

1970

# Balzac's Aristocracy: A Study Of The 'grandes Dames'

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## ABSTRACT

The Avant-Propos to Balzac's Comédie Humaine is the author's artistic manifesto, as it outlines in detail his aims as a novelist, his function as an artist and his method. Balzac asserts, in particular, that his work is historical, as it contains a history of French manners. He claims originality in this social history, however, as in his portraiture of individuals at every social level, he had written a history of the human heart, or what he calls "l'histoire secrète du genre humain".

Faced with a fait accompli in the political and social events which had already taken place and had to appear in his novels, Balzac felt he had to interpret these to transform into art the raw material of history. It was not enough to be vrai, he felt, it was crucial to be vraisemblable.

Balzac's conception of his function as an artist-historian led him to use a medico-philosophical system to explain man physiologically, and to trace the effect of this organism on French society. Just as he analyses man the organism with his medico-philosophical system, he dissects the lives of the grandes dames of the aristocracy like a social anatomist. From a careful observation and analysis of their behaviour, he explains the social disintegration of the aristocracy through the combined passions of its members.

In Balzac's view, aristocratic women are of the posterity of

Cain: hard, cruel and exceedingly egoistic. Adhering to their old traditions of idleness and imitating their grandmothers in their social life, they form an exclusive, social clique, rivalling one another for social supremacy and following a philosophy of chacun pour soi even in their homes. They develop a wide variety of social passions which destroy the unity of the family and, consequently, that of their own group.

However, the picture of these grandes dames of the aristocracy presented in Balzac's novels, inspired doubts about its accuracy, especially when it was considered that the author did not belong to this class and did not know it well. It was felt that he had either inadvertently or deliberately falsified the picture of these ladies in his novels.

Balzac's close association with the aristocracy, however, his qualities as an intuitive, almost psychic individual and acute observer of people, helped him to understand feminine psychology. His warmest admirers during his lifetime were women. He was also a serious student of history and the historical method of historical research, and was influenced by historians like Guizot, Michelet, Thiers and Thierry.

Evidence is available from Balzac's contemporaries, memorialists and impartial historians to permit an assessment of the authenticity of his portraiture of the grandes dames. A confrontation of this historical evidence with the material provided in Balzac's work verifies the accuracy of the author's portraits.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank Dr. Henri Tuchmaier, director of this dissertation, not only for the advice, encouragement and helpful suggestions given during the course of my research, but also for having readily assumed the direction of my investigations when the previous director left for France on a year's sabbatical leave. His understanding and concern for my welfare are gratefully appreciated.

I must also thank the Canada Council for the award fo a Doctoral Fellowship and the provision of much needed financial support during the last year of my research program. The award obviated the need for summer employment to support my family, and gave me ample leisure to pursue my studies.

I cannot overlook the hard work of the typist of this dissertation, Miss Nicole Trudel who worked day and night for weeks to enable me to reach the deadline for the presentation of this work. Always amiable, seemingly tireless, I owe much to her willing cooperation.

Finally, I wish to thank, and to dedicate this dissertation jointly to, the two persons without whose support, encouragement and courage this work could never have been attempted much more completed: my wife and my mother. My wife has given me all kinds of support, advice and encouragement while she endured the length of my studies with patience

rather than resignation, and undertook with cheerfulness and not bitterness the task of maintaining the family financially during many difficult years of my studies at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. My gratitude can only imperfectly acknowledge my incalculable debt to her.

Thanks must also be expressed to my mother for having given me the opportunity, in the first place, of completing my High School education, especially since my father died when I was nine years old and left a family of five children, the eldest of whom was ten. That all of us successfully completed High School in spite of the fact that my mother never remarried, is a tribute to her courage and love no less than to her sense of duty. She died, alas, three months prior to the completion of this dissertation, and it is to her memory that this work must be dedicated.

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## INTRODUCTION

The material for a work of art as complex and yet homogeneous, as comprehensive in scope as the Comédie Humaine could not have been secured merely from the recesses of a teeming imagination, even though, as Denis Saurat judiciously remarks, "Balzac porte en lui toute la culture française et n'est pas riche seulement de son génie individuel."<sup>1</sup> The range of the subjects covered on the human, artistic and spiritual levels, and the dimensions of both scope and treatment indicate a close, careful and frequently precise observation of men and manners of a society in a period of time very close to the life of the author.

But, perhaps, what is even more remarkable in the Comédie Humaine is the fact that there is clear and unmistakable evidence of not only uniform cohesion in the presentation of such vast material, but of a conscious and methodical art on the author's part. His characters and the institutions which they fashioned, while evolving in their own way under the influence of the social behests of their milieu, at the same time do so in accordance with an artistic or philosophical law, the application of which violates neither normal sociological patterns

<sup>1</sup>Saurat, Denis, Tendances, as quoted in Marc Blanchard, Témoignages et Jugements sur Balzac (Paris: Champion, 1931), p. 210

of change, nor the rudimentary elements of medicine or philosophy.

The Goncourt brothers, in a judgment on Balzac's artistic achievement, trace the comprehensive nature of his work on the society and the period concerned:

Personne n'a dit Balzac homme d'Etat; et pourtant c'est peut-être le plus grand homme d'Etat de nos temps, un grand homme social, le seul qui ait plongé au fond de notre malaise, le seul qui ait vu par le haut le dérèglement de la France depuis 1789, les moeurs sous les lois, le fait sous le mot, l'anarchie des intérêts débridés sous l'ordre apparent de la concurrence des capacités, les abus remplacés par les influences, les privilèges par d'autres, l'égalité devant la loi par l'inégalité devant le juge, le mensonge de ce programme de 89, l'argent au lieu du nom, les banquiers au lieu des nobles et le communisme au bout de cela, la guillotine des fortunes. Chose étrange que seul un romancier ait vu cela!<sup>1</sup>

France, and in particular, France of the 19th Century is the subject of Balzac's scrutiny, and the Avant-Propos of 1842, a lucid manifesto of what he had set out to achieve in the Comédie Humaine, outlines in detail the subject, scope, method of treatment and the role of the author in the work. Balzac's point de départ is the conviction that the achievements of scientists like Saint-Hilaire, Cuvier, Lavater, Gall, Swedenborg, Buffon and others whose scientific studies were very much in vogue at the time could be applicable to man and his social milieu.

Balzac's interest in science was not sudden as when he was a schoolboy at the College of the Vendôme, the Director Jean Philippe Dessaignes whose passion was for "les problèmes de la chaleur, de la lumière et du fluide magnétique" exercised a great deal of influence on

<sup>1</sup>Goncourt, Edmond et Jules de, Journal (Monaco: Imprimerie Nationale, 1956), p. 398

him. Of, perhaps, greater influence was the reading material he obtained from his parents whose library was filled with pamphlets and books containing illuminist and determinist doctrines. Later, as a student in Paris, Balzac came into contact with the various medical and scientific doctrines and systems of Récamier, Broussais, Magendie and J.J. Virey whose book De la puissance vitale, published in 1823, was of almost crucial importance to Balzac's nascent theoretical ideas on human life.

In so far as the Comédie Humaine is concerned, instead of adumbrating, like the scientists, medical and determinist theories on the evolution of zoological species, Balzac confines himself to the social species and their milieu. Inevitably, however, the various systems and theories which he had digested over a long period of time and which were in harmony with his own ideas, served to fashion his outlook and concretise his view of man. It is therefore by no means surprising that Balzac declares in the Avant-Propos that:

... la Société ressemblait à la nature. La Société ne fait-elle pas de l'homme, suivant les milieux où son action se déploie, autant d'hommes différents qu'il y a de variétés en zoologie?... Si Buffon a fait un magnifique ouvrage en essayant de représenter dans un livre l'ensemble de la zoologie, n'y avait-il pas une oeuvre de ce genre à faire de la Société?<sup>1</sup>

The unitary philosophy of creation in the world which Saint-

<sup>1</sup>Balzac, H. de, L'Oeuvre de Balzac, ed. Béguin et Ducorneau (16 vols; Paris: Le Club français du livre, 1966), XV, 369.

NOTE: All quotations and references to Balzac's work, except where expressly indicated, will be taken from this edition.

Hilaire had labelled "unité de composition," Balzac, in the role of sociologist, fashions into an internal law of his social and artistic world in a parallel with the scientist. Man is fashioned by his environment, by the age in which he lives, by legislation, professions, social milieu, just like the animal which evolves and is conditioned by the environment. This deterministic factor which the scientists proposed to explain the evolution of the various zoological species of "L'Animalité," Balzac fashions and adopts to explain the evolution of his social species.

The exploration of society in all its various aspects is the object of Balzac's study, and for this purpose the social milieu is divided into its basic, essential unities: "Les hommes, les femmes et les choses, c'est-à-dire, les personnes et la représentation matérielle qu'ils donnent de leur pensée; enfin l'homme et la vie, car la vie est notre vêtement." (XV, 370) Not only man and his milieu are important, but the very nature of man's existence, the physiological laws or principles which govern his life and death must be determined. In this respect, the principles enunciated by the Vitalistes and expounded in Virey's book De la puissance vitale helped Balzac to formulate his theory of human life and to adapt it to study the social organism.

For definite reasons Balzac subdivides society into men and women, for unlike zoological species where, in Balzac's view, the lioness bears very close resemblance to the lion, "dans la Société la femme ne se trouve pas toujours être la femelle du mâle" (XV, 369)

Women reason and act in accordance with their own fundamental, psychological make-up which differs greatly from men's, largely on account of the influences of the milieu, education and genetic or biological factors. These manifest differences required a separate and distinct classification or subdivision of humanity, and women are prominently featured in the history of French manners which Balzac set out to write in fiction.

These historical ambitions of Balzac arose from what were considered to be Scott's shortcomings in the historical novel. While giving due credit to the achievement of the English writer in the genre, Balzac was nevertheless moved to utter the criticism that Scott had shown some want of foresight:

Il n'avait pas songé à relier ses compositions l'une à l'autre de manière à coordonner une histoire complète, dont chaque chapitre eût été un roman, et chaque roman une époque. En apercevant ce défaut de liaison, qui d'ailleurs ne rend pas l'Écossais moins grand, je vis à la fois, le système favorable à l'exécution de mon ouvrage et la possibilité de l'exécuter. (XV, 368)

What is important here is not only the link in the whole mosaic of novels which Scott did not see, but also the method, the system Balzac asserts he saw as being favourable to the execution of the contemplated history. This system of Balzac which he uses to interpret the evolution of man and social groups is important, as it must satisfactorily explain the actions of individuals and groups as well as account for subsequent sociological developments. Balzac therefore interprets reality in the light of this system, and his novels as a work of art

depends on the credibility of it.

However, to command the attention and respect of his reading public no less than his literary enemies jealous of his success, the history Balzac set out to write must obviously conform to rigid standards in the choice and treatment of events to avoid the risk of its impartiality being vitiated by the caprices of subjectivism, or condemned simply as a vehicle for the discharge of private resentments. For these and other reasons, no doubt, Balzac demarcated in detail the area of investigation, established the principles of choice of types to portray characters and passions, and selected important events to illustrate human movement. To emphasize his historical impartiality, he indicated that France and not he, Balzac, would be the real historian of the work:

La société française allait être l'historien, je ne devais être que le secrétaire. En dressant l'inventaire des vices et des vertus, en rassemblant les principaux faits des passions, en peignant les caractères, en choisissant les événements principaux de la Société, en composant des types par la réunion des traits de plusieurs caractères homogènes, peut-être pourrais-je arriver à écrire l'histoire oubliée par tant d'historiens, celle des mœurs. Avec beaucoup de patience et de courage, je réaliserais, sur la France au dix-huitième siècle, ce livre que nous regrettons tous. (XV, 372)

The historical approach is thus clearly set out, but it must be borne in mind that, despite these historical claims, the Comédie Humaine is essentially a work of art and that the historical and artistic aspects are woven together into a tight synthetic unity. Balzac not only observes and records as an historian, but he explains and interprets human behaviour. He invents nothing, as history has already tied

his hands. The material which forms the foundation for portraits and descriptions of people and events is based on what he saw or heard. Balzac's artistic achievement lies not only in his fidelity to history, but also in the transmutation of this reality, of the raw material of the present and recent past which must find its way into his work and satisfy both his historical and artistic conscience.

Baudelaire gives a good account of Balzac's keen interest or passion to interpret reality, to go beyond the simple, observable facts of existence, to penetrate to the essential truths lying concealed behind the "fenêtre fermée:"

On raconte que Balzac... se trouvant un jour en face d'un beau tableau, un tableau d'hiver, tout mélancolique et chargé de frimas, clair-semé de cabanes et de paysans chétifs, — après avoir contemplé une maisonette d'où montait une maigre fumée, s'écria: 'Que c'est beau! mais que font-ils dans cette cabane? à quoi pensent-ils? quels sont leurs chagrins? les récoltes ont-elles été bonnes? ils ont sans doute des échéances à payer?'<sup>1</sup>

A.J. Mount<sup>2</sup> is right in his observation that the creative process begins with the contemplation of the external, followed by a search beneath the surface to discover, among other things, the details of private griefs of individuals concealed behind the silence and gloom of a house, or to reveal the glossy exterior of but pretended luxury.

<sup>1</sup>Baudelaire, Charles, Curiosités Esthétiques (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1868), pgs. 217-218

<sup>2</sup>Mount, A.J., The Physical Setting in Balzac's Comédie Humaine (University of Hull, England, 1966), p. 15

To judge individuals and groups, it is necessary to know and to divine not only the outward events of their lives, but also their secret thoughts and concealed ambitions. Balzac, therefore, surprises the courtisane behind the great aristocratic lady, the seething, volcanic mass of ambitions disguised behind the polite, aristocratic smile. The author's psychological analyses are therefore of capital importance, as his personages, which are all fictional, must be shown to behave in accordance with the spirit and the letter of the times.

The grandes dames are a special category of aristocratic women who differ greatly from les jeunes filles. For example, apart from Félicité des Touches in Béatrix who, for specific reasons, is unmarried, but who is by no means a jeune fille, Balzac does not show his young, unmarried girls receiving and entertaining guests in a salon. He creates a clear distinction between les jeunes filles and les femmes on the social level which is not inconsistent with the sheltered situation of girls at that time, and the relative freedom of les femmes. This sheltered existence of les jeunes filles is in direct contrast with their social situation later on when marriage has been undertaken. The married ladies of Balzac's day not only had certain freedoms which girls did not enjoy, but they were also the object of a far greater admiration than the young girls could ever hope to obtain. The unmarried Louise de Chaulieu in Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées is greatly disappointed that, though young, beautiful and exquisitely dressed, her mother, instead of her, is admired by the young men while they ride in the Bois de Boulogne:



Je n'ai pas recueilli le moindre sourire, je n'ai pas fait rester un seul pauvre petit jeune homme hébété sur ses jambes, personne ne s'est retourné pour me voir, et cependant la voiture allait avec une lenteur en harmonie avec ma pose... Ma mère a été prodigieusement admirée. Cette énigme a un mot, et je le chercherai. (XV, 59)

At Balls, the married ladies are entertained in conversation and regaled to the tune of witty dialogue, while the young girls occupy themselves in dancing. In pointing out the excessive attention and neglect given respectively to the married ladies and the young girls, Louise de Chaulieu bitterly comments:

Chacune d'elles avait ses fidèles, elles s'observaient toutes du coin de l'oeil, plusieurs brillaient d'une beauté triomphante comme était ma mère. Au bal, une jeune personne ne compte pas, elle y est une machine à danser. (VI, 60)

Not only are the young girls severely restricted socially, but they even consider themselves prisoners and make every attempt to escape into what they believe is the freedom of marriage. Félicien Marceau points out that Clothilde de Grandlieu in Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes commence, elle aussi, à se sentir prisonnière. Elle veut s'évader. Pour les jeunes filles de la Restauration, l'évasion, c'est un homme, c'est le mariage.<sup>1</sup>

The grandes dames, therefore, have as their most important, distinguishing feature, the state of marriage, and this has been the distinction adopted in delimiting the topic and scope of this study. It is

<sup>1</sup>Marceau, Félicien, Balzac et son monde (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), p. 152

a distinction created by the social situation of women in the early 19th Century. Frances Trollope, the British novelist, an independent witness of French moeurs, makes identical distinctions between the married lady and the unmarried girl:

On entering a French ball-room, instead of seeing the youngest and loveliest part of the company occupying the most conspicuous places, surrounded by the gayest men, and dressed with the most studied and becoming elegance, you must look for the young things quite in the background, soberly and quietly attired, and almost wholly eclipsed behind the more fully blown beauties of their married friends. ... All that exceeding charm and fascination which is for ever and always attributed to an elegant French woman, belongs wholly, solely, and altogether to her after she becomes a wife. A young French girl 'parfaitement bien élevée' looks ... 'parfaitement bien élevée', but it must be confessed, also, that she looks at the same time as if her governess (and a sharp one) were looking over her shoulder.<sup>1</sup>

The grandes dames are therefore those ladies of the aristocracy who are married and are playing a role in the social and political life of the country. It is entirely upon their influence, according to Frances Trollope, that the tone of society depends. In Autre étude de femmes, it is even asserted that there is a difference in the behaviour of the grandes dames, compared to the jeunes filles, due to age, experience and feminine savoir-faire. According to Emile Blondet:

Dans ma conviction, il est impossible qu'une femme, fût-elle née aux environs du trône acquière avant vingt-cinq ans la science encyclopédique des riens, la connaissances des manèges, des grandes petites choses, les musiques de voix et les harmonies de couleurs, les diableries angéliques et les innocentes roueries, le langage et le mutisme, le sérieux et les railleries, l'esprit et la bêtise, la diplomatie et l'ignorance, qui constituent la femme comme il faut. (VIII, 104)

<sup>1</sup>Trollope, Frances, Paris and the Parisians in 1835 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1836), p. 180

This description is closely echoed by what Frances Trollope saw and described in 1835:

But if you would see that graceful perfection of the toilet, that unrivalled agacerie of costume which distinguishes a French woman from all others in the world, you must turn from mademoiselle to madame. The very sound of the voice, too, is different. It would seem as if the heart and soul of a French girl were asleep, or at least dozing, till the ceremony of marriage awakened them.<sup>1</sup>

It is not the intention to ignore the jeunes filles, but to illustrate, by frequent references, the social situation of persons in this group who become grandes dames later, especially since their childhood, education, social milieu explain the subsequent actions of the great ladies with whom we are concerned. It is only in this respect that consideration will be given to this group which has legitimate claims to be studied separately in order to promote an adequate comprehension of their psychology.

Balzac's considered view of the aristocracy is that it is a monde mort or en train de mourir, and in Autre étude de femme he declares that "le glas de la haute société sonne." (VIII, 94) The Comédie Humaine, therefore, describes the final chapters of this exclusive social class whose continued existence Balzac would have praised if its members were claiming superiority in virtue and intelligence instead of displaying a vivid memory of old privileges, and fostering prejudice, pride, conceit and vanity. It is to these vices that Balzac attributes the

<sup>1</sup> Trollope, 120

causes of the decline and subsequent disappearance of the aristocracy as a separate class, vices which Balzac severely criticises.

Criticisms of the aristocracy as being decadent are commonplace, however, and in a study of Molière's work Louise Forsythe shows that even as far back as 1660:

...the justification for its superiority had, to a great extent, vanished. This was an idle class, lacking all real power, subservient to the king, remaining aloof from all commercial activities and dedicated to the refinement of its manners and amusements.<sup>1</sup>

By the 19th Century, Balzac could only see a few aristocrats adhering to the original ideals of duty and service of the aristocracy, even though the aristocratic claims about their superiority over other Frenchmen were still strong and frequent, and their behaviour to other classes appropriate to their beliefs.

For Balzac, as for the historian Guizot, the aristocratic belief in their superiority of race and blood originates in the Frankish conquest and settlement of Gaul. The conquering Franks are claimed as the original ancestors of the aristocracy, while other Frenchmen are considered to originate from the conquered Gauls.

The grandes dames are the inheritors of this aristocratic ancestry, tradition, attitude and belief. Often more scornful than men, more proud, more contemptuous of those who are excluded from their social

<sup>1</sup>Forsythe, Louise, The spirit of Relativism and Molière's dynamic perspective, unpublished Thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1966, p. 120

group, admission to which was normally granted only on satisfactory evidence of a brevet de noblesse, they show even more than men why the Revolution of 1789 was occasioned, and why, after two Restorations, the aristocracy met an eventual 'Waterloo' in 1830. Balzac examines the situation of these ladies, analyses their social exclusiveness in their homes and salons, explains the origin of their clannishness and shows with credible realism the causes of their decadence and decline.

In treating Balzac's aristocracy in this group, our method will be to analyse the portraiture of each of the various categories of grandes dames presented in the Comédie Humaine to show their psychological or social evolution, and to compare what Balzac asserts with information obtained from independent, historical sources. The aim of this study is, therefore, to make an assessment of Balzac's claimed historical accuracy by estimating the extent to which his female aristocratic characters of the Restoration are, or are not, a correct interpretation of known historical facts.

## CHAPTER I

### BALZAC THE NOVELIST AS HISTORIAN

Literary criticisms, by their very nature, cannot be anything but subjective, in that they are not only relative often to personal criteria, but they sometimes reflect the influences of individual temperament and, even more important, of the age when the criticisms are made. Often a work condemned by one generation as without value is considered by a later one not only a work of talent, but even of genius. Balzac was among the few who were aware of the great merit of Stendhal who, himself, considered that he should write for an age far in advance of his time in order to be sufficiently appreciated. In Baudelaire's case, it required a period of over 60 years after his death for critical judgments to reverse themselves on the poet's insight. Even as late as the 1920's, Enid Starkie relates that she was severely attacked and scoffed at in some quarters for demonstrating the spiritual nature of Baudelaire's personality, his inspiration and his writings.<sup>1</sup>

Balzac, in his Lettres sur la littérature, while lamenting the fact that true literary criticism no longer existed in his day due to jealousies, hatreds and personal rancour, nevertheless pointed out the subjective aspect which must be taken into account when composing a work

<sup>1</sup>Starkie, Enid, Baudelaire (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), p. 17

for the public: "La vérité littéraire consiste à choisir des faits et des caractères, à les élever à un point de vue d'où chacun les croit vrais en les apercevant, car chacun a son vrai particulier." (XV, 1054) This vrai particulier often makes for varying interpretations by critics of an artistic work and, consequently, widely varying judgments.

Balzac's observation, however, is by no means a remarkable one. What some consider vulgarity is praised by others as realism. What is insipid sentimentality for some is delicate sensibility for others. Ramon Fernandez quite aptly illustrates this in reference to criticisms on Balzac:

Si les dénigreur n'aiment pas ce que leur dit Balzac, c'est surtout la façon dont il le dit qui leur répugne: ils diront par exemple, avec M. Gustave Lanson, que la manière dont Balzac peint les femmes du monde ne leur inspire aucune confiance, et c'est précisément cette même façon qui séduit les enthousiastes. Alors?<sup>1</sup>

There are other cases, however, where judgment in a large measure is based not simply on impressions and personal likes or dislikes per se, but on a rapprochement between historical evidence, when this is known, and the interpretation or transposition of this reality into the artistic work. In such a case, the subjective element is considerably reduced, as the point de départ becomes le vrai which can be opposed or contrasted with le vraisemblable which the author has sought to achieve. A whole concept of literary art is involved here, a fact which is not overlooked by such a perceptive critic as Bernard Guyon who tries to

<sup>1</sup>Fernandez, Ramon, Balzac (Paris: Stock, 1943) p. 13

establish and illustrate some of the laws or themes which lie behind Balzac's method of literary creation and which ought to be taken into account when judging the author's work:

Nos réflexions s'organiseront autour de trois grands thèmes: celui des rapports entre la 'Réalité' et la 'Fiction'; celui des rapports entre la 'Conception', et l' 'Exécution'; celui des rapports entre les 'désirs de l'Homme' et les 'exigences de l'Artiste'. Elles pourraient se résumer en trois formules: Balzac n'invente rien. Balzac subit et accepte pour sa création les lois de la vie. Balzac exerce sur son oeuvre le contrôle d'une conscience artistique scrupuleuse.<sup>1</sup>

Gustave Lanson, however, in his Histoire de la littérature française, criticized Balzac's portraiture of the grandes dames of the Restoration. As the vast majority of these ladies portrayed in the Comédie Humaine are from this period, Lanson's criticism can be considered a general one on Balzac's handling of the grandes dames:

Balzac avec son génie robuste et vulgaire, est incapable de rendre les caractères et les moeurs dont la caractéristique est la délicatesse. Son aristocratie de la Restauration, ses grandes dames, douairières ou coquettes, nous mettent en défiance, sans que l'on connaisse l'original. Elles nous font l'effet de cabotines jouant des rôles de duchesses dans un théâtre de sous-préfecture: elles ont des grâces épaisses, et un étrange sans-çaçon, sous prétexte d'aristocratique désinvolture.<sup>2</sup>

There are a number of important elements which emerge from this criticism and which it is important to consider in turn. First in order though, perhaps, not in importance, is the fact that Balzac's competence

<sup>1</sup>Guyon, Bernard, La Création Littéraire chez Balzac (Paris: Armand Collin, 1951), p. 225

<sup>2</sup>Lanson, Gustave, Histoire de la littérature française, XIIth édition, (Paris: Hachette, 1912), p. 1002



to describe this group is contested. The author's "génie robuste et vulgaire", it appears, makes him singularly unqualified to portray the aristocracy. It will be shown later in this chapter, when examining in detail Balzac's competence to describe this group, that this is a quality which is among Balzac's many assets.

For the moment, it should be pointed out that the implied suggestion is that only some one whose genius is not robuste or vulgaire is capable of depicting the aristocracy, a position which seems to be manifestly untenable, as the implication is that Balzac's plebeian origin is a disqualifying factor. If he had délicatesse, he would be considered to meet Lanson's main objection. But how can one measure or appreciate délicatesse in a bourgeois, and is this an important attribute for an historical study of a social class? And, most important, who is to judge whether a trained historian, for example, undertaking an historical study of such a social group, has or has not this délicatesse, whether he is or is not robuste or vulgaire? Even if one were willing to accept as legitimate the implied claim that the portraiture of the aristocracy would be helped if the novelist or historian were not robuste or vulgaire, this is an area which will be open to much subjective interpretations. What some will accept or expect as satisfactory criteria, others will reject.

The converse of Lanson's criticisms seems to be equally untenable: that Balzac whose genius is robuste or vulgaire, would be in a better position than, say, an aristocrat, to describe the bourgeoisie, where the délicatesse is not among la caractéristique. But a far more

serious objection can be made as a result of these implications, in that the consequences of Lanson's criticisms are that only the aristocracy would appear to have the required qualities to judge the aristocracy as, unlike the bourgeoisie, their délicatesse would not be suspect or be a subject for caution. In such an eventuality, what would become of the important element of impartiality? To accept as a valid criticism the claim that Balzac's génie robuste et vulgaire rules him out as a satisfactory historian of the aristocracy, would involve, not only problems of subjective criteria in assessing the competence of an historian, but also some other unacceptable implications which we have pointed out.

The second point which emerges is the identification by Lanson of délicatesse as the distinguishing feature of the caractères et moeurs of the aristocracy. It is not clear whether such an evaluation is based on the aristocracy of the Ancien Régime, or that of the Restoration, a matter of considerable importance, for the aristocrats of the Restoration are by no means the same as those of pre-Revolutionary days. However, the whole question of Lanson's competence to characterize the aristocracy as he did must be taken into account, for unlike Balzac, he seems to have lacked every contact with this class, except, according to Larousse, the brief but doubtful encounter in 1886, when "... il enseigna la littérature française au tsarévitch depuis Nicholas II." His judgment on this matter of délicatesse must therefore have been dictated by a personal conception of what was a grande dame, a view formulated within the university cloister and unrelated to the evolutionary changes which those ladies were undergoing

as a result of the new social and political pressures of the time. If it can be proved that the aristocracy no longer had délicatesse, will Balzac then be considered competent to describe it?

Gilbert Stenger, writing about these ladies of the first half of the 19th Century gives an opposite view to Lanson's declaration of délicatesse:

L'histoire de la deuxième Restauration n'est qu'une suite de vengeances sanguinaires auxquelles les femmes ne rougirent point de prendre part. Les grandes dames qui, la première année du règne des Bourbons, n'avaient songé qu'à leurs toilettes et aux jouissances du luxe, ouvrirent leurs salons aux hommes les plus violents dont les doctrines étaient contraires aux idées apaisantes, aux pratiques parlementaires. Elles accusaient les anciens ministres d'avoir été trop faibles...<sup>1</sup>

This is not an isolated view as Dulaure, writing about these ladies of the same period, confirms the fact that they showed a vindictiveness and a bloodthirstiness in keeping with the changed political and social climate of the time. A new political system had come into being after the Revolution with a new Code and divisions in the social hierarchy. The aristocrats of the old order had to contend with those of the Empire, not to mention the fact that many of those of the old regime were now poor while the bourgeois class was fast becoming the new source of wealth:

Toutes les femmes bien pensantes, écrit Dulaure, en son Histoire de la Restauration (tome III, p. 366) qui avaient alors une grande part aux affaires publiques, étaient d'avis que la monarchie ne pouvait être

<sup>1</sup>Stenger, Gilbert, Grandes dames du XIX Siècle (Paris: Perrin et Cie, 1911), p. 109

régénérée que dans le sang. Elles disaient hautement qu'il fallait profiter du séjour de leurs bons alliés pour mater les vilains, et n'hésitaient pas à déclarer que si on leur confiait cette tâche, elles ne la laisseraient pas incomplète.<sup>1</sup>

Lanson, writing almost 90 years after such events, does not appear to take into account these important historical changes of which Balzac was very much aware as he himself saw the new aristocratic lady and declared:

Mais quant à la grande dame, elle est morte avec l'entourage grandiose du dernier siècle, avec la poudre, les mouches, les mules à talons, les corsets busqués ornés d'un delta de noeuds en rubans. Les duchesses aujourd'hui passent par les portes sans qu'il soit besoin de les faire élargir pour leurs paniers. Enfin, l'Empire a vu les dernières robes à queue! (VIII, p. 91)

One ought therefore to blame the material, not the author who has copied the details of the changes of these ladies from the history of the times. Stendhal is right when he remarks on the fact that the mirror reflects the mire, but that "L'homme qui porte le miroir dans sa hotte sera par vous accusé d'être immoral."<sup>2</sup>

The third element to be pointed out is the fact that there is a vagueness in the criticism of Lanson. There are two main problems involved here which relate to Balzac's art: the psychological analyses of the character of the grandes dames, their emotions, motives, sentiments,

<sup>1</sup>Stenger, p. 109

<sup>2</sup>Stendhal, Le Rouge et le Noir, ed. Henri Martineau in the edition Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (2 vols.; Paris: Gallimard, 1911), I, 557

etc., and the description of their characteristics, such as dress, spend-thrift habits, infidelities, extravagances which are a matter for observation and description rather than interpretation. There is, of course, a basic and fundamental difference between an inaccurate description of persons, the externals or outward characteristics, and a false analysis of the motives for their actions and emotions.

Assuming for the sake of argument that Balzac erred in describing the external characteristics of the ladies, did he give correct psychological analyses of their behavior? For example, did he correctly analyse the reasons why the grandes dames imitated their ancestors in idleness, extravagance, social splendour? And if Balzac did, in fact, give correct psychological analyses of the grandes dames while conveying inaccurate information on their dress, homes, appearance, that is, the physical details, the author's portraits would still be true, even though his descriptions would be faulty. The essential point is that there are two separate aspects involved in Balzac's treatment of the aristocracy which Lanson does not specify, but which Ramon Fernandez aptly observes:

M. Lanson veut-il dire que Balzac 'peint' inexactement les dames du Faubourg Saint-Germain, ou bien qu'il nous propose une 'analyse' fautive de leurs sentiments et de leur conduite? Car c'est une chose d'exprimer maladroitement -- comme il arrive fréquemment à Balzac -- des sentiments vrais, c'en est une autre de se tromper sur le fond même de l'humanité que l'on peint. Et quel principe nous guidera et fera le départ? Comment saurons-nous où nous arrêter, où avancer, où nier, où affirmer? Attention à la scolastique!<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Fernandez, Ramon, p. 13

It has been pointed out earlier that in this matter of interpretation of historical data, Balzac's psychological analyses are important, for the many characters he invents must be portrayed in a believable way within the framework of the novel itself. It is not enough to be historical in the choice of material for the stories and the actions of the characters which are described in the novel, Balzac must also make these characters vraisemblables. Often, what is true is not vraisemblable, a point which Pierre Laubriet amply illustrates:

... car le vrai de la nature s'écarte trop souvent du vrai littéraire par manque d'unité, par défaut de vraisemblance, ni possible, car le vrai littéraire, est toujours une reconstruction de la nature par une intelligence, un tempérament, qui en offre une synthèse forcément déformée. Le vrai est toujours transposé. Bien plus, il apparaît comme une nécessité inhérente à l'oeuvre d'art que le vrai de la nature soit idéalisé et spiritualisé.<sup>1</sup>

Some critics often ignore le vrai and judge only le vraisemblable in the work itself, while some criticize the vraisemblable as not being vrai. Others consider the vraisemblable in relation to the vrai and make suitable adjustments for the fact that art cannot or, rather, should not copy reality. Balzac's position was that the novelist's art consists in being true in all the details when his character is fictif. This means that the work by itself must be judged on what the author has included in it, rather than for the reader to have preconceived notions and expect the author to conform to them. In accordance with this concept, the

<sup>1</sup>Laubriet, Pierre, L'intelligence de l'art chez Balzac (Paris: Didier, 1958), p. 65

amassing of a considerable fortune by Grandet in Eugénie Grandet is vraisemblable within the novel itself, regardless of personal notions of whether such a feat can or cannot be achieved in real life. For those critics who made a rapprochement between the novel and real life, and considered Grandet invraisemblable, Balzac pointed to the fact that there was such a man like Grandet in real life. But this, in effect, is seeking le vrai instead of le vraisemblable, and Balzac made a logical and clear distinction between the two in his preface to Le Cabinet des Antiques:

Le vrai souvent ne serait pas vraisemblable, de même que le vrai littéraire ne saurait être le vrai de la nature. Ceux-ci qui se permettent de semblables observations, s'ils étaient logiques, voudraient au théâtre, voir les acteurs se tuer réellement. (XV, 297)

For artistic and other reasons, therefore, Balzac did not insert in his novels all the physical details of his models, which would have made his work cease to be art. Instead he made a fusion of the "real" and the "ideal". He had the raw material for his novels before him in the shape of the aristocrats, their behaviour, and the Revolutions of 1789 and 1830, all constituting a fait accompli. From this data, Balzac attempted to reconstruct his history of manners by the invention of characters who had to be credible within the novels themselves, but consistent with known historical facts and social evolution. It is the transmutation of this raw material into fiction which involves problems for the novelist who aims at being an historian. To achieve artistic and, at the same time, historical truth, is no mean task. Balzac's conception

of the historical novel is well illustrated by what he wrote in Les Paysans by way of an explanatory epilogue:

Toucher à l'histoire contemporaine, ne fut-ce que par des types, comporte des dangers. C'est en se servant, pour des fictions, d'un cadre dont les détails sont minutieusement vrais, en dénaturant tour à tour les faits par des couleurs qui leur sont étrangères qu'on évite le petit malheur des personnalités. (III, 1322)

Lanson does not appear to have given consideration to those important aspects of Balzac's art, his psychological analyses as distinct from the description of externals, the fusion of reality and fiction, distinctions which have since been the subject of much scholarly research. F.C. Green declared that the business of the novelist was to interpret life in all its complexity, to create a miniature pattern that should give his reader the illusion that he was witnessing the grandiose and mysterious process by which life itself evolved from the loom of time. The art of the great novelist must therefore always be a compromise since, however strenuously he tries to submit himself to the object, his interpretation of life will be coloured by the reflection of that inner vision which results from the action of the imagination upon remembered experience.<sup>1</sup>

Lanson, however, was not the only one in the late nineteenth century who made adverse criticisms on Balzac's portraiture of the aristocracy. Not enough research had been accomplished then to promote a

<sup>1</sup>Green, F.C., French Novelists from the Revolution to Proust (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent: 1931), p. 196



better understanding of Balzac's work, a situation which has since considerably improved.

