type expressed by George Sand in her autobiography: 'Il faut croire que la vie est une bien bonne chose en elle-même puisque les commencements en sont si doux, et l'enfance un âge si heureux'.³ The children in her later novels, like Petit-Pierre in La Mare au diable, are aspects, not even characters, of her conventional gentle idealism.

1. P. Coveney. The Image of Childhood, p. 42.
2. ibid., p. 43.
3. G. Sand. Histoire de ma vie, vol. II, p. 151.

Here we must digress for a moment to examine the direct influence of Rousseau on Balzac. Later in this chapter we shall consider to what extent Balzac was tainted by Rousseauism.

The total of Rousseau's influence on Balzac is too great, too dispersed and even too contradictory to be treated here. Certain aspects of it have been touched on by P. Laubriet,¹ B. Guyon,² and M. Bardèche.³ P. Laubriet notes that Balzac's ambivalent attitude to Rousseau, alternating between praise and condemnation, is a recognition of the stimulus the latter provided him. In general he considered him a great writer. He followed his lead in rehabilitating passion, exposing much of the artificiality and corruptness of civilised society and testing empirical theories by observation of reality. M. Bardèche's thesis is that the Comédie humaine is an unusual interpretation of Rousseau's 'L'homme qui pense est un animal dépravé'.

Rousseau's influence was specific as well as general. The theory of feminine upbringing developed in La Physiologie du Mariage is based on Rousseau's dictum: 'Chez les peuples qui ont des mœurs, les filles sont faciles, et les femmes sévères. C'est le contraire chez ceux qui n'en ont pas'.⁴ Many of Balzac's ideas on education are parrotings of Emile, such as the desirability of breastfeeding and the necessity for an isolated, preferably rustic, environment. Balzac praised Emile for its plea for greater respect for women and the institution of marriage,⁵

1. P. Laubriet, L'Intelligence et l'art chez Balzac.
2. B. Guyon, La Pensée politique et sociale de Balzac.
3. M. Bardèche, Une Lecture de Balzac.
4. Phy p. 86.
5. Phy pp. 130-131.

but he criticised it on the grounds that it was incomplete and bred hypocrisy. As regards the first criticism, Balzac intended to remedy it with his Analyse des corps enseignants which would embrace 'l'éducation humaine fouillée sur un plan plus étendu que ne l'ont tracé mes prédécesseurs en ce genre. L'Emile de J.-J. Rousseau n'a pas sous ce rapport embrassé la dixième partie du sujet, quoique ce livre ait imprimé une physionomie nouvelle à la civilisation'.¹ Balzac then goes on to say that Emile bred hypocrisy for since breastfeeding became fashionable among the upper classes 'il s'est développé d'autres sentimentalités'.² His reasoning is not altogether clear, but it seems that he felt that people were content to pay lip-service to Rousseau's doctrines, not to go beyond proclaiming the superficialities of his thought and the sentimentality into which it can so easily fall. In Entre Savants Mme de Saint-Vandrilie suckles her children from motives of vanity, not conviction. Balzac mockingly justifies her neglect of her children with the rhetorical question: 'Peut-être ne faut-il pas se livrer à de trop grands efforts pour l'éducation, et se fier au bon naturel des enfants?'.³ Thus Balzac acknowledges the importance of Emile while making stern reservations about the pitfalls of the facile understanding of it. Like Rousseau Balzac was aware of the child's complexity and peculiarity, but his approach to the child and adolescent's characteristics is para-medical rather than emotional. He rejects Rousseau's doctrine of original goodness, without reverting to the doctrine of original sin, declaring firmly: '... dans l'état naturel ... l'homme n'est ni absolument bon, ni absolument

1. Pref. to *Phy*, *Pléiade* XI, p. 160.

2. loc cit.

3. Entre Savants, O D III, p. 630.

méchant, mais ... essentiellement imparfait'.¹ This is not to say that Balzac did not occasionally use the notion of original virtue for literary effect, but his pre-Freudian, quasi-scientific investigation of the child consciousness ventilated Rousseauist sentimentality. The trend of Balzac's thought seems to me to be epitomised by the last in his list of three natural and inescapable causes of inequality, namely 'la fécondité du mâle et de la femelle réunis, ce qui constitue la plus terrible inégalité sociale et qui résulte encore de lois fatales inappréciables'.²

Balzac's discrimination with regard to Rousseau is all the more extraordinary when one realises how slowly Rousseauism penetrated society, and even more so literature. Only in 1833 did Loëve-Weimars start Le Journal des Enfants specifically for the enjoyment of children. This was followed by other publications which may be regarded as symptomatic of a relinquishment of the claim for the all-sufficiency of rational adult standards.³ It was in the nineteenth century that the child was given an important place in society: the family acquired a social significance, and not merely the biological and legal one it had hitherto been awarded, and the word 'bébé' took on its present meaning of 'baby' instead of defining any child of schoolgoing age. Balzac is very much of his time when he defines 'homme' as comprising 'un homme, sa femme, son enfant', in other words 'Homme veut dire famille'.⁴ Literature was slow to register the increased importance placed on the child, who was curiously

1. Catéchisme social, OD, III, p. 693.

2. ibid., p. 696.

3. For more about the growth of children's literature in the 19th century see P. Hazard. Les Livres, les enfants, les hommes and E.M. Senn. The Development of the Child Character in the CH.

4. Catéchisme social, OD, III, p. 692.

neglected by novelists and poets in the first half of the century until well after the Romantic period. This is outstandingly demonstrated by Hugo's work, and confirmed by a perusal of, for example, A. Le Breton's Le Roman français au XIXe siècle avant Balzac for the pre-Romantic novel and a random choice of representative Romantic novels. In Hugo's early collections of poetry the child figure is not individualised; it is spiritualised as a symbol of innocence, candour and gaiety - in a word, sanctity. The child's importance lies mainly in his contribution to family life. Only after 1849 did Hugo amplify this rather trite idealisation when he began to make full use of the child as a symbol of suffering humanity, and it was as late as 1877 that he began to study children for themselves in his collection of poems revealingly entitled L'Art d'être grand-père. Children are absent from his novels before Les Misérables, which falls outside the scope of this thesis as it was published twelve years after Balzac's death. Children have no rôle in other romantic novels such as Lamartine's Raphaël and Graziella or Gautier's Mademoiselle Maupin, and Vigny's novels concern man's destiny and exclude the child. From Oberman onward novels which do happen to speak of childhood tend to be 'autobiographies transposées' or 'enfances romancées'.¹

Chateaubriand idealised his childhood as the 'seed-time of the soul', and in Mémoires d'Outre-tombe he attributes to it his melancholy, extreme sensibility, poetic vocation and love of the sea. In Volupté Sainte-Beuve uses his childhood to retreat into self-pity and introversion,

1. The terms are Thibaudet's used in Histoire de la littérature française de 1789 à nos jours.

and gives utterance to vapid rhetoric like: 'C'est une école inappréciable pour une enfance recueillie de ne pas se trouver dès sa naissance ... dans le mouvement du siècle Ces chastes années ... se prolongèrent donc chez moi fort avant dans la puberté, et maintinrent en mon âme ... quelque chose de simple, d'humble et d'ingénument puéril'.¹ Amaury, when an older man, longs to turn back in tears to his cradle and seek refreshment 'aux vierges ombrages de l'enfance'.² In the Confession d'un enfant du siècle Musset is guilty of the same rhetorical self-pity. Emma Bovary will, of course, represent a caricature of this plaintive nostalgia.

Stendhal virtually avoids the issue in his novels. He tends to write 'autobiographies transposées' rather than 'enfances romancées', depicting aspects of himself in his heroes but barely touching on children and childhood. The Rênal children in Le Rouge et le Noir serve to round off the picture of Mme de Rênal as a devoted mother and enable Julien to leave his peasant background, but they are shadowy, undeveloped figures whose importance for the novel is strictly utilitarian and structural. Although Julien's misanthropy and ambition are present from his youth Stendhal does not indicate the correlation between his 'deprived' childhood and later behaviour. It is unfortunate that it was only in the posthumous and undisguisedly autobiographical Vie de Henry Brulard that Stendhal explained his antagonism to his family by a rancorously incisive, if hindsighted, description of his childhood - his powers of observation of his elders' peccadilloes, his flashes of perversity, his Oedipal love for his mother, his contempt for his father, and frank hatred of

1. Sainte-Beuve. Volupté, vol. I; p. 14.

2. ibid., vol. II, p. 133.

of his younger sister. There is much of Balzac's scepticism about a child's original virtue in Stendhal's description of himself: 'un enfant de neuf ou dix ans dévoré par un tempérament de feu peut voir des choses dont tout le monde évite de lui dire le fin mot'.¹ However, in his novels Stendhal underplayed infancy and boyhood, missing the desire to have children as 'cette manie d'avoir des enfants, de jolies poupées qui deviennent des sots à faire fuir'.² Balzac's reaction to his unhappy childhood was quite the opposite. In his novels he ubiquitously analysed the characteristics of children and childhood.

Writers in the first half of the nineteenth century tend to use children as a vehicle for introspective wish-fulfilment, with the notable exception of Stendhal who ignores them. This is frequently true of the work of the only Romantic poet to concentrate on the child figure - Hugo. Like Chateaubriand, Hugo considered his childhood portentous and believed that he was destined to be famous because he had, as a sublime child, venerated and basked in Napoleon's glory.³ Of course this is not the only reason he, and others,⁴ have hailed him as the first French writer to give the child his due. Calvet has described the crucial importance in his work of children - Hugo's own and all others - as follows: 'L'oeuvre de Victor Hugo se trouve tout entière éclairée par

1. Vie de Henry Brulard, p. 63.
2. quoted by F.W.J. Hemmings. Stendhal: a study of his novels, p. 34
3. e.g. Mon enfance in Odes et Ballades, and 'Ce siècle avait deux ans' in Les Feuilles d'automne.
4. J.P. Chr. de Boer. Victor Hugo et l'Enfant, pp. 1 & 8.
A.D. Tolédano. La Vie de famille sous la Restauration et la Monarchie de Juillet, pp. 36 & 43. Tolédano reports Hugo as saying that Columbus discovered America, and Hugo discovered the child (p. 36).

la lumière du visage enfantin. Les enfants aimés tout bonnement parce qu'ils sont ses fils ou les fils de ses fils, les enfants sacrés parce que Dieu les regarde et fait frissonner en eux le mystérieux avenir, les enfants, symbole de l'innocence au milieu de la méchanceté humaine, les enfants fermement divins qui ... soulèvent notre misère vers la générosité et l'héroïsme'.¹ Despite this amplification of the theme of the child, Hugo's work remains anchored to a Rousseauist idealisation of the child figure. Herein lies the reason why Balzac, and not Hugo, should be considered the first writer to have a modern approach to the child. Even such an admirer of Hugo's as Dr. de Boer, admits that he was no child psychologist. Ugly or bad children are rare in his work, and he uses the child figure as 'un thème de méditation et d'épanchement lyrique'.²

It might be objected that Balzac's treatment of child is as stereotyped and limited as that of his contemporaries. In the section on innocence it will be seen that Balzac is usually uncritical of the notion of a child's almost celestial innocence, and exploits it for the purpose of pathos. Some of his novels may be regarded as 'enfances romancées'. The two obvious examples are Le Lys dans la vallée and Louis Lambert. The biographical importance of the former has been studied by J. Borel in Le Lys dans la Vallée et les sources profondes de la création balzacienne, and that of the latter by H. Evans in Louis Lambert et la philosophie de Balzac. B. Guyon, too, has some interesting comments to make on the autobiographical genesis of both Louis and Félix in La Pensée politique et sociale de Balzac. There is thus no need for me to analyse here the correspondences between these characters and their

1. J. Calvet. L'Enfant dans la littérature française, p. 141.

2. De Boer, op. cit., pp. 260-261.

creator. Suffice it to observe that the child Félix is a fairly objective transposition of Balzac, whereas Louis is an idealisation of Balzac as he might have been.