In the nineteenth century, Henry James made remarks similar to Lanson's comment, and also on the basis of Balzac's bourgeois origin:

These ladies altogether miss the mark; they are vitiated by that familiar foible which Thackeray commemorated in so many inimitable pages. Allusion was made in the earlier part of these remarks to Balzac's strong plebeian strain. It is no reproach to him.<sup>1</sup>

It is significant, however, that at the turn of the century, James became far more appreciative of Balzac's achievement, either as a result of his greater experience and knowledge, or the benefit derived from the research of other scholars which was continually going on. Perhaps, even, as a result of both. James considered that the Rougon-Macquart of Zola would not have existed without Balzac's monumental contribution, and he went on to outline Balzac's sympathy for his characters while emphasizing the lesson to be learned from the work. As for criticisms, they appear to have vanished with the new appreciation of the novelist. Even when he is moved to mention Balzac's faults, he hastens to add a modifying phrase:

Let me say, definitely, that I hold several of his faults to be grave, and that if there were any question of time for it, I should like to speak of them; but let me add, as promptly, that they are faults on the whole, of execution, flaws in the casting, accidents of the process; they never come back to that fault in the artist, in the novelist, that

<sup>1</sup>James, Henry, French Poets and Novelists (London: Macmillan 1878), p. 144

amounts most completely to a failure of dignity, the absence of saturation with his idea.<sup>1</sup>

Not only is James more appreciative of Balzac's merit, but even in his new comments on Balzac's handling of the ladies of the aristocracy, he grants that the writer knows this social class thoroughly, a judgment which is a reversal of his earlier attitude:

Balzac carried the uppermost class of his comedy, from the princes, dukes and unspeakable duchesses down to his poor barons de province, about in his pocket as he might have carried a tolerably befingered pack of cards, to deal them about with a flourish of the highest authority whenever there was the chance of a game. He knew them up and down and in and out, their arms, infallibly supplied, their quarterings, pedigrees, services, intermarriages, relationships, ramifications and comparatively simple learning: the real wonder is when we linger on the ground of the patriotic consciousness itself, the innermost, the esoteric, the spirit, temper, tone — tone above all — of the titled and the proud.<sup>2</sup>

It will be shown later how critics of the 20th Century, as in the case of James, are more appreciative than those of the nineteenth century of Balzac's portraiture of the aristocracy. Taine, however, an important 19th Century critic, among other things, reproaches Balzac for his naturalist tendencies, and the fact that Balzac, in his view, enjoyed describing the immoral activities of his characters like Valérie Marneffe,

<sup>1</sup>James, Henry, The House of Fiction (London, 1957), p. 75 Original date of publication of essay cannot be accurately determined, but it belongs to that group of essays collected and published in 1907 and 1909 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1961) XII, 883

<sup>2</sup>James, Henry, The Art of Fiction (New York, 1943), pgs. 44-45 (Essay is numbered among those originally published in 1907 and 1909) (Encyclopaedia Britannica XII, 883)

for example, in La cousine Bette. According to him, Balzac ignored the beautiful and idealistic in human nature and concentrated on the energies of man which he described as "une simple force". With this main idea, according to Taine, Balzac did not flinch from absorbing himself in the sordid or mean, but seemed to take an obvious delight in participating vicariously in what his characters did. With his naturalist tendencies, according to Taine, he declined to make distinctions between ugliness or beauty but preoccupied himself with "la force" in man:

Il l'aime pour elle-même. C'est pourquoi, à tous ses degrés dans tous ses emplois, il l'aime; pourvu qu'il la voie agir, il est content. Il dissèque aussi volontiers le portier que le ministre. Pour lui, il n'y a pas d'ordures. Il comprend et manie ses forces; c'est là son plaisir, il n'en a pas d'autres; il ne dit pas: le beau spectacle! mais le beau sujet! ... De pureté, de grâce, il ne s'inquiète guère; à ses yeux, un crapaud vaut un papillon; la chauve-souris l'intéresse plus que le rossignol. Si vous êtes délicat, n'ouvrez pas son livre; il vous décrira les choses telles qu'elles sont, c'est-à-dire fort laides, crûment, sans rien ménager ni embellir.<sup>1</sup>

Balzac, it is true, was greatly interested in the concentration and the expenditure of the energies of man, that vital force or passion which impels the individual to embark on projects the execution of which frequently signifies the superior intellect or the superior being like Napoleon. This interest in "force" mentioned by Taine will be treated in Chapter II when considering Balzac's philosophical views. It must be admitted, however, that Balzac considered important any subject

<sup>1</sup>Taine, H., Nouveaux Essais de critique et d'Histoire (Paris: Hachette, 1905), p. 46 (VIII edition) Date of publication of 1st edition 1865

which he conceived as having the material necessary for an inspiring novel, regardless of whether the subject displayed human weakness, dishonesty or some other human failing. And this is quite consistent with the requirements of an historical novel.

A work like the Comédie Humaine which aims at historical truth must, of necessity, include the good and the bad, the idealistic and the naturalistic. And that is why, to use Taine's own words to prove the point, Balzac "dissèque aussi volontiers le portier que le ministre. Pour lui, il n'y a pas d'ordures". The historian must not conceal or suppress any detail through squeamishness, or deliberately manipulate his facts to give a false picture or one colored to suit his views. It is to Balzac's credit, however, that Taine can declare that "il vous décrira les choses telles qu'elles sont, c'est-à-dire fort laides, crûment, sans rien ménager ni embellir". It outlines Balzac's search for a truth which is not to be embroidered or deformed to suit the fancy of individuals.

#### JUDGMENT OF MODERN CRITICS AND BALZAC'S CONTEMPORARIES

Faguet, Lanson, Henry James, all in the nineteenth century, were critical, in varying degrees, of Balzac's portraiture of the aristocracy. But, as we have already pointed out with James, such criticisms began to reverse themselves and to become far more favourable as more evidence came to light to indicate that Balzac was perhaps right after all in what he described. Among those who were still sceptical were the univer-

sity scholars who, like Lanson, had their own conception of what a grande dame was, their own ideal, based, according to Samuel Rogers, on their own conventional ideas:

If Balzac's duchesses may become involved in melodrama, if his presentation of them (as of all his characters) is shaped by his own temperament, I cannot help feeling that sometimes it is the critics who have a conventional idea of how duchesses behave.<sup>1</sup>

André Bellesort is only one among the new breed of twentieth Century university scholars who have a new view of Balzac's aristocracy. Bellesort not only ignores Balzac's "génie robuste et vulgaire" as not being germane to a valid assessment of this social class, but he confesses to the fact that Balzac knew those aristocratic ladies and that his portraiture of them has destroyed a personal ideal of what a grande dame was conceived to be:

Sa façon de faire parler les duchesses nous a beaucoup scandalisés dans l'Université. Ce n'était pourtant pas, de sa part, faute d'en avoir connu. Peut-être à mesure que nous démocratisons, sommes-nous devenus plus pointilleux sur le langage que doivent tenir les duchesses. Quel idéal nous resterait-il si elles se mettaient à parler comme les autres? Balzac les a vues et entendues dans ses hallucinations créatrices avec leur légèreté de propos, leur liberté d'allures, leurs impertinences et leurs prétentions telles que la société les avait offertes à sa curiosité ou à son amour.<sup>2</sup>

This judgment was given in 1924. There is one important fact

<sup>1</sup>Rogers, Samuel, Balzac and the novel (The University of Wisconsin, 1953), p. 50

<sup>2</sup>Bellesort, André, Balzac et son oeuvre, as quoted in Marc Blanchard, Témoignages et Jugements sur Balzac, p. 250

which is to be pointed out in this view of Balzac's work, that is his personal knowledge of these ladies. Bellesort mentions very definitely that Balzac not only saw but heard them, and this evidence of personal contact is another factor which will be examined in order to establish Balzac's competence to treat the aristocracy. In addition to admitting Balzac's personal knowledge of the aristocracy, Bellesort has indirectly confessed what Lanson concealed, that is, his own personal conception of the aristocracy was based on an ideal rather than on personal knowledge.

The number of those now attesting to the veracity of Balzac's picture of the aristocracy is now legion. In 1959, H.J. Hunt conceded that Balzac's aristocratic women are individual and vivid:

... probably because Balzac, so keen was his scrutiny of the 'weaker' sex, did not allow the fact that they were the daughters of the nobility to blind him to the fact that they were also daughters of Eve. They form a fascinating collection, as mothers, wives, hostesses, schemers, idealists, coquettes, passionate victims of love or victimizers of lovers according to their temperaments ... Strange to say, it is when he is dealing with his own class that he sometimes fumbles...<sup>1</sup>

The inference is rather clear here, that in dealing with the aristocracy Balzac does not fumble. In addition, mention is made of Balzac's keen scrutiny of the "weaker sex", an aspect which underlines the novelist's serious study of women.

In the case of Ramon Fernandez, he not only praises Balzac but considers that his portraiture of the aristocracy was only equalled by Proust:

<sup>1</sup>Hunt, H.J., Balzac's Comédie Humaine (University of London, The Athlone Press, 1964), pgs. 439-440.

Balzac a su se débrouiller et se repérer dans ce labyrinthe avec une précision et une finesse qui, après lui, n'ont été égalées dans le roman français que par Marcel Proust; ...Les nobles de Proust sont des souvenirs de leur propre passé; ceux de Balzac sont encore pris dans un drame où leur passé met en péril leur avenir. Or, ces nobles, Balzac les avait connus dans le mouvement et comme dans le train de leur vie et de leur originalité.<sup>1</sup>

Like André Bellesort, Fernandez mentions Balzac's knowledge of the aristocrats and, in addition, the fact that Balzac wrote about what he was himself witnessing in France. He was therefore in a better position than the historian who must gather his evidence long after the events have taken place. The Abbé Philippe Bertault, therefore, not only considers that Balzac is historically accurate in his judgments, but he is moved to agree with Anatole France that Balzac is the greatest historian of modern France.<sup>2</sup> These favourable judgments in the twentieth Century can be added to and multiplied almost ad infinitum. But it is important to consider the judgment of those critics who were contemporaries of Balzac and who, living closer in time to these great ladies, were perhaps in a better position to endorse or reject Balzac's descriptions from the models which they probably saw.

In dealing with this early generation of critics, there are three dangers which must be pointed out. The first of these is the fact that although these critics lived in the same period as Balzac, it does not follow that they would necessarily be in a better position to judge Balzac's aristocracy, for the simple reason that there were only a

<sup>1</sup>Fernandez, Ramon, Balzac p. 121

<sup>2</sup>Bertault, Philippe, Balzac, l'homme et l'oeuvre (Paris: Boivin, 1946) p. 66

few aristocratic salons at that time which accepted artists and literary men. Those who were accepted had to be as famous as Balzac. Not many critics met this qualification. The judgment of some of these persons, therefore, is often based on secondary sources, but the advantage which these critics have lies in the fact that they were aware of the decadence of the aristocracy from the number of cases which reached the courts relating to debts and resulting in imprisonment, facts which were duly reported in the Press. No doubt these critics even attended some of these cases.

It should be remembered, however, that Balzac would be in a much better position than those critics whose task was not to study the aristocracy or to document themselves for their reviews with the kind of care which Balzac was required to do for his novels. One cannot readily conceive of critics journeying to some remote part of France to check or verify Balzac's documentation, in the same way that Balzac journeyed to Fougères, for example, to acquaint himself with the atmosphere and details of the area concerned with the uprising in the Vendée. Balzac saw and studied the aristocrats. He read about them, consulted others and visited localities.

The second danger is the element of jealousy and personal spite of which mention was made earlier, and which moved Balzac to declare that true literary criticism was no longer possible. In addition to this danger, there tends to be a confusion, as in the case of Lanson, in the minds of those critics about the historical and artistic nature of Balzac's work, in that they separated these two aspects and judged each



separately according to what suited their fancy. In the case of Balzac, such a procedure can only produce an inaccurate assessment, especially in view of what we said earlier of Balzac's interpretation of history, his psychological analyses of the grandes dames, and the greater importance of le vraisemblable over le vrai. Philippe Bertault emphasized the importance of the synthesis of the historical and artistic roles in Balzac which ought never, in his view, to receive separate and individual judgment:

Il est vain, il est erroné d'opposer en lui le romancier et l'historien, l'idéaliste et le réaliste. Ils se copénètrent l'un l'autre; nous l'avons déjà dit; nous le démontrerons à propos de la structure des caractères. Pour ce qui est de Balzac, l'un n'existerait pas sans l'autre.<sup>1</sup>

Balzac's contemporaries were fully cognizant of the fact that he was portraying a complete picture of contemporary life and that the social groups represented in the novels were based on those of which they themselves formed part and were thus able to observe first hand. From a compilation of available statistical information concerning the judgments of these persons between the years 1830 and 1870 compiled by Bernard Weinberg, it is shown that in the period 1830 to 1839 nearly all of the critics attested in one form or another to the exactness of Balzac's social descriptions: "In general the critics concede that Balzac's people are truly observed and depicted."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Bertault, Philippe, p. 65

<sup>2</sup>Weinberg, Bernard, French Realism: The critical reaction, 1830-1870 (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 42

As early as 1832, the Quotidienne was conscious of Balzac's achievement in his psychological analyses of character as well as his reconstruction and interpretation of the actions of various groups in the different social levels of society:

Il a reconstitué nos salons, renoué toutes les relations sociales, effacé toutes les antipathies, restitué le sourire sur les lèvres crispées; il a repris sa physiologie des passions ... il a embrassé la société entière: la société dans ses mystères et son éclat de grand jour, au boudoir, au bal, dans l'intimité de la vie privée et du tête à tête; toujours dans sa réalité avec son vide, ses mensonges, ses illusions, ses fluctuations de vice et de vertu; la société enfin, telle que l'ont faite les arts, la pensée, l'éducation et la loi.<sup>1</sup>

Al de C. considered that the nineteenth century would be ungrateful if it did not love Balzac, as he was a product of it. It was the very nineteenth Century which produced the painter of its egoisms.

Copiste d'une société sans Dieu, sans foi, sans but, mais non sans passions, sans art, ni sans lumières, Balzac restera comme l'interprète de ce monde vacillant, qui n'est que grain de sable et qui fuit sous nos pas.<sup>2</sup>

The assertion by Al de C. was intended to emphasize the fact that Balzac did not invent or add to the ugliness of any of the vices of society which were already in existence and obvious to any interested observer.

The opinion of critics, however, was not unanimous, as some saw

<sup>1</sup>Weinberg, p. 44

<sup>2</sup>Al de C., Chronique littéraire, Chronique de Paris (13 décembre, 1835), III, 312-313, as quoted in Bernard Weinberg, French Realism, p. 44

in Balzac's work evidence of exceptional heroes who, according to the critics, even when they had roots in common humanity, were exaggerated into monstrosities. Jules Janin introduced this kind of criticism with the publication of Eugénie Grandet, and thus, like some of the modern critics, he confused the real and the artistic, the vrai and the vrai-semblable. A few critics also, while accepting Balzac's general portraiture of humanity as accurate, created divisions in this portraiture which they considered separately for judgment.

As far as I.C.T. was concerned, Balzac was particularly expert in the handling of aristocratic circles for which his novels were especially written.<sup>1</sup> Jules Janin is entirely at variance with this point of view and reproaches Balzac for not understanding the special language of the aristocracy, because he does not belong to this "in-group". The implication is that Balzac's own plebeian origin is a disadvantage, as he cannot reproduce the dialogue of true life aristocrats. The implied assertion here is that there is such a special langage of the aristocrats, known by Janin, unknown to Balzac, or, perhaps, incapable of reproduction by Balzac. According to Janin:

Tant qu'il est peuple, bourgeois, étudiant, observateur de la rue, tant qu'il est M. Balzac, il est excellent, naïf, amusant, bonhomme, gai, observateur, et même quelquefois écrivant bien... mais une fois que M. Balzac devient ou redevient M. de Balzac, une fois qu'il se fait grand seigneur et marquis, alors, ma foi! ce n'est plus le même homme. Il est raide, il est guindé... car il ne sait pas ce que veut dire ce langage à

<sup>1</sup>Weinberg, p. 46

part, tous ces petits mots qui ont un sens à part.<sup>1</sup>

Janin, it is true, was admitted into aristocratic circles, but it must be mentioned that he was no friend of Balzac. In fact he was always a hostile critic motivated in some measure by jealousy and spite. Even in the above quotation, he clearly jibes at Balzac's social pretensions when he says "M. Balzac devient ou redevient M. de Balzac".

Janin's dislike of Balzac was due to the latter's literary success.

Balzac was also one of many victims of an unscrupulous journalistic confraternity, and he had a number of quarrels with Latouche, Janin, Bohain, Pichot and others. Later, when Balzac published Un grand homme de Province à Paris, Janin, Buloz and Sainte-Beuve took sides against him for his denunciation of the Parisian Press. Balzac's exposure of the kind of journalistic chicanery which was a regular feature among journalists who praised or condemned an artist work in order to benefit their own personal, financial interests was not likely to win him friends in that group. According to Hunt: "He was burning with indignation at the thought that the work of scrupulous and inspired artists should be at the mercy of profane, envious and greedy adventurers".<sup>2</sup>

But even though Janin's criticism is vitiated by interest, it

<sup>1</sup>Janin, Jules, "Le Père Goriot", vaudeville en trois actes, par M. Jaime, Comberousse et Théaulon", Journal des Débats (13 avril, 1835), as quoted in Bernard Weinberg, French Realism, p. 46

<sup>2</sup>Hunt, H.J., Balzac's Comédie Humaine, p. 206

merits some examination, for the criticism of the aristocracy which he makes is significant for the fact that the critic does not find anything to blame in Balzac's psychological analysis of his characters, especially his grandes dames with which we are concerned. In fact, about the same time period as the date of Janin's criticism just mentioned, the critic readily admitted to Balzac's superiority in the portraiture of women and, according to Hunt, he wrote in 1833, "C'est M. de Balzac qui a inventé les femmes",<sup>1</sup> a grudging praise which makes it plain that Balzac attached considerable importance to women whom he carefully studied and analysed.

In 1835, Janin spoke of Balzac as "l'infatigable historien des 'misères inconnues de la femme'",<sup>2</sup> and he joined the chorus of those who readily acknowledged Balzac's superiority in the handling of female characters. In 1838, for example, Le Constitutionnel reported that "La femme de trente ans est une création de M. de Balzac",<sup>3</sup> and the author was praised for his impartiality and his fine analytical studies. The critics, relates Weinberg, "accord to Balzac a real superiority in the study of feminine character".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hunt., p. 29

<sup>2</sup>Janin, Jules, 'La Fille de l'Avare', vaudeville en deux actes, par MM. Paulin et Bayard', Journal des Débats (12 janvier, 1835), as quoted in Bernard Weinberg, French Realism, p. 41

<sup>3</sup>'Anonymous'. At a later date, Sirtène de Grovestins entitles his chapter on Balzac 'L'Inventeur de la femme de trente ans', as quoted in Bernard Weinberg French Realism, p. 42

<sup>4</sup>Weinberg, p. 42

Sainte-Beuve, another of Balzac's contemporaries, was also one of his many bitter critics during his lifetime. It is to Sainte-Beuve's discredit that he considered Balzac inferior to George Sand:

Mme Sand, est-il besoin de le rappeler? est un plus grand, plus sûr et plus ferme écrivain que M. de Balzac; elle ne tâtonne jamais dans l'expression. C'est un grand peintre de nature et de paysage.<sup>1</sup>

He errs in this comparison of Balzac with Sand, and J.M. Cayla reports that in a conversation with Gautier, Renan and Neftzer, Sainte-Beuve showed not only a lack of sound critical judgment, but that he even went so far as to expect to see in Balzac's work a complete calque of the streets of Paris:

La causerie touche à Balzac et s'y arrête. Sainte-Beuve attaque le grand romancier: 'Balzac n'est pas vrai... C'est un homme de génie, si vous voulez, mais c'est un monstre!

—Mais nous sommes tous des monstres! riposte Gautier. Alors qui a peint ce temps-ci? Où se retrouve notre société? Dans quel livre? ... si Balzac ne l'a pas représentée?

—C'est de l'imagination, de l'invention, crie aigrement Sainte-Beuve, j'ai connu cette rue de Langlade, ce n'était pas du tout comme ça.<sup>2</sup>

Those who expect to see details like those whose absence upset Sainte-Beuve are like the critics who would search for Rabelais' Abbaye de Thélème, Robinson Crusoe's island, or Swift's Lilliput. Balzac did not tire in repeating the folly of persons who sought this kind of infor-

<sup>1</sup>Sainte-Beuve, C.A., Causeries du Lundi (Paris: Garnier, 1850), 11, 461

<sup>2</sup>Cayla, J.M., Célébrités européennes (Paris, 1854), pgs. 55-58 as quoted in Marc Blanchard Témoignages et Jugements sur Balzac, p. 176

mation: In Les Paysans, he asserted: "Une fois pour toutes, il répond ici que ses inexactitudes sont volontaires et calculées... en dénaturant tour à tour les faits par des couleurs qui leur sont étrangères, qu'on évite le petit malheur des 'personnalités'". (III, 1321)

Zola was severe on Sainte-Beuve for showing a want of impartiality and fairness in his judgment on Balzac during the author's lifetime. He pointed out how little the critic cared for Balzac and how much he misunderstood "... notre grand Balzac! Je regarde son entêtement comme un crime de lèse-génie! ... cet aveuglement volontaire fait tache au milieu des jugements de M. Sainte-Beuve si clairvoyants et si justifiés d'ordinaire".<sup>1</sup> The reason for this voluntary stubbornness of the critic has been ascribed by Marcel Bouteron to animosity arising out of a competition between himself and Balzac for the heart of Mme de Castries.

After Balzac's death, there was not only a far more reasonable appreciation of his work by Sainte-Beuve, but even praise for his handling of the great ladies of the aristocracy:

Qui mieux que lui, par exemple, a peint les vieux et les belles de l'Empire? Qui surtout a plus délicieusement touché les duchesses et les vicomtesse de la fin de la Restauration, ces femmes de trente ans, et qui, déjà venues, attendaient leur peintre avec une anxiété vague, tellement que, quand lui et elles se sont rencontrés, ç'a été comme un mouvement électrique de reconnaissance?... ce fut d'abord par ses observations de finesse et de grâce qu'il gagna le coeur de cette société aristocratique à laquelle il avait toujours aspiré.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Zola, Emile, L'Atelier de Zola, textes de Journaux 1865-1870 (Genève: Droz, 1963), p. 141

<sup>2</sup>Sainte-Beuve, C.A., Causeries du Lundi, II, 445

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<sup>2</sup>Sainte-Beuve, C.A., Causeries du Lundi, II, 445



Sainte-Beuve must be taken at his word in this praise, as he would not have hesitated to condemn Balzac's portraiture of the aristocracy if he thought it a valid criticism to make. In addition, in this very article is to be found a comparison with George Sand in which Balzac is shown to be inferior to her, a factor which tends to prove that Sainte-Beuve would certainly not praise Balzac for his handling of the aristocracy if he felt he did not deserve it. This belated praise, however, given in 1850, merely echoes what was already the general opinion of the critics in the period 1830 to 1839. The consensus of critical opinion then was that Balzac's world was a faithful portrayal of France at that time. Some admired the accuracy of one phase or another of his fictional world, while others praised his fidelity, his remarkable gift of observation and his impartiality.

During the period 1839 to 1845, the critics were almost unanimous in their praise both as regards Balzac's excellence in the matter of characterization as well as his powers of observation. There can hardly be found a dissenting voice on the uniformly favourable judgment which was made on his work and, especially, his characterization. According to Weinberg: "for many, as for Loménie, his characters constitute 'la base la plus solide de l'édifice littéraire de M. de Balzac'".<sup>1</sup> In addition to those who praised his general art of characterization, there were many who indicated the excellence of individual portraits.

Between 1846 and 1870, the favourable trend of criticism was

<sup>1</sup>Loménie, Louis de., 'M. de Balzac', Galerie des contemporains illustres (Paris: 1841), III, (no. 9), 36, as quoted in Bernard Weinberg, French Realism, p. 65

continued. The critics revived their earlier praise of Balzac's superiority in the portraiture of women and they commented warmly on his delicacy of psychological analysis which equipped him admirably for the task he had undertaken. They discover that Balzac is an analyst who penetrated deeply into "human motives and arcana".<sup>1</sup> They praise his "seconde vue psychologique" which stands out among his many assets as a novelist. His principal merit, they claimed, was not that of a storyteller, but rather that of a patient and encyclopaedic historian, ever patient and watchful for details which should explain later developments of history.

George Sand is warm in her praise of Balzac whom she considered to have "presque trouvé la solution d'un problème inconnu avant lui, la réalité complète dans la fiction complète".<sup>2</sup> Achard is even more specific on the historical exactness of Balzac's portraiture of characters and details of the nineteenth century:

M. de Balzac est resté, autant que la chose est praticable à un romancier, dans les limites du possible et du vraisemblable... Sa Comédie Humaine est le monument qui donnera à la postérité l'idée la plus exacte de la France au dix-neuvième siècle.<sup>3</sup>

The final conclusions of Weinberg's study of critical opinion of

<sup>1</sup>Weinberg, pgs. 68-69

<sup>2</sup>Sand, George, 'Honoré de Balzac', Autour de la table (Paris, 1876), pgs. 197-213, as quoted in Bernard Weinberg, French Realism, p. 70

<sup>3</sup>Achard, Amédée, 'Lettres parisiennes', Assemblée Nationale, (15 août, 1850, as quoted in Bernard Weinberg, French Realism, p. 70

Balzac and his work over a period of 40 years, between 1830 and 1870, are a good indication of the favourable judgment of contemporary critics who, though not fully aware of the deep significance of Balzac's philosophy and the fusion of the two roles of the artist and the historian in the author which Philippe Bertault forcefully illustrated,<sup>1</sup> confirm the veracity of the historical aspect of the Comédie Humaine.

According to Weinberg:

Hence, in general, Balzac the artist is at all times considered inferior to Balzac the historian and even to Balzac the philosopher. Nevertheless, it will be evident from the preceding pages that the fairly consistent censure of Balzac the philosopher and Balzac the artist is overbalanced by the continued and genuine admiration for the 'peintre de moeurs'. In the last analysis, then, the total evaluation of Balzac' by the critics of the whole period was manifestly in his favour.<sup>2</sup>

#### BALZAC'S NOTION OF HISTORY IN THE NOVEL

Balzac was conscious of the artistic freedom allowed him in the novel where his material could be adapted to reflect his vision as an artist and thinker. The historian cannot imitate the freedom of the novelist and, for this reason, Balzac considered the novelist superior to the historian in that the artist can select his material and offer an image of what can be, while the historian is confined to a presentation of what is or was. Balzac asserted this in the Avant-Propos: "J'ai mieux fait que l'historien... L'histoire n'a pas pour but comme le roman de

<sup>1</sup>Bertault, Philippe, Balzac, p. 65

<sup>2</sup>Weinberg, p. 31

tendre vers le bel idéal... L'histoire est ou devrait être ce qu'elle fut; tandis que le roman doit être le monde meilleur". (XV, 377)

At the same time when Balzac was launching out on his literary career, however, historians like Guizot and Michelet were formulating a new view of history. Guizot's special conception of history included not only the traditional characteristics of accuracy, fidelity, scientific method, integrity, etc., but he paid great attention to small details which, when pieced carefully together, could explain the hidden causes of subsequent events. According to him: "C'est un devoir de regarder de près aux plus petits détails, et toutes les questions ont leur importance, toutes les recherches ont leur valeur: je me suis efforcé de ne jamais l'oublier".<sup>1</sup>

Guizot, however, had more than simply a love for exact details, he had a love for ideas which he formulated after examining the many small facts pieced together and interpreted to show and to explain the progress of society. His purpose in his approach to the writing of history was to explain the transformation of institutions, to "faire connaître... le développement progressif d'une société" by searching to discover causes and effects. It will be recalled that Balzac's declared intention in the Comédie Humaine was also to show the Effets in the Comédie de Mœurs, and Causes in the Etudes philosophiques. It will be shown how Balzac the novelist imitated Guizot's scientific and historical

<sup>1</sup>Guizot, F., Essai sur l'Histoire de France (Paris, 1823), as quoted in Pierre Laubriet, L'Intelligence de l'Art chez Balzac, p. 256

method.

Guizot not only studied political institutions, but also the régime social to show the movement of ideas and of beliefs. His intention was to penetrate the entire heart of society rather than to select a few important personages for study. He dissected society with the same method that an anatomist, for example, would dissect a body. Society became a social organism to be dissected by the historian in a threefold analytical process, called by G.P. Gooch, historical anatomy, physiology of history, and external physiognomy. According to the historian Gooch,

Guizot was the first to dissect a society as the anatomist dissects a body, the first to study the functions of the social organism as the physiologist those of the animal... Guizot himself declared that the historian has a threefold task. He must collect his facts and know how they are connected--they may be called historical anatomy. He must discover the organisation of life of societies, the laws which preside over the course of events--that is the physiology of history...<sup>1</sup>

Balzac also regarded society as a social organism to be studied like a physiologist, and his approach to history was also like the historian in that he observed accuracy, fidelity, scientific method, integrity, etc. Pierre Laubriet asserts that Balzac was reading the works of historians of his period, even though their names are absent from the Comédie Humaine. He mentions Thierry, Thiers and Michelet. As for Guizot, Balzac attended his history courses at the Sorbonne. According to Laubriet:

<sup>1</sup>Gooch, G.P., History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), p. 131

Il n'est pas interdit de penser qu'il a pu lire--bien que leurs noms soient presque totalement absents de son oeuvre--les hommes qui renouvè-  
lèrent l'histoire au début du XIX siècle, et surtout qu'il a pu suivre  
les cours des uns ou des autres, particulièrement de Guizot, qui donna  
ses cours en Sorbonne entre 1820 et 1822, et dont il semble avoir partiel-  
lement adopté la conception de l'histoire".<sup>1</sup>

There is a decided influence on Balzac of Guizot and, to some extent, Michelet. The appearance of Michelet's history of France in which the historian declared in his preface that his work was "un récit et un système", and in which he attempted a "résurrection de la vie intégrale du passé" is somewhat similar, broadly speaking, to Balzac's intention to write the history of "la société française", that is, to resurrect the past, also. According to Laubriet, when Michelet made his assertions about his view of history, "il (Michelet) remplissait pleinement les vœux de Balzac appelant en 1830 des travaux conçus dans un tel esprit".<sup>2</sup> For Michelet, history was

...trop spirituelle, parlant des lois, des actes politiques non des idées, des mœurs, non du grand mouvement progressif, intérieur, de l'âme nationale. Surtout peu curieuse du menu détail érudit où le meilleur, peut-être, restait enfoui aux sources inédites.<sup>3</sup>

This method of seeking out the "menu détail" and of being concerned with "mœurs" is identical with Balzac's. As far as the "menu détail" is concerned, Balzac declares in Les Paysans that:

<sup>1</sup>Laubriet, p. 256

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., (footnote 31) p. 257

<sup>3</sup>Julian, C., Extraits des historiens français du XIXe siècle (Paris, n.d.), as quoted in Pierre Laubriet, pgs. 256-259

Les vicissitudes de la vie sociale ou privée sont engendrées par une multitude de petites causes qui tiennent à tout. Le savant est obligé de se déblayer les masses d'une avalanche sous laquelle ont péri des villages, pour nous montrer les cailloux détachés d'une cime qui ont déterminé la formation de cette montagne de neige. (III, 1097-1098)

Balzac is concerned with examining these small details in order to interpret them and to understand the evolution of social groups. He must determine the causes which lie under a multitude of details and minutiae. For example, to fully appreciate why the aristocracy alienated other social classes or, for that matter, were their own executioner, it is not enough to indicate that they considered themselves a race apart, that they were selfish and arrogant, but Balzac must show their education, their milieu, their doctrines, their traditions, their ambitions which, when carefully pieced together, will constitute what Balzac calls "l'histoire des moeurs".

Michelet, it must be mentioned, has been criticized for his too emotional passages in his histories. Pieter Geyl emphasizes the fact that he is a national historian<sup>1</sup> in the sense that there is far too much patriotic fervour in his history, too much emotion. Balzac was not influenced by this side of Michelet, but by his method or approach to history which we have pointed out. In spite of his faults (Geyl asserts that he will take him with his eyes open),<sup>2</sup> G.P. Gooch mentions that he

<sup>1</sup>Geyl, Pieter, Debates with historians (London: Collins, 1964), p. 100

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 100

was the first to realise

the full importance of the geographical factor in the development of his country. He maintained that political divisions corresponded to physical divisions, and that each province had its peculiar role as each organ its function in the human body.<sup>1</sup>

It is also Balzac's view that the provinces have their own individuality, in the same sense that Paris has its own identity and personality.

Like Guizot and Michelet, therefore, Balzac is opposed to the traditional method of the historian whose technique was to collect a mass of details which Balzac labels in the Avant-Propos "les sèches et rebutantes nomenclatures de faits appelées 'histoires'" (XV, 370), and which were then reproduced in their own historical sequence without the intention to coordinate them "d'après une vue générale de leur enchaînement logique, de faire saisir leur continuité homogène et leur génération réciproque".<sup>2</sup> His view of history sets him apart from writers of the old school and into the new with the Guizots and Michelets. Pierre Laubriet asserts that even as late as 1850, the year of Balzac's death, the novelist was still commenting adversely on the old method of writing history, a method which he felt he had changed in his work:

Ce qu'on nomme communément histoire est le tableau de tout ce qu'ont fait les grands troupeaux d'hommes qu'on nomme nations, mais comme

<sup>1</sup>Cocch, p. 171

<sup>2</sup>Feuilleton des Journaux politiques, XXXVIII, 427, as quoted in Pierre Laubriet, pgs. 256-257



jusqu'ici, l'on ne s'est occupé que des bergers et de leurs chiens, je crois qu'il reste beaucoup à faire.<sup>1</sup>

To underline Balzac's historical approach in the Comédie Humaine, Laubriet has emphasized that "... pour Balzac... histoire et roman ne soient différenciées que par la forme, mais que les méthodes de l'historien et celles du romancier soient fondamentalement les mêmes".<sup>2</sup> Laubriet's views here are intended to emphasize the fact that the novelist and the historian are concerned with representing truth, either in manners or in political events. Documentation is therefore a critical factor for both. Balzac's originality, however, lies in the fact that he set out to compose a "histoire du coeur humain" in his scheme of writing a history of manners. In his Avant-Propos, he had commented on the fact that in Ancharsis, the Abbé Barthélemy had devoted himself to "refaire les moeurs grecques" and that he, for his part, would compose a history of the human heart.

If Balzac wanted to be original, he had to strike out into this field, somewhat different from that which Guizot and Michelet were already exploring with their attention being given to "le régime social" and to "moeurs". While these two historians were concentrating on humanity in general terms, on the importance of geography, climate and other factors which affect political and social evolution, Balzac concentrated on the individual at all levels in society, and in his various

<sup>1</sup>Balzac, as quoted in Laubriet, p. 17

<sup>2</sup>Laubriet, p. 260

milieux.

This history, the history of the human heart which he decided to make in the study of manners, must involve a careful and painstaking search for and observation of a multitude of details from the private lives of individuals from all walks of life. He must observe the "menu détail" to be able to interpret and reveal the secret working of social groups. These small facts, when carefully pieced together like the ancient Chinese puzzles, will finally explain the main events of nations, of wars, of political and social revolutions. This is what Balzac calls in the Avant-Propos the "histoire secrète du genre humain". He is under no illusions about the difficulty facing the novelist as historian as he shows in Les Paysans:

L'historien des moeurs obéit à des lois plus dures que celles qui régissent l'historien des faits: il doit rendre tout probable, même le vrai: tandis que, dans le domaine de l'histoire proprement dite, l'impossible est justifié par la raison qu'il est advenu... S'il ne s'agissait ici que d'un suicide, il y en a cinq cents par an, dans Paris; ce mélodrame est devenu vulgaire, et chacun peut en accepter les plus brèves raisons; mais à qui ferait-on croire que le suicide de la Propriété soit jamais arrivé par un temps où la fortune semble plus précieuse que la vie? (III, 1097-8)

Balzac must therefore not only collect his mass of details, sift and observe them to discover what part they play in the mosaic of human, social and political life, but he must so interpret them to arrive at an acceptable explanation for subsequent events. In short, he must make everything vraisemblable in the novel.

As far as the grandes dames are concerned, he must be in a position to observe their actions closely, to note the "menu détail" of

people who have a skill in deception and hypocrisy. in the art of concealing fierce passions under an exterior of studied calm, these small details can be very significant: "Les visages sereins et riants, les fronts calmes couvraient d'odieux calculs: les témoignages d'amitié mentaient et plus d'un personnage se défiait moins de ses ennemis que de ses amis". (XII, 52).

The grandes dames must be observed to determine not only what they say and how they smile, but for what they do not say and what can be read in the hard unsmiling eyes. Often the gaiety on the lips is an illusion to conceal either mocking contempt or, perhaps, grief. One needs only recall the assumed gaiety of Mme de Beauséant at her farewell ball when her serene countenance concealed a despair which, if known by her guests, would add immeasurably to her discomfiture. The evolution of Balzac's fictional characters can therefore only be fully understood if the reader has information about their joys and sorrows, their hopes and ambitions.

The answer given by Raphaël de Valentin to Emile Blondet's impatience over his description of the early days of his life, gives some idea of the importance Balzac attaches to background information which helps to reveal personality and character. According to Raphaël: "Comment pourrais-tu concevoir mes sentiments si je ne te raconte les faits imperceptibles qui influèrent sur mon âme..." (VII, 1045) Later in the story he makes this significant statement:

Pour jurer un homme, au moins faut-il être dans le secret de sa pensée.

de ses malheurs, de ses émotions: ne vouloir connaître de sa vie que les événements matériels, c'est faire de la chronologie, l'histoire des sots". (VII. 105<sup>a</sup>)

To understand the grandes dames, therefore, it is important to know as much as possible of their family circumstances, childhood, youth, as it is to know what circumstances they had to face later on in life in Paris and the Provinces. All of this information has some bearing, some influence on the evolution of the individual and the group and, consequently, must be taken into account. The benefit of Balzac's historical training and reading appears to be in evidence here.

The social historian is required to have contacts with those persons and groups whom he will portray in his work. He must have a keen observation or intuition to see and to discern what is often concealed. He must have the patience to collect small facts, an ability to interpret these correctly, and the courage to portray faithfully what he sees and hears. His impartiality and integrity should be such as to inspire confidence in his readers and even among those groups which are portrayed sometimes in an adverse light. His judgment should be a balanced one in order to avoid any charge of rashness or partisanship. The possession of these qualifications is important if one is to accept his descriptions of society as impartial and historical. It is to Balzac's competence, therefore, to undertake the task which he did that we must now turn to consider.

## BALZAC'S CONTACTS WITH THE ARISTOCRACY

In criticising as inaccurate Stendhal's descriptions of the great ladies of the aristocracy, Sainte-Beuve declared that the reason for the error lay in the simple fact that, unlike Balzac, the author did not know the salons. He explained, with reference to Armance, that Stendhal was not an habitué of the great salons of the Faubourg Saint-Germain where, before 1829, to be admitted one had to possess a good deal of influence. Due to Stendhal's little contact with that social class to which he did not belong but sought to portray, Armance for Sainte-Beuve was a deformation of the aristocracy.<sup>1</sup>

The criticism of Stendhal is an indirect praise for Balzac, as Sainte-Beuve's favourable judgment on Balzac's portraiture of the grandes dames which we pointed out earlier (vide p. 39) is all the more valuable when it is realised that Sainte-Beuve not only met Balzac in the aristocratic salons but was competent to judge the accuracy of Balzac's portraits from the models which they both saw. In explaining why Stendhal did not know the salons, he added:

Il y avait encore sous la Restauration une ligne de démarcation dans le grand monde: n'allait pas dans le faubourg Saint-Germain qui voulait: ceux que leur naissance n'y installait point tout d'abord n'y étaient pas introduits, comme depuis sur la seule étiquette de leur esprit. M. de Balzac et d'autres, à leur heure, n'ont eu qu'à désirer pour y être admis: avant 1830, c'était matière à négociations, et, à moins d'être d'un certain coin politique, on n'y parvenait pas. Beyle qui vivait dans des salons charmants, littéraires et autres, a donc parlé du Faubourg Saint-Germain comme on parle d'un pays inconnu où l'on se figure des

<sup>1</sup>Sainte-Beuve, C.A., Causeries du Lundi, IX, 327

monstres.<sup>1</sup>

The critics who questioned Balzac's competence to describe the aristocracy based their arguments on the fact that Balzac was a bourgeois and naturally suffered from his plebeian origin. His portraiture of the aristocracy was considered suspect, and, like Hunt,<sup>2</sup> they raised the question whether Balzac had enough social experience to portray the life and manners of lords and ladies as he so often did in the Comédie Humaine. They wondered whether meetings and conversations with them at a few parties could offer him scope for the understanding of their inner selves disguised under a mask of social promiscuity and spurious gaiety, especially when they took into account the exclusiveness of the genuinely old aristocracy during the Restoration and the rigidity of their social habits. The Countess D'Agoult disclosed that after July 1830, the exclusive old aristocrats closed their ranks still further for a time and went into a period of mourning until the great ladies like the Duchesse de Rauzun, the Marquise de la Bourdonnaye, Mme de la Grange and others reopened their salons during the reign of Louis-Philippe.<sup>3</sup>

It is a mistake, however, to think that the salons of the great ladies of the aristocracy who lived for the most part in solitary

<sup>1</sup>Sainte-Beuve, C.A., Causeries du Lundi, IX, pgs. 327-328

<sup>2</sup>Hunt, H.J., Honoré de Balzac: A Biography (The University of London, The Athlone Press, 1957), p. 43

<sup>3</sup>Agoult, Comtesse d' (pseud. Daniel Stern), Mes Souvenirs, 1806-1833 (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1890), p. 337

splendour in their mansions in the Faubourg Saint-Germain were exclusive and that Balzac had little contact with them. Although, as Sainte-Beuve asserted, "n'allait pas dans le faubourg Saint-Germain qui voulait", the salons were only partially exclusive. If this was not the case, there would have been no need for the old aristocrats to close their ranks still further after 1830 as Mme d'Agoult asserted.

Capefigue expressly mentions, however, that these salons were not at all exclusive, especially to distinguished persons:

Les salons de l'aristocratie n'étaient ni exclusifs, ni hautains; ouverts à tout ce que la littérature avait de plus distingué, ils accueillirent les hommes de mérite avec une bienveillance particulière et une distinction qui illuminaient leurs travaux. Chez les duchesses de Duras, de Guiche, de la Trémouille, la comtesse du Cayla, la duchesse de Dino ou de Laval, la littérature, la poésie, étaient admises sur un pied de parfaite égalité avec les plus grands seigneurs.<sup>1</sup>

It is certainly true, though, that not anyone who wanted to be a guest in the salons would be invited, but well-known writers, artists, scientists, cartoonists were to be found among the habitués of the salons of the most famous aristocratic socialites. Even Hunt who questions Balzac's contacts with the aristocrats is emphatic on their non-exclusiveness:

The Parisian 'monde' was not exclusive or snobbish within certain limits. It could not even be termed respectable in a narrow sense, for respectability has never been a conspicuous social virtue in France. Many of the ladies who welcomed Balzac had dubious incidents in their past, but were

<sup>1</sup>Capefigue, M., La comtesse Du Cayla, Louis XVIII et les salons du Faubourg Saint-Germain sous la Restauration (Paris: Amyot, 1866), p. 106

obviously not ostracized on that account. Such great aristocrats as the Duc de Duras and the Duc de Fitz-James, with whom Balzac was soon to become friendly, were no more averse than journalist dandies like Lautour-Mézeray from spending an evening in the salon of the demi-mondaine Clympe Pelissier.<sup>1</sup>

The information of Lady Morgan, a British visitor who wrote an account of her travels in France during the Restoration, confirms the impossibility of aristocratic exclusiveness. She reports a discussion with a distinguished member of society to whom she addressed the question:

He replied--'Nothing of the kind. Every attempt of form such an influential côterie of exclusives (for it has been frequently attempted since the Restoration) has utterly failed. Some of your English ladies who have settled here for reasons it would be want of gallantry to discuss, and a certain number of diplomatic ladies and of the fair members of the emigration, who go upon their historic names, and the favoritism of their mothers in the court of Marie Antoinette, have endeavoured to set up an exclusive circle, with such pretences to superiority as France no longer acknowledges ... besides, the haute noblesse and their friends, the English fashionables and foreign diplomates have no means of competing with the immense wealth of the classe industrielle, and with the dynasties of the Bourse.<sup>2</sup>

The Countess d'Agoult who had spoken about the exclusiveness of the salons of old aristocrats especially after 1830, nevertheless admits that great talents like Balzac who served the interests of the ladies were admitted but not treated as equals, an assertion which runs counter to what Capefigue mentioned earlier. Mme d'Agoult, it should be remembered, is an aristocrat herself, and due regard must be paid to her

<sup>1</sup>Hunt, H.J., Honoré de Balzac, pgs. 42-43

<sup>2</sup>Morgan, Lady, France in 1829-1830, (New York: Harper, 1830), I, 218



assertion of aristocratic prejudice:

La vieille aristocratie de la cour, de la ville, de la province, qui faisait le fond de cette noble compagnie, admettait bien dans ses salons, par haute faveur, quelques hommes récents, mais seulement ceux qu'un grand zèle, de grands talents ou des circonstances heureuses, avaient mis à même de servir efficacement la cause des Bourbons, et toujours avec une nuance d'accueil.<sup>1</sup>

Balzac's first contacts with the aristocracy, however, go back much further than 1829, as they began during the period of his childhood and youth. His parents had bought a pleasant house at 29 Rue d'Indre-et-Loire as well as a farm in Tours. They lived not far from M. de Margonne, owner of the 'château de Saché' where Honoré used to visit frequently. The Margonne family were of the lower nobility, but both husband and wife Ann de Savary had the important particule to their name and possessed an estate at Saché. The close contact with this family was such that there was much gossip in the neighbourhood that Balzac's mother, who was then quite young and handsome, was involved in a liaison with M. de Margonne.

In April 1814, after Napoleon's defeat and exile to Elba, Balzac represented his father at a banquet and ball held in honour of the Duke d'Angoulême's triumphant entry into Tours. At the banquet, all the ci-devant nobility emerged from the châteaux and, according to Maurois, Balzac moved with rapture and delight among the crowd of women, observing the dazzling lights, the luxurious hangings and drapes, the exquisitely dressed women. In 1820, M. de Savary, the father-in-law of Jean de Mar-

<sup>1</sup>Agoult, Comtesse d', Mes Souvenirs, pgs. 257-258

gonne, was impressed with Balzac and invited him to the "château de Montcournour" in Touraine. The friendship with the Margonnes lasted throughout his life, and it was at Saché that Balzac wrote some of his finest novels.

In 1819, after the retirement of Balzac's father Bernard-François, the whole family moved outside Paris to Villeparisis where there were other aristocratic contacts, as Balzac's new neighbours were the Comte d'Orvilliers who lived in a modest château opposite the Balzac's house, and Gabriel de Berny and his wife Laure, daughter of Louise de Laborde, a former lady of the bed chamber to queen Marie Antoinette. Louis XVI and his wife had stood as god-parents for Laure who was "tenue sur les fonts baptismaux par la princesse de Chimay et le duc de Richelieu".<sup>1</sup>

Laure de Berny grew up in the intimacy of the court circles, and retained the polished manners of her court life. When the Balzacs met the de Bernys, Balzac encountered the first of the four aristocratic ladies in his personal life whose influence was going to be considerable both in his development as a man and as an artist. The other three ladies were the Duchesse d'Abrantès, the Marquise de Castries whose case will be considered separately, and Mme Hanska whom he later married.

Balzac found in Laure de Berny not only a mother and woman whom he desired and to whom he made love, but a vast storehouse of knowledge and information about the aristocracy of the Ancien Régime. According

<sup>1</sup>Brisville, Jean-Claude, 'Balzac le mal-aimé', Balzac in the series Collection Génies et Réalités (Paris: Hachette, 1959), p. 44

to Jean-Claude Brisville, Laure de Berny was "une personne de coeur, d'expérience et de bonnes manières, capable de répondre à la fois à son besoin d'affection, à son goût de l'histoire et à sa vanité sociale".<sup>1</sup>

Balzac's debt to Laure de Berny is considerable, as she educated his taste, criticised constructively his novels, enlarged his knowledge of the psychology of the aristocratic ladies, in addition to giving him precious information on the old aristocracy. In discussing the value of this contact with a living survivor of the old regime, Brisville is precise:

Que lui doit-il? A peu près tout — et d'abord son éducation, personne avant elle ne s'était soucié. Non content de lui apprendre à se 'tenir', à faire bonne figure dans la société de son temps, elle l'initia encore aux moeurs d'une civilisation — L'Ancien Régime — dont elle avait connu la fin. Par elle, Balzac entra dans un passé prestigieux qui lui serait resté inconnu dans sa réalité, si sa maîtresse ne s'était pas souvenu à haute voix.<sup>2</sup>

Balzac was not content to listen passively to her reports about the life, customs, manners and intrigues of the old regime, but, according to Maurois,<sup>3</sup> he questioned her endlessly about the world of the Ancien Régime, acutely conscious of the gulf between this god-daughter of a queen and people of the Marais, his father's friends.

While Balzac was benefitting from his contact with Laure de Berny, the liaison between himself and the Duchesse d'Abrantès, the wife of

<sup>1</sup>Brisville, Jean-Claude, p. 44

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 45

<sup>3</sup>Maurois, André, Prométhée ou la vie de Balzac, (Paris: Hachette, 1965), p. 78

General Junot, began about 1825 or 1826 at Versailles. When Laure discovered the relationship, she was in great anguish as she knew the attractions of a woman with whom even Napoleon was thought to have been in love. Balzac became her lover in 1829, and while he gave her some help with her memoirs, she was the source of a far greater help and influence for him by not only giving him information vital to the period of the Empire and Napoleon, but by introducing him into the great aristocratic salons of the time. The value of this living contact with the world of the Empire can be estimated by Balzac's rhapsodies:

Cette femme a vu Napoléon enfant, elle l'a vu jeune homme inconnu, elle l'a vu occuper des choses de la vie, puis elle l'a vu grandir s'élever et couvrir le monde de son nom! Elle est pour moi, comme un bien heureux qui viendrait s'asseoir à mes côtés après avoir vécu au ciel tout près de Dieu.<sup>1</sup>

The importance of these links which the duchess had with the past is such that Brisville cannot help feeling that it was Balzac's duty to fall in love with her: "Balzac se devait de tomber amoureux d'une femme qui avait de si beaux souvenirs".<sup>2</sup>

At the home of the duchess, Balzac met her son Napoléon d'Abrantes who became the prototype of La Palférine, one of Balzac's characters in Un Prince de Bohême, as well as other survivors of the Empire who, according to Maurois, "nourriront de leurs souvenirs et de leurs récits bien des pages de la Comédie Humaine".<sup>3</sup> When Versailles was abandoned

<sup>1</sup>Brisville, Jean-Claude, 'Balzac le mal-aimé', p. 46

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 46

<sup>3</sup>Maurois, André, Prométhée ou la vie de Balzac, p. 75

for L'Abbaye-aux-Bois where Mme d'Abrantès took up her new quarters in the last quarter of 1829, there were to be found other aristocratic socialites who were in semi-retreat from the hustle and bustle of Paris. Among these aristocratic ladies, according to Arrigon,<sup>1</sup> were Mme Récamier, Meses de Séran, de Gouvelle, d'Hautpoul, the Courteses Eugène d'Hautefeuille and de Brandi.

Balzac's penetration into the smart Parisian society began in the winter of 1829, thanks to the duchess d'Abrantès, and he was introduced to her friends who, like her, lived at l'Abbaye. He not only met Mme Récamier, but Mme Hamelin from whom "il peut entendre raconter mainte anecdote sur Montrond qui fut son amant, sur Talleyrand ou sur la comtesse Regnault de Saint-Jean-d'Angely".<sup>2</sup>

He was also introduced to the Princess Bagration and he became an habitué of her salon. The princess was the widow of General Bagration whom Tolstoy portrayed in War and Peace. Although ruined, she still possessed

... un nom et un titre qui conservaient leur prestige et éblouissaient Balzac. De ses années brillantes, elle gardait des amitiés utiles. Pour un jeune ambitieux, elle était une amie précieuse. Et, puis, pour réaliser l'oeuvre puissante que rêvait Balzac, quel trésor d'informations.

Her salon was still flourishing in its former brilliance, however, with

<sup>1</sup>Arrigon, L. J., Les années romantiques de Balzac (Paris: Perrin et Cie., 1927), p. 19

<sup>2</sup>Bardèche, Maurice, Balzac Romancier (Paris: Plon, 1940), p. 178

<sup>3</sup>Arrigon, pgs. 19-20

the most imposing members of the aristocracy flocking there. At her 'raouts' were to be found the duchess d'Aumont, the duchesse d'Esclignac, the duke and duchess Decazes, the countess Môle, the dukes de Guiche and de Mouchy, the duchess d'Otrante, the count de Rambuteau and ambassadors.

Mme Hamelin, whom Balzac also met through the duchess d'Abrantès, in her day used to entertain all the elegant socialites of the Directory, the Aigle, the Montronds, the d'Orsay, the Noailles and the Rastignacs. She still received guests in her salon, although she occupied the same building with her lover the count de Montrond. Her guests included Balzac, Arnault, Lucas de Montigny, Berryer, the countess Regnaud de Saint-Jean d'Angely. According to Maurois, Fortunée Hamelin could tell Balzac "mille aventures romanesques".<sup>1</sup> As for Sophie Gay who received the young romantics, Balzac was welcomed in her salon, and it is to her that he owed "un grand nombre d'anecdotes et de délicates observations. Elle avait naguère tenu tête à l'Empereur".<sup>2</sup>

At Madame Récamier's salon, Balzac found Chateaubriand, Lamar-tine and duchesses of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, as well as those of the Empire. He frequented other salons at this time, including those of Sophie Gay, the Countess Merlin, Olympe Pelissier, Baron Gérard, Mme Ancelot, Delphine de Girardin and others. At the countess Merlin's, he met the counts Destutt de Tracy and de Saint-Aulaire, Viscount Siméon, the marquis de Pastoret and de Custine, the duchess de Flaisance, count

<sup>1</sup>Maurois, André, Prométhée ou la vie de Balzac, p. 152

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 152

and countess d'Orsay, James de Rothschild, Villemain, Charles and Philippe Dupin and, according to Maurois, "les deux ou trois mille personnes qui se connaissent, se reçoivent et, parce qu'elles ont des loisirs, cultivent des sentiments".<sup>1</sup>

At Olympe Pelissier's salon, among the usual crowd of aristocratic celebrities, he met the duke de Duras, "le plus orgueilleux premier gentilhomme de la chambre de Charles X". He was similarly overwhelmed with aristocratic contacts at Baron Gérard's salon. The Parisian élite of the Institut, the Sorbonne, of literature, science, the arts were frequent guests. Not a stranger of distinction who visited Paris was not presented there. Mérimée, Stendhal, Cuvier, Baron Mareste, count Horace de Viel-Castel, Henri de Triquety, David d'Angers who later made a bust of Balzac, count Gamba and his sister "la blonde comtesse Guiccioli", Aurore and Adèle de Bellegarde and others. Balzac also met the duke de Fitz-James, the uncle of the marquise de Castries.

The period 1829 to 1832 is filled with Balzac's social success, a matter not to be wondered at since he had already become well known, if not famous, with the publication of Le dernier Chouan later changed to Les Chouans, La Physiologie du mariage, La Peau de Chagrin and other tales. Philippe Bertault relates that in 1832,

... Balzac était le célèbre écrivain que les maîtresses de maison ont honneur à recevoir dans leur salon, les directeurs de journaux et de revues à voir figurer dans leurs sommaires. Il se disait 'hébété de

<sup>1</sup>Maurois, André, Prométhée ou la vie de Balzac, p. 152

sujets et de demandes'. Il était devenu l'amant de la duchesse d'Abrantès, fréquentait chez Mme Récamier, la Princesse Bagration, la Comtesse Merlin, Mme de Girardin, Mme Hamelin, la Comtesse Guidoboni-Visconti, la Comtesse d'Agoult, la Marquise de Fitz-James.<sup>1</sup>

Balzac not only frequents the salon of Mme d'Agoult, but also that of Mme de la Bourdonnaye whom Mme d'Agoult mentioned as being among the genuinely old and exclusive aristocracy:

La marquise de la Bourdonnaie, par exemple, réunit chez elle, non seulement des gens de la société comme Mme de Chastellux, Mlle de Mackau et Mme Alfred Noailles, mais des femmes de lettres comme Mme Emile de Girardin et sa mère Sophie, des artistes comme Balzac, Jules Janin, Eugène Sue.<sup>2</sup>

Balzac was a social success before he began to portray in the Comédie Humaine the aristocracy of the Restoration. He was thoroughly accepted in the aristocratic society, even though there was some disdain for his plebeian origin. He occupied the "loge infernale" where could be found also, among others,

... le marquis de Podensac, le comte Germain, M. de Custine, le marquis de Vallette, le baron Vidal qui essaie de rétablir la mode des talons rouges, le général Claparède, Honoré de Balzac, le baron de Knyff qui a toujours sur lui une boîte à bijoux dont il offre comme des bonbons, et enfin le vicomte Walsh, le directeur de la Mode, très légitimiste, celui qu'on appelle 'le dernier des vicomtes', le seul littérateur parisien qui porte des bas de soie à jour.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Bertault, Philippe, Balzac, l'homme et l'oeuvre, p. 47

<sup>2</sup>Bertaut, Jules, Le Faubourg Saint-Germain sous l'Empire et sous la Restauration (Paris: Tallandier, 1949), p. 233

<sup>3</sup>Bertaut, Jules, Le Faubourg Saint-Germain, p. 70



Bardèche sums up the result of Balzac's adventure into the world of the grand monde in terms which show clearly that Balzac had sufficient social contacts to meet with, analyse and portray the aristocracy and their secret motives and ambitions, based on the models which he saw in real life and did not invent:

Toute une société qu'il ignorait jusqu'ici s'ouvre devant lui. Pour la première fois, il rencontre le monde, la vanité, les femmes, Comtesses et grandes dames qu'il ne connaissait que par les romans, il les voit, il les contemple comme un spectacle nouveau et prodigieusement intéressant. Les dandys ne sont plus pour lui la froide image d'Horace Landon. Il découvre leur vie, leurs calculs, les secrets de leur existence parfois précaire. Le 'grand monde' qui n'était pour lui qu'une expression littéraire, devient une réalité qu'il étudie avec passion, avec d'autant plus de passion qu'il commence par faire petite figure et passe inaperçu...<sup>1</sup>

The third female aristocratic contact who must be considered before attempting an assessment of the result of Balzac's excursions into the world of Parisian high society, is Mme Hanska. Born Rzewuska of a famous Polish family, she was married in 1819 to Count Wenceslas Hanski, a member of the Ukrainian nobility. The influence which she exercised on Balzac's work is considerable, and one of the "double but" proposed by Sophie de Korwin-Piotrowska in her long study Balzac et le Monde Slave is, in her words;

Rechercher patiemment dans l'oeuvre de Balzac, l'influence incontestable de l'Etrangère et, à travers elle, du monde slave. En plusieurs ouvrages, cette influence est certaine, visible; en quelques autres elle

<sup>1</sup>Bardèche, Maurice, Balzac Romancier, p. 178

est très probable.<sup>1</sup>

However, it is only to show what aristocratic contacts she gave Balzac as a result of their association that Mme Hanska is introduced at this point.

Her first letter to Balzac is dated February 28, 1832, and although he inserted a discreet answer to it in the Gazette de France, it was not noticed by Mme Hanska, and she felt obliged to write to him again on November 7, 1832. By the end of 1833, the friendship was well established as they met in Neuchâtel, Switzerland, that year. By the beginning of 1834, this contact was producing excellent social results, as Mme Hanska's sister, the Countess Potocka, had advised him to pay his respects to countess Apponyi, the wife of the Austrian ambassador.

The Apponyis had been in Paris since 1826, and were frequent hosts to all the fashionable world of Paris at the many brilliant receptions and dance luncheons which they gave. Balzac was later invited by countess Apponyi to call, and he became an habitué of her salon. He mingled freely with legitimists as well as with socialites from Louis-Philippe's circle. He became such a great social success that he even dared to absent himself from her salon, a matter which greatly concerned the countess Apponyi, as she complained about it to countess Potocka. In a letter dated May 10, 1834, the countess Marie Potocka

<sup>1</sup>Korwin-Piotrowska, Sophie de, Balzac et le monde slave (Paris: Champion, 1933), p. 14

indicates to what extent Balzac's visits were appreciated:

Êtes-vous de retour dans votre élégant ermitage? Vous arriva-t-il de le quitter parfois en faveur de Madame d'Apponyi qui se plaint de vous et désespère de ses moyens de séduction pour vous attirer chez elle? Voici le moment de ses déjeuners dansants: vous y verrez tout Paris avec ses jolies femmes.<sup>1</sup>

The advice to resume his visits to the Apponyis given to Balzac by the countess was unnecessary, as in Le Journal of count Rodolphe of March 8, it is reported that "Balzac avait assisté à une soirée à l'ambassade d'Autriche et s'était entretenu avec le duc de Laval de magnétisme et de somnambulisme".<sup>2</sup> It is not surprising that Mme Apponyi was anxious to get Balzac to continue frequenting her salon, as he was a very knowledgeable person who could discourse on any conceivable topic with other guests. It is at such "soirées" that he developed his knowledge of the great ladies of the aristocracy from frequent contacts with them.

Not only France, but Europe also furnished him with an opportunity to observe and study the aristocracy. In 1835, when he decided to spend a few days in Vienna, he called at Schloss Weinheim, near Heidelberg, and Prince Alfred Von Schonburg introduced him to Lady Ellenborough who is considered to be in part the model for Lady Dudley in the Comédie Humaine. The Viennese aristocracy overwhelmed him with hospitality. He was received by Prince Metternich, about whom he had heard from Mme d'Abrantès and the marquise de Castries. He was entrusted by

<sup>1</sup>Balzac, H. de, Correspondance; (2 vols.; Paris: Garnier-Frères 1960), II, 496

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 496, (footnote 1)

the marquise with a private message for the Prince in connection with his grandson Roger Von Aldenburg. Balzac not only got on well with the Prince, but the Princess Mélanie Von Metternich, the wife of the Prince, found him "simple et bon".<sup>1</sup>

During his Vienna tour he was conducted over the field of Wagram by Prince Felix Zu Schwarzenberg and he was entertained by the Schonburgs and Kisseleffs. He even received a signet ring from Baron Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall. Astolphe de Custine who was in Vienna at the same time wrote to Sophie Gay about the social success of Balzac.<sup>2</sup>

In 1837, when he revisited Italy to attend to business matters involving the Guidoboni-Viscontis, he was armed with more letters of introduction than he could use. Among them were letters from the contessa Sanseverino to her brother the Principe Alfonso Porcia, and their friend Clara Maffei. The Principe and the contessa Bolognini were kind to him, and a carriage and their loge at the Scala were put at his disposal.

#### BALZAC'S TALENTS AS AN ARTIST

To describe the grandes dames with the historical and artistic method that Balzac intended, he required not only an intimate knowledge of society, especially about what Ramon Fernandez calls certains représentants typiques du monde noble<sup>3</sup> which he was certainly

<sup>1</sup>Correspondance, II, 678 (footnote 2)

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pgs. 634-5 (footnote 2)

<sup>3</sup>Fernandez, p. 120

able to get from his social contacts since 1829, but he was also required to possess certain qualities as an artist - subtlety of analysis, a fine perception, and a gift of understanding feminine motives and sensibility.

It has already been shown how wide and varied were his contacts with the aristocracy both on the French and the European scene. To add to the confidences which he received from his personal contacts is the important aspect of his elaborate documentation. Balzac's general knowledge was extensive. Léon Gozlan calls him the human encyclopaedia, "l'être encyclopédique",<sup>1</sup> and Henry James mentions that he has an opinion on everything, in heaven and on earth, and a consistent theory of the universe which was ever ready for service. Quoting Taine, James adds: "We can think of no other mind that has stood ready to deliver itself on quite so many subjects".<sup>2</sup>

In preparing for his historical task, Balzac read voraciously. Apart from the numberless books, periodicals and other material quoted in the Comédie Humaine and which cannot be definitely traced, Marc Blanchard quotes at least 350 authors used by Balzac in his wide reading. To this number must be added the newspapers, an important reading material, for, as M. P.G. Castex shows in his introduction to Le Cabinet des Antiques, an actual "affaire judiciaire" formed the point de départ of

<sup>1</sup>Gozlan, Léon, Balzac en pantoufles (Paris: Horizons de France, 1962), p. 16

<sup>2</sup>James, Henry, French Poets and Novelists, p. 104

Balzac's novel, a factor which indicates, as we pointed out with Eugenie Grandet,<sup>1</sup> that the vraisemblable in Balzac's work rests on the solid foundation of le vrai.

Among the 350 authors mentioned by Blanchard, there is a distinct preference shown for the work of historians and memorialists: "On y voit déjà la prédilection de Balzac pour l'histoire et les histoires—plus de 50 historiens et mémorialistes—".<sup>2</sup> He is familiar with Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Theocritus, Pausanias, Plotinus, Virgil, Horace, Tacitus and others. From his reading list, Balzac appears familiar with the literature of every continent: "Montesquieu, Lavater, Gibbon, Shakespeare, Hobbes, Jean-Paul Richter, sont des auteurs qu'il étudiait volontiers".<sup>3</sup>

According to H. Nicolle:

Sa fécondité prend sa source dans une observation profonde et une érudition inépuisable. On pourrait pour le savoir, comparer M. de Balzac à un bénédictin. Ces moines s'attachaient à une seule branche des connaissances humaines: M. de Balzac les embrasse toutes.<sup>4</sup>

Balzac's quest for documentation underlines the historical method which requires description of places and people to be as accurate as possible, regardless of the time period concerned. According to Bertault: "Il n'étudiait pas seulement les lieux, mais il se documen-

<sup>1</sup>Ibid. p. 23

<sup>2</sup>Blanchard, Marc, Témoignages et jugements sur Balzac, p. 80

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 127

<sup>4</sup>Nicolle, H., Les Romans et les Revues, Musée des Familles (Paris, 1941) p. 26, as quoted in Marc Blanchard, Témoignages et Jugements, p. 88

tait sur les époques historiques, sur les questions scientifiques dont il voulait traiter".<sup>1</sup> Not only did he study sites and gather information about historic epochs and scientific questions, but when he wrote La Recherche de L'Absolu in which chemistry was to have an important place, he consulted two members of the Academy of sciences and read all kinds of scientific material. In a letter to Eve Hanska dated October 19, 1834, Balzac describes this documentation:

Deux membres de l'Académie des sciences m'ont appris la chimie pour laisser le livre vrai scientifiquement. Ils m'ont fait remanier mes épreuves jusqu'à dix à douze fois. Il a fallu lire Berzélius, travailler à se tenir dans la science et travailler son style, ne pas ennuyer de chimie les froids lecteurs de France en faisant un livre dont l'intérêt se base sur la chimie, et il n'y en a pas, en effet huit pages en tout dans les quatre cents pages du livre.<sup>2</sup>

Balzac questioned tirelessly people who had lived under the Ancien Régime like his friend M. de Villers, "ancien abbé de Cour et ancien Maître de l'oratoire du Comte d'Artois, comme la mère de Mme de Berny".<sup>3</sup> He was no longer satisfied with reading the memoirs of Vidocq, a former convict who later became Chief of the Sureté, he had to have direct contacts, to hold conversations with him, and Jacques Collin, alias Vautrin, emerges with certain characteristics of Vidocq.

But a far more striking example of documentation can be advanced in the case of Henri Sanson, the public executioner. According to

<sup>1</sup>Bertault, Philippe, Balzac, p. 54

<sup>2</sup>Balzac, Lettres à l'Etrangère, I, 193

<sup>3</sup>Bertault, Philippe, Balzac, p. 54

Arrigon, "afin de se documenter, Balzac souhaitait rencontrer Sanson".<sup>1</sup>

Balzac's sister Laure Surville relates that M. Appert, the Inspector general of prisons and a friend of Balzac, arranged the visit, and in a brief description of Balzac's encounter with Sanson, one gets a good impression of Balzac's method to arrive at the truth:

Balzac, raconte Paul Lacroix, l'interrogeait. Balzac le forçait à fouiller dans les coins les plus sombres de sa mémoire. Sanson racontait aussi l'exécution des Girondins, celle de Charlotte Corday, celle de Robespierre, etc. Il ne parlait pas de Louis XVI, ni de Marie-Antoinette. Balzac lui demanda impitoyablement de retracer les derniers moments de ces augustes victimes.<sup>2</sup>

There is no end to the reports about his method of garnering material. Some critics like Champfleury considered him a tireless investigator, and he was so admired by contemporary critics for his exactness and his analytical method, that Bernard Weinberg considers him responsible for directing the novel away from romanticism and towards realism, as well as being the founder of the realistic school.<sup>3</sup>

One result of Balzac's documentation is the fact that the material he gathers about persons in his historical reading finds its way into his work. In Le Père Goriot, Eugène de Rastignac has an aunt named Mme de Marcillac in the Provinces on whom he relies to secure an introduction to Mme de Beauséant. According to Hervé Donnard, Balzac

<sup>1</sup>Arrigon, L.J. Les années romantiques de Balzac, p. 28

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 29

<sup>3</sup>Weinberg, Bernard, p. 73



"a eu en mains les Souvenirs de Marcillac, car ils sont indiqués sur une facture de libraire datée de 1828".<sup>1</sup> To portray Louis XVIII in Le Bal de Sceaux and in Le Lys dans la vallée, Balzac did not proceed by guesswork, but he utilised "des sources livresques, mais, plus encore, à notre avis, les confidences des aristocrates qu'il a rencontrées en 1829 dans le salon de la comtesse Merlin, et surtout dans celui de la princesse Bagration".<sup>2</sup>

The conclusion which can be drawn from Balzac's efforts at documentation, is that it vouches for his integrity as an historian who is preoccupied with the search for truth. In fact, Philippe Bertault reports that numerous scholars and archeologists like De Contades, Etienne Aubrée, Maurice Serval, Albert Arrault and Fray-Fournier have verified the exactness of the descriptions of sites, monuments, houses and streets of Alençon, Fougères, Tours and Touraine, Limoges, etc.<sup>3</sup> When Balzac departs from copying reality, he is still vraisemblable, for he would gather his information from specialists or persons competent to describe places or people.