Balzac's adolescence as well as his childhood is transcribed in the Comédie humaine. His years of apprenticeship in Paris made a strong impression on him, and many of his characters have a similar experience. Raphaël de Valentin, Eugène de Rastignac and Lucien de Rubempré, like their creator, experience in Paris the parallel emotions of doubt and ambition. They all struggle to survive - both materially and socially. The authenticity of their experience is confirmed by a friend of the adolescent Honoré who said that the description of Lucien's début was drawn from personal experience.¹

Even though many parts of the Comédie humaine remind the reader of the 'roman confession' tradition, Balzac goes far beyond the limits of this type. In Le Lys dans la vallée for instance Balzac indicates his views on procreation. Félix asks what moral or physical defect in him is the cause of his mother's indifference, and Balzac is led to meditate on the difference between children conceived in love and those conceived out of duty. Elsewhere in the Comédie humaine we shall see how profoundly Balzac meditated on generation and procreation, and the extent of Sterne's influence in this respect. In Louis Lambert Balzac shows an interest in the child for his own sake. He postulates the existence of a private world peculiar to the child, and the latter's need to work out a world-view for himself. Unlike Senancour, Constant, Sainte-Beuve or Musset, Balzac does not introduce autobiographical elements into his work primarily to indulge himself in introspection. Proof of the originality both of his general technique and his treatment of the child is given in his warning, 'Souvent il est nécessaire de prendre plusieurs

1. quoted by S.J. Bérard. La Genèse d'un roman de Balzac: 'Illusions perdues', vol. I, p. 107.

caractères semblables pour arriver à en composer un seul'¹ and 'quant à l'ensemble des faits rapportés par l'auteur ils sont tous vrais pris isolément'.¹ This warning would be considered unnecessary today when synthesis of personal experience is a commonplace of creativity in the novel, but it was an innovation in the 1830's. Balzac certainly does not base his view of the child wholly on his own childhood or experience of children. A. Lorant notes that when Balzac was composing La cousine Bette he was crushed by the knowledge of Eve's miscarriage. In the novel, however, he gives a burlesque account of Hulot's delight at the news that Valérie Marneffe is expecting his child, yet the fact that the child is stillborn passes without comment.² Balzac's interest in children focusses here on a completely different aspect: the study of the mental and physical state of an adolescent girl, Hortense Hulot. In the Comédie humaine as a whole Balzac displays a Promethean, if unpredictable and unstructured, curiosity in the formation, development and character of the child, different types of children, various methods of education and upbringing and the childishness which endures in us all.

Balzac, then, is an innovator both in the novel and in the treatment of the child in literature. Before, French writers regarded the child figure as an incarnation of a sunny, facile idealism, and this figure rarely appeared outside the confines of the 'autobiographie transposée'. Balzac's work is far from exempt from this post-Rousseauist idealisation,

1. First Preface to CA, Pléiade XI p. 368.
2. A. Lorant. Les Parents pauvres d'Honoré de Balzac, vol. 1, p. 63.

but he was aware of the complexity of the child's nature, and shunned both the extreme concepts of original sin and original virtue. While Rousseau inevitably proved a source of inspiration, Balzac appears to prefigure some of Freud's ideas by his quasi-scientific investigation of the infant and child consciousness, for 'a major concern of Freudian analysis was to increase awareness of the child and objective appreciation of the importance of the childhood consciousness to the development of the adult mindFreud was a powerful agent in the ventilation of the sentimental atmosphere which had grown up around the Victorian child'.¹ In other words Balzac is the first French novelist to whom one can apply Coveney's comment on the development of the child in English literature: 'Literature, however, did not discover the child through the medium of psycho-analysis. The influence of Freud was to redirect, clarify, sometimes enrich (and in part, perhaps, explain) an interest which was already very clearly there'.²

Independent of Scott and of contemporary Rousseauism, Balzac was the first in France to adopt (although not imitate) the approach of the English Romantics to the child figure in literature.

1. P. Coveney. The Image of Childhood, p. 34

2. Coveney. op. cit., p. 33

CHAPTER II

CHILDREN'S CHARACTERISTICS

In the preceding comparison between Balzac and his contemporaries it has become clear that it was he who pioneered the introduction of children and childhood in the novel. We must now amplify this finding and examine the extent of his originality. Such an examination is best begun by a comparison with Hugo, whose vision of the child may reasonably be considered representative of the Romantic vision as a whole, if only because Hugo himself and some of his critics considered that he had 'discovered' the child. Hugo is reputed to have said that Columbus discovered America and he discovered the child.¹ M. Braunschvig, whose assessment is likely to be less biased, hails Hugo as the nineteenth century writer who is most deserving of the title 'peintre de l'enfance'.² Dr. J.P. de Boer in his thesis Victor Hugo et l'Enfance goes further and claims that Hugo was the first to give the child a prominent position in literature. Thus, although one may disagree with the award of pride of place to Hugo, his position as Romantic spokesman is undisputed.

Dr. de Boer's thesis has enabled me to summarise Hugo's outlook. For Hugo the child-figure was, on the whole, an attractive, healthy, happy, talkative, innocent and turbulent being. In later works, like Les Misérables, he portrayed the unhappy, downtrodden child, the innocent victim of Society. His writings did much to further the introduction of legislation designed to protect the child worker. Notwithstanding, the Hugolian child always remains a somewhat idealised symbol - be it of innocence or unjust victimisation - whose literary origins are easily traceable to Rousseau. This figure progresses from being the guardian angel of the home in the 1830's to become the

1. A.D. Tolédano. La Vie de famille sous la Restauration et la Monarchie de Juillet, p. 36.

2. M. Braunschvig. Notre littérature étudiée dans les textes, p. 495.

spotless victim of politics and Society and finally to receive his assumption as the symbol of forgiveness for original sin in L'âme d'être grand-père.

In many respects Balzac's picture of the child resembles Hugo's. He usually describes the physical appearance of healthy, goodlooking children, and he too analyses a child's innocence, gaiety and energy. He does so with less of Hugo's fervent enthusiasm however, for he realises that children's innocence is rarely unalloyed, their gaiety may be mere insouciance and should not be carried into adulthood, and their boundless energy may be tiring as well as delightful. The fundamental difference between Balzac and Hugo, however, is that Balzac's approach seems to be more medical than literary, indirectly owing more to Rousseau than to Rousseauism. This is confirmed if one analyses some samples of medical works which Balzac probably perused.

Balzac's interest in contemporary medicine has been exhaustively charted by M. le Yaouanc in Nosographie de l'humanité balzacienne, in comparison with which J. Borel's recent Médecine et psychiatrie balzaciennes is a slender and disappointing work. Le Yaouanc shows that Balzac was remarkably well-informed for a layman. He mentions that Balzac was very likely introduced to medical notions in his youth. Dr. Nacquart, the probable model for Bianchon, was an intimate of the Balzac family and life-long friend and physician to Honoré. Bernard-François was fascinated by such problems as longevity, callipedics and eugenics, and possessed the fifty-six volumes of Dictionnaire des Sciences médicales.¹ According to Le Yaouanc this was no work of vulgarization but a very expensive 'orthodox' encyclopedia published for professional

1. published by Panchkouce, 1812-1822.

use. Davin, Balzac's friend and admirer, claims vaguely that between 1818 and 1820 Balzac read widely about medicine, but does not specify what. It is impossible for us to state categorically what Balzac read in this field, as the first half of the nineteenth century abounded in medical publications. All we can do is to ascertain whether or not Balzac was in line with contemporary thinking. A sample of the latter is the above-mentioned Dictionnaire des Sciences médicales, with which Balzac was almost certainly acquainted, and the Dictionnaire de Médecine,¹ which is another general work which Le Yaouanc thinks Balzac might well have consulted. In any case, for our purpose, the latter has the advantage of being the more concise and modern, relying less on old wives' tales for illustrations. Henceforth these works will be referred to as DSM and DM respectively.

The present chapter is intended to show how closely Balzac's concept of the child's character conforms to that expounded in DSM and DM. Both speak of children's need for sleep and their insouciance. DSM describes a child's cruelty which is the product of his natural curiosity rather than malice, and his gourmandise. DM helps to explain why Balzac notices the quality of children's eyes and skin in detail. Balzac appears to differ from these two authorities in three minor respects. DSM speaks of a child's penchant for imitation,² and Balzac rather ignores it. Likewise he tends to disregard the claim of both DSM and DM that a child is docile. More positively, he emphasises a child's tenacity, which neither work mentions. In general, however, Balzac's vision of the child conforms to contemporary medical notions.

1. published by Béchét, 1832.

2. article Imitation

He displays his creative powers by enlarging on the data given in the two encyclopediae with vivid, almost photographic descriptions of children's activities. Most of this data, of course, originates in Emile, especially that given in DSM. Rousseau's influence on paediatrics does not seem to have been sufficiently acknowledged, possibly because Jean-Jacques had inveighed against 'la vanité de la médecine ... funeste au genre humain'.¹ Although Balzac could not but owe much to Rousseau because of the latter's impact on nineteenth century medicine, it does not follow that he accepted the whole of Rousseauism, which broadly encompasses those elements in Rousseau's work which easily lent themselves to distortion or exaggeration, such as the doctrine of original innocence and pristine instinct.

The elements of Balzac's concept of a child's attributes are not systematically presented in the Comédie humaine as Balzac did not assimilate them systematically. He tended to pick up information at random from conversations and reading, and prided himself on being among 'les simples amateurs d'idées'.² For the sake of clarity, however, I have grouped Balzac's ideas under various headings, beginning with innocence as it was a literary and medical cliché of the period and then discussing, in order, Balzac's descriptions of the child's physical appearance and his allusions to the qualities mentioned above of energy, weakness, instinct, insouciance and tenacity. Lastly, I shall attempt to answer the question whether Balzac's analysis of the child is more than a miscellany of contemporary medical and literary generalia by looking at his presentation

1. Emile, p. 25

2. Quoted by M. Le Yaouanc. Nosographie de l'humanité balzacienne, p. 393.

of the child-figure in tableaux or extended images. It is a pleasing and feasible hypothesis that the basis of these may be Rousseau's perceptive, almost clinical comment: 'Avant l'âge de raison l'enfant ne reçoit pas des idées, mais des images'.¹

1. Emile, p. 97 - my underlining.

Innocence

Until Freud it had been a long tradition to take a child's innocence for granted. Christ said 'Suffer little children to come unto me', and Christian mystics since have used the image of a child's innocent docility to express the state of mind in which a Christian should approach God. In the wake of Rousseau Romantic writers panegyrized a child's primeval innocence. Hugo, for instance, saw in the child a reflection of celestial purity.¹ In his work up to, and including, Les Contemplations the child is a symbol of candour, serenity, innocence and gentleness.

Et les plus tristes fronts, les plus souillés peut-être,
Se dérident soudain à voir l'enfant paraître,
Innocent et joyeux.²

Even Vigny, possibly the most pessimistic of the Romantic poets, has Satan confess:

Car toujours l'ennemi m'oppose triomphant
Le regard d'une vierge ou la voix d'un enfant.³

Contemporary medical opinion as well as literature affirmed unreservedly the existence of a child's almost total innocence. DSM even advises the maintenance of this state of innocence for as long as possible, claiming that it promotes physical health and 'surtout une âme énergique et élevée.'⁴ Balzac uncritically perpetuates this myth in the Oeuvres de Jeunesse.

1. Odes V, no. 22.

2. 'Lorsque l'enfant paraît ...' in Les Feuilles d'automne

3. Eloa in Poèmes antiques et modernes, Livre mystique

4. Enfance, pp. 235-236. Unless otherwise stated, all references in this chapter to DSM and DM are taken from DSM's article Enfance and DM's article Age.

Characters like Joseph and Horace Landon are hopelessly conventional in their tendency to view their childhood in retrospect as a period of Eden-like innocence.¹ The heroes of at least four of the youthful works are 'children of nature' on the model of Paul et Virginie. In fact, like Paul and Virginie, Joseph and Mélanie in Le Vicaire des Ardennes were brought up on a desert island and preserved from the corruption of Society by their adoptive mother. Like Paul and Virginie's their story is tragic, although it is more sensationalist and, Balzac was hopeful, more scandalous. Abel in La dernière Fée is, at the age of fifteen, another 'veritable' child of nature.² This is the only work in the Oeuvres de Jeunesse to criticise slightly such an upbringing, for here Balzac permits himself some strictures on the obscurantism of Abel's father.³ Nevertheless, at the end of the book Balzac explains that it is an allegory of a child of Nature's entry into Society. However, Abel's innocence is too complete to be credible, and the other 'children of nature' in these works are quite simply stereotypes.⁴

The notion of a child's essential innocence remains an 'idée reçue' in the Comédie humaine. Etienne d'Hérouville in L'Enfant maudit is an example of a 'child of nature', nurtured by a loving mother far from the ravages of civilisation. That Balzac continues to view candour and innocence as the attributes of any child up to the age of sixteen is

1. Le Vicaire des Ardennes, vol. II, p. 16, Wann-Chlore, p. 1379.
2. La dernière Fée, p. 51.
3. ibid., p. 49.
4. cf. Marianne in Le Centenaire, p. 197, Clotilde de Lusignan in the novel of that title, p. 26.

evident from one of his standard similes. Eugénie Grandet is 'innocente autant que l'enfant qui naît'.¹ Schmucke has the candour and naïveté of a six-year-old who has never left his mother.² Laurence de Cinq-Cygne has the naïveté of a fifteen-year-old,³ and Pierre Grassou that of a young man of sixteen.⁴ None of these characters is any longer even an adolescent, but the similes Balzac uses to describe them are significant in showing the omnipresence of children in his thought world. Moreover Balzac is conventional in his loose use of expressions like 'candide comme un enfant' or 'une naïveté d'enfant'⁵ and in his belief in the Romantic cliché that childish innocence is the mark of a man of genius and of an angelic being, a cliché whose wistfulness was rendered by George Sand: '... l'enfance est bonne, candide et les meilleurs êtres sont ceux qui gardent le plus ... de cette candeur et de cette sensibilité primitives'.⁶ In like vein Balzac describes Maurice de l'Hostal's uncle as 'naïf comme un homme de génie'.⁷ He elaborates on this in La Recherche de l'absolu where, probably with himself in mind, he declares that a man of genius becomes 'inamusable' if he loses 'ce principe de candeur, ce laisser-aller qui rend les gens de génie si gracieusement enfants'.⁸ He believes that 'cette enfance de coeur' is rare, and knowing that Balzac considered himself to be an eternal child the reader cannot help suspecting that he therefore

1. EG p. 435. See also Phy p. 194, R p. 395.
2. CP p. 278.
3. TA p. 159.
4. PGr p. 444.
5. eg. AS p. 56, MC p. 118, etc.
6. G: Sand. Histoire de ma vie, vol. II, p. 174.
7. H p. 322.
8. RA p. 198.

considered himself such an admirable phenomenon. Balzac gives childish innocence its supreme accolade when he terms it the external form of the innocence of angelic beings.¹

Balzac, then, can be undeniably slavish in conforming to the contemporary literary and medical belief in a child's almost total innocence. Mercifully he is not consistent about this, and sometimes examines it critically or qualifies it. He is not as confident as DSM that prolonged innocence is necessarily desirable. In the Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées and Albert Savarus he is troubled by the question of when and how much young girls should be told about sex. Childish innocence should be viewed with caution in both children and adults. In the former it is often merely evidence of immaturity and ignorance, and far from being celestial it can be ignoble. In the latter it tends to be either a portent of failure or a diabolical weapon.

Balzac was markedly aware that puerile innocence may be tainted with egoism, deceitfulness or sheer nastiness. He frequently lets fall unelaborated statements showing this. He affirms, for instance, that an unattractive aspect of a child's naïveté is that he expects his unreal demands to be instantly realised.² Henriette de Mortsauf reflects that a child's love includes a certain naïve selfishness for he is not aware of the pain he inflicts.³ Balzac is more positive about the deliberate nature of child's egoism when he says that he may wrong his parents by suspecting that their concern for him is selfishly motivated,⁴ and he is damning when he declares that a child's self-interest stifles all feelings

1. Ser p. 244.

2. EG p. 359 'la naïveté d'un enfant qui croit pouvoir trouver promptement ce qu'il désire'.

3. Lys p. 252 'Son amour a le naïf égoïsme de celui que nous portent nos enfants. Il n'est pas dans le secret des maux qu'il me cause'.

4. M. de Chatillonest says he has always seen 'les enfants attribuant à un sentiment personnel les sacrifices que leur font les parents!'

of pity.¹

Balzac's assessment of the ambiguous nature of a child's innocence is best shown in his use of the phrase 'malice d'enfant'.² This seems to me to have no exact English equivalent because it connotes both a harmful spite and an innocent mischievousness. Balzac regards the combination of ruse and simplicity, 'malice' in other words, as typical of childhood.³ He makes two contradictory assertions about the efficacy of a child's ruses which, although they are irreconcilable, show that he was not uncritical of the notion of a child's absolute innocence. On the one hand he says that children are at a disadvantage when they lie, for their falsehoods are so transparent that they are unconvincing.⁴ On the other hand, he describes how children often practise cunning successfully because they know that their innocence will not be doubted and they are able to lay traps with the ruse of primitive men.⁵ Similarly, while accepting the generalisation of a child's spontaneity,⁶ simplicity⁷ and integrity⁸ Balzac was not blind to other of their faults like petulance. This perceptiveness is evident from his earliest works. When a child, Del Ryès committed 'certains actes de noirceur enfantine'.⁹

1. E p. 121 'L'intérêt y (i.e. chez les employés) étouffe toute pitié, comme chez les enfants'.

2. SPC p. 354, Cath p. 138, Lys p. 80.

3. TA p. 236 'simple et rusé comme un enfant'; cf. FA p. 290, MM p. 18.

4. F30 p. 135.

5. CP p. 281.

6. EG p. 356 'encore enfant, encore dans l'âge où les sentiments se produisent avec naïveté.' See also EM p. 334, FE p. 182.

7. MJM p. 257 'la simplicité d'un enfant', see also FM p. 18.

8. R p. 473 'une loyauté d'enfant', see also P p. 9.

9. Sténie, p. 151.

Wann-Chlore weeps with jealousy, 'avec cette naïveté de sentiment qu'on ne trouve que dans l'enfance où nous avons recours aux larmes lorsqu'on touche à des objets que nous croyons inviolables'.¹ A character in Clotilde de Lusignan behaves similarly, emitting little cries like those of a child whose toy is being taken away from him,² and in La cousine Bette, Balzac's second last completed work, Baron Hulot will have precisely the same reaction when he discovers that the two Marneffes arranged together for the police to find him in flagrante delicto in Valérie's bed.³

If puerile innocence can be equivocal or reprehensible, the retention of it in adulthood can be catastrophic, either for the individual or those around him. Schmucke and Pons are doomed to be victims because they are 'doux comme des moutons, faciles à vivre, point défiants, de vrais enfants'.⁴ Notable among characters who assume childish naïveté to the detriment of others are Marie de Verneuil, Diane de Cadignan, Philippe Bridau and Gaston de Neuil. Diane is a veritable siren because her wiles are concealed under a virginal innocence.⁵ Similarly Marie is able to conquer Bauvan by assuming a childishly naïve attitude,⁶ but her pretence is not as impenetrable as Diane's. Philippe Bridau's apparent ingenuity⁷ is lethal to his enemies, whereas Gaston de Neuil's

1. Wann-Chlore, p. 1569.

2. Vol. I, p. 68.

3. Be p. 326 'en sanglotant comme un enfant à qui l'on ôte un jouet'.

4. CP p. 52.

5. SPC p. 358.

6. Ch p. 251, 297.

7. R p. 289.

combination of childish candour and ruse¹ proves mortal to himself and, indirectly, to Mme de Beauséant. He insists on insinuating himself into her retreat at Bayeux, and the loss of the exquisite love he finds there eventually drives him to suicide. Thus, whatever form it takes, innocence in adulthood is fatal. In a way Marie de Verneuil, Philippe Bridau and Gaston de Neuil end as disastrously as Pons and Schmucke, although they inflict considerably more harm on other people first.

With centuries of tradition endorsing the myth of a child's saintly innocence it is remarkable that Balzac should have realised that the notion is a truism, especially as his Romantic contemporaries continued to propagate it enthusiastically. It is to his credit that he should have picked out and expanded on medical reservations about the myth, and considered its implications in both childhood and adulthood.