The raw material for the historical study of the aristocracy was available, and we have seen that Balzac possessed it. To use the material properly requires intelligence, and Balzac, perhaps, more than

<sup>1</sup>Donnard. Hervé, Les réalités économiques et sociales dans la Comédie Humaine (Paris: Armand Collin, 1961), p. 73 (Footnote 2)

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 73

<sup>3</sup>Bertault, Philippe, p. 53

any other novelist at the time, possessed the type of intellect capable of using material so tremendous in quantity and so bewildering in diversity. E.C. Green is of the opinion that the use of such raw material would have struck dismay in any but a Balzac "who alone possessed the type of intellect capable of mastering it, a mind in which the analytic and synthetic faculties were balanced to a nice degree, and splendidly reinforced by a peerless imagination".<sup>1</sup>

To supplement his intelligence and his documentation, mention must be made of Balzac's powers of observation and intuition, and here, perhaps, more than anywhere else, will emerge Balzac's uniqueness. The origin of his ability to observe people and details goes back to his lonely childhood. He complained of his moral abandonment by his mother in his childhood, but blessed her indifference, as it had accustomed him early in life to find pleasures in solitude, observing closely the actions of insects. His faculty for observation is born from suffering, and Félix Davin emphasizes this: "Cependant, ne faut-il pas avoir souffert aussi, pour si bien peindre la souffrance?"<sup>2</sup>

When Félix de Vandenesse in Le Lys dans la vallée returns to Paris after a stay in the provinces, he is able to notice the hypocrisy in the speech, manner and attitude of his brother Charles, especially in his introductions to the socialites of the grand monde. Félix has

<sup>1</sup>Green, F.C., French Novelists from the Revolution to Proust (London: J.M. Dent, 1931), p. 181

<sup>2</sup>Davin, Félix, preface to the Etudes de Moeurs, L'oeuvre de Balzac, XV, 140

acquired sharpened powers of observation as a result of suffering:

Sans les malheurs de mon enfance, j'aurais pu prendre sa vanité de protecteur pour de l'amitié fraternelle: mais la solitude morale produit les mêmes effets que la solitude terrestre: le silence permet d'y apprécier les plus légers retentissements, et l'habitude de se réfugier en soi-même développe une sensibilité dont la délicatesse révèle les moindres nuances des affections qui nous touchent. (I, 413)

When Balzac, like Félix, went into society, his powers of observation were sharpened to an extraordinary degree. He was a bourgeois and, as Mme d'Agoult indicated, there was always a "nuance d'accueil" in the reception of persons who had no aristocratic blood. In spite of Balzac's brilliant conversation, wit and success in the salons, despite his regular attendance at the raouts and soirées, there were still men and women who kept aloof either from envy, prejudice, or both. He was too intelligent, however, too sensitive not to guess what some people thought of his manners and looks: "Ces gens là m'ont fait comprendre Rousseau".<sup>1</sup>

As a result of aristocratic disdain resulting in suffering for him, Balzac's powers of observation were considerably enhanced. He himself relates this to Mme Hanska:

J'ai été pourvu d'une grande puissance d'observation, parce que j'ai été jeté à travers toutes sortes de professions involontairement. Puis, quand j'allais dans les hautes régions de la société, je souffrais par tous les points de l'âme où la souffrance arrive et il n'y a que les âmes méconnues et les pauvres qui sachent observer, parce que tout les froisse et que l'observation résulte d'une souffrance. La mémoire

<sup>1</sup>Lettres à l'Etrangère, I, 20

n'enregistre bien que ce qui est douleur.<sup>1</sup>

Far from being a disadvantage as Lanson implied in his criticism on Balzac, his bourgeois origin became one of his greatest assets, as circumstances helped Balzac to look more closely at the aristocrats than he would normally have done, a fact which Leszec Kolakowski brings out: "'la bonne société' le reçoit... mais ne le traite pas comme l'un des siens. Heureusement! cela lui permet de l'observer de biais afin de découvrir la non-évidence de ses évidences."<sup>2</sup>

The Duchesse de Dino, the niece of Talleyrand, who had invited Balzac to dinner in 1836 following a visit he made to the Prince who, at that time, was staying in the château de Rochecotte, in Touraine, describes a highly significant but normal attitude of Balzac in observing the aristocracy: "Il nous a tous examinés et observés de la manière la plus minutieuse, M. de Talleyrand surtout".<sup>3</sup>

What escapes the close, penetrating eye of Balzac the observer, is divined by his keen intuition. To the acts and gestures of the aristocrats whom he observes and studies, he applies an analysis so intuitive that he discovers behind the small, apparently insignificant details, a host of significant factors which reveal motives. This intuition also allows him to go behind motives to discover the systems

<sup>1</sup>Lettres à l'Etrangère, pgs 15-16

<sup>2</sup>Kolakowski, Leszec, as quoted in André Maurois Prométhée, p. 165

<sup>3</sup>Bertault, Philippe, p. 57

in the aristocratic caste of society which regulate the lives of its adherents, the iron law of the social group which can only be broken if one is prepared for ostracism. The Duchesse de Langeais cannot yield to the sexual desires of Montriveau because she is a prisoner of her caste. When she breaks the iron law of this caste by openly avowing her feelings, she is obliged to renounce society for solitude like Mme de Beauséant.

But Balzac's intuition is reinforced by a quality which he possessed and which Gautier has called the gift of avatar. According to Gautier, who know Balzac well, Balzac, like Vishnu, the Indian god, had the gift of avatar, that is to say, of incarnating himself into different bodies, and of living in them as long as he wished. The number of the avatars of Vishnu is fixed at ten, but those of Balzac are countless.<sup>1</sup> What is more, he had the power to incite them at will.

And Gautier adds:

Quoique cela semble singulier à dire en plein dix-neuvième siècle Balzac fut un 'voyant'. Son mérite d'observateur, sa perspicacité de physiologiste, son génie d'écrivain ne suffisent pas pour expliquer l'infinie variété des deux ou trois mille types qui jouent un rôle plus ou moins important dans la Comédie Humaine. Il ne les copiait pas, il les vivait idéalement, revêtait leurs habits, contractait leurs habitudes, s'entourait de leur milieu, était eux-mêmes tout le temps nécessaire. De là viennent ces personnages soutenus, logiques, ne se démentant et ne s'oubliant jamais, doués d'une existence intime et profonde... Un véritable sang rouge circule dans leurs veines au lieu de l'encre qu'infusent à leurs créations les auteurs ordinaires.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Gautier, Théophile, Portraits contemporains (Paris: Charpentier, 1914), p. 63

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 64

Balzac had a tremendous capacity for immersing and saturating himself in his characters, and from Gautier's observation, Balzac's special gifts enabled him to transport himself, as it were, into the personality and material envelope of the aristocrats. Balzac himself mentions this amazing gift in Facino Cane. One evening, while walking and observing a workman and his family who were discussing a play and arguing about their problems in life, Balzac absorbed himself in their personality, in their "âmes", even in their bodies:

En entendant ces gens, je pouvais épouser leur vie, je me sentais leurs guenilles sur le dos, je marchais les pieds dans leurs souliers percés, leurs désirs, leurs besoins, tout passait dans mon âme, ou mon âme passait dans la leur... Quitter ses habitudes, devenir un autre que soi par l'ivresse des facultés morales, et jouer ce jeu à volonté, telle était ma distraction. A quoi dois-je ce don? Est-ce une seconde vue? Est-ce une des qualités dont l'abus mènerait à la folie? Je n'ai jamais recherché les causes de cette puissance; je la possède, je m'en sers, voilà tout. (II, 860-861)

Balzac must be taken at his word, even if Albert Béguin did not say, as he did, that Balzac "sait précisément de quoi il parle". (II, 854) Philippe Bertault finds it easy to believe that Balzac was psychic, for he was "doué par les Fées de facultés psychiques spéciales qui lui permettaient la vue intuitive".<sup>1</sup> Marie-Jeanne Durry sees the advantage of this gift, for it gives Balzac's psychological descriptions and analyses of the feminine heart a remarkable authenticity: "Les amours dans la Comédie Humaine, sont à la fois si multiples et d'une telle authenticité que tout lecteur est soudain rappelé par elles à ses propres

<sup>1</sup>Bertault, Philippe, p. 63

amours. Car Balzac possède le don presque monstrueux d'être à la fois lui et les autres".<sup>1</sup> It is no doubt as a result of such authenticity, originating from his probable gift of avatar that female readers of Balzac's day were amazed that he could understand the feminine mind so well.

Because of Balzac's special talents, therefore, and his opportunity to meet with the great ladies of the aristocracy, he is in, perhaps, a unique position to faithfully portray the grandes dames in his work. If his superiority in description and portraiture are generally recognized, his female characters stand out more for their authenticity. He painted women in every possible situation. He not only knew them but he wrote for them. He said what they themselves did not dare to say. He divined their most clever hypocrisies. The elaborate falsehoods invented by feminine, aristocratic ingenuity to conceal their inner selves, he detected and analysed them until he discovered the truth. He was not misled by fawning smiles, nor by the elegant dress of women. He is like Bianchon, the ubiquitous, medical doctor of the Comédie Humaine who also knows the human heart. According to Bianchon: "Mon cher, ces femmes de qui vous dites: 'C'est des anges!', moi, je les ai vues déshabillées des petites mines sous lesquelles elles couvrent leurs âmes... Elles ne sont pas belles". (L'Interdiction, VI, 1190)

Balzac's ability to understand women was certainly very remarkable, and Maurice Bardèche even speculates that Balzac may have been a

<sup>1</sup>Durry, Marie-Jeanne, 'L'Amour dans la Comédie Humaine', Balzac Collection Génies et Réalités (Paris: Hachette, 1959), pgs. 199-200

woman in some previous life:

Il possédait ce sixième sens des femmes qui leur avait fait trouver leur route instinctivement parmi les coupons aussi bien que parmi les hommes. A mille détails d'une audace extrême, il semblait qu'il eût été femme dans quelque vie antérieure.<sup>1</sup>

Balzac's interest in the female sex was recognized by his contemporaries. Sainte-Beuve is under no illusions about Balzac's knowledge of women about whom he knows "beaucoup de choses... leurs secrets sensibles ou sensuels". Even Jules Janin whom Balzac once described as "un gros homme qui mord tout le monde", in spite of the usual malice to be found in his criticism, makes an indirect praise of Balzac's pre-occupation with women:

C'est M. de Balzac qui a inventé les femmes. Dieu, que de femmes sont sorties du crâne de M. de Balzac! La femme pleine de coeur, la femme sans coeur, la femme de trente ans, la femme de quinze ans, la femme veuve, la femme mariée, il n'est question que de femmes chez M. de Balzac! On n'y voit que mousselines blanches, chapeaux roses, blondes tombantes, rubans de soie, ablutions du soir, mystères de l'âme, soupirs, regards, déclarations, silences. M. de Balzac joue aux propos interrompus avec la femme, il la peint, il la dépeint, il la re-peint; il présente les femmes sous tous les aspects, il les habille et les déshabille, il leur sert de femme de chambre, il est leur valet de pied, il porte la queue de leur manteau, il les contemple dans leur sommeil.<sup>2</sup>

Balzac's two great ambitions were to be famous and to be loved by a beautiful, aristocratic lady, a passion which he gave to Raphael de

<sup>1</sup>Bardèche, M., Une lecture de Balzac (Paris: Les sept couleurs, 1964), pgs. 269-70

<sup>2</sup>Jules Janin, as quoted in Bardèche, Maurice, Une lecture de Balzac, p. 270



Valentin. When Raphael rejects the love of Pauline for the aristocrat in Foedora, it is Balzac who has transposed himself. He is intoxicated by the distinction of her manners and her "sourire fin". "Quand elle met une barrière entre elle et le monde, elle flatte en moi toutes les vanités, qui sont la moitié de l'amour". (VII, 1072) Because of Balzac's ambition to be loved by a duchess, an ambition which continued year after year unsatisfied, he set about the task of observing and studying them, even more than he did men. "Mon unique passion, toujours trompée m'a fait observer les femmes, me les a fait étudier, connaître et chérir..."<sup>1</sup> This admiration, observation and study of women led to Balzac's superiority in understanding and portraying them. His sympathy for the plight of women in society makes him show in what respects they are victims either of the Civil or the Penal Code, or to what extent their status is inferior to their husband's. Léon Gozlan is therefore right when he says that "il a pris le parti héroïque de les présenter toujours comme victimes".<sup>2</sup>

His delicacy and his kindness, his good nature attested to by Gautier and his other friends, enabled Balzac to appreciate people and to mitigate the harshness of judgments even when circumstances dictated an opposite course. His genius certainly gave him a fine sensibility and a certain delicacy. His understanding of women must therefore be considered one of his most remarkable qualifications as an historian of

<sup>1</sup>Lettres a l'Etrangere, I, 16

<sup>2</sup>Gozlan, Léon, Balzac en pantoufles, pgs. 18-19

the grandes dames, for it is one thing to observe and analyse, it is another to understand. To attempt to understand men is to approach a problem which bristles with difficulties, but to achieve an understanding of women and to obtain their praise, is, without doubt, more than a feat. Balzac was very likely thinking of himself when Louise de Macumer in Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées wrote to Renée de l'Estorade that only a man of genius can understand women:

Evidemment la sensibilité se trouve en raison de la puissance des organisations intérieures, et l'homme de génie est alors le seul qui se rapproche de nos délicatesses: il entend, devine, comprend la femme; il l'élève sur les ailes de son désir contenu par les timidités du sentiment. (VI, 169)

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ENCOUNTER WITH MADAME DE CASTRIES

The Vicomte Spoelberch de Louvenjoul in Une page perdue de H. de Balzac, has estimated that Balzac received from his female admirers, the astonishing number of twelve thousand letters. While Marcel Bouteron laments the loss of almost all of these letters except for those collected in the series Cahiers Balzaciens, those of the Marquise de Castries are among the few of real importance which have survived to document Balzac's popularity with women who have had a remarkable tendency to see themselves in many of the female characters he portrays. Not only does Bouteron add that "ce sont les femmes qui ont fait le grand, l'immense succès du romancier de la Femme de Trente ans et de la Femme abandonnée...<sup>1</sup>, but he points to the fact that Balzac observed to Mme

<sup>1</sup>Bouteron, Marcel, preface to Les Cahiers Balzaciens (Paris: Cité des livres, 1925), III, v

Hanska that seventy-two women have had the impertinence to recognise themselves in the character of Feodora.

The encounter with Mme de Castries is important in two respects. It gave Balzac both a contact on a personal and, in many respects, an intimate level, with a truly grande dame whose aristocratic ancestry dated back to the eleventh century, and it afforded him an entrée into the great salons frequented by her relatives and friends. The second importance concerns the oft repeated charge that Balzac in La Duchesse de Langeais revenged himself on Mme de Castries after the rupture in their relationship at Geneva, Switzerland, in October 1832, a charge which, if substantiated, would tend to cast doubts on Balzac's impartiality as an historian and impair his claims of objectivity. The severe condemnation of the aristocracy made in the early part of La Duchesse de Langeais in what Balzac himself calls an "aperçu semi-politique", might tend to lend strength to such charges if it is true that the novel is a work of vengeance.

In October 1831, Balzac received at Saché, the home of the Margonnes, the first letter from Mme de Castries which was addressed to him simply as "M. de Balzac, à Paris". In her second letter dated February 1832, she revealed her true identity. She was the Marquise (later Duchesse) de Castries of unquestionable aristocratic rank. She was born Claire-Clémence-Henriette-Claudine de Maillé, and was a member of the most exclusive circle in the exclusive Faubourg Saint-Germain.

In the last years of the 18th Century, one of the finest "hôtels" and, perhaps, the most aristocratic in the Faubourg, was that of the

Ducs de Maillé, a noble and illustrious family from Touraine,

apparentée aux plus anciennes de la vieille noblesse. Quelques-uns des membres de cette famille ducale, étaient attachés aux services de la cour à Versailles; et tel fut leur dévouement, que, les princes, étant sortis de France, les Maillé ne les abandonnèrent point, et durant l'émigration, on vit, près du Comte d'Artois, le duc, son ami qui devint un des gentilshommes du prince, lorsqu'il fut le roi Charles X.<sup>1</sup>

None of the doctrines of the Revolution found an echoing chord in a Maillé. There was no compromising solution for them between their principles of absolute monarchy on the one hand, and constitutional monarchy on the other. The grand-father of Mme de Castries, Charles de Maillé, baron d'Entrammes, was lieutenant-general and gentilhomme of the bedchamber of the Comte d'Artois, later to become Charles X, and was hereditary duke by royal decree since 1784. Two members of the Maillé family had the doubtful distinction of perishing on the scaffold during the Revolution. Not only was the ancestry of Mme de Castries unimpeachably aristocratic on her father's side, but from her mother Henriette-Victoire de Fitz-James, the marquise descended from the royal house of the Stuarts.

Balzac had already met the Duke de Fitz-James, the uncle of the marquise, in the salon of Olympe Pellissier and, together with Berryer, the duke was among the active leaders of the legitimist Party, having the support of a newspaper Le Rénovateur to support their cause. Perhaps it was he who first mentioned Balzac's name to Mme de Castries.

As the friendship between the marquise and Balzac became stronger

<sup>1</sup>Stenger, Gilbert, Grandes dames du XIXe siècle, p. 59

in 1832, by May he had already progressed to the stage where he was paying her daily visits. His growing friendship with the marquise gave him important social contacts, as he was brought into a closer relationship with the Duke de Fitz-James. The Duke used to frequent the great salons of Paris where could be found

l'aristocratie la plus pure et la plus orthodoxe. Vous eussiez cou-doyé les Vêrac, les Sérent, les Vaudreuil, nommé gouverneur du Louvre, les Beaurepaire, les Noailles, les Choiseul-Praslin, les d'Harcourt... le jeune Sosthène de LaRouchefoucauld l'élève de l'abbé Legris-Duval, et le marquis d'Ecqueville et le vicomte de Dampmartin, et du Bouchage et la Bourdonnaye, et de Castelbajac et de Puymaurin, ces deux derniers députés de Toulouse.<sup>1</sup>

When Balzac came closer to the Duke as a result of the relationship with Madame de Castries, he became an habitué of the salons where he was introduced by the Duke and where he met and received the adoration of beautiful, titled women. According to Stenger, Balzac, like Chateaubriand, became the idol of the great ladies:

Alors, comme jadis Chateaubriand, elles l'entouraient et s'humiliaient devant lui. Balzac se laissait faire. Il aimait cet encensement des salons où l'avait introduit son ami le duc de Fitz-James, parce qu'il en tirait avantage... Que ces enflures outrées, ces admirations excessives pour l'écrivain, aient produit l'engouement des coquettes, il faut le croire; et quelques-unes, les plus légères, les plus faibles, les plus entraînées dans le tourbillon mondain et, de ce nombre, notre belle marquise, cédèrent, dit-on, à l'éclat de ce triomphateur adoré déjà par des rivales à qui elles l'enlevèrent.<sup>2</sup>

From May to September, 1832, the friendship progressed into pas-

<sup>1</sup>Stenger, Gilbert, Grandes dames, p. 65

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pgs. 72-73

sionate adoration on Balzac's part, and into warm affection by Mme de Castries. On a visit to Switzerland, she pressed him into joining her at Aix-les-Bains where she registered as Mme de Balzac. Although he did not succeed in persuading her to become his mistress, he accepted her invitation to visit Italy. Nevertheless, at Geneva, although it is now believed by some scholars to have been at Aix,<sup>1</sup> there was a rupture in their relationship and Balzac departed for France on October 19, 1832. No one knows what caused the rupture, and there can only be speculations. According to Hunt, "no precise details are known"<sup>2</sup> In 1965, at a conference of Balzac scholars held in Paris, Annie Ubersfeld speculates:

... un événement que nous ignorons, parce que Balzac ne s'est pas expliqué sur ce point, mais qui est peut-être un refus brutal de la marquise... mais rien n'est certain, ni les aveux de Balzac ni le ton des lettres ultérieures de Mme de Castries, ne vient confirmer cette hypothèse.<sup>3</sup>

Balzac, it appears, was deeply humiliated and grieved at the behaviour of the marquise at Geneva, and André Billy relates that when Balzac was informed by the marquise that she would not be his mistress, "il redescendit vers la ville en pleurant".<sup>4</sup> All of this must, of course, be speculation.

<sup>1</sup>Correspondance, II, 153 (footnote 1)

<sup>2</sup>Hunt, H.J., Balzac, p. 56

<sup>3</sup>Ubersfeld, Annie, 'La Crise de 1831-1833' in "Colloque", Balzac, Europe (Paris: Les éditeurs réunis, Janvier-Février, 1965), p. 64

<sup>4</sup>Billy, André, Vie de Balzac (2 vols.; Paris: Flammarion, 1944), p. 263

The events which succeeded this rupture have been variously interpreted by critics, especially in the light of the Confession inédite which Balzac wrote very shortly after the incident at Geneva for insertion in Le Médecin de Campagne on which he was working. In the 'Confession', all the pangs of humiliation, sorrow and disappointment are laid bare. Referring no doubt to the actions of the marquise and describing the thoughts which assailed him after the incident, he wrote in the "Confession":

La pauvre femme, toute faible qu'elle se dise, a tué une âme heureuse. Elle a flétri toute une vie. Les autres sont plus charitables; ils tuent promptement. Pendant quelques heures le démon de la vengeance m'a tenté. Je pouvais la faire haïr du monde entier, la livrer à tous les regards, attachée à un poteau d'infamie. Mais il eût été plus généreux de la tuer d'un coup que de la tuer tous les jours et dans chaque siècle. Je ne l'ai pas fait. J'ai fait la magnifique aumône de mon silence. Elle ne méritait rien; ni pitié, ni amour, ni vengeance même.<sup>1</sup>

Critics like H.J. Hunt, André Billy, even Marcel Bouteron, have spoken of Balzac's "vengeance" which they say he exacted in writing La Duchesse de Langeais to compensate himself for the atrocious behaviour of the marquise at Geneva. According to Hunt, "he decided to avenge himself on Henriette by telling the story of Antoinette de Langeais in Ne touchez pas à la hache, whose title was later changed to La Duchesse de Langeais".<sup>2</sup> André Billy takes the same stand: "Le refus, dont à Genève elle le cingla, ne pouvait s'expier. De là, La Duchesse de Langeais... de là, ces retours de haine qu'il éprouva contre elle jusqu'à

<sup>1</sup>Guyon, Bernard, La création littéraire chez Balzac (Paris: Armand Collin, 1951), pgs. 254-255

<sup>2</sup>Hunt, H.J., Balzac, p. 56

la fin".<sup>1</sup> Even the knowledgeable Marcel Bouteron speaks of "cette vengeance qu'il savoura, recuite en 1834, lorsqu'il écrivit La Duchesse de Langeais".<sup>2</sup>

The simple fact is that Balzac refused to insert the confession in the Médecin de Campagne. The contents of it show that he had yielded to the impulse of his momentary fury to lay bare his heart. Critics see in the rejection of the confession by Balzac, not the refusal of the author to use details which, as he himself said in the confession, would affect the person for centuries to come; that the best vengeance was no vengeance; that a self-respecting man could retire into a decent silence, but that he was reserving some of the details of the confession for insertion in La Duchesse de Langeais. Balzac himself relates that he was only tempted for a few hours to exact vengeance. "Pendant quelques heures le démon de la vengeance m'a tenté", and this statement of the brief duration of his anger is in keeping with Balzac's hasty nature, quick to anger, but quick to forget. Bardèche alludes to this when he calls the confession "Une réaction trop prompte et trop proche de la souffrance".<sup>3</sup>

Balzac, however, was not vindictive. Ne Touchez pas à la hache was published in 1834, and to wait until then to show his feelings harshly, when the incident of the rupture took place since October, 1832, is

<sup>1</sup>Billy, André, Vie de Balzac, p. 167

<sup>2</sup>Cahier balzacien, (Paris: Lapina, 1928), VI, xxx

<sup>3</sup>Bardèche, Maurice, Balzac Romancier, p. 289



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to show vindictiveness, a view which is contradicted by the reports of persons who knew him well. Théophile Gautier, George Sand, Lamartine and others all attest to Balzac's good nature. According to Gautier, Balzac would load him with abuse over some matter and just as quickly forget it, or else immediately lie down on his floor and snore peacefully away. Even though he was angry with George Sand for not seeing the merits of Les Contes drolatiques and told her: "Vous n'êtes qu'une bête", she reports: "Mais nous n'en fûmes que de meilleurs amis, tant Balzac était véritablement naïf et bon".<sup>1</sup> Lamartine is overwhelmed by Balzac's goodness:

Mais le trait dominant du visage, plus même que l'intelligence était la bonté communicative... Aucune passion de haine ou d'envie n'aurait pu être exprimée par cette physionomie: il lui aurait été impossible de n'être pas bon. Mais ce n'était pas une bonté d'indifférence ou d'insouciance, comme dans le visage épicurien de La Fontaine, c'était une bonté aimante, intelligente d'elle-même et des autres... Tel était exactement Balzac.<sup>2</sup>

Stephan Zweig, biographer of Balzac, avers that "he was too magnanimous for enmity and nowhere in his writings is there to be found a polemic against an individual".<sup>3</sup>

It is true, as have been suggested by Gautier, Sand and Lamartine, that Balzac was naturally good, although this does not mean that

<sup>1</sup>Sand, George, (pseud. Mme Aurore de Dudevant) Histoire de ma vie (20 vols.; Paris: Cadot, 1855), XVII, 214-215

<sup>2</sup>Lamartine, Alphonse de, Balzac et ses oeuvres (Paris: Lévy frères, 1866), pgs. 13-14

<sup>3</sup>Zweig, Stefan, Balzac, trans. Wm. and Dorothy Rose (New York: Viking Press, 1946), p. 113

he was incapable of fits of anger, then it does not appear that the charges of "haine" spoken of by Billy and the vindictiveness implicit in the charge of 'vengeance' can be justified. The offence which is committed must be imprinted and lie smouldering in his memory. The recollection of it, instead of fading away must grow clearer with the passage of time. It must sleep in his heart for months and over a period of more than a year to awaken with new force, perhaps, more painful than on the day it was inflicted. Balzac must be able to harbour in his mind this kind of poisonous ill-will to embark on vengeance.

Though disappointed over his failure to secure the love of the marquise, Balzac did not part from her in Geneva in a way which indicated that he was planning any vengeance, as in a letter to Mme Carraud dated January 1, 1833, he is surprised at the tone of the letters of the marquise:

Une froideur inouïe succède graduellement à ce que j'ai cru passion chez une femme qui était venue à moi assez noblement. Je tremble de savoir d'où cela vient; je ne veux pas tirer les déductions logiques que ma science d'observation veut que je voie. Je ferme les yeux comme un enfant.<sup>1</sup>

Not only was there no breakdown in their relationship in that they continued to correspond with each other, but it appears that his grief was caused not so much by the circumstances surrounding the incident at Geneva, but because, as he wrote to Mme Hanska at the end of March 1833, Paris was taking an extraordinary interest in his affairs and thereby

<sup>1</sup>Correspondance, II, 216

adding to his embarrassment. According to Guyon, "Dans ce Paris où il était rentré depuis plusieurs semaines, les bons amis s'en donnaient à coeur joie pour se gausser de lui".<sup>1</sup> In view of this development, there is all the more reason for him to conceal, rather than reveal, the consequences of the disastrous episode at Geneva under a cloak of silence. He himself says that he was only separated from the lady "par délicatesse" and although he suffers "je ne la juge pas".<sup>2</sup>

In the novel La Duchesse de Langeais, Montriveau cannot be said to be Balzac, and Antoinette de Langeais is shown to be a victim of her rigid social caste; a victim of her unfortunate marriage; of the "culte de noblesse". If there is vengeance in the novel, it is a strange one indeed to give such extenuating circumstances to explain the coquetry of the duchess, a point which Jacques Borel does not hesitate to point out:

Curieuse vengeance, celle qui fait d'Antoinette de Langeais la plus sublime héroïne. La vanité, la coquetterie, la sécheresse de coeur, les froids manèges, ce n'est pas elle, mais le milieu mondain qui les veut, et dont sont victime son éducation, sa jeunesse, son inexpérience.<sup>3</sup>

Bardeche is emphatic in rejecting the suggestions that the Duchesse de Langeais is the Marquise de Castries:

<sup>1</sup>Guyon, Bernard, La création littéraire chez Balzac, p. 205

<sup>2</sup>Lettres à l'Etrangère, p. 19

<sup>3</sup>Borel, Jacques, Personnages et destins balzaciens (Paris, 1958), pgs. 130-1

La duchesse de Langeais n'est pas, dans son existence littéraire, la marquise de Castries, elle est l'incarnation de la coquetterie et de l'égoïsme et aussi l'image de toute une classe sociale... Balzac invente alors un 'caractère' au lieu de reproduire une individualité. Il crée comme Molière quand il invente Célimène.<sup>1</sup>

The insistence of certain critics that there was vengeance is all the more difficult to understand. It has been pointed out by Martin Turnell that the urge to seek the author in his characters must be resisted,<sup>2</sup> although it is known that autobiographical elements are utilised by Balzac as the raw material for certain incidents and details, according to the need of the work. In La Peau de Chagrin, Louis Lambert, Albert Savarus and other novels, aspects of Balzac's youth, desires, ambitions, even of his physical features are revealed. To go beyond the most restrained use of such material to advance all kinds of theories or propound other speculations, is to tread a dangerous course. Referring to these autobiographical details which Balzac made use of from time to time, Borel adds:

Le génie créateur interpose entre eux ses filtres mystérieux. A passer outre, on risque les plus lourdes méprises et les plus injustes jugements. Balzac n'a pas manqué d'en avertir, de le répéter, et ce sont les meilleurs balzaciens qui l'oublient.<sup>3</sup>

Pierre-George Castex, the editor of Histoire des Treize in which La Duchesse de Langeais appears among three novels in 1966 in the edition

<sup>1</sup>Bardèche, Maurice, Balzac Romancier, p. 289

<sup>2</sup>Turnell, Martin, The Novel in France (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1954), p. 218

<sup>3</sup>Borel, Jacques, p. 133

of Garnier-Frères, supports the view of Jacques Borel:

On aurait tort de simplifier à l'excès et de voir dans ce roman, ainsi que dans la Colère de Samson, par exemple, un acte de vengeance, consacrant une rupture. La réalité est beaucoup plus complexe. Gardons-nous d'abord de croire que le malentendu de Genève, en octobre 1832, a brisé tout lien entre Balzac et madame de Castries.<sup>1</sup>

Balzac not only continued to receive letters, invitations for visits from the marquise as well as introductions to European contacts, but she approved the novel La Duchesse de Langeais, as Balzac mentions in a letter dated February 18, 1834, addressed to Mme Hanska. According to him:

Je reviens de chez madame de C... que je ne veux point pour ennemie à l'occasion de mon livre, et le meilleur moyen de m'en faire un défenseur contre le Faubourg Saint-Germain est de lui faire approuver l'oeuvre par avance, et elle l'a fort approuvée.<sup>2</sup>

Though the novel was very critical of the aristocracy, the marquise must have felt that Balzac had not given a distorted view of the aristocrats or had revenged himself on her, as her approval would not have been given.

Bearing in mind all these facts, it is more reasonable to suggest that Balzac withdrew the Confession inédite not because he hoped to exact vengeance in a later work, but because he had no intention of revealing further his private misfortunes. It must be remembered, too,

<sup>1</sup>Balzac, H. de, Histoire des Treize, ed. P.G. Castex, Introduction to La Duchesse de Langeais (Paris: Garnier-Frères, 1966), p. 124

<sup>2</sup>Lettres à L'Etrangère, I, 131

that at this time he was corresponding with Mme Hanska, and that they exchanged kisses in Neuchâtel, Switzerland, in late 1833. He had been in love with her, according to Arrigon, since the end of March 1833, and his new love would tend to assuage any kind of rancour, assuming it existed, by giving him the kind of happiness, hopes, illusions which would dispel any plans for vengeance. In fact, as a result of his developing interest in Mme Hanska, it was even more vital for him not to show that he was hurt in the Castries affair, for no woman willingly loves a discarded lover and Balzac was determined not to undermine his own position with Mme Hanska. According to Arrigon:

Balzac ne se soucie plus de Mme de Castries, mais beaucoup de L'Etrangère, dont il sent que la sympathie tourne à la tendresse. Ne croit-il pas que l'ardente 'princesse' polonaise va prendre ombrage de cet amour, si abondamment décrit, pour une autre femme? Au reste, est-ce une attitude avantageuse pour quiconque veut conquérir un coeur féminin que de se présenter en victime et en amoureux transi?<sup>1</sup>

But what no critic has done is to quote the arguments of Henri de Marsay against the use of revenge on a woman, an argument which fits all the circumstances of Balzac's case to the very letter. When Henri de Marsay in Autre étude de femme realised that the great lady he was courting was trifling with his affections, he considered, in the heat of the moment, just like Balzac, the possibility of exacting a suitable and salutary vengeance on the lady, but he soon rejected this as unworthy of him:

<sup>1</sup>Arrigon, p. 278

En repassant avec un esprit infernal les véritables cruelles vengeances qu'on peut tirer d'une femme, dit de Marsay en continuant (et, comme nous nous aimions, il y en avait de terribles, d'irréparables), je me méprisais, je me sentais vulgaire, je formulais insensiblement un code horrible, celui de l'Indulgence. Se venger d'une femme, n'est-ce pas reconnaître qu'il n'y en a qu'une pour nous, que nous ne saurions nous passer d'elle? Et alors la vengeance est-elle le moyen de la reconquérir? Si elle ne nous est indispensable, s'il y en a d'autres, pourquoi ne pas lui laisser le droit de changer<sup>ce</sup> que nous nous arrogeons?... Supprimez la vengeance, la trahison n'est plus rien en amour. Ceux qui croient qu'il n'existe qu'une seule femme dans le monde pour eux, ceux-là doivent être pour la vengeance. (VIII, 83)

If Balzac could compose these arguments against vengeance, it is not unlikely that these could have been his reasons for abandoning the idea of vengeance against Mme de Castries when his anger had cooled and reason had reasserted itself. It may well be that the above quotation contains Balzac's own thoughts after the incident with the marquise. It would be most astonishing if Balzac, whose popularity with women was growing steadily, did not come to the same conclusion as de Marsay when he said: "Ceux qui croient qu'il n'existe qu'une seule femme dans le monde pour eux, ceux-là doivent être pour la vengeance".

As far as the semi-political treatise is concerned in which Balzac severely criticized the aristocracy, it must be pointed out that he was doing this long before he met Mme de Castries, chiefly as a result of the errors, extremism and the selfishness of the aristocracy. Balzac's greatest desire was to preserve the unity of Frenchmen and to conserve the national energies. He had no wish to see the aristocracy disappear, but reformed. For these reasons, therefore, even though he himself was a legitimist, he did not sanction the views of legitimist extremists who were largely selfseeking and, for the most part, occupied



with their own ambitions. Balzac was more interested in the national cause, in a reconciliation between the classes rather than simply the perpetuation of the rule of the Bourbons. And that is why he was severely critical of the aristocracy in La Duchesse de Langeais whose stubbornness, blindness and stupidity he could no longer countenance with mild reproaches.

In September, 1832, Balzac had written an article for Le Rénovateur entitled Du Gouvernement moderne which contained both an attack on constitutional government as well as a defence of the Bourbons, a fact which indicates that he was on the side of the monarchy. He took an independent line, however, when he declared that he did not believe in any divine right of kings, and he gave the impression that his plea for monarchy was one of political expediency. The adverse reactions of the legitimists, however, are sufficiently self-explanatory from the fact that the article was prevented from being published in Le Rénovateur. According to Hunt, "Perhaps he did not himself realise how distasteful his views were becoming to the aristocratic party".<sup>1</sup> These events all took place before the rupture with Mme de Castries and show that Balzac not only had an independent mind as a legitimist, but that he did not hesitate to criticise the aristocrats.