1. FA p. 268, 290.

Physical Characteristics

In her thesis E.M. Senn devotes a section to 'Child portraits in the Comédie humaine', during the course of which she unwittingly demonstrates the paucity of full-length physical descriptions of children in the work. Mrs. Senn either transcribes Balzac's descriptions of children's activities (for example the games of the d'Aiglemont children in La Femme de trente ans) or translates uncritically Balzac's observations about characters, such as: 'Some fatality, but a fatality which had become a habit, caused Joseph never to be able to keep his clothes clean'.¹ She does not pause to examine Balzac's tautology combined with inconsistency, for obviously a fatality is unavoidable but a habit can be corrected. In point of fact, there are very few detailed physical descriptions of children in the Comédie humaine, and the only full-length one is that of Ursule Mirouët. On the whole Balzac shows a fondness for complaisant vignettes, with diminutive details like the embroidered collar worn by Charles d'Aiglemont,² or Jacques de Mortsauf's ash-blond curls and clothes: his little collar embroidered by his mother, his tiny sky-blue frock-coat, his white pleated trousers and his Scottish cap.³

The description of Ursule Mirouët is not quite as flowery as those found in Hugo's early poetry, but it narrowly misses being so. Hugolian children nearly all have beautiful eyes with silvery pupils, pink eyelids and lips, tiny hands, delicate feet and a halo of golden hair.

1. E.M. Senn. The Development of the Child Character in the CH, p. 100.
2. F30 pp. 131 - 132.
3. Lys p. 126.

Such descriptions provide an excellent example of Rousseauism. Their kinship with, yet distance from, Rousseau's general portrait of a child is illuminating: 'N'est-ce pas ... un spectacle charmant et doux, de voir un joli enfant, l'oeil vif et gai, l'air content et serein, la physionomie ouverte et riante'.¹ Ursule resembles Hugolian children in that her hair is blonde and she has tiny feet with rosebud toes and beautiful blue eyes. The description of her is one of saccharine banality, for Dr Minoret notices that as she grows up her hair changes from down to silk and then to fine light hair 'si caressants aux doigts qui les caressent'.² This mellifluous portrait is relieved by a few rare realistic notations. Her toes are covered with 'une pellicule sous laquelle le sang se voit'.² Balzac actually allows this angelic being to suffer the indignity of teething, reminding one that contemporary doctors attached great importance to it. DSM even divides the period from birth to seven years into two parts, according to the dentitions.³

The same Hugolian banality is found in the description of Barbette's son in *Les Chouans*. He is aged between eight and nine, and has '(une) figure fraîche, blanche et rose, des joues bouffies, des yeux vifs, des dents d'ivoire et une chevelure blonde qui tombait par échevaux sur ses épaules demi-nus'.⁴ In short 'ce petit gars était sublime de beauté'.⁴ Balzac shows a predilection for depicting him in touching poses: there is the pastoral setting where he is surrounded by cows and a dog,⁵ and there is the scene of his mumbling a prayer to Sainte Anne d'Auray.⁶

1. *Emile*, p. 172.

2. UM p. 57.

3. DSM (*Art. Age*) p. 178.

4. Ch pp. 242 - 243.

5. *ibid.*, p. 260.

6. *ibid.*, p. 334.

Only once does he become a creature of flesh and blood, and that is when he discovers the decapitated head of his father. Then emotion distorts his fresh face in a nervous convulsion until 'sa figure, abruti par l'ignorance, arriva jusqu'à exprimer une curiosité sauvage.'¹

Balzac was noticeably unimaginative in his descriptions of children, barely progressing beyond conventional stereotypes, and showing little development on his youthful works. The descriptions of Ursule and Barbette's son are small improvement on the two long portraits of children in the Oeuvres de Jeunesse. Mélanie in Le Vicaire des Ardennes has, at the age of five, all the elements of childish beauty: 'sur sa peau blanche, rouge et tendue, apparaissaient tous les germes des grâces et des attraites ... sa pose enfantine, son naïf sourire'.² In the second Falthurne Balzac, speaking of little girls, states: 'leurs visages sont frais, leur peau douce comme du satin ne semble pas assez forte pour contenir leur sang pur et leur force mouvante'.³ The vague idealism of phrases like 'sa pose enfantine' or 'leur sang pur' reappears in the descriptions in the Comédie humaine, where Balzac is content with airy statements like 'graces enfantines'⁴ or, in describing Henriette's voice, 'ces notes enfantines'.⁵

Even when Balzac describes a sickly child he is rarely realistic. He tells us that Madeleine de Mortsauf is puny, with lacklustre sunken eyes and thin dark hair, but he attenuates this by comparing her to a

1. Ch p. 341.

2. vol. II, p. 19.

3. pp. 282 - 283.

4. Lys p. 173.

5. ibid., p. 183.

weeping willow,¹ and by allowing this ugly duckling to turn into a swan with extreme rapidity. At fifteen she is like a medieval statuette: her cheeks are as velvety as a peach and her neck is covered with the silky down² which Balzac believes to be peculiar to little girls.³

Balzac is no gifted observer of children's appearance, and his portraits tend to be exasperatingly banal. They are not redeemed by the scattered realistic notations I have mentioned. The rarity of original and detailed full-length portraits of children in the Comédie humaine is one of the chief grounds for the accusation that Balzac ignored children. However, Balzac's clinical outlook moves into focus when he alludes in passing to individual physical features.

These allusions appear to be based almost entirely on information given in DSM and DM which is inevitably a list culled from Emile. The former defines the child as follows: 'L'enfant ... aime le mouvement, le bruit, l'éclat ... se livre au babil ... dort facilement et longtemps'.⁴ The latter notes that the young child's activity makes rest essential and that therefore his sleep is deep and prolonged.⁵ From his early works Balzac often referred to a child's relaxed slumbers. In a passage in the second Falturne he describes a child's sleep as indicative of its trusting dependence on those around it.⁶ Both in the Oeuvres de Jeunesse and in the Comédie humaine a character's capacity for sleep reveals his

1. Lys p. 42.
2. ibid., p. 234.
3. ibid., p. 22.
4. pp. 251 - 252.
5. pp. 589 - 590.
6. p. 279.

childishness and hence, for Balzac, integrity. The gentle Aloïse, heroine of L'Héritière de Birague, is described as 'la jeune enfant qui semblait sourire en son sommeil'.¹ Later, in the Comédie humaine, Ursule Mirouët's angelic innocence is shown by the way in which she sleeps. Her guardian comments 'elle dort comme un enfant qu'elle est',² and Savinien claims to have fallen in love with her in the coach while watching her 'sommeil d'enfant'.³ Balzac, then, seems to have consistently used a medical fact - the nature of a child's sleep - to prove the Romantic premise that childlikeness is equivalent to goodness. Rousseau himself had not employed this procedure.

A child's capacity for deep sleep is paralleled by his healthy appetite. DM notes that a baby's early existence is occupied entirely by food and sleep,⁴ and that a small child's appetite is insatiable.⁵ DSM mentions a child's highly developed sense of taste which comes from 'la vivacité des appétits du jeune âge, aussi presque tous les enfants sont gourmands et friands'.⁶ Balzac elaborates on these observations in two related groups of varied and nuanced descriptions. The first concerns a child's unrestrained longing for sweetmeats, and the second its love of stolen fruit. It is worth quoting several examples from each group.

1. p. 117.
2. UM p. 137.
3. UM p. 155.
4. p. 587, pp. 618 - 619.
5. p. 597.
6. p. 249.

Proof that Nucingen is a financial genius is that he treats his creditors like children. He pretends to be on the point of going into liquidation, frightens them into settling for shares of doubtful value, and then resumes payment of his bills of exchange as if nothing had happened. This is his way of giving 'un petit pâté d'or à de grands enfants, qui comme les petits enfants d'autrefois préfèrent le pâté à la pièce, sans savoir qu'avec la pièce ils peuvent avoir deux cents pâtés'.¹ The simile is probably a vivid enlargement of Rousseau's remark: 'Un enfant donnerait plutôt cent louis qu'un gâteau'.² Valérie Marneffe keeps Hulot dancing attendance on her by her system of pleasing him just enough to be cruel - 'de lui tenir la dragée haute comme à un enfant'.³ There is a similar image in Petites misères de la vie conjugale, but here it is expanded. Adolphe says that wives should be treated like children: 'présentez-leur un morceau de sucre, vous leur faites danser toutes les contredanses que dansent les enfants gourmands; mais il faut toujours avoir une dragée, la leur tenir haut, et ... que le goût des dragées ne leur passe point'.⁴ The irony of this observation is that Adolphe, in order to get his own way, will promise whatever Caroline wants, 'de même que les enfants devant une tarte'.⁵

Balzac is amusedly aware that a child's gourmandise is often linked with his love of the forbidden. He frequently employs the metaphor of green or stolen fruit for he believes that children prefer stolen fruit

1. MN p. 394.
2. Emile, p. 91.
3. Be p. 116.
4. PMV p. 58.
5. ibid., p. 190.

to those they can eat at table.¹ A young girl's curiosity is compared to the 'vois faits par les enfants trop gourmands à un dessert mis sous clef'.² There is an improvement on this image in one of the Oeuvres de Jeunesse: Landon savours his wedding day with Jane, his bigamous wife, like one of those children who 'loin de l'oeil sévère du maître, dévorent le charme de désobéir, mangent avec délices le fruit défendu et s'amuse d'autant plus que, peut-être, dans le lointain gronde l'orage des punitions'.³ On the same theme is the description of Bette Fischer's character which assumes immense proportions 'comme un arbre s'échappe des mains de l'enfant qui l'a plié jusqu'à lui pour y voler des fruits verts'.⁴ The comparison of Bette's character to a tree is incongruous, but the picture contained in the comparison is evocative. Balzac, then, gives concrete expression to the concept of a child's gourmandise in the form of a variation of images on the theme of sweets, tartlets and green or stolen fruit.

The last two physical traits to which Balzac pays special attention are skin and eyes. One might be inclined to show more indulgence towards his sometimes hyperbolic descriptions of these when one finds that DM held that a child's skin and eyes are especially vulnerable to disease. Balzac makes this point in regard to eyes, which for him are the outward sign of a child's inward state of health. Dr. Benassis notices 'le regard pâle d'un enfant malade'.⁵ In La dernière Fée

1. Lys p. 191, concerning M. de Mortsauf - 'agir à la manière des enfants qui préfèrent les fruits volés en secret à ceux qu'ils peuvent manger à table'.
2. Phy p. 83.
3. Wann-Chlore, p. 1523.
4. Be p. 131. cf. Canalis' contemptuous denial that he is not attracted by Modeste for he is not enough of a child to like green fruit (MM p. 110).
5. MC p. 247.

there is a lyrical passage about eyes which is the forerunner of many in the Comédie humaine. Little Abel looks at a book of engravings with 'toute la force de ses beaux yeux noirs, humides de la sève de l'enfance'.¹ Moisture, or the lack of it, is something Balzac particularly notices. Hélène d'Aiglemont's eyes, for instance, reveal that she is too old for her years because they lack 'cette humide vapeur qui donne tant de charme aux yeux des enfants'.²

It must be admitted that Balzac is less clinical when it comes to descriptions of skin. He tends to insist on its texture and transparency. Etienne d'Hérouville's complexion is as transparent and satiny as a little girl's.³ Zambinella has the fresh face of a child - pink and white, fragile and transparent.⁴ Although these descriptions are a little inflated they echo, if from afar in the case of skin, the semi-scientific beliefs of Balzac's day.

It is undeniable that most of Balzac's full-length portraits of children are sentimental and idealised. The semi-medical origin of many of his isolated observations of physical traits does not wholly compensate. Nevertheless Balzac was undoubtedly capable of precise, even earthy, observation of children's physical characteristics. This is seen in his approach to their energy which we shall study in the next section, and in his Correspondence. Here there are two perspicacious accounts of a child

1. Vol. I, p. 44.

2. F30 p. 132. cf. B p. 52-Calyste's eyes; MM p. 18-Modeste's eyes.

3. EM p. 380.

4. S p. 400. cf. Gr p. 233.

'au physique'. In 1822 he describes to Laure a certain illegitimate child who 'gémît, pâtit, fait pipi, grandit, se nourrit et vit, au grand scandale de Villeparisis'.¹ Many years later, in 1849, he says of Anna Mzinech's hands: 'Ces mains de rien, de beurre, fluides, blanches, dont trois tiendraient dans la mienne',³ giving an almost tactile impression of their size, colour and texture. One cannot but regret that he did not display this descriptive gift more often in the Comédie humaine, and that such lack of inhibition only occurs in his private letters which, presumably, he did not consider as literature.

1. Corres. I, p. 40.

2. Corres. V, p. 671.

Energy

DSM's definition of a child, quoted earlier, made it clear that nineteenth century medical opinion, inspired by Rousseau¹, regarded unceasing activity as part of a child's nature, as indeed does modern medical opinion. DM corroborates this in its remark that because a child's body is so supple and agile he has to be actually forced to keep still in one place.² DSM considers that a child's seemingly tireless energy is the result of his vigorous circulation.³

Balzac fully endorses the existence of this energy. He comments wryly that mothers alone are capable of tolerating their offspring's restlessness.⁴ He seems to echo the very phraseology of DSM's definition of the child who 'se livre au babil' when he relates how Jacques and Madeline de Mortsauf 'babillaient pour babiller, allaient, trottaient, revenaient sans raison apparente; mais, comme les autres enfants, ils semblaient avoir trop de vie à secouer'.⁵

Not content with merely stating the existence of this compulsion to be active, Balzac vividly describes its manifestations in apparently futile movements, games in general and the times of schoolboys in particular. The fact that he tends to do so in metaphors does not invalidate the acuity of his observation. For example, there is a delightful word-picture in Maître Cornélius when the police arrest

1. e.g. Emile, p. 197 '... pour courir, les enfants sont toujours prêts'.
2. p. 589
3. p. 247.
4. Théorie de la Démarche, OD II, p. 640.
5. Lys p. 116. cf. DSM art. Fille p. 499 'un petit babil naïf et charmant'.

Georges d'Estouteville and dress him 'avec l'habile prestesse d'une nourrice qui veut profiter, pour changer son marmot, d'un instant où il est tranquille'.¹

The mad Countess, Stéphanie de Vandières, is like a child in her restlessness: she plays with her shoe, twists the halter of the cow she is leading,² and finds a childish pleasure in immersing her long tresses in water and taking them out quickly in order to see the drops of water fall.³

Games are the obvious outlet for this energy, and Balzac lists various games with zest. His descriptions of them may not be profound but they are vivid and give the reader a sense of the physical presence of children which Hugo's Les Feuillantines, for example, does not.

Several examples must be quoted to show the range and variety of Balzac's observation.

Jacques Brigaut and Pierrette pass the time by fishing, picking flowers, catching insects, gardening, skating and playing in the snow.⁴ Etienne d'Hérouville and Gabrielle Beauvaloir enjoy themselves quite differently, hunting for shells hidden in rocks.⁵ Balzac also mentions hide-and-seek, card games and toys like tops and small drums: Pille-Miche looks at his victim like a child trying to divine the whereabouts of a hidden object from his opponent's expression;⁶ Colonel Chabert compares two corpses on a battle-field to cards arranged by a child so as to form

1. Cor p. 241.

2. Ad p. 12.

3. Ad p. 14.

4. P p. 61.

5. EM p. 433.

6. Ch p. 261.

the foundations of a castle¹; Mme Camusot 'fait agir son mari comme un enfant fait aller sa toupie'² and Hulot's promise of support for the child he believes Valérie Marneffe to be expecting by him is 'sur la langue et la physionomie de Valérie ce qu'est un tambour entre les mains d'un marmot, elle devait en jouer pendant vingt jours'.³

Another outlet for a child's energy is his curiosity. As DSM explains⁴, nature inspires a child with a burning curiosity for knowledge which is satisfied by seeing, touching and feeling objects. This is why a child often kills a bird or an animal, or mutilates a plant. He is not necessarily motivated by cruelty but by a love of what is new and a desire to exercise his faculties. All these observations come straight from Emile: 'Avant l'âge de raison, nous faisons le bien et le mal sans le connaître Un enfant veut déranger tout ce qu'il voit: il casse, il brise tout ce qu'il peut atteindre; il empoigne un oiseau comme il empoignerait une pierre, et l'étouffe sans savoir ce qu'il fait'.⁵

Balzac frequently remarks on the existence of this curiosity and consequent acts of apparent cruelty. 'Une curiosité d'enfant' or equivalents are clichés in the Comédie humaine⁶. Balzac describes several cruel actions - tormenting birds, animals and insects, and destroying

1. Col p. 19 - cf F30 p. 67 Julie and Arthur are like children not daring to breathe over 'des châteaux de cartes qu'ils ont bâtis'.
2. CP p. 197.
3. Be p. 286.
4. p. 247.
5. Emile, p. 43.
6. e.g. Ser p. 274; CM p. 248; Lys p. 7; PCh p. 333

flowers. Lucien attacks d'Arthez' book 'comme les enfants prennent un bel oiseau pour le déplumer et le martyriser'.¹ Camusot says of his plan to establish Vautrin's identity: 'j'aurai imité les enfants qui attachent une ferraille à la queue d'un chat; la procédure fera toujours sonner les fers de Jacques Collin'.² Mme Grandet's resignation is likened to that of an insect tormented by children.³ Although the notion of an insect's capacity for resignation seems to me to be an over-personification, Balzac evidently wishes to convey the enforced passivity of an insect with regard to something stronger, bigger and more powerful. The attitude of the tormentor is shown by the Comte de Mortsauf's bewilderment at his wife's lack of reaction to his jibes: he is as anxious as a child who loses sight of the insect he is tormenting.⁴ Another vivid comparison made by Balzac is that between the partners in an unsatisfactory marriage and wasps which schoolboys have decapitated but which continue to flutter along a pane of glass.⁵ We are given a picture of a child mutilating a plant when Antoinette de Langeais tears her scarf like a child ripping the petals off the flower with which he is playing.⁶

So much for the activities of children in general. In the Comédie humaine there is a group of images which deals with the pastimes of

1. IP, vol. XI, pp. 335 - 336.
2. S&M, vol. XVI, p. 138.
3. EG p. 299.
4. Lys p. 231.
5. Phy p. 63.
6. DL p. 73.

schoolboys in particular. At one point Balzac gives an example of collage jargon. When Esther told that she must no longer associate with Lucien she resembles 'un radieux cerf-volant, ce géant des papillons de l'enfance, tout chamarré d'or, planant dans les cieux Les enfants oublient un moment la corde, un passant la coupe, le météore donne, en langage de collège, une tête, et il fond avec une effrayante rapidité'.¹

Elsewhere Balzac elaborates on the partiality of nineteenth century schoolboys for breeding animals. This partiality is described by Henri Rolland in his article L'Ecolier in Les Français peints par eux-mêmes, a series of monographs on French types as seen by contemporaries.² Rolland does not say whether this hobby was an innovation at the time. He merely states that if schoolboys were prevented from indulging it they consoled themselves with various species of beetles like 'les hannetons, les biches, les cerfs-volants et autres lamellicornes'. Balzac alludes to 'hannetons' (may-bugs) several times. The Royalists lead Lucien as a child leads a may-bug on a string.³ When Lousteau loses Dinah he resembles a child who has just noticed that by dint of tormenting his may-bug he has killed it.⁴ Although both these descriptions refer to adults, their precision and vividness makes mockery of the notion that Balzac was unaware of children.

It seems that it was in maturity that Balzac realised his full potential for evocative description of children at play. There is but one glimmering of his virtuosity in the Oeuvres de Jeunesse, the word-picture of Abel in La dernière Fée: 'il confondait les milliers

1. S&M, vol. XVI, p. 180.

2. It was a periodical edited by Jules Janin and was published in 1840. Balzac was a contributor.

3. IP, vol. XII, p. 318.

4. MD p. 241.

de boucles de ses beaux cheveux noirs avec les toiles d'araignées, il se barbouillait le visage de charbon, il grimpait sur les fourneaux, voulait goûter à tout, toucher tout, riait, folâtrait sans chagrin, sans contrainte, et la nature souriait au tableau divin que présentait le laboratoire où elle régnait en souveraine!¹ This is not, however, Balzac at his best, for although this tableau is enthusiastic it is pure Rousseauism.

Balzac's descriptions of puerile energy and its manifestations are vigorous, sometimes wry and generally refreshingly credible. Here his gift for observing the human comedy is brought to bear on that of children.

Weakness

DSM and DM both stress 'la faiblesse' inherent in childhood, DM believing that this is why childhood is interesting: 'La faiblesse de l'enfance, les dangers qui entourent son berceau, les soins constants et prolongés qu'elle exige, les grâces naturelles qui l'accompagnent, la naïveté de son langage ... sont autant de circonstances propres à motiver l'intérêt qu'inspire cet âge de la vie'.¹ DSM goes further and claims that a child's prolonged dependence is the basis of maternal love² and family solidarity.³ The author of the section Enfance maintains that human beings owe their moral grandeur to their original physical weakness, and that the most outstanding men are often those who were delicate and puny in childhood.⁴

The notion of a child's physical weakness was, then, a common medical one at the time, deriving from Emile. We find it repeated in the Comédie humaine, with serious modifications. For instance, Félix de Vandenesse's definition of 'faiblesse' is substantially the same as DM's but more astringent: 'La naïve ignorance d'un enfant, les grâces ingénues, l'avidité de mouvement, l'insouciance profonde de ce qui n'est pas son désir ou lui, enfin toutes les faiblesses qui recommandent l'enfant à la protection'.⁵ This astringency implies that Balzac has two attitudes to puerile weakness. One is sympathetic, and it is in this spirit that he explores a child's need for protection and the development of speech. The other is unsympathetic, a little impatient, and is evinced in Balzac's patronising approach to a child's limited understanding. The former

1. p. 581. cf. art. Paediatric p. 2 'la faiblesse qui est le caractère distinctif ... de l'enfance'.

2. p. 217.

3. p. 245

4. p. 246.

5. Lys pp. 190 - 191.

attitude is illustrated in some of Balzac's near-angelic characters, like Louis Lambert, Etienne d'Hérouville and Gabrielle de Beauvaloir, whose delicate health conforms to DM's notion of moral grandeur. The latter attitude appears in Balzac's use of the epithet 'child' as an insult. Each attitude merits elaboration.