In May and June, 1832, Balzac advised the Royalists to abandon their isolationism and take the oath to the existing charter. He had in earlier articles established three aristocracies, those of birth,

<sup>1</sup>Hunt, p. 52

talent and fortune, but had advised the Royalists to be leaders in talent if they wished to preserve their prerogatives. He made it clear that the times no longer would recognise an aristocracy of birth without talent, the same views which he inserted in La Duchesse de Langeais. He made other criticisms in his essay of May 26 and June 2, 1832, entitled Sur la situation du parti Royaliste, in which he analysed the failings of the aristocracy during the Restoration:

La guerre civile commencée à Paris en 1830 aurait pu être étouffée par la France entière, si les royalistes eussent fait leur devoir pendant la Restauration, s'ils eussent tous habité leurs terres; s'ils eussent de leurs mains coopéré au bien-être des localités, s'ils eussent tenté de décentraliser le gouvernement, et s'ils eussent, converti leurs capitaux en propriétés au lieu de les mettre en rentes; enfin s'ils eussent tâché d'être les magistrats du pays, ils auraient créé autour d'eux des attachements, réveillé des croyances, et auraient pu guerroyer; car, pour aller prendre un fusil, comme l'ont fait les ouvriers de Paris, il faut se croire menacé dans ses intérêts.<sup>1</sup>

Serious criticisms of the aristocracy had therefore been made long before Balzac's disappointment with Mme de Castries and, naturally, the conception of La Duchesse de Langeais. In fact, while courting the marquise, in March 13, when Le Colonel Chabert first appeared in the review L'Artiste between February and March 13 in 4 instalments, Balzac had criticized the aristocracy for its selfishness, egoism, its ruthlessness and its political ambitions. In his criticisms of the aristocracy in La Duchesse de Langeais, therefore, Balzac was not doing anything new, and it would be unjust to him to see in the semi-political treatise in

<sup>1</sup>Balzac, H. de, Oeuvres Diverses, ed. Marcel Bouteron and Henri Lorgnon (Paris: Louis Conard, 1938), p. 619

the novel an added example of his vengeance. His motive was certainly not of this petty kind but, according to Bernard Guyon, his action was the result of

... la décision non pas seulement de jouer un rôle politique, de faire servir sa littérature à la propagnade de ses idées, mais plus précisément de faire entendre à ses amis politiques, à son parti, une voix amicale, certes, mais indépendante et libre dont le ton sera parfois un peu rude.<sup>1</sup>

There seems no doubt as to Balzac's impartiality, for to be a legitimist and to criticise the legitimists is to show both an independence of mind as well as a regard for justice. When he first wrote Le dernier Chouan, later changed to Les Chouans, he was on the side of the Republicans, the Bleus. When he became a legitimist and subsequently found it necessary to make certain emendations to the text, he toned down his judgment on those persons and factions he felt responsible for the rebellion in the Vendée, but these changes did not alter the details and general picture which he had presented before. The finest roles are still reserved for the Republicans, as he was not prepared to alter the historicity of the details of his novel to cater to his political views. In the preface to the third edition of 1846, he declared: "Tous les événements de ce livre, même les moindres sont entièrement historiques; quant aux descriptions, elles sont d'une vérité minutieuse". (II, 1115) Balzac's impartiality, therefore, was not compromised either by disappointments experienced in his personal life, nor by his political views and alliances.

<sup>1</sup>Guyon, Bernard, la pensée politique et sociale de Balzac (Paris: Armand Collin, 1947), p. 619

The value in writing about the Restoration or the July monarchy is considerable, as contemporary events and those nearly so provide a greater opportunity for more penetrating analyses of events and individuals. The periods concerned are not so far off as to make difficult minute inquiries into causes and effects of riots, rebellions and revolutions, and this advantage of the close proximity of persons and events can be seen in at least one case when, to document himself, Balzac went to Fougères, interrogated Baron Pommereul about the rebellion in the Vendée, and saw and questioned the living survivors of that episode. There is also the added advantage which Balzac secured from the fact that he was able to see the consequences of the actions of the aristocrats, begun in the past, and coming home to roost in the present. His characters are life-like and vivid, solidly anchored in the period concerned. Gautier makes an interesting comment about this last aspect of Balzac's achievement when he asserts that Balzac was more able to recreate in his novels persons whose lives were very close to his own. Balzac, he felt, could immerse himself more in these characters than those from the remote past. Speaking about the author's gift of transferring himself into his characters, Gautier adds:

Cette faculté, Balzac ne la possédait d'ailleurs que pour le présent. Il pouvait transporter sa pensée dans un marquis, dans un financier, dans un bourgeois, dans un homme du peuple, dans une femme du monde, dans une courtisane, mais les ombres du passé n'obéissaient pas à son appel: il ne sut jamais, comme Goethe, évoquer du fond de l'antiquité la belle Hélène et lui faire habiter le manoir gothique de Faust. Sauf deux ou trois exceptions, toute son oeuvre est moderne; il s'était assi-

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milé les vivants, il ne ressuscitait pas les morts.<sup>1</sup>

It must not be forgotten that Balzac also benefitted from the newspapers of the period which provided him with much useful information about the country, people and trends. These newspapers, for example, related cases of charges and imprisonment against the aristocrats, information that Balzac used to form the point de départ of some of his novels. Balzac was also in a position to consult persons and check doubtful points with the aristocrats who lived during the Restoration and who, like himself, frequented the salons. These personal contacts are vital and almost unique for the historian, as it is only in rare cases that the subject to be studied can be consulted by the historian. The favourable judgment of Balzac's contemporaries is all the more important, therefore, when it is considered that they were in a position to observe any inaccuracies on the author's part. The conclusions of Hervé Donnard who read the newspapers of Balzac's day and consulted the writings of persons who lived during the same period as Balzac, are significant: "En tout cas, une chose est certaine: ce que nous serions tentés de prendre pour une caricature est, le plus souvent, une interprétation fidèle de la réalité".<sup>2</sup>

Balzac's competence to portray the aristocracy was therefore not vitiated by his bourgeois origin, but, rather he profited from it

<sup>1</sup>Gautier, p. 64

<sup>2</sup>Donnard, p. 160

to observe society closer and to record what would have escaped him if his social circumstances had been different. His abilities enabled him to understand women of all classes and to comprehend their delicate sensibilities. In spite of holding legitimist views, his preoccupations with the truth made him criticize the failings of the legitimists which he did not do through self-interest or other base motives, but rather because mores castigando corriget. The role of historian which he adopted for periods close to his own life enabled him to verify certain facts and check his sources from people who were the only ones able to give this kind of help. If Balzac is not a competent historian of the periods he studied, there is not likely to be anyone else better qualified to perform the task which he undertook in the Comédie Humaine. This is why Flaubert's opinion, reinforced by Philippe Bertault's added judgment, is so true: "'Nul, plus tard ne pourra écrire l'histoire du règne de Louis-Philippe sans consulter Balzac'. On peut en dire autant des règnes de Louis XVIII et de Charles X".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Bertault, p. 66

## CHAPTER II

### PHILOSOPHY, MEDICINE AND SCIENCE

In writing the Comédie Humaine, Balzac reproduced or reconstructed in fiction many of the movements of political and social life which took place between 1789 and 1848: peasant uprising, revolutionary agitation, the imperial splendours, the blindness and unyielding stubbornness of the aristocracy under the Restoration, and the downfall of this caste contrived by its own members, excessive in their vanities and rigid in their prejudices. The rise of financial powers, the ascension of the bourgeoisie as well as the increasing democratic aspirations of the lower classes are not only observed, analysed, described by Balzac in keeping with his function as an historian of manners, but they are studied for both causes and effects in the private lives of individuals and their concomitant effects on the public weal.

As far as the aristocracy is concerned, in Le Cabinet des Antiques, their accumulated errors and abuses of their social position and privileges are made the subject of a strong indictment by Du Croisier, a member of the rising bourgeoisie who, like others in his class, is scorned by the aristocrats. This indictment represents the many charges levelled against the aristocracy from time to time by critics, and is a summary both of Balzac's own views about the aristocracy which permeate the pages of the Comédie Humaine and those of other novelists and



historians who have written about the period:

...il s'agit de la France! Il s'agit du pays, il s'agit du peuple, il s'agit d'apprendre à messieurs vos nobles qu'il y a une justice, des lois, une bourgeoisie, une petite noblesse qui les vaut et qui les tient! On ne fourrage pas dix champs de blé pour un lièvre, on ne porte pas le déshonneur dans les familles en séduisant de pauvres filles, on ne doit pas mépriser des gens qui nous valent, on ne se moque pas d'eux pendant dix ans, sans que ces faits ne grossissent, ne produisent des avalanches, et ces avalanches tombent, écrasent, enterrent messieurs les nobles. Vous voulez le retour à l'ancien ordre des choses, vous voulez déchirer le pacte social, cette charte où nos droits sont écrits... La Cour d'Assises luit pour tout le monde... Vous récoltez ce que vous avez semé. (II,1178-1179)

Balzac is concerned, rather, preoccupied with the historical veracity of his work and, as we have already shown, he does not spare himself in his search for documentation to authenticate his narrative. But, as an artist, he has another mission, another function to fulfil, one in which, as he said, the artist can do what the historian cannot, to show not only what was, but what could have been. Art must not copy but explain reality, and Balzac not only sees the facts of history which must find their way into his work, but he must explain these facts, the effects, as he calls them, to arrive at causes. In Le chef-d'oeuvre inconnu he expounds this idea:

La mission de l'art n'est pas de copier la nature, mais de l'exprimer! Tu n'es pas un vil copiste, mais un poète... Nous avons à saisir l'esprit, l'âme, la physionomie des choses et des êtres. Les effets, les effets, mais ils sont les accidents de la vie, et non la vie. Ni le peintre, ni le poète, ni le sculpteur ne doivent séparer l'effet de la cause qui sont invinciblement l'un dans l'autre! La véritable lutte est là. (XII,163-164)

There are two aspects to bear in mind when considering the

historical aspect of Balzac's work, le vrai and le vraisemblable.

Balzac's psychology is involved in le vraisemblable as we pointed out earlier, for Balzac was aware that le vrai was quite often not suitable material for le vraisemblable and had, therefore, to be toned down, mainly because it was often too brutal, harsh, or extraordinary for art. As he elaborated on this in his preface to Le Cabinet des Antiques, in answer to those critics who had reproached him for making Le Père Goriot what they called "une calomnie envers les enfants", Balzac added that in real life the father had shouted

pendant vingt heures d'agonie pour avoir à boire, sans que personne arrivât à son secours, et ses deux filles étaient, l'une au bal, l'autre au spectacle quoiqu'elles n'ignorassent pas l'état de leur père. Ce vrai là n'eût pas été croyable. (XV,298)

Having secured for his novels the point de départ from the broad details of events from contemporary society, he proceeds to breathe into them the breath of the artist's creative life. In this process of artistic creation and reconstruction of history, he occupies himself rather with the spirit than the letter of historical events. The task of the artist as historian

...consiste à fondre les faits analogues dans un seul tableau, n'est-il pas tenu de donner plutôt l'esprit que la lettre des événements, il les synthétise. Souvent il est nécessaire de prendre plusieurs caractères semblables pour arriver à en composer un seul, de même qu'il se rencontre des originaux où le ridicule abonde si bien, qu'en les dédoublant, ils fournissent deux personnages. (XV,298)

History and art, therefore, blend in a synthesis in his novels.

In the Avant-Propos to the Comédie Humaine, Balzac issued a clear and precise statement relating to the artistic method he had adopted in writing his novels. His work, he said, was not only descriptive, but was based on a system, a view of man and his world. It is not enough to describe, one must have a system:

Mais, pour mériter les éloges que doit ambitionner tout artiste, ne devais-je pas étudier les raisons ou la raison de ces effets sociaux, surprendre le sens caché dans cet immense assemblage de figures, de passions et d'événements? Enfin, après avoir cherché, je ne dis pas trouvé, cette raison, ce moteur social, ne fallait-il pas méditer sur les principes naturels et voir en quoi les Sociétés s'écartent ou se rapprochent de la règle éternelle, du vrai, du beau? Malgré l'étendue des prémisses qui pouvaient être à elles seules un ouvrage, l'oeuvre pour être entière, voulait une conclusion. Ainsi dépeinte, la Société devait porter avec elle la raison de son mouvement. (XV,373)

The architecture of the Comédie Humaine is sketched out in this statement, for the three great assises of the work are identified in so far as their contents are concerned. These "assises" are the "effets sociaux", the "raisons ou la raison de ces effets sociaux" and, finally, the "principes naturels".. These three categories form the "prémisses" of the entire Comédie Humaine. What Balzac wrote in 1842, he had already firmly established, however, since 1834 when, in a letter to Madame Hanska dated October 26, 1834, he outlined his scheme:

Les Etudes de Moeurs représenteront tous les effets sociaux...l'histoire sociale faite dans toutes ses parties, voilà la base. Ce ne serait pas des faits imaginaires; ce sera ce qui se passe partout. Alors, la seconde assise est les Etudes philosophiques, car après les "effets" viendront les "causes". Je vous aurai peint dans les Etudes de Moeurs les sentiments et leur jeu, la vie et son allure. Dans les Etudes philosophiques, je dirai pourquoi les sentiments, sur quoi la vie; quelle est la partie, quelles sont les conditions au delà desquelles ni la société, ni l'homme n'existe; et après l'avoir parcourue (la société),

pour la décrire, je la parcourrai pour la juger. Aussi, dans les Etudes de Moeurs sont les individualités typisées; dans les Etudes philosophiques sont les types individualisés... Puis, après 'les effets' et les 'causes', doivent se rechercher les 'principes'. Les 'moeurs' sont les spectacles, les 'causes' sont les 'coulisses' et 'les machines', les 'principes', c'est l'auteur. Mais, à mesure que l'oeuvre gagne en spirale les hauteurs de la pensée, elle se resserre et se condense. S'il faut vingt-quatre volumes pour les Etudes de Moeurs, il n'en faudra que quinze pour les Etudes philosophiques! il n'en faut que neuf pour les Etudes analytiques. Ainsi, l'homme, la société, l'humanité seront décrites, (sic) jugées, analysées sans répétitions.<sup>1</sup>

On Balzac's own testimony, the Etudes de Moeurs would form the basis of the pyramidal shape of the architecture of the Comédie Humaine and, obviously, the largest part of the structure, followed, in decreasing size, by the philosophical and then, analytical studies. In these great "assises", there are many gaps, as Balzac, not surprisingly, was unable to complete all the works in his vast scheme. In the Etudes analytiques, for example, La physiologie du mariage is the only work which forms this section and is not considered to be a really serious contribution to the scheme as outlined by Balzac himself. This view is in keeping with the partly frivolous tone of the work which was written since 1820, according to Balzac himself, printed in 1826, and can be considered as one of the Oeuvres de jeunesse, although it was later revised and reissued in 1829. In 1828, it carried the provisional title of Code marital ou l'art de rendre sa femme fidèle, an indication of the general tone of the work. The other two "assises", however, are far more satisfactory from the point of view of fulfilling Balzac's plans which he drew up for them, and it is with these two sections that we

<sup>1</sup>Lettres à L'Etrangère, I, 205-206

must occupy ourselves.

Marcel Bouteron asserts that two thousand four hundred and seventy-two separate characters have been created by Balzac in the Comédie Humaine, and if this is so, it seems fairly clear that a philosophical system, a view of man to explain his position in society and the development of the latter was a sine qua non. Balzac had such a system. According to Félicien Marceau:

Les personnages de Balzac ne déambulent pas dans le vide. Ils sont reliés à des lois, à des principes, à ce que Balzac a appelé les grands intérêts de la vie. 'Balzac, écrit Thibaudet, est le seul des grands romanciers dont le roman soit commandé par une philosophie positive, par une conception du monde'. Je ne suis pas sûr qu'il soit le seul, mais c'est chez lui que cette conception du monde apparaît avec plus de force.<sup>1</sup>

As far as the Etudes de Moeurs is concerned, Balzac's interpretation of facts and other details drawn from history, rests directly on his view of Man. To understand Man, and, consequently, society, one must therefore have a grasp of his Etudes philosophiques. In accordance with this view, Per Nykrog affirms that:

Toute l'interprétation balzacienne de la société au XIXe siècle, donc toute la Comédie Humaine, repose directement sur la conception particulière de la vie humaine sur le plan de la Pensée: la reproduction des relations sociales comme la reproduction des destinées individuelles.<sup>2</sup>

Nykrog's view about the Comédie Humaine is shared by Maurice

<sup>1</sup>Marceau, Félicien, Balzac et son monde, pgs. 241-242

<sup>2</sup>Nykrog, Per, La Pensée de Balzac, (Copenhagen, Denmark), 1965,

Bardèche who established the fact that the Etudes de Moeurs cannot on any account be fully understood without first taking into account the Etudes philosophiques, a fact that should not have needed any assertion as Balzac had clearly established the guiding principles behind the architecture of the Comédie Humaine as explained to Mme Hanska. According to Bardèche, however:

Pendant longtemps on n'a donc voulu voir en Balzac qu'un prodigieux 'peintre' de la société du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle et rien de plus; on en fait uniquement un appareil enregistreur. Quand cette prodigieuse machine à décrire se mêle de penser, on sourit avec indulgence. C'est prendre l'oeuvre de Balzac à l'envers et l'on peut être sûr que rien ne l'aurait attristé autant que cette méconnaissance de son effort... La société de Balzac dépend d'une certaine vue des problèmes sociaux. Tout se tient dans son oeuvre... C'est lire avec négligence et juger avec légèreté que de sacrifier Louis Lambert au Père Goriot. Ce sont les deux faces d'une même pensée. On ne comprend bien Balzac que lorsqu'on peut restituer à son oeuvre un éclairage qui permette au lecteur l'unité de sa pensée.<sup>1</sup>

Balzac's philosophy is of crucial importance to a full understanding of the Etudes de Moeurs, for implicit in Bardèche's statement is the suggestion, which is quite sound, that Balzac's novels are all, in a sense, philosophical. If Louis Lambert, a philosophical novel, and Le Père Goriot which belongs to the Etudes de Moeurs, are both simply "deux faces d'une même pensée", that is, two different plots with the same ruling, philosophical idea, then it follows that the novels of the Etudes de Moeurs are philosophical in so far as this "pensée" is seen to regulate the lives of the main characters in

<sup>1</sup> Bardèche, Maurice, Une lecture de Balzac (Paris: Les sept Couleurs, 1964), p. 13

the stories. It will be shown later that the philosophy contained in La Peau de Chagrin constitutes, as it were, Balzac's philosophical manifesto for "la pensée", and that this philosophy runs through most of the novels of the Comédie Humaine. In a study of Balzac's work, therefore, one ought to begin with the philosophical studies which are a kind of prologue to the study of the Etudes de Moeurs. Man must first be considered and, after him, society.

Saint-Hilaire's unitary system of organic matter exercised some influence on Balzac's philosophic ideas. Saint-Hilaire believed that the universe was not created in successive stages, according to Genesis, whereby God created successively and in separate and distinct acts of creation "les éléments, le règne minéral, le règne végétal, le règne animal" etc., but that God's actions had more logic than had been allowed him in the Bible. According to his view, God had created a single organism, "une seule substance" which had evolved into different forms according to the milieu, and each "règne" evolved quite naturally from the preceding one. The "règne minéral" evolved from the "éléments", the "règne végétal", from the "règne minéral", the "règne animal" from the "règne végétal", and Man from the "règne animal". According to his propositions, other "règnes" could evolve from Man and his "règne".

Balzac was influenced by the scientific ideas of unitarianism which occupied, according to him, "Les plus grands esprits des deux siècles précédents" (XV,368) and had been revived by the quarrel between Cuvier and Saint-Hilaire. Not only did he accept these ideas and absorb

them, but he, too, postulated another "règne" called "le règne spirituel" which he asserted will emerge from Man. He believes that Man has in him the material for the "règne spirituel" and, in Louis Lambert, he shows that Man has a dual nature, the material and the spiritual.

"L'homme est composé de matière et d'esprit; l'animalité vient aboutir en lui, et l'ange commence à lui". (I,472) In Le Lys dans la vallée, he asserted that the conflict felt by all men between a future destiny of which they have presentiments, and the memories of their original instinct from which they are not wholly detached -- the love of the flesh and the love that is divine -- are evidence of this duality. Some men hover undecided between the "voluptés de la matière et celles de l'esprit", while others spiritualize the flesh and ask of it what "elle ne saurait donner." (I,472)

For Balzac, Nature is one and, as it were, indivisible, as it is moved by one single force. If Nature as a whole is one and the same thing, then the material and the spiritual are merely 'recto' and 'verso' of the same page. The world of reality or of materiality is only a reflection of the spiritual one, and the material manifestations of nature are only the "enseignes" of the spiritual world with which there are "correspondances". From the original unitarian ideas of the scientists and emphasized by Saint-Hilaire whom Balzac greatly admired, he constructs the guiding principles in his novels. Referring to this unitarian idea which he calls the "unité de composition" in the Avant-Propos, Balzac adds:



Il n'y a qu'un animal. Le Créateur ne s'est servi que d'un seul et même patron pour tous les êtres organisés. L'animal est un principe qui prend sa forme extérieure, ou, pour parler plus exactement, les différences de sa forme, dans les milieux où il est appelé à se développer. Les Espèces zoologiques résultent de ces différences... Pénétré de ce système bien avant les débats auxquels il a donné lieu, je vis que sous ce rapport, la Société ressemblait à la Nature. La Société ne fait-elle pas de l'homme, suivant les milieux où son action se déploie, autant d'hommes différents qu'il y a de variétés en zoologie... Il a donc existé, il existera donc de tout temps des Espèces sociales comme il y a des Espèces zoologiques. Si Buffon a fait un magnifique ouvrage en essayant de représenter dans un livre l'ensemble de la zoologie, n'y avait-il pas une oeuvre de ce genre à faire pour la Société? (XV, 368-369)

To attempt to evaluate Balzac's unitarian ideas is to embark on an aspect which is peripheral to the study of the aristocracy. In addition, it would require a study in itself to make this evaluation, assuming that information is available to prove or disprove the implications of the various notions contained therein. Man's position in this world, its relationship with other, possible worlds, spiritual or otherwise, whose existence is implied in Balzac's unitarianism, involve questions of far more serious a nature than simply literary implications.

Balzac's ideas contained in his unitarian views which have only limited application in the Comédie Humaine, are important for us only in so far as they explain the process of his thought and indicate the scientific influences which lie at the root of the Comédie Humaine. Environment, for example, which shapes the individual, is one of the few aspects of this unitarian idea which are germane to the study of the aristocracy. In the Etudes de Moeurs, the influence of environment is shown to harmonize with the data provided about the locality, family and a variety of other influences. Balzac attempts to show that changes in individuals and groups are normal sociological occurrences rather

than a scientific phenomenon.

According to Balzac's theories, Man is changed or modified by environment, by the "époque" in which he lives, by legislation, by his profession, ("les lois de l'étiquette et des cours influent sur la morale épinière au point de féminiser le bassin des rois, d'amollir leurs fibres cérébrales et d'abâtardir ainsi la race") (I,47), by the entourage in which he habitually moves, in the same way that "l'animal unique" has been modified and diversified by its "conditions de vie biologique". Just as the influences of "milieu" gave different zoological species, the same law gave what Balzac calls the "espèces sociales". While man is being influenced by environment, however, self-interest also develops in him and suppresses or destroys his good instincts: "L'homme n'est ni bon ni méchant, il naît avec des instincts et des aptitudes... Mais l'intérêt développe alors énormément ses penchants mauvais".(XV,374). This self-interest is rapidly developed when, for example, religion and other influences which make for order and restraint are ignored and sacrificed in an environment which has established its own god, that of money.

In Balzac's theory of environment, heredity, education, group behaviour and other forms of social interaction play an important role in the determination of what the character will eventually be. This is by no means surprising, considering the origin of Balzac's interest in sociology and physiology. His father Bernard-François strongly influenced his moral nature, between the ages of sixteen and twenty-eight, by conversations on sociology, politics, history, religion and physiology.

From him has been acquired the taste for research into physiological influences, eugenics, heredity, education and longevity. According to Philippe Bertault: "D'après Honoré, la physiologie est la grande explicatrice du réel. Son père avait été le premier à lui enseigner et démontrer ce principe".<sup>1</sup>

Moving from the vue d'ensemble of man in the Avant-Propos, he proceeds to examine the situation of man as an individual and what forces are responsible for his preservation or destruction. Physiology is the science used to illustrate his ideas. According to him, man destroys himself by "La Pensée", a conclusion arrived at from an examination of society itself:

En lisant attentivement le tableau de la Société, moulée, pour ainsi dire, sur le vif avec tout son bien et tout son mal, il en résulte cet enseignement que si la pensée ou la passion qui comprend la pensée et le sentiment, est l'élément social, elle en est aussi l'élément destructeur. En ceci, la vie sociale ressemble à la vie humaine. On ne donne aux peuples de longévité qu'en modérant leur action vitale. (XV, 374)

While emphasizing that "La Pensée" is "l'élément destructeur" in society, Balzac shows that there is a method to counteract "la Pensée" and achieve "longévité", but this antidote, as it were, which works against "la Pensée", involves moderating the "action vitale". It is important to note from the quotation, however, that society merely follows the process which takes place in the individual and not vice versa. The assertion that "la vie sociale ressemble à la vie humaine" emphasizes the fact that Balzac has worked out his ideas of "la Pensée"

<sup>1</sup>Bertault, P., Balzac, p. 16

in the individual before proceeding to show in what way the same principles apply to society as a whole. It is therefore clear that he moves from the physiological domain to the sociological, from man to the social species. All these philosophical or physiological ideas of his are worked out and illustrated in the picture of society he presents in the Etudes de Moeurs, but expounded as a system in the Etudes philosophiques.

To emphasize the importance of Balzac's views about "la Pensée", Félix Davin had asserted that:

M. de Balzac considère la pensée comme la cause la plus vive de la désorganisation de l'homme, conséquemment de la société. Il croit que toutes les idées, conséquemment tous les sentiments, sont des dissolvants plus ou moins actifs. Les instincts, violemment surexcités par les combinaisons factices que créent les idées sociales, peuvent, selon lui, produire en l'homme des foudroiements brusques ou le faire tomber dans un affaissement successif et pareil à la mort; il croit que la pensée, augmentée de la force passagère que lui prête la passion, et telle que la société la fait, devient nécessairement pour l'homme un poison, un poignard. (XV, 116-117)

What Balzac means by "la pensée" he sets out in Les Martyrs ignorés:

Je voulais vous dire un secret, le voici; la pensée est plus puissante que ne l'est le corps. elle le mange, l'absorbe et le détruit; la pensée est le plus violent de tous les agents de destruction, elle est le véritable ange exterminateur de l'humanité... je suis convaincu que la durée de la vie est en raison de la force que l'individu peut opposer à la pensée... Savez-vous ce que j'entends par pensée? Les passions, les vices, les occupations extrêmes, les douleurs, les plaisirs sont des torrents de pensées. Réunissez sur un point donné quelques idées violentes, un homme est tué comme s'il recevait un coup de poignard! (XIV, 887)

"Pensée" therefore takes a variety of forms in his novels.

Mania in scientific research which Balzac depicts in La Recherche de l'absolu, excessive pride in family name as in Le Cabinet des Antiques,

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"Pensée" therefore takes a variety of forms in his novels.

Mania in scientific research which Balzac depicts in La Recherche de l'absolu, excessive pride in family name as in Le Cabinet des Antiques,

excess of pleasure and sorrow in La Peau de Chagrin, remorse, miserliness, extreme zeal in perfecting one's art, excessive paternal love, etc. constitute "des torrents de pensées". Balzac's firm conviction is that thought, or "la pensée" is a malady which ravages the body and leads individuals and, consequently, social groups to disaster.

Ideas and sentiments, in Balzac's view, have an active force and power which, when they become overwhelming or, according to Davin, "sur-excités", produce in man "des foudroiements". This whole concept of 'la matérialité de la pensée' is expounded in the philosophical tales where the ruling idea is that the blade wears out the scabbard: "la lame use le fourreau":

Ainsi, dans L'Adieu, l'idée du bonheur, exaltée à son plus haut degré social, foudroie l'épouse... Dans Le Réquisitionnaire c'est une mère tuée par la violence du sentiment maternel... Dans El Verdugo, c'est l'idée de dynastie mettant une hache dans la main d'un fils... dans L'Elixir de longue vie l'idée hérédité devient meurtrière à son tour... Dans Maître Cornelius... c'est l'idée avare tuant l'avare dans la personne du vieil argentier. Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu nous montre l'art tuant l'oeuvre... (XV, 120-123)

By frequent exercise of "la Pensée", man uses up his "force vitale" and accelerates his race to death. To obtain longevity, to conserve the "force vitale", one must moderate or avoid, if possible, the use of this energy. But the work which illustrates this entire system of the conservation and the expenditure of energies, of the "force vitale", and which serves as Balzac's most important philosophic manifesto, is La Peau de Chagrin. Apart from being an illustration of the system in action in society, the novel has a great symbolic importance which

both Balzac and Félix Davin pointed out. According to Davin:

Donc, après avoir poétiquement formulé, dans La Peau de Chagrin, le système de l'homme considéré comme organisation, et en avoir dégagé cet axiome: 'La vie décroît en raison directe de la puissance des désirs ou de la dissipation des idées', l'auteur prend cet axiome comme un cicerone prend la torche pour vous introduire dans les souterrains de Rome, il vous dit: Suivez-moi! Examinons le mécanisme dont vous avez vu les effets dans les Etudes de Moeurs! Alors, il fait passer sous nos yeux les sentiments humains dans ce qu'ils ont de plus expressif en comptant sur votre intelligence pour revenir par des dégradations aux crises moins fortes dont se composent les événements de la vie individuelle. Il s'élançait, il montre l'idée exagérant l'instinct, arrivant à la passion, et qui, incessamment placée sous le coup des influences sociales, devient désorganisatrice. (XV, 120)

Davin has now made it clear that the Etudes de Moeurs is intended to illustrate in action the philosophy of "la pensée" in its various stages in society, and to emphasize this point about the link between the philosophical studies and those of manners, he added a year later that "les esprits attentifs auront facilement reconnu les liens qui rattachent les Etudes de Moeurs aux Etudes philosophiques". (XV, 160)

Modern critics are now beginning to stress the philosophical nature of the Etudes de Moeurs. Balzac had himself pointed out since 1842 the position of the études philosophiques in his whole system and the importance he attached to La Peau de Chagrin: "La Peau de Chagrin relie en quelque sorte les Etudes de Moeurs aux Etudes philosophiques par l'anneau d'une fantaisie presque orientale où la Vie elle-même est peinte aux prises avec le Désir, principe de toute Passion". (XV, 382)

Balzac and Davin have now identified La Peau de Chagrin as the work which is the embodiment of Balzac's system, a formula of human life.

In a letter dated August 1831, Balzac wrote to Montalembert that

La Peau de Chagrin est la formule de la vie humaine, abstraction faite des individualités. Et, comme le disait M. Ballanche, tout y est mythe et figure. Elle est donc le point de départ de mon ouvrage... Dans ces tableaux, je suivrai les effets de la PENSÉE dans la VIE.<sup>1</sup>

Later in that same year, Balzac informed Mme de Castries that La Peau de Chagrin devait formuler le siècle actuel, notre vie, notre égoïsme".<sup>2</sup>

Balzac became more and more engrossed in his philosophical views of man and, consequently, of society. He asserted in Pathologie de la vie Sociale that "pour l'homme social, vivre, c'est se dépenser plus ou moins vite. Il suit de là que, plus les sociétés sont civilisées et tranquilles, plus elles s'engagent dans la voie des excès". (XII, 1522)

Because of this view of man and society, Balzac's search is to determine how "l'homme social est fait" and to discover the laws of the outer existence and, from them, to deduce philosophical axioms:

L'Etat de société a fait de nos besoins, de nos plaisirs, de nos nécessités autant de plaies de maladies par les excès auxquels nous nous portons, poussés par nos goûts mais surtout par le développement que leur donne la pensée. Il n'y a rien aujourd'hui où elle ne se trahisse. En effet, là où il n'y a pas maladie physique, il y a maladie morale... N'était-ce donc pas un ouvrage d'une haute importance que de codifier les lois de cette existence extérieure, de rechercher son expression philosophique, de constater ses désordres? (XIII, 1517)

Such a work is La Peau de Chagrin. Intense study, excessive passion, desires and debauchery, voluntary and involuntary wishes, in

<sup>1</sup>Correspondances (Paris, Garnier-Frères, 1960), I, 567

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pgs. 591-592



short, "la pensée", brings about the death of Raphaël de Valentin and proves the proposition propounded by Davin acting on Balzac's behalf that "la vie décroît en raison directe de la puissance des désirs ou de la dissipation des idées". (XV, 120) Balzac himself commented on the death of Raphaël who, he said, wore himself out "par excès de travail aussi bien que par la débauche". In Balzac's own words: "Quand on mène de front la vie intellectuelle et la vie amoureuse, l'homme de génie meurt comme sont morts Raphaël et lord Byron". (XII, 1523)

According to Bernanos: "Pourquoi dit-on 'avancer dans la vie'? C'est dans la mort qu'on avance, c'est notre mort que nous approfondissons sans cesse, ainsi qu'une oeuvre lente à venir".<sup>1</sup> Death is inevitable, sooner or later, in accordance with one's activities. The crucial problem is how to delay it. In La Peau de Chagrin, Balzac posed the perpetual problem of life in death and death in life which man must face. According to Bardèche: "Et dans l'âme du héros, dans l'âme de Raphael se livrera le combat du poème de Crabbe, la lutte de 'la Mort' dans 'la Vie' qui représente sa volonté de jouir, contre 'la Vie dans la Mort' qui représente sa volonté de vivre".<sup>2</sup> The main incidents in the novel illustrate not only Raphaël's but man's never ending struggle to preserve life and postpone death. Raphael's dilemma as Balzac will show, is the dilemma of man inherent in "la condition humaine".

There are two reasons why La Peau de Chagrin is important in the

<sup>1</sup>Bernanos, Georges, as quoted in Guy Gaucher Le Thème de la mort dans les romans de Bernanos (Paris, 1955), p. 3

<sup>2</sup>Bardèche, Maurice, Balzac Romancier, p. 216

study of the grandes dames. The novel contains the only complete exposé of Balzac's philosophical system of human life which he uses in most of his novels in the Comédie Humaine. Louis Lambert, for example, is not an exposé of Balzac's system. It contains an explanation of the process of physiological change which occurs under the heat of passion, an explanation which is crucial for a full comprehension of Balzac's system, however, and which must be used to complement the philosophy in La Peau de Chagrin.

The second reason for examining closely La Peau de Chagrin lies in the fact that the two main female characters, Foedora and Pauline, are used by Balzac as symbols to represent his views of women in nineteenth Century France. The symbol of these two characters appear throughout the Comédie Humaine in the character and personality of the various grandes dames in the Études de Moeurs who, albeit, have their own names and their individual personalities, but behave more or less like Foedora and Pauline. The grandes dames have similar vices and virtues, similar ambitions, similar fates. In the Études de Moeurs, therefore, the great ladies of the aristocracy are largely a transposition of Foedora and Pauline, the working out in the novels of the Études de Moeurs the ideas which are adumbrated in his philosophical studies. We must therefore begin with La Peau de Chagrin before studying the grandes dames in the novels of the Études de Moeurs.