Balzac frequently evokes the ipso facto reason for a child's need of protection, namely his fearfulness originating in his physical weakness. Vautrin feels as weak as a child when he is confronted with Lucien's corpse.¹ Balzac gives many photographic impressions of a child alarmed by a sudden loud noise. Sabine du Guénic describes her fear that her husband does not love her as follows: 'Je me mets, comme les enfants, les mains devant les yeux pour ne pas entendre une détonation'.² This comparison is amplified to contain an implicit Emile-type lesson when a chastened husband is likened to 'un enfant qui après avoir fait partir la détente d'une effrayante machine, a un incroyable respect pour le plus petit ressort'.³ Clearly Balzac had in mind Rousseau's insistence on habituating Emile to sudden detonations.⁴ This image always seems to have haunted Balzac. In Wann-Chlore Landon pushes away unpleasant thoughts like a child thrusting aside an unpleasant object,⁵ and later on he himself declares: 'ce serait agir comme les enfants qui mettent la main devant leurs yeux pour ne pas voir l'objet qui les effraye'.⁶

1. S&M, vol. XVI, p. 156. cf. Ch0 p. 222, Gillette, bereft of her strength, feels herself to be a child.

2. B p. 274. cf. Phy p. 54, ignoring the problem of bachelors would be to behave like 'ces petits garçons qui se bouchent les oreilles au spectacle pour ne pas entendre les coups de fusil'.

3. Phy p. 327.

5. p. 1286.

4. Emile, p. 38.

6. p. 1537.

Another group of images in which Balzac depicts a child's helplessness are those of a protective adult comforting a child, giving him, as it were, 'les soins constans et prolongés'. Like the previous group of images this one was in Balzac's mind from his youthful works onwards. When Landon is wounded Jane tends him 'comme une mère qui soigne son enfant chéri'.¹ When he faints on finding his first wife, Eugénie, installed as Jane's maid, she cherishes him 'muette, attentive, comme l'est une mère près de son enfant malade'.² As she comes to suspect his love for Eugénie she watches him with 'une inquiétude, un soin de mère'.³ Similarly, when Louis Lambert loses his reason his uncle, the Abbé Lefebvre, observes him with the attention of a mother for her child,⁴ and his fiancée Pauline succours him as if he were a child in a cradle.⁵

Sometimes Balzac is more specific and depicts a mother or nurse cuddling or force-feeding a child. Mme Lorrain takes her desperately ill grand-daughter, Pierrette, into her arms 'comme les bonnes prennent les enfants'⁶ and the du Guénics' manservant lifts the injured Béatrix as if she were a child.⁷ On Pons' death Schmucke's grief is such that, as Mme Sauvage comments picturesquely, 'c'est un nouveau-né, faudra lui

1. p. 1397.

2. p. 1556.

3. p. 1566. cf. *Le Vicaire des Ardennes*, vol. II., p. 141, Mélanie watches Joseph 'avec la douce inquiétude de l'amour. Elle ressemblait à une mère qui veille son enfant'.

4. LL p. 156.

5. LL p. 161. cf. F30 p. 63 Lord Grenville cares for Julie with what she terms 'la sollicitude qui vous faisait veiller sur moi comme une mère sur son enfant'.

6. P p. 136.

7. B p. 218.

entonner son manger',¹ and in fact Mme Cantinet does feed him like a child almost against his will.²

Most of these illustrations, with the exception of Mme Sauvage's vivid earthy imagery, are hackneyed. All the examples I have given of a child's need of protection describe adults. Even so they are most important. They show that Balzac felt a child's weakness worthy of frequent mention, and also that he had discovered intuitively that insecure adults may regress to a childlike state.

So much for a child's helplessness in general. Balzac studies in some detail - if haphazardly - DM's comment on 'la naïveté de son langage', and appears to follow closely its division of a child's progress in speech which is also that of Rousseau.³ This division is crying, gestures and finally words, which are first stammered out and then clearly articulated.⁴ He also mentions a stage referred to in DSM but not DM, which is a baby's use of its eyes as a means of communication.

Crying is obviously the child's first means of vocal expression. DM recognises this when it calls tears 'ce langage primitif'⁵ to which it attributes a semiological value.⁶ As early as the Oeuvres de Jeunesse Balzac insists that tears are a characteristic of childhood. Del Ryès admits to sobbing like a child when he receives news of Sténie's forced marriage.⁷ In the Comédie humaine Chesnel gives way to tears on hearing

1. CP p. 300.
2. CP p. 308.
3. see Emile, p. 39.
4. p. 589.
5. p. 589.
6. Paediatric, p. 14.
7. Sténie, p. 176.

of Victurnien's debts and 'redevient enfant pour quelques instants'.¹ Jean-Jacques Rouget indulges in childish wailing.² It would be tedious to multiply examples, but Balzac's derogatory attitude towards tears, a Romantic characteristic, shows that Balzac was more of a sceptic than most Romantics. Unlike them he emphasises that tears are childish as well as childlike, and this insistence is yet another indication of his cool, largely unidealised, approach to children and his refusal to follow one of the two current trends concerning original virtue.

Looking is another form of a baby's 'primitive language'. DSM mentions the apparent stupidity of babes in the first forty days of life. The new-born child 'paraît stupide, incapable de tout Ce n'est que vers le quarantième jour qu'il commence à sourire et à reconnaître sa mère'.³ It seems more than probable that Balzac had read and noted this fact, because he uses it in description several times - once almost verbatim. Grandet on his death-bed stares at his gold like a child 'qui, au moment où il commence à voir, contemple stupidement le même objet; et comme un enfant il lui échappait un sourire pénible'.⁴ Etienne d'Herouville looks around him with the stupid avidity natural to children.⁵ More poignantly, a cretin in Le Médecin de campagne has a livid face 'où la souffrance apparaissait naïve et silencieuse comme le visage d'un enfant qui ne sait pas encore parler et qui ne peut plus crier'.⁶

1. CA p. 101.

2. R p. 521, 528.

3. p. 245.

4. EG p. 457.

5. EM p. 369.

6. MC p. 22.

Balzac was intrigued by the relationship between mothers or nurses and their infant charges. At one point he evokes the gestures of prevocal children, and the mechanical reply they receive from their mothers - often a mere 'oui, c'est bien joli'.¹ He seems to have had a particular tenderness for the loving, nonsensical language used by those in charge of children. Hortense Steinbock speaks to her twenty-month-old son in that onomatopaeic language which, says Balzac, makes children smile.¹ Charles IX addresses his baby son with 'ces folles et vagues paroles, jolies onomatopées que savent créer les mères et les nourrices'.²

Balzac occasionally alludes to the state of mind of a child who has learnt to speak. He believes that a child needs to have someone to whom he can stammeringly express his first ideas,³ and later, with whom he can share his emotions.⁴ At this stage a child can still be consoled by empty cajolery, however. Mme de Listomère and Mlle Salomon easily comfort the abbé Birotteau with the tone used by mothers promising their child a toy.⁵

Balzac's sympathy is less noticeable when he examines a child's limited understanding. DSM postulates this trait in no uncertain terms,

1. CP p. 57.
2. Be p. 273.
3. Cath p. 312, cf. F30 p. 135, 'ces petits mots sans suite et détournés de leur sens véritable que nous adressons amicalement aux enfants'.
4. Lys p. 7 'Ne pouvant me confier à personne, je ... disais (à mon étoile) mes chagrins dans ce délicieux ramage intérieur par lequel un enfant bégaye ses premières idées, comme naguère il a bégayé ses premières paroles'.
5. Lys p. 116. 'Jacques et Madeleine ... eurent je ne sais quelle joie enfantine de voir leurs émotions partagées'.

ascribing a child's mobility of feeling, impressionability and hence lack of judgement to 'la prodigieuse domination de l'appareil nerveux dans la première période (sic) de son existence'.¹ Balzac nowhere advances this reason, but he often enlarges upon the given fact to the extent of using the same words and speaking of 'la mobilité de sentiments qui distingue l'enfance'.² DM is more tolerant than DSM, and pronounces: 'L'enfant, naturellement bon, se montre crédule, docile, ingénu'.³ Balzac evidently accepted this evaluation for, as we have seen, he liked to think of himself as charmingly credulous, but in the Comédie humaine he comments patronisingly, indeed sometimes scathingly, on a child's credulity. Mme Claës' state of depression would be noticeable to the most unobservant of children,⁴ Athanase Granson's hopeless love for Rose Cormon would be obvious to even a sixteen-year-old girl who had never read a novel,⁵ and a wife's fishing for compliments is so transparent that 'un enfant qui sort du collège apercevrait la raison cachée derrière les saules de ces prétextes'.⁶ Not only the author but his creations as well remark disparagingly on a child's credulity. Nathan thinks he will be able to 'jouer des banquiers comme des enfants',⁷ but it is he who is 'joué comme un enfant' by Du Tillet.⁸

1. Imitation, p. 93.

2. Be p. 496.

3. pp. 588 - 589.

4. RA pp. 123 - 124.

5. VF p. 320.

6. PMV p. 29.

7. FE p. 155.

8. FE p. 191 cf. B p. 202.

A lack of business sense is regarded as childish. Gigonnet, the usurer, says of Saillard that he is no child because he knows the value of money.¹ Mathias, the loyal solicitor, does his utmost to regard Paul de Manerville's marriage contract as a question of business, not sentiment, and prides himself 'Je ne suis pas un enfant'.² Adult characters often use the epithet 'child' as an insult. Mme de Chaulieu rebukes Canalis with the comment that he is a child who is attempting to outwit her.³ The same reproach is proffered by such diverse characters as the withdrawn, austere Comte de Sérisy and the angelic Séraphita.⁴ This scornful attitude on the part of both Balzac and his characters substantiates Régine Pernoud's assertion that it was a long time before the bourgeoisie in nineteenth century France fully accepted the child.⁵

In his attitude to children's helplessness, then, Balzac combines the detached, yet fairly sympathetic, approach of DSM and DM (even to the extent of using the same phraseology) with the current condescension of the French middle-class. This may leave something to be desired, but it does show how far Balzac was from the Romantic ethos of the child and to what extent his scepticism expresses a scientific detachment.

1. E p. 180.

2. CM p. 246.

3. MM p. 268

4. Dlv p. 410, Ser p. 206. cf. Be p. 423, E p. 195, 233; R p. 465, MCP p. 64.

5. R. Pernoud. Histoire de la bourgeoisie en France, p. 496.

Instinct

For Balzac and nineteenth century medical opinion, a child is a creature of instinct. DSM speaks of two stages in a child's life: the first is when he is guided by instinct, and the second when he is guided by reason.¹ DM corroborates this, describing a child as more a creature of feeling than of reason.² According to these medical dictionaries, a child is essentially an instinctual being but his instincts are not necessarily sound.

On the whole Balzac agrees, but he sometimes adopts a Rousseauist idealisation of a child's instinct as basically good. He does not seem to have clarified his thinking on this issue: he speaks of a child's irrational but fairly sound canine instinct as well as of his rigorous direct logic. These two are in apparent contradiction, although Balzac probably considered them interchangeable with regard to the child. Here he is a faithful disciple of Rousseau for the latter had blamed the poverty of the French language for the paradox.³ Similarly he exalts the telepathic relationship between mother and child, and yet castigates the limitations of the latter's reasoning. His inconsistency makes any conclusive study of childish instinct in his work impossible: all one can do is note the various aspects of his thought, and give him credit where he manifests a critical attitude to post-Rousseauist over-idealisation.

Balzac's confusion between instinct and logic stands out in the Comédie humaine. The young Topinards' scrutiny of Pons is typical of childhood 'habituée comme les chiens à flairer plutôt qu'à juger'.⁴ This 'flairer' usually enables children to assess character correctly.

1. p. 241.

2. pp. 588 - 589.

3. Emile, p. 98.

4. CP p. 340.

Pierrette senses the iniquity of her guardians, the Rogrons, for children are said to have 'le flairer de la race canine pour les torts de ceux qui les gouvernent; ils sentent admirablement s'ils sont aimés ou tolérés.... un enfant ne comprend pas encore le mal, mais il sait quand on froisse le sentiment du beau que la nature a mis en lui'.¹ This why Balzac can declare that problem children probably always have a bad mother,² for they sense their mother's shortcomings and react against them. Juana Marana is relieved that her ignoble husband is not much at home because she knows that her children's intuition and finesse would have enabled them to judge him, and she prefers that a father remain above judgement.³ Henriette de Mortsauf adheres to the same unwritten code of Paternity when she attempts to shield her husband from the judgement of his children.⁴ Incidentally these last two examples show Balzac's loose use of the notions of 'flairer' and judgement. There are times when he is more emphatic about the latter and even over-exaggerates.

In La vieille Fille he speaks of 'la terrible logique des enfants qui consiste d'aller de réponse en demande, logique souvent embarrassante',⁵ and in Le Cabinet des antiques of 'la logique rigoureuse qui conduit les enfants et les jeunes gens aux dernières conséquences du bien comme du mal'.⁶ Balzac exalts this logic because he believes 'le casuisme

1. P p. 66.

2. Gr p. 236.

3. Ma p. 117.

4. Lys p. 169.

5. VF p. 331.

6. CA p. 29

de l'enfance' to be 'la logique insensée des belles âmes',¹ indicative of a deep love of mystery and capacity for belief in the supernatural.² Louis Lambert, for instance, accustoms himself to life's phenomena by means of 'la rêverie instinctive'.³

Contemporary medical opinion was Rousseauist in its praise for the telepathic, instinctual relationship between mother and child for, as DSM phrases it, 'cette voix intérieure parle au coeur des mères et répond à celui des enfants'.⁴ Balzac echoes this in various pronouncements and examples. He thinks that a child can sense his mother's presence even when asleep.⁵ His own resentment against his mother intensified his belief that children are instinctively grateful for love,⁶ and can sense their mother's affection or lack of it. Hélène d'Aiglemont knows that Julie does not love her for Julie is unable to hide her tacit preference for little Charles, a preference which Balzac suggests a child can divine supernaturally.⁷

In his praise of instinct Balzac tends to agree with Rousseau. Like Jean-Jacques he too compares children to 'Savages', but not, however, to 'noble Savages'. Balzac was never to espouse the myth or 'le Bon Sauvage' for he considered that Savages were drunken, improvident, lazy, stupid, perfidious and malicious.⁸ Although this may have been a

1. IO, vol. XI, p. 237.

2. LL p. 72, cf. CA p. 10, TA p. 77.

3. LL p. 47.

4. pp. 244 - 245.

5. EG p. 392. When Eugénie makes the sleeping Charles more comfortable 'il se laissa faire comme un enfant qui, même en dormant, connaît encore sa mère et reçoit, sans s'éveiller, ses soins et ses baisers'.

6. Gr p. 236.

7. F30 p. 132.

8. AB 1966, L-J. Hoffmann. Balzac et les Noirs, pp. 302 - 303.

defense of his brother Henry's slave-trading interests the youthful Balzac had deprecated 'l'imprévoyance enfantine du nègre'.¹ Thus there is little approval in Balzac's statement that children hatch plans with the ruse of primitive men, knowing that their innocence is unlikely to be doubted.² According to Balzac children, like Savages, are guided by emotion only, whereas civilised man is guided by both emotion and intelligence. Hence the former's dogged pursual of an 'idée fixe'.³

Not only does Balzac not follow Rousseau in his adulation of children as Savages, but there are times when he is scathing about that logic which he so vaunted on occasion. For instance the Comte de Mortsauf's illogical remarks are 'de véritables raisons d'enfant',⁴ and he answers Henriette's proposals for improving their property 'par l'objection d'un enfant qui mettrait en question l'influence du soleil en été'.⁵ In his private letters Balzac sometimes condemned a work of art on the grounds of empty and childish stupidity, such as Les Burgraves for being 'd'une stupidité d'enfant',⁶ and Consuelo as 'le produit de tout ce qu'il y a de plus vide, de plus invraisemblable, de plus enfant'.⁷

In conclusion, then, it seems that Balzac had given some thought

1. Wann-Chlore, p. 1363.

2. CP p. 291.

3. Be p. 48.

4. Lys p. 81.

5. Lys p. 123.

6. Lettres à Mme H. II, p. 185.

7. ibid., p. 236.

to children's instinct. As regards this puerile instinct in general, as distinct from the instinct of curiosity which we have already examined, the Comédie humaine is a mixture of contemporary medical thought and Rousseauism, with possibly a bias towards the latter. This uneasy co-existence of the scientific and the conventional is unfortunately typical of much of his thinking about children's characteristics.

Light-heartedness

The notion of a child's lightheartedness and insouciance seems to have been a nineteenth century 'idée reçue'. For Hugo the child alone is capable of simultaneously experiencing and providing unalloyed happiness, and most of his child-figures are attractive and gay.¹

The two medical dictionaries lay stress on children's insouciance, attributing it, as we have seen, to a lack of judgement and emotional mobility.² DSM qualified the child as 'sans soucis, sans chagrin, il rit, joue, chante sans cesse' because he does not yet fear life's vicissitudes.³ Balzac fully agrees with these statements and often celebrates a child's unthinking expression of joy which he epitomised in his phrase 'les longs éclats de rire de la joie enfantine'.⁴ He avoids the rhapsody of many of his contemporaries by his admission that this gaiety stems from lack of judgement, ignorance of life and even immaturity.

Phrases like 'joie enfantine', 'joie d'enfant' or 'joie d'enfance' frequently recur in the Comédie humaine, and also in the Oeuvres de Jeunesse.⁵ Sometimes this joy is mere frivolity: Montauran eats with 'une légèreté enfantine'⁶ and Marie de Verneuil dances with 'une ivresse enfantine'.⁷

1. J.P. De Boer. Victor Hugo - l'Enfant, p. 206, 261.

2. pp. 251 - 252.

3. DSM p. 243, DM pp. 588 - 589.

4. Visites, OD II, p. 3.

5. Wann-Chloé, p. 1211, La dernière Fée, vol. III, p. 116, UM p. 90, 170, RA p. 308, 312, EM p. 334, B p. 32, CP p. 181, SPC p. 331.

6. Ch p. 92.

7. Ch p. 291.

As for adolescent high-spirits Balzac creates a number of ebullient young men, and delights in reproducing their repartee and facile humour - not always successfully. There are the ripostes of the 'raïns' like Mistigris (alias Léon de Lora) and Bixiou; the witticisms of the clerks in Derville's office and the '-rama' jokes of Mme Vauquer's lodgers in Le père Goriot.

Yet although childish joy and youthful 'larking about' are Balzacian clichés their creator is not uncritical of them. Like DSM he believes that children and young people enjoy total happiness only because they do not yet know life.¹ Moreover, they are incapable of fully appreciating the happiness they are enjoying.² Balzac insists on the heedlessness and unawareness of a child's joy. The only period of happiness which Etienne and Gabrielle, the two angelic (in the Balzacian sense) children in L'Enfant maudit, enjoy is when they play together as a child plays with life.³ Lucien and Coralie seem doomed to tragedy by reason of their immature insouciance: they are as heedless as two children bent on enjoyment,⁴ and Lucien in particular is like a child pursuing the pleasures of gratified vanity and sacrificing all to them.⁵ In similar vein Benassis reflects that old men try ineffectually to impart their prudence to children 'enchantés de la vie et pressés de jouir'.⁶

1. MC p. 201.

2. F30 p. 86.

3. EM p. 430.

4. IP, vol. XII, p. 265.

5. IP, vol. XII, p. 346.

6. MC p. 194.

Balzac not only analyses childish light-heartedness in adults as a sign of immaturity but shows that it can be taken too far when it is simply irresponsibility. Novels like Le Cabinet des antiques and La Rabouilleuse disprove the proverb 'il faut que jeunesse jette sa gourme', (youth must sow its wild oats). The paternal Chesnel cites it to excuse Victurnien's giddy behaviour¹ but in the event Victurnien remains a mediocrity. The Chevaliers de la Désœuvrance use it as licence to create havoc.² Incidentally the use of the word 'gourme' is significant in comparison with the equivalent English idiom. It means both a teething rash³ and strangles, an infectious rash in a horse. Balzac gives a valid, if incomplete, explanation of the delinquency of these adolescent 'Chevaliers' when he says that their misdeeds are a sinister development of the pranks typical of all provincial gamins and youths.⁴ His comments about them have a sociological value: he views them without illusion whereas previously, according to P. Citron, Romantic literature had idealised bands of rebels led by an energetic chief, and also confirms that bands of 'blousons noirs' in embryo probably existed in Paris and the province in the 1840's.⁵ Moreover I believe that the bands of young men which Victurnien d'Esgrijon and Savinien de Portenduère join may well be modelled on Petrus Borel's group of Bousingos who disported themselves in the early 1830's..

1. CA p. 48.
2. R p. 365.
3. DSM Gourme, p. 34.
4. R p. 366.
5. R ed. Garnier.

Thus although Balzac considers spontaneous joyfulness a delightful quality in childhood, he warns against the dangers of indulging it for too long. He preaches that punishment for 'wild oats' follows inevitably, and for life. Nostalgia and indulgence pervade his descriptions of light-heartedness, but are counterbalanced by his realisation that heedlessness and irresponsibility bring their own reward.

Docility and Tenacity

By now it should be clear that, on the whole, Balzac's view of the child corresponds closely to that given by DSM and DM. He differs on three small points only. He ignores the child's penchant for imitation, gives minimal attention to his docility and emphasises his tenacity.