One evening in 1830, Raphaël de Valentin, on the verge of committing suicide, wanders from a gambling table into an old curiosity shop. The circumstances which have brought him to such despair as to

contemplete taking his own life are described by Balzac with a laconic grimness:

Une passion plus mortelle que la maladie, une maladie plus impitoyable que l'étude et le génie, altéraient cette jeune tête, contractaient ces muscles vivaces, tordaient ce coeur qu'avaient seulement effleuré les orgies, l'étude et la maladie. (VII, 971)

Balzac underlines the fact that "la passion" is a far more deadly malady than "l'étude et le génie", and that Raphaël's ailments have had a physiological effect on his organism. Raphaël has not yet obtained the talisman from the Antiquaire, and all his maladies are, as yet, only mental, although the mental suffering has affected his physical organism. His studies and his orgies have aged him, but his emotions, for "la passion" is an emotion and refers to his feelings for Foedora, have had a more deadly effect than the combined force of "les orgies, l'étude et la maladie" which also have taken their toll on him though only lightly in comparison with "la passion".

Balzac insists on these physiological changes which have taken place in the human organism as a result of Raphaël's emotions and his previous activities. "Était-ce la débauche qui marquait de son sale cachet cette noble figure jadis pure et brûlante, maintenant dégradée". (II, 971) Not only do the physical features of Raphaël reflect the cancer which is ravaging him, but even his disappointed hopes, his ambitions, his illusions are reflected on his countenance: "Son regard attestait des efforts trahis, mille espérances trompées!... la physionomie exprimait une résignation qui faisait mal à voir". As a result of Raphaël's

encounter with Fedora. his passions. his debauchery. his other excesses have all accelerated to a frightening pace his approach to death: "Les médecins auraient sans doute attribué à des lésions au coeur ou à la poitrine le cercle jaune qui encadrait les paupières. et la rougeur qui marquait les joues. tandis que les prêtres eussent voulu reconnaître à ces signes les ravages de la science". (VII. 971)

Entering the old curiosity shop while waiting for a suitable moment to take his life, Raphaël meets a wizened centenarian, older than Fontenelle, and who was to expound to him a formula of human life. On the wall of the shop is "un morceau de 'chagrin'", a talisman about which Raphaël inquires from the centenarian. On the talisman, imprinted with the seal of king Solomon, is engraved in Sanscrit a summary of a curious formula:

Si tu me possèdes, tu possèderas tout, mais ta vie m'appartiendra. Dieu l'a voulu ainsi. Désire, et les désirs seront accomplis. Mais règle les souhaits sur la vie. Elle est là. A chaque vouloir, je décroîtrai comme tes jours. Me veux-tu? Prends, Dieu t'exaucera. Soit. (VII, 1001)

The old man proceeds to elaborate on the formula of which the talisman has given only a succinct description. The skin offers a pact with anyone who wishes to accept it, and the benefits are clear: "Tu possèderas tout". But as there is no cause without effect, the granting of the wishes will involve the abdication of one's freedom to regulate the pace of one's life or approach to death. By accepting the talisman, the control of the individual's life passes from himself to another agent. And here is the crucial point, the agent who has arranged the consequences

for the pact sealed with the individual, is God, as the talisman expressly states: "Ta vie m'appartiendra. Dieu l'a voulu ainsi". It will be shown later why and to what extent Divine power is an essential ingredient of the formula of human life, for the inscription mentions the word "Dieu" twice on the parchment.

With each wish granted to the possessor of the skin, it has the power to shrink. But, in addition to shrinking, the talisman performs another very important function, as it shows not only how much of itself is left, but it indicates that its remainder is equal to the proportion or the extent of life left to the individual: "Mais règle tes souhaits sur ta vie. Elle est là. A chaque vouloir je décroîtrai comme tes jours".

If by Raphaël's wishes he will shrink his life, it follows, therefore, that his life represents an aggregate of such wishes. The faster or the slower they are used up, to that extent the approach to death is accelerated or slowed down. Why wishes have the capacity to affect the human organism in such a way, will be pointed out in Louis Lambert. For the moment, however, the implications of the formula posed by the skin can be reduced to a semi-algebraical expression. Man's lifespan is an unknown quantity and can be considered to be  $X$  which is equivalent to the total number of wishes or desires the individual possesses. Each wish has the power to shrink or subtract from  $X$ , that is,  $X$  is reduced by another unknown quantity of lesser value than itself which we will call ' $Y$ '. Some wishes are greater or more intense than others and, instead of ' $X$ ' being reduced uniformly by ' $Y$ ', it is reduced by  $Y+1$ , or

Y+2 or, even 2Y, as the case may be. The problem in life is the simple fact that no one knows how many Y's or Y plusses there are in 'X', or what quantity of 'X' remains after reductions, as the specific value of 'X' or 'Y' is unknown and the individual cannot regulate his life accordingly. Balzac solves this problem artistically by the invention and use of the talisman, but he shows at the same time what consequences ensue when the individual knows exactly his remaining lifespan.

When the centenarian explains the function of the talisman to Raphaël, he insists that everything is based on human life and the human organism:

Je vais vous révéler en peu de mots un grand mystère de la vie humaine. L'homme s'épuise par deux actes instinctivement accomplis qui tarissent les sources de son existence. Deux verbes expriment toutes les formes que prennent ces deux causes de mort: Vouloir et Pouvoir. Entre ces deux termes de l'action humaine, il est une autre formule, dont s'emparent les sages, et je lui dois le bonheur de ma longévité. 'Vouloir' nous brûle et 'Pouvoir' nous détruit; mais 'Savoir' laisse notre faible organisation dans un perpétuel état de calme. Ainsi, le désir ou le vouloir est mort en moi, tué par la pensée... En deux mots, j'ai placé ma vie, non dans le coeur qui se brise, non dans les sens qui s'émeussent; mais dans le cerveau qui ne s'use pas et qui survit à tout. Rien d'excessif n'a froissé ni mon âme ni mon corps. (VII, 1002)

The system of human life discussed by the centenarian stresses the fact that two instinctive acts exhaust man's lifespan, his "sources d'existence" which we have already signified as 'X'. "Vouloir" and "Pouvoir" are the causes of this death which man cannot avoid as the acts are "instinctivement accomplis". But the pace to death can be lessened by knowledge and a precise method of living to avoid "la pensée", for "Vouloir" and "Pouvoir" constitute "la pensée". This formula to prevent

the rapid consumption of the "force vitale" is identified by the centenarian as "Savoir" which gives a sort of vegetative calm to the human organism or "organisation". "Savoir" involves living like Gobseck, "immobile, impassible. Gobseck ressemblait à la statue de Voltaire vue le soir sous le péristyle du Théâtre-Français". (VI, 1356) His philosophy is equal to his physical appearance:

Cet homme parlait bas, d'un ton doux, et ne s'emportait jamais... Si vous touchez un cloporte cheminant sur un papier, il s'arrête et fait le mort: de même, cet homme s'interrompait au milieu de son discours et se taisait au passage d'une voiture, afin de ne pas forcer sa voix. A l'imitation de Fortenelle, il économisait le mouvement vital. (VI, 1356)

"Savoir" involves living without the use of desires and excessive emotions or, by transferring one's activities from the heart to the head, to have intellectual, rather than sentimental pleasures. According to the antique dealer, the surest way to waste the organism is to use the heart instead of the head. He himself has no desires whatsoever:

Je n'ai jamais rien désiré, j'ai tout attendu... Ce que les hommes appellent chagrins, amours, ambitions, revers, tristesse, sont pour moi des idées que je change en rêveries; au lieu de les sentir, je les exprime, je les traduis; au lieu de les laisser dévorer ma vie, ... je m'en amuse... N'ayant jamais lassé mes organes, je jouis encore d'une santé robuste. Mon âme ayant hérité de toute la force dont je n'abusais pas, cette tête est encore mieux meublée que ne le sont les magasins. Là, dit-il en frappant le front, là sont les vrais millions. (VII, 1002)

This philosophy of the antique dealer to banish all kinds of emotions to the "cerveau qui ne s'use pas", is to make him, in short, "un homme sans coeur" or, better, "un homme de tête". This policy to cheat death, as it were, by following a rigid plan of abstinence called

"Savoir", is responsible for his advanced age: "je lui dois le bonheur et ma longévité". To secure long life, he has abdicated life. He knows not the poetry of love, the joys, the bliss and, it must be added, the excesses of the heart, the surging tempests of passions. His life is a kind of living death, a death in life, "la vie dans la mort".

The reverse side of the policy of the antique dealer, the embracing of all the pleasures or, as he calls them, "chagrins, amours, ambitions, revers, tristesse", would give life by restoring the poetry to human existence. But by doing this, however, in Balzac's view, the individual will introduce the early spectre of death into his life, for to the extent that he enjoys himself and indulges into excess, to that extent he has introduced "la mort dans la vie". One must choose. One can be either a Raphaël or a centenarian. Raphaël makes a fateful choice when he says: "Je veux vivre avec excès". He has introduced the poison of "La pensée" into his life which will lead quickly and inevitably to his doom.

After Raphaël has accepted the pact, the antique dealer spells out the conditions which are attached thereto:

Vous avez signé le pacte, tout est dit. Maintenant vos volontés seront scrupuleusement satisfaites, mais aux dépens de votre vie. Le cercle de vos jours, figuré par cette Peau, se resserrera suivant la force et le nombre de vos souhaits, depuis le plus léger jusqu'au plus exorbitant.  
(VII, 1005)

Depending on the number, the frequency and, more important, the intensity of the wishes, his life will shrink in exact proportion thereto.



The originality of Balzac's theory of "La Pensée" is to be found in the modifications and additions he made to certain medical theories which were very much in vogue during the Restoration. Caméristus, Brisset and Maugredie, the exponents of those theories which Balzac inserted in the Peau de Chagrin and had expounded at Raphael's medical examination, had their counterparts in French medical life under the names of Récamier, Broussais and Magendie. The school of the Vitalistes was very popular, explaining man's life by the theory of "la puissance vitale", and J.J. Virey's book De la Puissance vitale published in 1823 was probably read by Balzac. According to Virey:

Il y a une loi de création qui est la loi de toute vie: il existe une proportion entre la quantité de vie et la possibilité de mort, ce qui vit d'une existence purement chimique et mécanique vit aussi éternellement. Les relations purement mécaniques de la vie minérale ne comportent donc pas d'usure vitale, tandis que l'action vitale dans le règne animal est susceptible d'usure... Et la grande loi de la vie, c'est que plus l'action vitale est énergique, plus la mort est prompte. Les êtres à vie dormante vivent longtemps, tandis que les êtres à vie active vivent peu: le moyen de vivre longtemps est de vivre avec économie de ses forces.<sup>1</sup>

While Virey's assertions closely resemble those expressed in La Peau de Chagrin in that the attainment of long life lies in economising energy, (le moyen de vivre longtemps est de vivre avec économie de ses forces), Virey indicates what is to be done but does not show how. Should an athlete, for example, cease to be an athlete? Should one abandon exercise in order to conserve energy? Balzac, however, provides details of his own method to economise energy. While Virey enunciates precepts, Balzac illustrates by example. Balzac's originality

<sup>1</sup>Virey, J.J., De la Puissance vitale as quoted in Maurice Bardèche 'Autour des études philosophiques', L'Année Balzacienne (Paris, 1960), p. 120

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here lies in the fact that he shows how and where energy is to be conserved by his invention of a mode of conduct for his characters (Vide Gobseck and La Peau de Chagrin) which is shown to be consistent with the basic idea that "plus l'action vitale est énergique, plus la mort est prompte".

Balzac also adds to Virey's propositions by introducing the elements of "la volonté" and "la pensée" and making them "des forces vives". As a result of these additions, Balzac advances the important point that man can govern and regulate the conservation and the expenditure of his vital forces by the exercise of the will. Moreover, Balzac's detailed description of "la pensée" already outlined in the quotation from Les Martyrs ignorés would also constitute an original feature. As far as "la volonté" is concerned, Balzac's originality lies in the implication that at any given moment, man can exercise his will over his actions and moderate the "action vitale" which is consuming him. Raphaël does this in the last part of La Peau de Chagrin.

Another original feature is the fact that Balzac does not confine his theory to the individual but, as we will show later, it is extended to include social groups and even society as a whole. Like Voltaire who found le point de départ for a number of his plays in certain ideas and themes utilised by his predecessors or other dramatists and yet achieved originality in his art, Balzac submits to the crucible the matière brute of current scientific ideas and theories and fashions a work of art which is not a slavish copy of borrowed ideas. It is one thing to assert that Goriot is devoured by "la pensée", but it is of a completely different order to describe the successive stages of his obsession and achieve vraisemblance within the novel itself.

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In the second part of La Peau de Chagrin entitled "La femme sans coeur", Raphaël relates to Emile Elandet the circumstances which led him to contemplate suicide when he entered the gambling den in a last desperate attempt to secure money. In fact, having first introduced Raphaël to the reader subsequent to his encounter with Foedora, and after detailing the physiological changes Raphaël has undergone as a result of his experiences with her, Balzac interrupts the course of events in the story to introduce the talisman and explain the formula of human life. He then retraces his steps to show what were these circumstances with Foedora which gave Raphael "une passion plus mortelle que la maladie" and, by doing this, to illustrate by examples the precepts he advanced about his formula for human life.

It is not by chance that the second part of the novel bears the title of "la femme sans coeur", a reference to Foedora, for she is the exact counterpart of the Antiquaire in so far as her actions and her way of life are concerned. For Foedora, like the centenarian, does not use her heart as she is a "femme de tête". Before introducing Foedora to the reader in the early stages of the second part of the novel, Balzac details Raphaël's early life to show in what way circumstances and environment brought him to the stage where Foedora remained his only avenue to happiness.

Raphaël's father and mother had come from an aristocratic background. His father was heir to "une maison historique à peu près oubliée en Auvergne", while his mother was "l'héritière d'une grande maison".

Left struggling in Paris after the death of his parents, without money and without friends, he dared to look for help and support to his aristocratic relatives only to receive unmistakable evidence of their cruel indifference:

Des liens de famille, mais faibles, m'attachaient à quelques maisons riches dont l'accès m'eût été interdit par ma fierté, si le mépris et l'indifférence ne m'en eussent déjà fermé les portes. Quoique parent de personnes très influentes et prodigues de leur protection pour des étrangers, je n'avais ni parents ni protecteurs, (VII, 1054)

His family fortune having disappeared, he learned the bitter lesson that to have wealth is to have relatives, but to be poor is to be friendless and alone.

After meeting every kind of misfortune in his life, he decides to become a studious recluse for three years while working on a 'traité de volonté'. His life is concentrated, like the Antiquaire, in the 'cerveau'. Then he meets Eugène de Pastignac and enters a new kind of environment which serves to destroy his innocence and alter him. Even before he meets Pastignac, however, Raphaël had ambitions of becoming famous by a great work of art as well as capturing the heart of "une grande dame":

J'étais la proie d'une excessive ambition, je me croyais destiné à de grandes choses... je fus jeté par mon père dans le tourbillon de la grande société... Je te le déclare en mon âme et conscience, la conquête d'une grande renommée littéraire me paraissait un triomphe moins difficile à obtenir qu'un succès auprès d'une femme de haut rang, jeune spirituelle, et gracieuse. (VII, 1054-1055)

By his ambitions and desires, therefore, Raphael had already begun to

shrink his life. His passions are immense. Even before he met Foedora, he was consuming himself. Referring to the elegant ladies whom he passionately desired, he adds:

J'en ai beaucoup vu que j'adorais de loin, auxquelles je livrais un coeur à toute épreuve, une âme à déchirer, une énergie qui ne s'effrayait ni des sacrifices, ni des tortures... Combien de fois, muet, immobile, n'ai-je pas admiré la femme de mes rêves, surgissant dans un bal; dévouant alors en pensée mon existence à des caresses éternelles, j'imprimais toutes mes espérances en un regard, et lui offrais dans mon extase un amour de jeune homme qui courait au devant des tromperies. En certain moments, j'aurais donné ma vie pour une seule nuit. Eh! bien, n'ayant jamais trouvé d'oreilles où jeter mes propos passionnés... de coeur pour mon coeur, j'ai vécu dans tous les tourments d'une impuissante énergie qui se dévorait elle-même... (VII, 1055)

These ambitions of Raphaël have been aroused consequent upon his entry into "le tourbillon de la grande société". The consequences of living in this new environment are that Raphaël has begun to adapt himself to his new surroundings and to pattern his life on what he sees. The moment he goes into the whirlwind of high society, the tempo of his life increases. Balzac's view is that "l'état de société fait de nos besoins, de nos nécessités, de nos goûts, autant de plaies, autant de maladies, par les excès auxquels nous nous portons, poussés par le développement que leur imprime la pensée". (XII, 1517 (Pathologie de la Vie Sociale)) When Raphaël aspires to "la conquête du pouvoir ou d'une grande renommée" and "un succès auprès d'une femme de haut rang", (VII, 1055) he has introduced the poison of "la pensée" into his life.

Rastignac proposes to Raphaël a short cut to fortune and social success. He suggests that Raphaël adopt the philosophy of the "arri-viste" and swim with the tide. Comparing the fate of the honest

"négociant" and the "dissipateur" who are both ruined by speculation, Rastignac points out that it is the "dissipateur" who recovers from this set-back because "il place ses capitaux en amis, en plaisirs, en protecteurs, en connaissances... Connaissant les ressorts du monde, il les manoeuvre à son profit... N'est-ce pas là la moralité de la comédie qui se joue tous les jours dans le monde". (VII, 1074) In short, his suggestion to Raphael is that his "protecteur" should be a "grande dame" on whose influence he can always rely. So while Balzac introduces the aspect of the "jeune arriviste", he shows that to succeed he must have the protection of "une femme influente". Such a woman is Foedora.

"Demain soir tu verras la belle Comtesse Foedora, la femme à la mode... Espèce de problème féminin... la plus belle femme de Paris, la plus gracieuse". The effect of these words of Rastignac on Raphaël is significant. He had been devoured by his social ambitions and is now given an opportunity to meet "une grande dame" in the person of Foedora. His desires and wishes are about to be fulfilled, but at a cost to his life:

Foedora. Mais ce nom, cette femme n'étaient-ils pas le symbole de tous mes désirs et le thème de ma vie? Le nom réveillait les poésies artificielles du monde, faisait briller les fêtes du haut Paris et les clinquants de la vanité. La femme m'apparaissait avec tous les problèmes de passion dont je m'étais affolé. La comtesse Foedora, riche et sans amant, résistant à des séductions parisiennes, n'était-ce pas l'incarnation de mes espérances, de mes visions. (VII, 1075-1076)

These are fateful words of Raphaël, and Balzac shows to what extent they foreshadow doom. Foedora is the "symbole de tous mes désirs et le thème de ma vie". As "désirs" have physiological effects on the



human organism and shorten the span of life, already it can be seen that by attaching himself to Foedora, disastrous consequences will ensue for Raphaël. But there are other implications of equal seriousness in what follows. Foedora symbolizes for Raphaël the "poésies artificielles du monde" where there are "les fêtes du haut Paris et les clinquants de la vanité". She would bring all kinds of "problèmes de passion" into Raphael's life. "Passion" is a fateful word, the last stage of "la pensée", for when, according to Davin, "la pensée" arrives at "la passion", it becomes "désorganisatrice". Raphaël is not yet aware of the ominous forebodings implicit in his words, but he will be bound to Foedora by the strong bonds of his love and will become, like Alceste, another tragic figure.

Foedora, for her part, is a countess and a "grande dame". She is married though separated from her husband. Even more important, she is a "femme à la mode", the reigning queen of Parisian and aristocratic social life. She is rich and beautiful, but is an "espèce de problème féminin". In spite of being rich, beautiful, titled and a "femme à la mode", she is, however, in Raphaël's words, "sans amant, résistant à des séductions parisiennes". (VII, 1076) This is very curious indeed, for according to the standards and social morality of the aristocracy at that period in history, she would not only have had a good choice of lovers, but, likely, would have yielded to, rather than have resisted "des séductions parisiennes". One thing is clear, however. She has detached herself from the "émotions qui tuent" and is using "la tête" and not "le coeur".

"Elle a une mémoire cruelle, elle a une adresse à désespérer un diplomate, elle saurait deviner le moment où il dit vrai". (VII, 1077)

This penetrating kind of mind, this absence of tenderness and sympathy are all marks of the "femme de tête" and of the "femme à la mode". Her aristocratic friends are Madame de Sérizy, Mesdames de Kucingen and de Restaud, the Duchesse de Carigliano, etc., who have in varying degrees a "sécheresse d'âme" and an "égoïsme" which have served to gain for them social survival and prominence in Paris. Foedora is courted by sons of peers, but she politely shows them the door: "Beaucoup de jeunes fats, le fils d'un pair de France, lui ont offert un nom en échange de sa fortune. Elle les a tous poliment éconduits". (VII, 1077) It is an understatement to describe her as an "espèce de problème féminin".

Her physical attributes make her a desirable woman. Rastignac called her the most beautiful woman in Paris, and when Raphael meets her for the first time, he sees "une femme d'environ vingt-deux ans de moyenne taille, vêtue de blanc, entourée d'un cercle d'hommes". Her beauty and her dress with its symbolic suggestion of purity have earned for her a host of admirers. She is gracious and greets Raphael with every mark of courtesy: "elle se leva, vint à nous, sourit avec grâce, me fit d'une voix mélodieuse un compliment... Je fus l'objet d'une attention particulière qui me rendit confus". (VII, 1078)

This elaborate attention given Raphaël is to encourage him to become one of her followers, her satellite, as it were. But this charm and courtesy now displayed to attract him into her fold will be contrasted later on in the novel with her cruelty when Raphaël becomes her "esclave",

or, according to Rastignac, her "premier valet". (VII, 1099)

Foedora's mind is sharp and penetrating. When Raphaël discusses "la matérialité de la volonté" or, as he says by way of explanation of his system, that "la volonté humaine était une force matérielle semblable à la vapeur... une masse fluide", (VII, 1080) she raised certain objections which proved to Raphaël that she had "une certaine finesse d'esprit". Raphaël's "connaissances physiologiques" and his "études antérieures sur la femme" helped him to analyse Foedora, "cette singulière personne et ses manières".

Foedora's attitudes and manner can be compared to those of a "striptease" dancer whose movements encourage and attract men, while fostering the idea that her virtue is not intact. "Elle excitait si puissamment le désir que je devins alors très incrédule sur sa vertu". (VII, 1072) Her coquetry is deliberate and calculated. "Elle se soutenait sur la boiserie avec coquetterie, comme une femme près de tomber, mais aussi près de s'enfuir si quelque regard trop vif l'intimide". (VII, 1083) Everything about her excites the passions. Her arms are "mollement croisés", and she appears not to talk but to "respirer les paroles". Her lips are red and inviting. Raphaël is overwhelmed by this image of love, of passion, by this semblance of voluptuousness and purity: "Je trouvai la passion empreinte en tout... c'était plus qu'une femme, c'était un roman". (VII, 1083)

It is only Raphaël's physiological studies which made him see that Foedora's appearance belied her true nature. The purity, symbolized by her dress and her appearance, instead of being divine, was satanic.

In fact, as Raphaël discovered, Foedora was the combination of two persons. She looked like the goddess of love but was, in reality, a "femme froide":

Il y avait en Foedora deux femmes séparées par le buste, peut-être; l'une était froide, la tête seule semblait amoureuse; avant d'arrêter ses yeux sur un homme, elle préparait son regard, comme s'il se passait je ne sais quoi de mystérieux en elle-même". (VII, 1083)

As far as the heart was concerned, she did not use it, but chose to analyse and calculate just like the old antique dealer. Like Gobseck, she resembled "une statue de marbre, paraissant exprimer l'amour, mais froid". (VII, 1093)

Her philosophy and her nature which made her reject emotions, are compatible with her high social position as a "femme à la mode". To remain beautiful, she must banish emotions which have a physiological effect on the organism, disfiguring the face in the process. By not using her heart but her head, she has not only preserved her beauty, but her popularity with men: "Elle ne s'était donnée à aucun pour les garder tous. Une femme est coquette tant qu'elle n'aime pas". (VII, 1084)

Love, for Foedora, means abdicating her empire over men and women and to become subjugated. She must be neither daughter nor wife nor mother. To be queen of society in order to rule; to be the foremost among the feminine deities of the aristocracy, a "grande dame" who is a "femme à la mode" must find a way not only to secure but to preserve her power, and Foedora does this first by her coquetry and, later, by "égoïsme". She lives for herself and her own social success. But to

dedicate herself to egoism, even though she avoids one kind of excess, the excess or excesses of the heart, to embrace the cult of "l'individualisme" or "le bonheur individuel" is to embark on another kind of excess, and Balzac himself says: "Tous les excès sont frères". (VII, 1138) In fact, Foedora has introduced the poison of "la pensée" into her life by her passion for social success. There is just no way out.

When Raphaël returns to his garret after his first encounter with Foedora and her fashionable friends, he has already been altered by this social contact. He begins to curse his life of poverty and studious asceticism. Balzac's law of environment always operates. The contrast between the luxurious drawing room of aristocratic society and Raphaël's wretched garret makes him long to share the luxury and pleasure enjoyed by Foedora and her friends:

Ce contraste était un mauvais conseiller, les crimes doivent naître ainsi. Je maudis alors, en frissonnant de rage, ma décente et honnête misère... Je demandai compte à Dieu, au diable, à l'Etat social, à mon père, à l'univers entier, de ma destinée, de mon malheur; je me couchai tout affamé, grommelant de risibles imprécations, mais bien résolu de séduire Foedora. Ce coeur de femme était un dernier billet de loterie chargé de ma fortune. (VII, 1085)

Raphaël's conclusion that Foedora was the "dernier billet de loterie chargé de ma fortune" is in keeping with the lesson of "l'arri-visme" which he learned from Rastignac who had earlier promised to introduce him into the mainstream of aristocratic society "où va tout Paris, notre Paris à nous, celui des beaux, des gens à millions, des célébrités..." (VII, 1074-1075) To make his way in the world through Foedora and her social influence is, in Rastignac's view, to understand

"la théorie de la fortune".

In spite of Raphaël's ambitions and determination to succeed, however, he commits a most fatal social blunder in his encounter with Foedora: he falls in love with her: "... bientôt ma passion grandit, je ne fus plus maître de moi, je tombai dans le vrai, je me perdis et devins éperdument amoureux". (VII, 1085) ~~At this stage in Raphaël's~~ life, the pace towards disaster begins to develop at a much faster rate. He begins to sacrifice his work and to spend the little money he had left in the pursuit of his social ambitions. In his courting of Foedora, if he dared commit some fault or blunder, "elle se laissait longtemps supplier avant de me pardonner". (VII, 1089)

Raphael's dignity and self-respect are eroded by Foedora's tyranny. But worse, he is humiliated in a shameful manner by her. On one occasion he cannot offer a reward to the "commissionnaire" for the courtesy rendered them when he kindly opened his umbrella and sheltered both Raphaël and Foedora from the rain. When Raphaël takes her to her hotel, Foedora is scornful and devoid of any feelings of compassion over his obvious financial plight. She replies to his questions with "de dédaigneux monosyllabes... je gardai le silence. Ce fut un horrible moment". (VII, 1090)

When Foedora begins to talk to Raphaël, she is completely indifferent to his discomfiture, and affects to be unaware of his misery. Instead of sympathy, warm words of comfort, she is scornful, and warns him not to be so unwise as to attempt to talk to her about love: "Apprenez aussi que je n'ai jamais revu les personnes assez mal inspirées pour

me parler d'amour". Devoid of emotion, speaking like a lawyer in precise, measured tones, she crushes Raphaël by her attitude and her frigid words:

Elle s'exprimait avec le sang-froid d'un avoué, d'un notaire expliquant à leurs clients les moyens d'un procès ou les articles d'un contrat. Le timbre clair et séducteur de sa voix n'accusait pas la moindre émotion; seulement sa figure et son maintien, toujours nobles et décents, me semblèrent avoir une froideur, une sécheresse diplomatique. (VII, 1090)

Not only does Foedora's "sécheresse" make her unfeeling, but Balzac insists on the fact that she makes Raphael shrink his "force vitale" by ruining his hopes and casting a blight on his life. Raphaël, it must be noted, is the opposite of Foedora, for he is the "homme de coeur" who meets with all kinds of misfortunes when he makes the mistake of falling in love with a society coquette. Referring to the treatment meted out to him by Foedora, Raphaël adds: "En ce moment Foedora marchait sans le savoir, sur toutes mes espérances, brisait ma vie et détruisait mon avenir avec la froide insouciance et l'innocente cruauté d'un enfant qui, par curiosité, déchire les ailes d'un papillon". (VII, 1091)

Raphaël's attempt to defend himself by attacking Foedora with cruel words meets with failure, as she is impervious to insults. Immobile like a statue, a feminine Gobseck, she listens to Raphaël's insulting words without the faintest trace of emotion, with a perpetual smile on her lips, "ce sourire qu'elle prenait comme un vêtement, et toujours le même pour ses amis, pour ses simples connaissances, pour les étrangers". (VII, 1092) To be able to hurt her, Raphael must be

stronger than she is. But he has already lost the battle by falling in love. To be impervious to insults, however cruel they are, is to give proof, not of a personal quality but, rather, of a kind of aberration of nature and a case for medical observation. Raphaël is aware of such an implication when he suggests this to Foedora: "La nature qui fait des aveugles de naissance, peut bien créer des femmes sourdes, muettes et aveugles en amour. Vraiment, vous êtes un sujet précieux pour l'observation médicale". (VII, 1092)

Raphaël is overcome, however, by Foedora's cruel indifference, her egoism, her "sécheresse", and is brought to the stage where, in his despair, he even contemplates killing her: "Avez-vous jamais songé, repris-je aux effets d'un violent amour? Un homme au désespoir a souvent assassiné sa maîtresse -- il vaut mieux être morte que malheureuse, répondit-elle froidement". (VII, 1093) Her logic is that of a woman not at all in love, a "femme sans coeur" who is contemptuous of her suitors and only cultivates their friendship and admiration by her coquetry in order to taste and enjoy the delights of her power. For a woman of fashion, social success means everything, as it is in this field only, la Mode, that she has an opportunity to wield personal power. In order to obtain this success, she must have a train of admirers. It is a threat to her very existence as a queen of fashion to contemplate the prospect of love, or to allow herself to be hotly pursued by a young and ardent lover.

Raphaël has other problems, however. Now that he has embarked on the same course as Rastignac, the problem of money has added to his woes. To be on equal terms with the young dandies who adorned the



fashionable houses in Paris where Foedora visited, Raphaël needs money to pay for his clothes, his cab fares, his theatre tickets, etc.

On his own admission

... je ne possédais pas un denier... Comment pouvoir aborder désormais une femme élégante et me présenter dans un salon sans un chapeau mettable... Mais traverser les rues de Paris sans se laisser éclabousser, courir pour éviter la pluie, arriver chez elle aussi bien mis que les fats qui l'entouraient, ah! ... cette tâche avait d'innombrables difficultés. Mon bonheur, mon amour, dépendait d'une moucheture de fange sur mon seul gilet blanc! Renoncer à la voir si je me crottais, si je me mouillais! Ne pas posséder cinq sous pour faire effacer par un décrotteur la plus légère tache de boue sur ma botte! Ma passion s'était augmentée de tous ces petits supplices inconnus, immenses chez un homme irritable. Les malheureux ont des dévouements desquels il ne leur est point permis de parler aux femmes qui vivent dans une sphère de luxe et d'élégance; (VII, 1094)

"Ma passion s'était augmentée" Raphael exclaims and, with it, a proportional shrinkage of his lifespan. Overwhelmed with the preoccupations of social life, with projects to obtain money to create for Foedora's benefit the illusion of wealth as well as to satisfy the vanities of his new social existence, to become an integral part of aristocratic high-life with its series of "fêtes", "bals", "raouts", "soirées" and, in short, to "user" his life in a continual round of social pleasures of one form or another, Raphaël's life circulates around his ambitions which all take their toll on his organism.

The warmth and friendliness of the sympathy and affection of Pauline Gaudin and her mother who live near to Raphaël help to assuage his anguish without, however, banishing it. They are struck by Raphaël's melancholy and give him warm words of encouragement. Raphaël realises that the true affection that he was seeking "au milieu des froides régions

du grand monde, était donc là vraie, sans faste, mais onctueuse et peut-être durable". (VII, 1098) But Raphaël's passion for Foedora is such that nothing can help him. On his own words, "J'étais dans le néant". (VII, 1099) Even when Rastignac cautions him later and gives him advice, "Rastignac parlait à un sourd". (VII, 1100) Devoid of strength, of ideas, as a result of his passion, he was "comme une jeune fille tombée à genoux devant un tigre". He becomes a kind of slave to the idea of possessing Foedora which is now his "idée-fixe". Pauline sums up his plight with words which seem to come from Balzac himself: "un homme sans passion et sans argent reste maître de sa personne: mais un malheureux qui aime ne s'appartient plus". (VII, 1099)

Rastignac shows Raphaël how to use his talents to obtain money by writing memoirs, and he gets a brief reprieve from his hardships and misfortunes, but he continues to waste his life in social pleasures alternated with frequent moments of despair and melancholy. His life is a summary of the "misères des grandeurs" of the aristocrats, "la misère du luxe, une misère espagnole, qui cache la mendicité sous un titre; fière, emplumée, cette misère en gilet blanc, en gants jaunes, a des carrosses, et perd une fortune faute d'un centime". (VII, 1127)

Raphaël's study now only occupies his time during the very early hours of the morning when he can afford two hours. When he leaves the drawing room of fashionable aristocratic society where he drains away his vitality, he returns to his garret to indulge in intellectual pursuits. Like Byron, he was burning the candle at both ends:

Après avoir ainsi dissipé ma journée, je revenais chez moi pour y travailler pendant les nuits, ne dormant guère que deux ou trois heures de la matinée... Je retombai dans cette vie précaire, dans ce froid et profond malheur soigneusement caché sous les trompeuses apparences du luxe. (VII, 1109)

Foedora finally confesses quite plainly to him that she does not love him: "Vous êtes un homme. Cela suffit". He now abandons his studies: "La muse avait fui". Other changes of a physiological nature take place in Raphaël. When he meets Rastignac by chance one day, Rastignac finds Raphaël to be "changé, maigri. — 'De quel hôpital sors-tu? me dit-il. — Cette femme me tue, répondis-je. Je ne puis ni la mépriser ni l'oublier". (VII, 1131) The only solution which occurs to Raphaël in his despair is to indulge in further excess. From excess in love he goes into excess in debauchery. He sells the plot of land on which the tomb of his mother is located to get his 'thirty pieces of silver', and sinks into further decadence until, one fateful day, he reaches the gambling table, penniless and on the verge of suicide. Having therefore shown in part two of the novel in what way Raphael's encounter with Foedora produced physiological effects, a "maladie mortelle" on the human organism, Balzac is now back at the beginning of the story. The last phases of Raphaël's life will be the subject of another section.

"L'Agonie", the final part of the novel, shows how the talisman shrinks with every wish of Raphaël and thus repeats, but in a theoretical way, what Balzac had already illustrated by example. It must be borne in mind that when Raphaël obtains the skin, his remaining lifespan was not very great. It is therefore not invraisemblable to see that his

death takes place very shortly after he comes into possession of the skin, as he had already shrunk his 'X'.