Both DSM and DM cite docility as one of a child's characteristics.¹ In the whole of Balzac's work there are only a few scattered references to a child's docility. Jane obeys Landon with 'la soumission d'un enfant',² and Marianne agrees to the delay of her marriage to Tullius 'avec la docilité d'un enfant et la douce soumission d'une femme'.³ This is an example of Balzac's conservative attitude to women. There are two minor references to childish docility in Les Employés and one in La Rabouilleuse.⁴

Balzac seems to have been more aware of the problems of disciplining children than hospitable to the notion of their docility, which one would think would avoid the need for the former. He declares that children despise indulgence yet detest undue severity.⁵ Thus a good mother is one who can find the mean between these two extremes.⁶ Balzac again shows his illiberalism when he pronounces that peasants, women and children can only be governed by terror,⁷ possibly because, as he affirms elsewhere, one masters a child through his passions.⁸

1. DSM p. 217, DM pp. 588 - 589.

2. Wann-Chlore, p. 1521.

3. Le Centenaire, vol. III, p. 186.

4. E p. 157, 159; R.p.400 - 'aussi timide et soumis à la discipline paternelle que peut l'être un enfant de douze ans'.

5. CM pp. 206 - 207; F30 p. 91.

6. MC p. 6.

7. Pay p. 145.

8. MJM p. 329.

Balzac was convinced of a child's tenacity or single-mindedness. He describes its nuances several times. He specifies its power and limitations when he says that although a child's longings are transient,¹ his expression of them is all-persuasive, being persistent and ingenuous.² His nagging gives him a temporary advantage over his parents because it wears down their resistance.³ Balzac particularises this when he describes 'une de ces prières faites avec tant d'instances qu'elles sont exaucées comme on exauce les prières des enfants'.⁴ Elsewhere he speaks of the irresistible blandishments known only to children.⁵ The intensity of a child's pleading is conveyed by two views of Esther Gobseck. She looks at Vautrin with 'le sourire de l'enfant quand il met la main sur une chose enviée',⁶ and when he pockets her letter to Lucien her face is like that of a child who has only one desire in mind.⁶ If further proof were needed, the following grandiose and garbled metaphor from Le Contrat de mariage would leave the reader in no doubt as to Balzac's acceptance of a child's tenacity: children are said to be capable of incubating a desire with growing intensity to bring it to fruition; they would do anything to satisfy a desire - including setting a house on fire in order to boil an egg.⁷

1. cf. DSM's reference to 'mobilité' p. 243.
2. PrB p. 393.
3. Be p. 49 cf. Lys p. 7, Children have over adults 'l'avantage de ne penser qu'à la chose défendue, qui leur offre alors des attraits irrésistibles'.
4. F p. 123.
5. LL p. 46.
6. S&M, vol. XV, pp. 29 - 30.
7. CM p. 298. This image originated, whether Balzac knew it or not, with Sir Francis Bacon. '... extreme self-lovers ... will set an house on fire, and it were but to roast their eggs'.

Balzac's concentration on a child's tenacity and his indifference to the traditional concept of his docility indicate his sceptical, wary and affectionate outlook on children, which refuses both cloudy Rousseauist idealism, and severe traditionalism.

Images of Childhood

The references in the Comédie humaine to children's characteristics enable the reader to form an idea of Balzac's concept of the child's character, unstructured as this concept may be. It broadly conforms to DSM. Inevitably the question of whether Balzac is merely an exponent of contemporary semi-medical generalia presents itself.

The answer is no. Throughout the Comédie humaine Balzac creates vignettes of children engaged in various activities, and also comments empathetically on how children feel. These vignettes and comments generally appear in the form of metaphors or comparisons rather than as straightforward descriptions. The exceptions are the oft-quoted accounts of the boyhood of Louis Lambert and Félix de Vandenesse, the sketch of life in a convent-school in Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées and the three miniature vignettes in La Femme de trente ans where Balzac visually describes Héléne and little Charles just before she pushes him into the river,¹ Moïna and Abel playing at bed-time,² and finally Héléne's brood of 'lion-cubs'.³ The first is a comparison between the cherished, blonde, well-dressed little boy and the constrained, sombre and austere-clad girl. The affectionate heedless nature of the former represents 'le véritable caractère de l'enfance' whereas the resentful strength of the latter is 'la science soucieuse de l'homme'.⁴ The second vignette has for décor a cosy house on a winter's night. Five-year-old Abel is refusing to allow his mother to undress him and his seven-year-old sister is encouraging him in his rebellion. Balzac attenuates the rose-tinted colouring of the picture of the 'two angels' - chubby, dimpled, pink and white complexioned-by the observation that Abel continues in

1. F30 pp. 130 - 132.

2. F30 pp. 144 - 145.

3. F30 pp. 186 - 188.

4. F30 p. 132.

'cette rébellion enfantine'¹ when he perceives that his mother cannot help laughing and that Moïna is egging him on 'par des agaceries déjà féminines'.¹ The third vignette is the least effective because it is the most sculptural. In fact, Balzac compares Hélène's four 'poussins' or lion-cubs to 'ces petits Romains curieux de guerre et de sang que David a peints dans son tableau de Brutus'.² These vignettes may not be startlingly original, but they are vivid and do show that Balzac had observed children fairly closely, especially as in the first two descriptions he relieves the Romanticism with a little realism.

Balzac often generalises with perception about certain of a child's emotions. He divines that a child's worries can be acute 'malgré leur naïveté'.³ He knows that a child's pride is easily hurt,⁴ and that children fear both laughter and compassion, two sorts of mockery.⁵ A child's gratitude cannot be compelled but is given of his own free will.⁶

True though these remarks are, Balzac is more effective when he particularises visually a child's reactions, that is, embodies a general truth in a specific image. He says, for instance, that the pleasure a child derives from looking at a magic lantern far outweighs his possession of that coveted object.⁷ He conveys a child's low tolerance of frustration when he describes his tears of despair on being refused a toy.⁸ Adolphe, after a month in the country alone with his wife, is

1. F30 p. 145.

2. F30 p. 187.

3. Ma p. 83.

4. Lys p. 13 'enfant, pouvais-je avoir cette grandeur d'âme qui fait mépriser le mépris d'autrui?'

5. LL p. 72 '... tant à cet âge l'âme encore neuve redoute et le rire et la compassion, deux genres de moquerie'.

6. Gb p. 382.

7. SPC p. 32.

8. IP vol. XI p. 15.

as bored and impatient as a child at the end of the first week in the year.¹ His gift of imagination and fantasy is communicated in Emile Blondet's worrying about what happens to ex-Opera girls, a worry akin to a child's concern about the fate of old moons.²

Balzac's descriptions of schoolboys, although not profound, have the same photographic and empathetic qualities of the examples in the preceding paragraph. His own memories of school-life were not tender. The principal of the Collège de Vendôme said tersely of him that he had 'Grande insouciance, taciturnité, pas de méchanceté, originalité complète', and, during his first two years, 'répugnance invincible à s'occuper d'aucun travail commandé. Il a passé une partie de ce temps en pénitence, soit dans sa cellule, soit dans un bûcher où il fut emprisonné une semaine entière'.³ This is corroborated by the old porter of the school, who in 1872 still remembered having had 'plus de cent fois l'honneur de conduire au cachot M. Balzac'.⁴ M. le Yaouanc thinks that the picture of Balzac as always having been a misunderstood and unhappy schoolboy is inaccurate.⁵ He believes that Balzac was not quite as miserable at Vendôme and Tours as is commonly thought, for he managed to win some prizes and 'accessits'. When, however, he went to the Lycée Charlemagne in 1815 - 16, he found himself lost in a crowd. His pique

1. PMV p. 82.

2. Pay p. 14. cf. La dernière Fée, vol. IV, p. 175, Balzac philosophises about the childhood of every man being marked by the woe of a child who is consoled by the refusal of something unreasonable by the promise of being given the moon once it is full.

3. Quoted by Lovenjoul. Histoire des oeuvres de Honoré de Balzac, pp. 401 - 402.

4. Quoted by M. Fargeaud. Balzac et la Recherche de l'Absolu, p. 112.

5. AB 1962. M. le Yaouanc. Balzac au lycée Charlemagne.

spurred him to introduce into French literature the theme of the sublime child misunderstood by both teachers and class-mates. As I shall show in the chapter on education, Balzac was to severely criticise the French educational system in the light of his own experience.

In view of this it is perhaps surprising that the images in the Comédie humaine which evoke the life of a schoolboy conform so closely to H. Rolland's creation of the average schoolboy in Les Français peints par eux-mêmes. Where Rolland declares that a schoolboy takes more pleasure in the charms of 'dolce far niente' than any 'lazzarone', Balzac comments that schoolboys have a penchant for sweet 'farniente' which is, however, attractive at any age.¹ Balzac appears to photograph, as it were, Rolland's assertion that a schoolboy has a quarrelsome attitude towards his class-mates, and one of fear compounded with malice towards his masters. As regards the former, the average schoolboy is believed to consider it a point of honour to establish the superiority of brawn over brain by means of fisticuffs, and in Physiologie du mariage there is a description of 'un écolier tenant sous lui un camarade renversé et le nourrissant d'une volée de coups de poings précipitamment assénés, pour le corriger d'une lâcheté'.² Balzac neatly reflects the teacher-pupil relationship as seen by Rolland. Mme Grandet fears her husband's wrath as a schoolboy who has not learnt his lesson dreads the morrow which will bring his teacher's irritation.³ The reverse of this is the triumph of the schoolboy who catches his master out in a mistake,⁴ or 'la malicieuse contenance d'un enfant qui rit intérieurement de son professeur tout en paraissant lui prêter la plus grande attention'.⁵

1. LL p. 47.

2. Phy p. 66.

3. EG p. 336.

4. Col p. 2.

5. EG p. 379.

Balzac does not wholly ignore elements of his own experience. These appear in his references to the hypocrisy, conservatism and undue severity in schools. He speaks of a wife's sycophantic praise of her husband as a kind of homework: 'Au collège on veut gagner des exemptions, en mariage on espère un châte, un bijou'.¹ He hints at the conservative attitude of many school-masters when he compares Rabourdin's wife to a tutor who cannot or will not accept that the child he used to dominate has grown up.²

Balzac's pictures of school-life are fairly conventional, based as they probably are on ideas akin to Rolland's or on the feeling of bored distaste which Balzac, like so many people, felt at school. Nevertheless, most ring so true, even today, that the lack of images concerning schoolgirls is noteworthy. This is in part explicable by the fact that education of girls was mainly familial in the nineteenth century. However the extended images which deal with the young girl describe her when she is of an age to have a suitor, and tend to be mawkish. For example Julie d'Aiglemont behaves like a virtuous young girl who heaps scorn on a lover only to find afterwards that she has an urge to confide her depression to someone.³ Rastignac, dressing for Mme de Beauséant's ball, indulges in 'des singeries enfantines autant qu'en aurait fait une jeune fille en s'habillant pour le bal'.⁴ These similes were part of Balzac's trite youthful stock-in-trade: when Del Ryès received an invitation to Sténie's ball he resolved: 'je me parerai comme la jeune fille qui veut plaire'.⁵ The only really striking image of this kind I

1. PMV p. 60.

2. E p. 12

3. F30 p. 33.

4. PG p. 365, cf. S p. 417, Sarrasine dresses herself like a young girl about to meet her first love.

5. Sténie, p. 197. cf. Le Centenaire, vol. III, p. 8, Nature is compared to a young girl blushing at her fiancé's first kiss.

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