Aquilina and Euphrasie whom Raphaël meets at Taillefer's ball, are both the opposite of Foedora. They are the "femmes de passion", one of whom was "comme la reine de plaisir, comme une image de la joie humaine, de cette joie qui dissipe", (VII, 1035) while the other "aime mieux mourir de plaisir que de la maladie". (VII, 1038) As both of them do not have "la manie de perpétuité", (VII, 1038) they have renounced the kind of vegetative life led by the antique dealer for what is, in their view, "la vraie vie" with its passions, its excesses and, consequently, "l'usure vitale". Like Raphaël, they embrace a life of passion and welcome "la mort dans la vie". Balzac's whole system is therefore summed up by Emile Blondet:

Les deux systèmes peuvent entrer dans une seule phrase et se réduisent à une pensée. La vie simple et mécanique conduit à quelque sagesse insensée en étouffant notre intelligence par le travail; tandis que la vie passée dans le vide des abstractions ou dans les abîmes du monde moral mène à quelque folle sagesse. En un mot, tuer les sentiments pour vivre vieux, ou mourir jeune en acceptant le martyre des passions, voilà notre arrêt. (VII, 1042)

In Balzac's own life, he chose to accept the second of the two propositions, to "mourir jeune en acceptant le martyre des passions". His life is a classic example of the philosophy of "l'usure vitale". In a letter to Auguste Borget of May 1834, he reports that serious physiological consequences had already taken place on his organism:

À votre retour, vous ne verrez plus ces beaux cheveux noirs que vous

aimiez, qu'aime ma mère et que d'autres aimaient! Ils tombent par poignées, tous les matins, et blanchissent tous les soirs. Les travaux exorbitants de mes quinze ou dix-huit heures par jour emportent tout. La nature est implacable... elle est plus dure que la cour d'assises n'est dure parce qu'elle est plus logique. Ma vie gagne le cerveau; la forme s'épaissit par l'inactivité du corps. Le siège principal de la combustion est en haut. La sobriété, l'abstinence des vrais moines maintient encore l'équilibre, mais le moindre excès le détruirait... J'ai peur d'avoir mangé beaucoup sur mon capital. Ce sera curieux de voir mourir jeune l'auteur de la Peau de Chagrin.<sup>1</sup>

In April 1849, the situation was even more serious, and Balzac wrote to his sister Laure de Surville in terms which show that the end of his life was not far off:

Je sais ce que c'est que les effets du chagrin. Comprends-tu que les chagrins m'aient fait tomber deux dents saines, entières, blanches, et cela sans douleur? On ne sait pas ce que me coûtent l'année 1847 et février 48! Les chagrins de février qui ont sapé fortune et littérature, ont fait déclarer à Saché, une hypertrophie du coeur... Je ne pouvais pas marcher vite, ni gravir la moindre éminence... je ne pouvais pas me peigner sans des étouffements et des palpitations.<sup>2</sup>

Balzac's excesses had shrunk his "force vitale".

Raphaël's first wish when he gets the talisman is for an orgy, and this is fulfilled just as his other subsequent ones will be. When he gets the news that he has been left a considerable fortune as a legacy, a fortune for which he had wished, he produces the talisman and discovers to his horror that it had shrunk: "Il voyait la MORT". (VII, 1153) He is now rich, but as he gains in wealth, he loses in

<sup>1</sup>Correspondances, II, 500

<sup>2</sup>Lettres à sa Famille, ed. Walter Scott Hastings (Paris: Albin, Michel, 1950), pgs. 367, 379-380

health, and it is he, Raphaël, like Man, who is the architect of his own doom. When Taillefer congratulates him on his wealth and concludes that henceforth the laws will bend to his new power, adding that "il n'y a pas d'échafauds, pas de bourreaux pour les millionnaires!", Raphaël, with the clear vision of death hovering before him answers in these significant words: "Ils sont eux-mêmes leurs bourreaux". (VII, 1155)

When Raphaël becomes the Marquis de Valentin, Jonathas, his servant, is entrusted with the responsibility of managing the huge mansion in the Faubourg Saint-Germain as well as anticipating and eliminating every situation which could make his master Raphaël express wishes. In spite of the most elaborate precautions, however, Raphaël continues to shrink his "force virale" and to see the extent of his remaining life exactly represented on the talisman which now becomes his consuming passion. He realises that further sacrifices are necessary to meet the situation.

To save his life, therefore, Raphaël abandons the joys of life and lives like the centenarian. According to Balzac, "Raphaël voulait vivre à tout prix", and he becomes "une sorte d'automate. Il abdiquait la vie pour vivre, et dépouillait son âme de toutes les poésies du désir". (VII, 1164) But it is now too late to save himself.

In desperation, Raphaël conceives the idea of appealing to science, to Lavrille the zoologist, to Planchette the "célèbre professeur de mécanique" and, finally, to Japhet the celebrated chemist, all in vain. It was impossible to stretch the skin so that he could obtain a new lease on life, and Raphaël realised that he was face to face with

something far more profound than Solomon's power symbolized by his seal. In Raphaël's words: "Je suis perdu. Dieu est là. Je vais mourir". (VII, 1208) To emphasize the subservience of science to Divine power, the two scholars who believed that science was the Alpha and the Omega of everything, now have a significant humility when their science cannot prevail on the talisman.

But what Raphaël says about God is significant. The skin represents the exact amount of life left in the human body and cannot be more than a gauge. To give longer life, to rejuvenate aging blood vessels, arteries and organs is to perform functions which only God can do. To have extended the skin by artificial means, therefore, when the skin represents only a gauge of Raphaël's lifespan, would have meant that the life was extended, or the skin would have ceased to be a gauge. In addition, the skin represents, not the power of man to be tampered with by science, but, rather, the power which emanates from God himself. Balzac's point here was meant to emphasize divine power in the process of age.

The medical doctors who accurately diagnosed Raphaël's case had made this observation about his malady:

Il est fatigué dis-je par des excès de pensée, par des écartés de régime, par l'emploi répété de stimulants trop énergiques. L'action violente du corps et du cerveau a donc vicié le jeu de tout l'organisme... il y a monomanie. Le malade est sous le poids d'une idée-fixe... Allons chercher la cause du mal dans les entrailles de l'âme et non dans les entrailles du corps. (VII, 1219-1222)

This diagnosis could well apply in its entirety to Balzac in the

1840's. In Albert Savarus, written in 1842, there are numerous autobiographical details. Albert Savarus-Balzac writes to Leopold Hannequin in such terms that the letter was a prophecy of Balzac's own life:

Hélas! cher et seul ami, voici bientôt dix ans que je lutte. Ce combat avec les hommes et les choses, où j'ai sans cesse versé ma force et mon énergie, où j'ai tant usé les ressorts du désir, m'a miné, pour ainsi dire, intérieurement. Avec les apparences de la force, de la santé, je me suis ruiné. Chaque jour emporte un lambeau de ma vie intime. A chaque nouvel effort, je sens que je ne pourrai plus le recommencer. Je n'ai plus de force et de puissance que pour le bonheur... Atteindre au but en expirant, comme le coureur antique! voir la fortune et la mort arrivant ensemble sur le seuil de sa porte! obtenir celle qu'on aime au moment où l'amour s'éteint! n'avoir plus la faculté de jouir quand on a gagné le droit de vivre heureux! ... Oh! de combien d'hommes ceci fut la destinée! (VIII, 739-740)

Balzac's life fulfilled this prophecy. Three months after marrying Mme Hanska after a courtship of eighteen years, Balzac was in his grave.

Raphaël's doctors try to save him, however. They recommend "un traitement à la fois physique et moral", and Raphael accepts the advice and goes to Aix to save his life. There he again meets with indifference, cruelty and egoism from the little social group assembled there. He read into their souls and discovered their "petites vanités", their ingratitude, and all their secret animosities. "Il eut horreur de la société". He is obliged to fight a duel in which he must use up one of his few remaining wishes to save himself, although he dies further in the process. He flees this heartless, cruel and indifferent society and goes to Mont-Doré. But alas! He is compelled to abandon this



retreat also and to return to his home where his last wish is used up, and he dies in the arms of Pauline, a frail, wasted, emaciated figure.

Before showing in what respect the theory of human life is also the theory of groups in society, it must be pointed out that Balzac had illustrated his medico-philosophical views further in Louis Lambert by showing in what way emotions, desires and passions were capable of destroying the physiological organism. In this respect he had largely repeated what he had already done in La Peau de Chagrin. However, there is one important development of Balzac's theories in Louis Lambert, as the author shows not only how and when desires and emotions alter the structure of the body, a matter which is fully illustrated in La Peau de Chagrin, but he now shows why this is so. In La Peau de Chagrin one understands the problems of Raphaël de Valentin and sees when his passions change him, but Balzac does not explain why this should be so. Louis Lambert, however, contains such an explanation, an important aspect of Balzac's whole system, and it is to illustrate this missing point that we must consider the novel.

We have already shown from references to Le Lys dans la vallée and the Avant-Propos to the Comédie Humaine that Balzac believes in the dual nature of Man. In Louis Lambert he states that man is divided into the "homme intérieur" and the "homme extérieur", or the "être actionnel" and the "être réactionnel". During sleep, the body is severed, as it were, and the inner being can traverse wide tracts of space. In addition, Balzac asserts that "La Pensée et les Idées sont le mouvement et les actes de notre organisme intérieur", (I, 69) and the evidence of

physiological decadence which is manifest on the face or body has its roots in the "homme intérieur" which no one sees, but which is ceaselessly active like a cancer. When the "homme extérieur" begins to show traces of the ravages of dissipations or other passions, the effect on the inner being, the "homme intérieur", has been so great that it has penetrated to the "homme extérieur", the visible reality.

Louis Lambert explains that "l'homme intérieur" has his own life, his own vital forces, his own operations. In most men and in normal circumstances, this interior life coincides exactly with that of the "homme extérieur" and only detaches itself in dreams or under the influence of certain agents like alcohol, pleasures, dissipations, passions, etc., when the "homme intérieur" can leave the envelope of his body and live for a time his own life. Balzac believes this is the only way to explain the lives of the martyrs who had the faculty, he believes, of transferring the "vie intérieure" elsewhere while their bodies were being mortified. Perhaps, the case of 'jay-walkers', people who walk in broad daylight like sleep-walkers, would be considered by Balzac a case where the individual is under the influence of the "homme intérieur", as in a dream, and that the body, the "homme extérieur" functions like an automaton.

Balzac asserts in Louis Lambert that an action takes place first in the "homme intérieur" before communicating itself to the "homme extérieur", the "être réactionnel". The inner man 'acts', the 'outer' man reacts. In short, the outer man only reflects the internal activity of the individual. Emotions, therefore, first affect and wear out the

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"homme intérieur" and, at a later date, the "homme extérieur". This is so because a wish or desire is an act first completely accomplished in man's will, in the "homme intérieur", before it affects the external man. And here is the crucial part of Balzac's whole system: wishes and desires are completed actions internally, and as these are usually many and intense, relative to their number and intensity, to that extent is man's life abridged. It will be recalled that Balzac made the statement in La Peau de Chagrin that "la vie décroît en raison directe de la puissance des désirs ou de la dissipation des idées".

Balzac asserts quite plainly that a wish or desire is an act, "un fait", which is accomplished in our will. If man has a thousand wishes, in Balzac's view, these wishes constitute a thousand acts. In Balzac's system, a wish for a new carriage, for example, while being unfulfilled for years, would be considered an accomplished act in the imagination of the individual, as he sees himself already possessing and using the carriage. This wish, repeated over a period of years, allied with others, would constitute for Balzac accomplished acts on the inner being which wear out the inner organism proportionate to their frequency and intensity. This constant "usure" Balzac measures by an imaginary gauge, "la peau de chagrin". However, passions, wishes, desires, all take their toll on the individual, and it is in this way that Raphael's physically wasted figure can be explained. According to Louis Lambert:

La Pensée et les Idées sont le mouvement de notre organisme intérieur... Un désir, disait-il, est un fait entièrement accompli dans notre Volonté avant de l'être extérieurement. Ainsi l'ensemble de nos Volitions et de nos idées constituaient l'Action... Pour lui donc, la Volonté, la Pensée étaient des 'forces vives'. Pour lui, ces deux puissances étaient en quelque sorte et visibles et tangibles. Pour lui, la Pensée était lente ou prompte, lourde ou agile, claire ou obscure. Il lui attribuait toutes les qualités des êtres agissants, la faisant saillir, se reposer, se réveiller, grandir, vieillir, se rétrécir, s'atrophier, s'aviver. (I, 69-75)

Balzac's theory involves important questions of physiology.

It is a commonplace medical fact, however, that emotions have a physiological effect on the body. Constant grief, for example, constitutes more 'wear and tear' on the human organism than joy. In L'Interdiction, Balzac shows that the features of Judge Popinot are lined with many wrinkles as a result of his stern countenance. His face is kept in harmony with the severity of the functions of a judge. The strain on the facial muscles is severe over a long period of time and this produces a physiological reaction.

Fear, also, has physiological effects on the human organism as it affects the central nervous system. It is known that fear can cause temporary and even permanent impotence. It also has other significant effects on the human body. In certain situations, it produces adrenalin which enters the bloodstream and quickens the actions of individuals. Anger also has a similar physiological effect on the body. If it is accepted that these emotions do have a physiological effect, then it may be argued that a wish, a desire or passion is akin to emotions with similar physiological reaction.

Kleptomaniacs have a desire, an overpowering desire to steal,

and it may well be that this desire or urge originates in or is greatly increased by a fluid produced in the body like adrenalin and which impels the individual onward. Lust may be regarded as a strong desire whose intensity may also be due to the same cause as fear or anger.

There is only one point which may cause one to wonder. Is there a limit to the production of these fluids, assuming they exist in every case, and does the body operate less effectively with their frequent consumption as a result of excessive wishes and desires? Raphaël, it will be recalled, dies through his excess, and the implication here is that there is a limit to the demands which can be made on these fluids and on the "homme intérieur". If Balzac's theory is better understood by using fear and other emotions as an illustration of his point, then for death to occur in Raphaël, we must assume that his body had excessive demands made on it for these lifegiving fluids and that, after a while, they were exhausted. It must be remembered, too, that Raphaël's organs were also atrophying, as the doctors found that the internal structure of the body had been seriously affected. In addition to the consumption of these fluids, therefore, Raphaël's internal organism was also being proportionately affected. These medicophilosophical views of Balzac, however, have sufficient medical background to make his ystème a credible one for his literary purpose.

In Louis Lambert's own case, the excessive richness of his inner life destroyed the "homme extérieur". At an early age, Louis, to all appearances, becomes mad but, in actual fact, he had withdrawn from the "vie extérieure" to live completely in the "vie intérieure". His body

remains like a vegetable, but his thoughts, like the martyrs, are elsewhere. At one stage in Le Père Goriot, in the boarding house of Mme Vauquer, as old Goriot sniffs his bread, to all appearances his presence is at the table. In fact, only his physical presence is at the table, but his thoughts, "l'homme intérieur", are elsewhere. He sometimes acts like an automaton. He cannot feel cold in his garret because, like Louis Lambert, the "homme extérieur" and the "homme intérieur" are no longer synchronised. When Lambert finally dies, worn out by the excesses of the "vie intérieure", he was a centenarian at twenty-five.

Desires, ambitions, emotions, then, all affect the "homme intérieur" and, consequently, the "homme extérieur". Such has been the case with Raphaël de Valentin, such has been the case with Louis Lambert. "L'homme intérieur" is, in short, the talisman, the "peau de chagrin" in every one of us, the unknown quantity X which shrinks inevitably in proportion to the number and the intensity of man's desires.

The symbolism of La Peau de Chagrin was expressed to Montalembert in a letter already quoted, and in which Balzac said: "Tout y est mythe et figure." Philarète Chasles, another of Balzac's spokesmen for the principles behind his work, explained in his Introduction to the Romans et Contes Philosophiques, that Rabelais at an earlier period had seen the strange effect of "la pensée religieuse qui, à force de pénétrer la société, achevait de la dissoudre". (XV, 80) Balzac places emphasis on Rabelais' use of "le symbole" which was effectively manipulated to demonstrate the evils of "la pensée religieuse". The word "pensée" is

significant. It is Balzac's view that "la pensée" of Rabelais' day has only changed its form in the nineteenth Century. Instead of "la pensée religieuse", Balzac finds, among other things, "la pensée sensualiste". He therefore uses the same method of "le symbole" which Rabelais used and for the same purpose: to attack social evils.

Philarète Chasles explains Balzac's use of "le symbole" in the introduction he wrote under Balzac's supervision for the first publication of the Roman et Contes philosophiques:

Rabelais, dans un autre temps, avait vu l'étrange effet de la pensée religieuse, qui, à force de pénétrer la société, achevait de la dissoudre. L'âme, divinisée par le christianisme, avait tout envahi. Le spiritualisme effaçait la matière. Le symbole, l'idéalisation, régnaient sans partage; pour symbole, l'Occident s'était rué sur l'Orient. Il dominait la poésie qu'il réduisait à l'état de fantôme, en multipliant les personnifications allégoriques, en banissant de son domaine les êtres vivants, la chair et le sang humains. Rabelais s'arma d'un symbole pour faire la guerre au symbole... L'ère de Rabelais a expiré. Celle qu'il annonçait parcourt son cycle et l'accomplit. Ce ne sont plus les ravages de la pensée idéaliste, mais ceux du sensualisme analytique, que le conteur philosophe peut retracer aujourd'hui".  
(*RM*, 80-81)

Balzac's use of symbolism has been variously commented on and described by critics. According to Pierre Laubriet, "Balzac transforme en mythe la matière contemporaine. Ce sont les passions, les ambitions, les idées que Balzac met en scène".<sup>1</sup> This view is consistent with what Philarète Chasles-Balzac wrote in the introduction mentioned above.

La Peau de Chagrin contains many kinds of "égoïsme civilisé" which are symbolized by the characters in the novel. Foedora, for example, is

<sup>1</sup>Laubriet, p. 57



more than a person, she is a type. In the epilogue of the novel, Balzac explains that she is the incarnation of society itself. He wanted to represent, above all, a society coquette, a "femme à la mode" who cares nothing for others, but is indifferent, heartless and egoistic. These are qualities which he specifically wanted to emphasize as being readily found in the society of the period. Foedora is therefore not only meant to represent a type, the grande dame who is cold, cruel and "sans coeur", but she is also the symbol of the group (the aristocracy) and the egoistic society which produced her.

Although Foedora is meant to represent a grande dame as a type as well as being the incarnation of society, as an individual in the novel she does come to life. In spite of her ravishing beauty and her voluptuous manner, as a "femme à la mode" she is as calculating as a moneylender, frigid as an iceberg, occupied with the triumphs of her vanity. She belongs to the "race des forts" in contrast to Raphaël who belongs to the "race des faibles". In spite of the apparent softness and fragility of her body, she, like all the grandes dames who are "femmes à la mode," must have an iron constitution. According to De Marsay who refers to these grandes dames in Le Contrat de Mariage, they have "des organisations de fer, conséquemment peu de coeur, et des estomacs excellents. Là est la raison de l'insensibilité, du froid des salons". (III, 972) Balzac describes Foedora as having "un coeur de bronze sous sa frêle et gracieuse enveloppe". (VII, 1111) Her social ambitions, however, would justify her attitude in the novel.

Social success means a great deal to a grande dame. After

Foedora returns home from one of her daily and nightly excursions, she asks her maid Justine to confirm the fact that she was beautiful "Étais-je bien coiffée ce soir?" (VII, 1122) The answer in the affirmative is important to her whole social existence. She husbands her beauty in the most careful manner, but retribution is not far off, as while she refuses the passions of the heart, her passion for society has brought along with it physiological consequences. Foedora is shocked when she sees the aging process at work on her precious beauty, the grim, implacable hand of time, of age: "Je n'étais pas jolie ce soir, mon teint se fane avec une effrayante rapidité. Je devrais peut-être me coucher plus tôt, renoncer à cette vie dissipée". (VII, 1121)

The physiological consequences of her social preoccupations are mentioned by Balzac though not dwelt upon at any length. There is sufficient information however to show that she is almost physically exhausted by her social life. When her guests depart one evening, the mask of beauty and gaiety she had assumed for their benefit vanished:

La physionomie changea, ses traits se décomposèrent, et sa figure exprima la fatigue. Elle venait d'ôter un masque; actrice, son rôle était fini. Cependant, l'espèce de flétrissure imprimée à sa beauté par son travail d'artiste, ou par la lassitude de la soirée n'était pas sans charme. (VII, 1121)

She cannot sleep without consuming a liquid which wracks her body, extracting from her not only "quelques soupirs pénibles" (VII, 1123), but the woeful exclamation "Mon Dieu!". Like the Comtesse de Restaud, (vide ch. VI, p. 389 et seq.) her social preoccupations take their toll of her health.

That there is a passion for social pre-eminence in the behaviour and attitude of Foedora, is brought out repeatedly by Balzac. Her ambition is not only to be a social queen but to ensure that, at all times, she is the most beautiful and the most admired woman on every social occasion. All other feminine interests are of no significance compared to her social ambition. When she goes to the Bouffons, for example, her passion for admiration is striking: "Elle n'écoutait pas la musique. Les divines pages de Rossini, de Cimarosa, de Zingarelli, ne lui rappelaient aucun sentiment, ne lui traduisaient aucune poésie de sa vie". (VII, 1111) She is not intoxicated by the music and the poetry of the occasion, as she does not even listen. Her presence there is simply to receive the adulation of admiring men and women. Her social satisfaction depends on the plaudits of the crowd, the public manifestation of her pre-eminence.

Foedora's joy rests solely on the admiration of her 'high-society' associates. When she enters any public place, she is in fear and trembling until such time as her pre-eminence is recognised. Thereafter, she basks in her temporary glory after her first moments of fright, of doubts and indecision as to whether she is the most beautiful of women. "Sa lorgnette voyageait de loge en loge, inquiète, quoique tranquille". (VII, 1111) When her social superiority is established, she is content: "Une joie inexprimable anima la figure de Foedora quand, après avoir braqué sa lorgnette sur toutes les loges et rapidement examiné les toilettes, elle eut la conscience d'écraser par sa parure et par sa beauté les plus élégantes femmes de Paris". (VII, 1173)

Her passion for society ruins her. As her ambition is to be queen, she undergoes a social eclipse when she ceases to be pre-eminent. Raphaël, the now influential marquis de Valentin, had let fall a cruel epigram about her which had quickly made the rounds of the aristocracy. Foedora is touched to the quick by this now well-known epigram whose sting she cannot endure, as she is wounded in her vanity, a place where it hurts the most.

Her rule as queen is also about to end. When Raphaël meets her at the Opera, he sees the tyranny which she still exercises over his successor, and he realises how much the women in fashionable society, like Foedora, ruin those who are foolish enough to love or pursue them. But when Foedora becomes aware that she no longer has any power over Raphaël, "elle pâlit". According to Balzac: "Un pouvoir impunément bravé touche à sa ruine". (VII, 1173) Her eclipse is complete when she is replaced by Pauline Gaudin who becomes the most admired woman at the Opéra and is given a spontaneous ovation by the aristocracy. Foedora is no longer the most beautiful, the most admired woman in Paris, and she is therefore forced to abdicate as queen: "Enfin sa dernière consolation lui échappa. Ces mots délicieux: je suis la plus belle! cette phrase éternelle qui calmait tous les chagrins de sa vanité devint un mensonge". (VII, 1173)

Apart from her behaviour as a grande dame which is consistent with her social ambitions, her treatment of Raphaël and others have a logical explanation when her private circumstances are taken into account.

Her social position in Paris is not fully secure as her marriage is not recognised by the Emperor of Russia. In fact, her marital situation is such that the Russian ambassador not only refuses to receive her socially, but he even laughed openly on one occasion when she became the topic of conversation. According to Rastignac: "Entre nous, je crois que son mariage n'est pas reconnu par l'empereur car l'ambassadeur de Russie s'est mis à rire quand je lui ai parlé d'elle. Il ne la reçoit pas, et la salue fort légèrement quand il la rencontre au bois". (VII, 1077)

Foedora wishes to have her marriage recognised in Russia, and to avoid jeopardising the successful outcome of this matter, it goes without saying that she must be exceedingly circumspect in her dealings with men, as the Russian ambassador certainly hears reports about her social behaviour. One can therefore see why Foedora would refuse to yield to the advances of men as this would seriously compromise her in the eyes of the ambassador. It is in her interest to create the impression that she is a paragon of virtue. On the other hand, however, she is so completely detached from the emotions of the heart that her marital difficulty cannot fully explain the extent of her frigidity. Nevertheless, Balzac does make her vraisemblable as an individual while also making her symbolic of a social class.

As a social type, a representative of society, a grande dame who is a "femme à la mode", one sees in Foedora the evils in the aristocratic society of the Restoration. Raphaël cannot succeed in that kind of society because he has not learned the social game which Rastignac has. In Le Père Goriot where Rastignac launched his defiant words at fashionable

society at the graveside of old Goriot (A nous deux, maintenant) and goes to dine with Mme de Nucingen, il avait compris. Raphaël's tragedy is that il n'avait pas compris. He used his heart instead of his head. Balzac uses him as a symbol to show in what way aristocratic young men waste their vitality and manhood in the vain pursuits of pleasures and women. When Raphaël is further humiliated one day by Foedora, he departed "en pleurant". The weak cannot survive in the bourbier that is Paris.

Not only youth but age as well must bend its knee and submit to the power and tyranny of the grande dame. When Raphaël goes to see the Duke de Navarreins, his uncle, to ask him a favour for Foedora who wants the Duke's influence in getting her marriage legitimised, the hostility which the Duke shows to Raphaël, his nephew, is contrasted with his transparent eagerness to exert himself to help Foedora:

Je m'étais presque avili pour elle en allant voir mon parent le duc de Navarreins, homme égoïste qui rougissait de ma misère et qui avait de trop grands torts envers moi pour ne pas me haïr; il me reçut donc avec cette froide politesse qui donne aux gestes et aux paroles l'apparence de l'insulte, son regard inquiet excita ma pitié. J'eus honte pour lui de sa petitesse au milieu de tant de luxe. Il me parla des pertes considérables que lui occasionnait le trois pour cent, je lui dis alors quel était l'objet de ma visite. Le changement de ses manières, qui de glaciales devinrent insensiblement affectueuses, me dégoûta. (VII, 1110)

Foedora is a product of the kind of society symbolized by the Duke de Navarreins, a survivor of the Ancien Régime who helps to shape the attitude and thinking of later generations of the aristocracy. The egoism manifested by the Duke and others like him, influences the younger breed of aristocrats. These latter are largely what they are because of the kind of influence they undergo from the survivors of a previous age

and regime. Balzac therefore shows that Foedora, in spite of her faults, is, herself, a "femme victime", as she is a victim of her environment, a victim of her own social group. She became a "femme à la mode" because of the kind of social caste to which she belonged with its rigid codes and its peculiar sense of honour, sanctioning idleness and condemning its members who participated in gainful employment. As women had very little else to do but to beautify themselves and adorn ball and drawing rooms, the aristocratic society required and created social queens like Foedora:

Foedora se produisait là comme un spectacle dans le spectacle. Sa lorgnette voyageait incessamment de loge en loge; inquiète quoique tranquille, elle était victime de la mode; sa loge, son bonnet, sa voiture, sa personne étaient tout pour elle. (VII, llll)

Pauline, as a symbol, is in the same category as Raphaël, as she, too, belongs to the "race des faibles", but unlike Raphaël who oscillates between the two poles of "la vie de coeur" and "la vie de tête", she remains essentially a kind, pure and graceful person (Raphaël calls her "un ange") who, in spite of loving sincerely, does not succeed in becoming Raphaël's wife. The weak go to the wall and the strong survive. According to Henri de Marsay: "Les belles âmes restent dans la solitude, les natures faibles et tendres succombent". (III, 876)

Pauline's love is so sincere that she has been given a kind of foresight, as she can foresee many of the pitfalls into which Raphaël was heedlessly rushing. This quality of "voyance" is only given by Balzac to "les privilégiés" as, for example, to Louis Lambert and those women, mothers and sweethearts who truly love and have a kind of divination

in that they can anticipate or foresee dangers to their loved ones. Pauline is provided with more than ordinary, feminine intuition in her relationship with Raphaël.

Because of Pauline's pure and sincere love for Raphaël, she is self-sacrificing. She desires Raphaël's happiness so much that she prefers not to intervene in his relationship with Foedora. She remains quietly in the background and only comes forward after a disillusioned Raphaël finally turns to her. Balzac's point is that her charm, unaffectedness and simplicity are virtues which do not succeed in society and, in explaining her symbolism in the epilogue, he makes her appear to be a kind of fantasy, a poetic figure which only appears in a dream, a "reine des illusions". In Balzac's view, her selflessness, her generosity, her warm sympathy and kindness are qualities which were not to be found readily in society. The Foedoras are far more common than the Paulines.

Balzac has shown how "La pensée", in its different social forms, has brought about the death of Raphaël de Valentin and aged, as well secured the abdication as "reine" of the society coquette Foedora. According to his medico-philosophical system whereby "la vie décroît en raison directe de la puissance des désirs ou la dissipation des idées", this medical formula of human life, Balzac believes, can be applied to an analysis of the social organism. From the human organism, he passes to the social organism. This is a point already made by Davin when he said that "La Peau de Chagrin est un arrêt physiologique, définitif porté par la science moderne sur la vie humaine... M. de Balzac considère la pensée comme la cause la plus vive de la désorganisation de l'homme,



conséquent de la société". (XV, 116-118) Maurice Bardèche also appreciates Balzac's method:

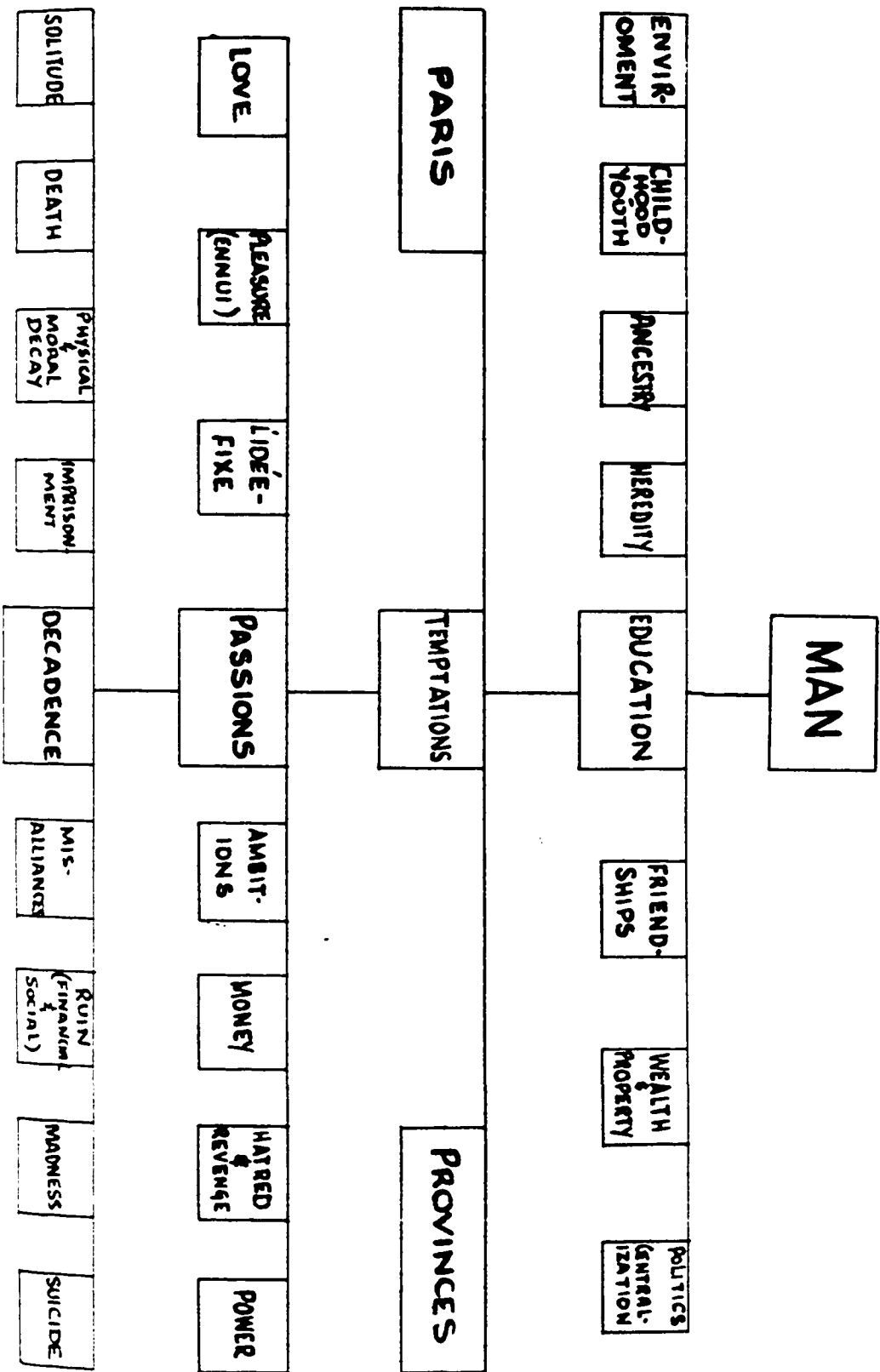
Balzac analyse l'organisme social avec les mêmes principes qui lui servent à analyser l'organisme humain. Il croit qu'on peut porter sur les nations des diagnostics médicaux comme on en porte sur les hommes et que les causes essentielles de mort se répètent et peuvent être retrouvées en passant de l'individu à la nation.<sup>1</sup>

We already pointed out Balzac's assertion in the Avant-Propos that "la vie sociale ressemble à la vie humaine" (vide p.112), and the aristocracy as a group, as an organism, is subject to Balzac's system of disintegration.<sup>2</sup> Living and behaving like the Duke de Navarreins and Foedora with a philosophy of chacun pour soi, au diable les autres, Balzac shows that by their égoïsme, by their pursuit of social pleasures, by dissipation, by the culte du bonheur individuel, by the importance placed on money, that they have introduced the poison of "la Pensée" into the organism of their group. When they disacknowledge their parents pauvres, spend their lives in idleness, luxury and ease, refusing to seek the common good of society as a whole, or even of themselves as a class, but live in their ivory towers, in splendid isolation in their châteaux, pursuing their individual interests and refusing to appreciate the importance of class solidarity for their own survival, then "la vie intérieure" of this whole group begins to fester like a wound until it spreads and engulfs the whole organism.

<sup>1</sup>Bardèche, Maurice, Une lecture de Balzac, p. 91

<sup>2</sup>(Wide illustrative chart of disintegrating process on p.

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Obsession with the "culte de la noblesse", dissipations, prejudices, are all evidence of "la pensée". The secretion of this cancer in the social organism is shown by Balzac to come about in various ways. Social ambitions, desire for wealth, selfishness, or simply a mania for the perpetuation of the "grand nom" and a refusal to recognize, as Du Croisier said, that "La Cour d'Assises luit pour tout le monde", all constitute, separately or collectively, "la pensée". Balzac shows that the individual lives of the grandes dames prove the lesson of l'usure vitale and, further, that the collective result of the individual secretion of "la pensée" was fatal to the aristocracy as an organism. Philarète Chasles confirms the fact that La Peau de Chagrin is a grand symbol of an epoch, an allegorical description of a whole society, or as Balzac himself said to Mme de Castries, "le siècle actuel, notre vie, notre égoïsme":

Aussi, voyez tous ces types d'égoïsmes, civilisés qui se donnent rendez-vous dans La Peau de Chagrin: Foedora, femme sans coeur, type d'une société sans coeur; Raphaël, symbole de la misère éclatante, le dandy sans un écu... Des critiques n'ont pas vu que La Peau de Chagrin est l'expression de la vie humaine, abstraction faite des individualités sociales... Voyez Raphaël? Comme dans la scène du duel, chez les paysans, dans son hôtel de Paris, le même sentiment l'absorbe! Soumis à ce talisman terrible, il vit et meurt dans une convulsion d'égoïsme. C'est cette personnalité qui ronge et dévore les entrailles de la société où nous sommes. A mesure qu'elle augmente, les individualités s'isolent; plus de liens, plus de vie commune. La personnalité règne; Dans ce livre, il y a toute une époque. (XV, 81-82)

It is to the Etudes de Moeurs that we must now turn to examine the activities of the grandes dames.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE SUCCESSORS OF FOEDORA AND PAULINE

##### LA POSTERITE DE CAIN ET CELLE D'ABEL

When Eugène de Rastignac challenged society at the graveside of old Goriot and went to dine with Mme de Nucingen, Balzac introduced in symbolic form the two broad divisions of society. These are summed up on the one hand by Delphine de Nucingen who represents society in general and, in particular, the ladder by means of which access to the upper echelons of an hierarchical and influential society is obtained, and on the other hand, Rastignac the disinherited, or the "Cosaque", who will besiege the walls of this society to penetrate its stronghold. Rastignac and Delphine therefore represent for Balzac the dichotomy in society, the 'establishment' and the 'ranks', which he saw and recorded. Referring to this dichotomy which he saw in society, in Le code des gens honnêtes he expressed the view that life involved a "combat perpétuel" between "les riches et les pauvres" or, "les grands et les petits":

Les uns sont retranchés dans une place forte à murs d'airain, pleine de munitions; les autres tournent, virent, sautent, attaquent, rongent les murailles, et, malgré les ouvrages à cornes que l'on bâtit, en dépit des portes, des fossés, des batteries, il est rare que les assiégeants, ces Cosaques de l'état social, n'emportent pas quelque avantage. (XIV, 60)

This division of society between the rich and the poor, the 'grands' and the "petits" are the two broad social divisions which are paralleled today in the convenient expression of the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. The aristocratic society of Balzac's time, generally speaking, was considered to represent the "grands" and the "riches", as its members exercised not only great influence in the judiciary, the executive and administrative machinery of government, but in many cases were very wealthy and, by virtue of their position in a monarchical system of government headed by the Bourbons, they also wielded political power. During the Restoration, their influence was immense, and under the Empire, Napoleon saw the necessity to court the favour of the great aristocratic families of the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

Owing to their once privileged position in society, the monarchical system of government during the Restoration, their proximity to the 'place where the action lies', the aristocracy can be considered to represent the symbol of power, wealth and comfort and, consequently, to be the object of attack from those who are considered to be the "exclus". A perpetual struggle is therefore inevitable between the "assiégés" and the "assiégeants", on the one hand between the aristocrats who strive to maintain or improve their position and preserve the 'status quo' while resisting encroachments, and on the other hand, the "pauvres", the "petits", the "infortunés" who attempt either to replace the aristocracy or to penetrate into the 'inner sanctum' of their group.

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the splendour of their carriages and dwellings, the manifestations of wealth and magnificence which vanity inspires the aristocrat to display, have given rise to envy, dissatisfaction and hatred. In short, inequality is at the basis of the "combat" between rich and poor, "grands" et "petits".

Le jour où l'on a fabriqué de beaux tapis, de riches porcelaines, des meubles de prix, des cachemires indigènes, les voleurs, la classe la plus intelligente de la société ont senti qu'il fallait se placer à la hauteur des circonstances. (XIV, 62)

The "guerre sociale" which Balzac saw in progress in the social fabric of nineteenth Century France, he classified under its moral, social and economic aspects, using such phrases to indicate their respective divisions as "les heureux et les infortunés", "les grands et les petits" and, finally, "les riches et les pauvres". For Balzac, society is a kind of jungle where the strong survive and the weak go to the wall, a continuation of the lesson he saw illustrated in the Biblical story of Cain and Abel. According to Lucien de Rubempré who writes to Vautrin, one of the "forts" in Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes:

Il y a la postérité de Cain et celle d'Abel comme vous disiez quelquefois... Vous descendez d'Adam par cette ligne en qui le diable a continué de souffler le feu dont la première étincelle avait été jetée sur Eve. Parmi les démons de cette filiation, il s'en trouve de temps en temps, de terribles à organisations vastes, qui résument toutes les forces humaines et qui ressemblent à ces fiévreux animaux du désert dont la vie exige les espaces immenses qu'ils y trouvent. Ces gens là sont dangereux dans la Société comme des lions... ils dévorent les hommes vulgaires et broutent les écus des niais. Quand Dieu le veut, ces êtres mystérieux sont Moïse, Attila, Charlemagne, Mahomet ou Napoléon; mais quand il laisse rouiller au fond de l'océan d'une génération ces instruments gigantesques, ils ne sont plus que Pugatcheff, Robespierre,

Louvel et l'Abbé Carlos Herrera. Doués d'un immense pouvoir sur les âmes tendres, ils les attirent et les broient... C'est la plante vénéneuse aux riches couleurs qui fascine les enfants dans les bois. C'est la poésie du mal. Des hommes comme vous autres doivent habiter des antres à n'en pas sortir. (V, 480-481)

Lucien could well have said 'Des hommes (et des femmes) comme vous autres...' as the "grandes dames" belong to the posterity of Cain. They bear the mark of that "feu dont la première étincelle avait été jetée sur Eve". Balzac called Vautrin "ce coeur de bronze", (V, 512) and Foedora, as we pointed out earlier, is described as "un coeur de bronze sous une frêle et gracieuse enveloppe". (VII, 1111) De Marsay recognises the iron constitution of the grandes dames and their excellent stomachs. Referring to one of these ladies, Natalie de Manerville, wife of Paul de Manerville who, like Raphaël de Valentin, is one of the "niais", de Marsay adds:

Si les femmes délicates périssent à ce cimetière (de société), celles qui résistent doivent avoir des organisations de fer, conséquemment peu de coeur, et des estomacs excellents... Pour faire jaillir l'amour dans cette nature siliceuse, il fallait un homme de fer. (VIII, 1116)

Balzac never forgets that women are all daughters of Eve, although he sees the differences between individuals, the various nuances of the species which he shows are often the result of circumstances.

#### THE FRANCES DE TETE

Under the Ancien Régime, a Duchess was one of the grandes dames at court, the prima inter pares among the other ladies of the aristocracy. She had the privilege and honour of the "tabouret" which consisted



in the right accorded them of being seated in the presence of the Royal Family of France upon ceremonial occasions. During the Ancien Régime the Duchesses were renowned for the splendour of their carriage draperies, their stately figure and bearing, the gravity of their countenance and, according to M. de Courchamps, "la sécheresse de toute sa personne".<sup>1</sup> The Duchess, however, was only the most distinguished among an otherwise very distinguished group of grandes dames who enjoyed royal favour and adorned the court of the king as well as balls and receptions of the fashionable world of the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

During the Restoration, the aristocracy preserved their pretensions, their prejudices, their vanities and their leisure which they enjoyed as a class during the days of the Ancien Régime. When the Bourbons returned to France after the departure of Napoleon, Mary Duclaux, a 20th Century historian shows how unrepentant the aristocrats were in their ideas and attitudes: "The King returned to France surrounded by a world of 'émigrés'... Far more than the King, and even more than Artois (later King Charles X), they had learned nothing and forgotten nothing".<sup>2</sup> They continued to idle away their time in vain, frivolous amusements, obsessed with the notion that gainful occupation would constitute a "dérogement à la noblesse". According to the historian

<sup>1</sup>De Courchamp, M., 'Les Duchesses', Les Français peints par eux-mêmes, p. 97

<sup>2</sup>Duclaux, Mary, A short History of France, trans. Mary F. Robinson (London, 1919), p. 302

J.P.T. Bury: "The nobility as a whole clung to the notion that the exercise of any profession save those of arms and diplomacy was beneath their dignity, and thus they themselves barred the way to other means of bettering their fortunes."<sup>1</sup>

If men, as the head of their families, refused to compromise their dignity and their aristocratic status, women were even more unoccupied, if there can be a degree in idleness, but they sought outlets for their inclinations and their energies by holding or attending balls, "soirées", "salons", "raouts", etc. Their lives were a continual round of social activities, of pleasures and amusements which inevitably led to a competition in fashions. Their peculiar situation in society made them establish La Mode as the sphere where their beauty, grace, elegance and finery could be displayed to the admiration and envy of others. La Mode therefore became a kind of "royaume" for these ladies with its own code and its iron laws, its devotees and its "reine". Unable to secure personal power in the political field or in government, the grandes dames sought a kind of social power in La Mode which, in turn, gave them influence in the government, an enhancement of their own reputation as well as admiration from their male and female devotees. Foedora was the first queen of fashion, a symbol of the others who frequent the pages of the Comédie Humaine.

Reflecting on the vital importance of admiration and flattery which women seek in the fashionable world of the Faubourg Saint-Germain,

<sup>1</sup>Bury, J.P.T., France 1814-1940, (London, 1949), p. 12

Balzac asserts in La Duchesse de Langeais:

A Paris et dans la plus haute compagnie, la femme est toujours femme; elle vit d'encens, de flatteries, d'honneurs. La plus réelle beauté, la figure la plus admirable n'est rien si elle n'est admirée; un amant, des flagorneries, sont les attestations de sa puissance. Qu'est-ce qu'un pouvoir inconnu? Rien. Supposez la plus jolie femme seule dans le coin d'un salon, elle y est triste. Quand une de ces créatures se trouve au sein des magnificences sociales, elle veut donc régner sur tous les coeurs, souvent faute de pouvoir être souveraine heureuse dans un seul. (II, 589)

The grandes dames of the Comédie Humaine are considered by Balzac from two standpoints: in their role as individuals and in their function in society. In this latter role, Balzac shows not only that their success in society, in the salons, for example, helps them to influence the decisions of men in the political, governmental and judicial field for their own personal reasons, but that they, like Foedora, are victims of one kind or another, either of their situation under the Civil Code where, for example, marriage became indissoluble, or in their frequently unhappy situation in loveless marriages, the mariage de convenance. Often they are victims of their own social group, of the tyranny of their caste and the "Frankenstein" they created in La Mode.

As individuals, Balzac divides them into three categories, a method which has been followed in this study. In La Physiologie du mariage, Balzac asserted:

La vie de femme est dans la tête, dans le coeur ou dans la passion... Le tempérament (la passion) est une maladie à guérir, le sentiment (le coeur) offre à un mari de grandes chances de succès; mais la vanité est incurable. La femme qui vit de la tête est un épouvantable fléau. Elle réunira les défauts de la femme passionnée et de la femme aimante, sans en avoir les excuses. Elle est sans pitié, sans amour, sans vertu, sans sexe. (XII, pgs. 1168-1169)

The first portrait of the "femme de tête" was Foedora in La Peau de Chagrin, and Balzac places in this category many of the aristocratic ladies of both the old and new aristocracy. The old aristocracy is bent on preserving its old privileges, its social position and its rivalry among one another in the display of their beauty, elegance and finery, while disacknowledging the new aristocracy created by Napoleon as an unpardonable encroachment upon their hereditary and ancestral rights and privileges. The new aristocracy on the other hand leaves no stone unturned in its desires and ambitions, its "lutte" to be accepted on terms of equality with the old aristocracy even if it involves sacrificing father, children, husband and marriage.

In addition to the divisions he describes between the old and the new aristocracy which are all firmly anchored in history, Balzac creates nuances of differences between members of the old aristocracy. Madame de Beauséant is not the same kind of grande dame as the Duchesse de Langeais, apart from the fact that the Duchess has a "tabouret" at court. The ladies in the Comédie Humaine also differ according to whether they are married and are still living with or separated from their husbands, a factor which is responsible for appropriate psychological differences in temperament and attitude. If separated from their husbands (not legally but by tacit agreement) they are more cruel and heartless like Foedora, the Duchesse de Langeais, the Marquise d'Espard and Béatrix de Rochefide. If living with their husbands, they are more generous like the Duchesse de Chaulieu, although they have the same vices, exercising the same kind of tyranny over their lovers or suitors.

The three categories of women, the "Femme de tête", the "Femme de coeur" and the "Femme de passion" are represented by their good and bad elements, their superior and their inferior characters, their heroic and mediocre qualities. If Madame de Langeais is more snobbish, proud, coquettish and headstrong than some of the other great ladies, Mme de Beauseant is more easily touched by sincerity, by genuine feelings, as Balzac shows in her dealing with Rastignac in Le Père Goriot and again with Gaston de Nueil in La Femme abandonnée. If the Marquise d'Espard is cruel and heartless in wishing to have her husband confined to an asylum for mentally disordered persons because the Marquis returned to the rightful owners the ill-gotten wealth his family secured in despoiling a family several generations before, Madame Firmiani, on the other hand, will not marry Octave de Camps unless he makes restitution of property dishonestly acquired by his father. Balzac gives to each character her own separate individuality although, as we pointed out, there is the common feature of their vices, their snobisme, prejudices, spendthrift habits and debts, to name a few.

The three categories of women are not in watertight compartments, however. It has been shown in the previous chapter when discussing the originality of certain aspects of his system that the aspect of "la volonté" involves the implications that the individual can reverse his mode of life and change from being a "femme de tête" to a "femme de coeur" or vice versa. Just as Raphael and the centenarian reversed roles in La Peau de Chagrin where the Antiquaire abandoned his "vie de tête" for a

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"vie de passion", Raphaël changes from a "vie de passion" and becomes a kind of living mummy in his "vie de tête".

As far as the grandes dames are concerned, there are a few who change their roles by force of circumstances. Madame de Langeais becomes a "femme de coeur" after being a heartless "femme du monde" like Foedora. Julie d'Aiglemont in La femme de trente ans switches roles and, at one stage, becomes a "femme de tête" in society when she was previously a "femme de coeur". Balzac was aware that there was no uniform rigidity in human nature which, in his view, is susceptible to all kinds of influences and change. It should therefore occasion no surprise to see some of the "femmes de tête" reappear as "femmes de coeur" or as "femmes de passion".

Among the many grandes dames of the Comédie Humaine, Balzac identifies six of them who are queens of fashion. Apart from Foedora who was his first "reine de la mode" and who is the symbol of the other society queens in Balzac's work, there are five others identified by name in L'Interdiction who show in their individual way by their selfishness, perpetual coquetries, egocisms, mania for social success, ambitions and prejudices that they are of the posterity of Cain in their determination to triumph in society regardless of the cost to others.

De 1821 à 1827, elle (la marquise d'Espard) tint un grand état de maison, se fit remarquer par son goût et par sa toilette; elle eut son jour, ses heures de réception; puis elle s'assit bientôt sur le trône où précédemment avait brillé madame la vicomtesse de Beuséant, la duchesse de Langeais, madame Firmiani, laquelle après son mariage avec monsieur de Camps, avait résigné le sceptre aux mains de la duchesse de Maufrigneuse à qui Madame d'Espard l'arracha. (VI, 1229)

The sequence in the succession to the "trône" of la Mode can be established without difficulty from the novels in the Comédie Humaine. First comes Foedora in La Peau de Chagrin, then Mme de Beauséant whose apogée as queen must have been prior to the events in Le Père Goriot, as both she and the Duchesse de Langeais, her successor, appear in the novel at the end of which the Vicomtesse is about to abdicate and retire to Courcelles in Normandy. Balzac does not show Mme de Beauséant's activities as queen in any other novel, although the Duchesse de Langeais, her successor, is "reine de la mode" in La Duchesse de Langeais, the events of which are contemporaneous with those of Le Père Goriot. In this latter novel, the Vicomtesse asks the Duchesse about the whereabouts of Montriveau, one of the main characters of La Duchesse de Langeais. Balzac's chronology appears to let him down here, as Mme de Langeais must have been queen while the events of Le Père Goriot are taking place, and yet Madame de Beauséant is about to abdicate as queen in Le Père Goriot.

Succeeding the Duchesse, is Mme Firmiani. Here again, Balzac has not written any novel where Mme Firmiani is shown as a "reine de la mode". In the novel Madame Firmiani, she is seen receiving guests in her salon, but some of the features which are generally ascribed by Balzac to those women who engage in this kind of social activity while being "reine de la mode" are a "sécheresse d'âme", a hard-hearted indifference to the welfare of others, lack of generous feelings and impulses and, above all, selfishness. Mme Firmiani, however is the very



opposite of the cold and egoistic grandes dames who hold court in their salons and are characterized by the many adverse qualities already noted but which were required to ensure their success in le monde. In pointing out this difference in the character of Mme Firmiani, Balzac shows an awareness of the fact that there were ladies in French society during the Restoration who were not all selfish, cruel and self-seeking in their social activities.

After Diane de Maufrigneuse succeeds Mme Firmiani, the Marquise d'Espard succeeds Diane. The Marquise is the last of these social queens, but she is, perhaps, the most heartless, cruel and vindictive of all the 'femmes du grand monde' of Balzac's aristocracy. Her birth places her among the very elite of the highest aristocratic families, as "elle est née Blamont-Chauvry", a family with ancestors and traditions extending very far into the Ancien Régime. She is beautiful, according to Rastignac, and "elle a un pied aussi joli que celui de la duchesse de Berri". In L'Interdiction Rastignac proposes to attach himself to her as she wields remarkable influence in his view, apart from the other advantages of her birth, her beauty and her apparent wealth. Her social position is very high as "elle est à la mode". Rastignac appraises the exterior attributes of the Marquise but makes the mistake of concluding that 'all is gold that glitters'.

Bianchon, the ubiquitous doctor of the Comédie Humaine is also a doctor of social medicine, and, like Gobseck, he sees into the soul of the great ladies. There, Bianchon read all the ugliness, all the vices of the Marquise who, according to him, 'nous confesse l'âme en

confessant le corps". (VI, 1190) Warming to the subject of the hypocrisy behind the calm, polished exterior, he sees in the Marquise the iron hand in the velvet glove:

Elle serait toujours sans âme, elle serait toujours le type le plus achevé de l'égoïsme... Malgré ce joli boudoir où nous avons passé la soirée, malgré le luxe de cet hôtel, il serait possible que madame la marquise fut endettée... Cette femme frêle, blanche, aux cheveux châtain, qui se plaint pour se faire plaindre, jouit d'une santé de fer, possède un appétit de loup, une force et une lâcheté de tigre. Jamais ni la gaze, ni la soie ni la mousseline n'ont été plus habilement entortillé autour d'un mensonge. (VI, 1190)

The Marquise's passion is to remain as queen of society regardless of the consequences. To continue to reign, she must needs be beautiful on every occasion. Although she is thirty-three years old, she manages to pass for twenty-two in the salons. There is nothing unusual in a woman concealing her age, however, but Balzac shows to what extent "la fureur d'être reine" had led the Marquise into excess. To preserve her beauty, she condemned herself to live in a kind of twilight in her home, affecting illness so as to sit under the protecting tones of light filtered in to her through muslin shade. She spends endless hours and a multitude "de soins et d'artifices" to manufacture elaborate and artificial curls to shade her graying temples. As for her bath, she uses cold water, and sleeps on a kind of horsehair mattress in order to preserve the beauty and graceful lines of her body. She eats very little food, drinks only water and "combinait ses mouvements afin d'éviter la fatigue". She is another female Gobseck.

The Marquise has a husband and two children who are an inconve-

nience to her social ambitions. The children are a great source of embarrassment as they are living proof of her age. She was therefore very delighted when her husband decided to separate from her and take the two children with him. The circumstances surrounding and succeeding the separation, reveal the egoism and the heartlessness of the Marquise.

Apart from her beauty which she must maintain, she also requires huge sums of money to continue as queen of her group. To be able to change her dresses to suit the changing fancies of tastes and fashions, to give balls and entertain in splendour, to maintain a palatial mansion in the fashionable society of the Faubourg Saint-Germain and pay the enormous expenses incurred in having liveried servants to decorate the carriages which also must be kept in regal fashion, not to mention the horses to be fed, the stables to upkeep, the Marquise must needs be blessed with considerable wealth.

The husband of the Marquise, however, creates a crisis in the family when he discovers that the family's wealth was dishonestly acquired and decides to make restitution to the heirs of the victims who are still alive. This mark of generosity on the part of the Marquis d'Espard meets with opposition from his wife, a matter which does not occasion any surprise, as it is in human nature to be selfish and a grande dame who has been accustomed all her life to luxury and ease cannot or will not willingly embrace poverty, especially when the recipient of the wealth of the family will be a bourgeois couple. To prevent her husband from pursuing his plans to part with the family wealth in

this way, the Marquise applies for a commission in lunacy to have her husband confined to an asylum and have herself and the Chevalier d'Espard, the brother of the Marquis, appointed to control and administer the family estate.

In her application for the "Interdiction" of her husband, the Marquise was obliged to invent falsehoods to explain the actions of her husband in parting with his fortune to a bourgeois family. She does not shrink from accusing him of infidelity and madness. A bitter struggle is subsequently waged between the Marquise and Judge Popinot who is appointed to investigate the case and who learns the real truth of the affair from the Marquis himself.

Balzac's psychology is not at fault in the novel, as the actions of the Marquise in wishing to confine her husband in an asylum are due to her social position which she wishes to maintain, her desire to possess control of the family's wealth to further her own social ends. The fact that the brother of the Marquis is also a petitioner in the case, lends strength to the Marquise's sworn testimony about her husband's derangement which she reasons would help to secure his confinement. Even Bianchon is the object of her coquetry as she wishes the judge to be influenced by his nephew on whom she accordingly centers her charms. According to Bianchon: "Ce soir elle m'a criblé de sourires en croyant que je puis influencer mon oncle Popinot de qui dépend le gain de son procès". (VI, 1192)

The only doubtful point in the novel concerns the elaborate scheme

of fraud prepared by the Marquise which is easily detected by the astute Judge Popinot when he decides to interview the husband himself. Did not the Marquise anticipate such an eventuality? Apparently she did, as her anxiety to influence Bianchon and, through him, Popinot, shows that she wanted to take into account the possibility of some lingering doubts in Popinot's mind.

The whole manoeuvre of the Marquise rests, however, in her belief that her "grand nom" would inspire suitable awe in Popinot, as the word of a Blamont-Chauvry, in her view, would never be doubted by a bourgeois Judge. For a clever woman like the Marquise, this is a serious miscalculation. However, she did attempt to influence Popinot and only fails because Popinot is incorruptible. But one is left to wonder why such an elaborate case of fraud rests on her belief that her sworn word would dispense the Judge from searching for the truth. No doubt this is Balzac's way of insisting on the fact that the exaggerated opinion of their ancestors, their birth, marriage and titles is the source of ruin of the old aristocracy.

But if the Marquise d'Espard shows in what way her social ambitions are responsible for her behaviour as a "femme de tête", there are other "grandes dames" who show in diverse ways that their actions are just as selfish, cruel and calculated as Mme d'Espard's. Diane de Maufrigneuse who passed the sceptre of queen to the Marquise is another "femme de tête", but she is given the significant name of the huntress which is symbolic of her activities. Born Diane d'Uxelles of an ancient aristocratic family, she is a Duchess by birth and marriage. By her

beauty and social position arising out of her birth and marriage, she becomes one of the queens of society. Her peculiar speciality is that she is a hunter of men, a curious jest of Balzac on the mythological character of Diana the huntress.

In Les secrets de la Princesse de Cadignan, Diana asserts to the Marquise d'Espard: "Je me suis amusée, mais je n'ai pas aimé... l'amour était un jeu au lieu d'être un combat". (VIII, 275-288) This confession is made in spite of the fact that the former Duchess, now the Princess de Cadignan, has had a history of possessing over thirty lovers, the names of whom are proudly displayed in an album on a table in her home. According to Balzac: "Elle nommait plaisamment ce livre le recueil de ses erreurs... Pendant les quinze années de la Restauration, elle s'était trop amusée pour penser à son fils". (VIII, 269)

Diane's husband lives apart from her, one of the consequences of the mariage de convenance. She has ample opportunity to give free rein to her tempestuous nature, and in her pursuit of men, her usual game, she devours inexperienced youth like Lucien de Rubempré and Victurnien d'Esgrignon, while submitting to the men of iron constitution like de Marsay. Her greatest triumphs are over the "faibles", the "niais" to whom she is even more cold and hard owing to their weakness. There is a kind of logic in her behaviour, in her hard nature as a "femme de tête". To be able to act the part of a society queen while she is by inclination, temperament and behaviour a "courtisane"; to pursue men and yet remain "reine" without compromising herself, her social position, her husband with whom she must maintain the fiction of marriage if her

son is to be Duke or Prince, she had to possess and practise all the wiles, coquetries and the "égoïsme" of the "femme sans coeur". In Le Cabinet des Antiques, her method of pursuing and ruining her victims are well illustrated.

Victurnien d'Esgrignon, one of the "niais", fresh from the provinces, arrives in Paris to make his fame and fortune in the social world. He meets with no Vautrin or a Madame de Beauséant to explain the way of Parisian life, as de Marsay does to Paul de Manerville in Le Contrat de mariage, as Henriette de Mortsauf does to Félix de Vandenesse in Le Lys dans la vallée, or as Fastignac does to Raphaël de Valentin in La Peau de Chagrin. No one tells him: "ainsi va le monde", but he is plunged into a selfish group of persons headed by the Vidame de Pamiers who introduces him to Diane de Maufrigneuse, "l'une des duchesses les plus aimables, les plus légères de cette époque...". Her other great vice apart from that of being a hunter of men is that of being a devourer of fortunes, as she belongs to "ce genre de femmes qui, sans qu'on sache à quoi, ni comment, dévoreraient les revenus de la terre et ceux de la lune si l'on pouvait les toucher". (II, 1128)

As a coquette, Diane acquired a skill in artifice. She also needed the accomplishments and artistry of a consummate actress, as there is probably no role requiring greater skill than that of a "Célimène" attempting to be an "Agnès". This is also Diane's special ability. According to Balzac, she could "s'improviser ange" when she wished and "se créait des rôles et des robes". (II, 1130) When she married the Duc de Maufrigneuse, "elle avait joué la femme instruite et perverse".

Bastignac and de Marsay are fully aware of her talents and hypocrisies, as they are numbered among her previous lovers. Through selfishness and indifference, they do not warn Victurnien about Diane, and the young provincial is infatuated with her at first sight: "la petite auréole chaussée par madame de Maufrigneuse éblouit Victurnien qui fut cadennassée dans la première heure, attaché à cette ceinture de petite fille, accroché à ces boucles tournées par la main des fées". (II, 1131)

Victurnien's inexperience with women and his instant passion for Diane prevented him from seeing that everything about the Duchess was studied, calculated and artificial. He judged from what he saw and did not imagine that anything was concealed. Balzac's analysis of Diane's coquetry is remarkable for the cleverness of the artifices employed to ensnare Victurnien. Her ability as actress is buttressed by her considerable experience in past liaisons which gave her expert knowledge on how to position her body to arouse Victurnien. Her dress dazzled him, as it was a combination of purity and sensuality. Her lips gave eloquent promises. Her reticences in her speech and in her attitude; her eyelashes which were demurely raised and lowered with grace and affected sensibility; the suggestions in her actions of favouring him while keeping a distance between them succeeded in enchanting her victim.

When Victurnien is ensnared, the other grandes dames present at the scene complacently remark that Diane "est allée au but assez lestement ce soir". (II, 1136) Like Raphaël de Valentin, Victurnien comes up against "une allumeuse", and he is by no means her equal. She trifles with his feelings and refuses to submit to him although, in the meantime,



he has been spending on her what little money he had brought from his native Alençon. When this is exhausted, he takes to gambling and acquires other vices. His innocence, resolutions and ambitions vanish: "Victurnien mena cette vie lassante, où l'on dissipe plus d'âme encore peut-être que d'argent, où s'enterrent les plus beaux talents, où mènent les plus incorruptibles probités, où s'amollissent les volontés <sup>les</sup> mieux trempées.

(II, 1136)

At the end of six months, by virtue of every kind of subterfuge and hypocrisy, Diane had succeeded in making Victurnien feel that a harmless kiss on her hand was a deadly sin. She contrived that every favour should be extorted from her, and she played her role with such consummate art that it was impossible for him to feel that she was not an angel. At moments, she would rise to great heights of feeling and at others, she would show the most selfish insensibility. Fascinated by the prospect of ultimately possessing Diane, Victurnien never flagged in his pursuit of her, spending not only what money he had, but even what he did not have, reducing himself to borrowing and debts. He mortgaged his youth and his future for the illusion of possessing a grande dame like the Duchesse, a fact which has serious consequences later in his life. According to the indifferent aristocrats who watch the process of Victurnien's progressive ruin: "Elle (Diane) ruinera ce pauvre innocent dit Charles de Vandenesse... Oh! moralement et financièrement, ça ne fait pas de doute, dit la vicomtesse (de Grandlieu) en se levant".

(II, 1134)

The end is not long delayed. Victurnien forges a document to

secure money and is arrested. The influence of both Diane and the King is required to save him from imprisonment. Balzac shows, however, that it is not through genuine concern for Victurnien that Diane exerts herself to help him, but because she felt that she may be implicated in a public trial, and the slightest breath of scandal could end her reign as a society queen. Self-interest, therefore, is responsible for her remarkable energy and resourcefulness. When Victurnien is finally saved, she becomes once more the hard and cold coquette. As she bids adieu to the friends and relatives of the d'Esgrignon family in Alençon where she had gone in male disguise in her attempt to save Victurnien, he now approaches her as she is about to leave:

Diane? cria le jeune comte au désespoir. — Monsieur vous vous oubliez étrangement, dit froidement la duchesse en quittant son rôle d'homme et de maîtresse et redevenant non seulement ange, mais encore duchesse, non seulement duchesse, mais la Célimène de Molière... La Duchesse le méprisait comme un homme faible qu'il était. (II, 1224)

On the historical level, it has been discovered that the portraiture of the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse in Le Cabinet des Antiques and as the Princesse de Cadignan in Les secrets de la Princesse de Cadignan was based on an authentic grande dame of the Restoration, a Comtesse Cordelia de Castellane. According to Anne-Marie Meininger, Cordelia was "l'une des authentiques reines de Paris, scandaleuse, spirituelle et charmante comme Diane de Maufrigneuse".<sup>1</sup> When Victurnien d'Esgrignon was arrested and Diane showed zeal, energy, resourcefulness and even artifice in her

<sup>1</sup>Meininger, Anne-Marie, 'Une Princesse parisienne ou les Secrets de la Comtesse de Castellane', L'Année Balzacienne, 1962, pgs. 284, 305-306

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attempts to save him, it is shown by Anne-Marie Meininger where Cordelia was similarly courageous in difficult situations. She even saved a certain Comte de Liscoet who, according to Charles de Rémusat in Mémoires de sa vie,

'avait perdu soixante mille francs de rente en bonne terres, par son émigration; il était de l'expédition de Quiberon et il lui restait à peine cent francs de rente pour vivre'. Sans responsabilité dans les malheurs du vieux gentilhomme... Cordelia met à secourir Liscoet autant de bonne grâce que Diane, sauvant de l'abîme la famille du vénérable marquis d'Esgrignon.<sup>1</sup>

It is not very often that Balzac's models for his grandes dames come to light in this way to support le vraisemblable with le vrai, but even without the support of le vrai, it can be shown where fashions and the influence of the aristocratic caste produced ladies of the kind of the Marquise d'Espard and Diane de Maufrigneuse. Writing about those grandes dames of the Ancien Régime whose habits, traditions and attitudes the aristocratic women of the Restoration continued, Taine shows that their actions conform to the iron laws of the group:

Après fait le code des usages, il est tout naturel que ce soit à leur profit, et elles tiennent la main à ce que toutes les prescriptions en soient suivies. A cet égard, tel salon 'de la très-bonne compagnie' est un tribunal supérieur où l'on juge en dernier ressort. La maréchale du Luxembourg est une autorité; point de bienséance qu'elle ne justifie par une raison ingénieuse. Sur un mot, sur un manque d'usage, sur la moindre apparence de prétention ou de fatuité, on encourt sa désapprobation, qui est sans appel, et l'on est perdu à tout jamais dans le beau monde.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Meininger, Anne-Marie, 'Une Princesse parisienne ou les Secrets de la Comtesse de Castellane', L'Année Balzacienne, 1962, pgs. 284, 305-306

<sup>2</sup>Taine, H., Les origines de la France contemporaine (Paris: Hachette 1890), p. 182

Balzac captures the state of mind of the great ladies of the aristocracy who, while they set the tone of their social group and establish the "royaume" or the divinity of la Mode, are victims of their own creation. Their actions and their state of mind conform both to the period in which they live as well as the social pressures brought about by their own particular milieu. Whether the Marquise d'Espard as a personage is or is not based on the model of an actual grande dame, is not very relevant to the historical aspect of Balzac's work, as during the architects of their own misfortunes, and the careers of the d'Espards and the Maufrigneuses match the spirit and the mood of the history of the period. Because of their traditions, prejudices and their social position, the ambitions of these ladies during the Restoration gave rise to the kind of situations in which the Maufrigneuses and the d'Espard find themselves.

The arrest and threatened imprisonment of Victurnien d'Esgrignon is also in keeping with the spirit and even the letter of the times, as the press of the period reveals the immoral behaviour of some of the aristocrats. P.G. Castex, in his introduction to Le Cabinet des Antiques in the edition of Garnier-Frères, shows that an actual "affaire judiciaire" is the point de départ of the novel, and Hervé Donnard also commented on the breakdown in morals among the aristocrats of the period which is eloquently recorded in the Press:

Des faits positifs révélèrent d'ailleurs la crise aiguë que traversait la nouvelle génération patricienne. Les portes de Sainte Pélagie se referment sur Savinien de Port\_enduère (vide Modeste Mignon), et il s'en

faut de peu que Victurnien d'Esgrignon ne comparaisse en cours d'assises, sous inculpation de faux et usages de faux. La chronique judiciaire de l'époque confirme en effet, que la meute des fesses-matthieux s'accrochait aux basques d'héritiers, imprudents d'illustres familles!<sup>1</sup>

The theme of coquetry and the role of Célimène are used by Balzac with variations in the majority of cases where the portraiture of the grandes dames is concerned, a technique which is to be explained by his conviction that women will always behave more or less like the daughters of Eve, as "la femme est toujours femme" he wrote in La Duchesse de Langeais. He did not need the personal experience of the coquetry of the Marquise de Castries to make him realise the importance of the role of Célimène in portraying the aristocracy. He read about and observed these attitudes in the society of his times.

D'Almèras also expresses the same point of view as Balzac about the basic similarity in desires and attitudes of women. According to him:

Les femmes changent de toilettes, mais elles ne changent pas d'âme, et la variation de leur toilette prouvent que leur âme, toujours, reste la même. Depuis Eve qui se vêtit, faute de mieux, d'une feuille de figuier, elles ornent leur beauté pour plaire à leur maître et seigneur, à leur roi, à leur dieu, l'Homme. Elles cherchent à attirer son attention, à fixer son regard.<sup>2</sup>

The variations which are to be seen in the portraiture of the grandes dames arise from their relationship with men, from differences

<sup>1</sup>Donnard, J. Hervé, Les réalités sociales et économiques de la Comédie Humaine, p. 164

<sup>2</sup>D'Almèras, H., La vie parisienne sous la Restauration (Paris: Albin, Michel 1909), p. 323

of social status, temperament and other modifying aspects. Although they are similar in their motives, ambitions, desire for admiration and flattery, their education, environment, heredity produce differences in the same species.

Antoinette de Langeais in La Duchesse de Langeais is also a society queen like Foedora and Diane de Maufrigneuse, and just as coquettish. Like both of these coquettes, she has her Montriveau, her "niais", for Armand "ne comprenait rien à ces petites singeries parisiennes, et son âme ne pouvait répondre qu'aux sonores vibrations des beaux sentiments". (II, 595) Through vanity and belief in her own power, the Duchesse approaches Armand, much in the same way that Diane approached Victurnien d'Asgrignon, and the Marquise d'Aiglemont, Charles de Vandenesse in La ferme de trente ans, and the result is the same: Antoinette inspires passion but refuses to yield to it. But here the resemblances cease. Montriveau is a "niais" but not a "faible". He is a man of energy, of steel, though inexperienced in the special aristocratic game of love as played by Antoinette and others. This difference in Montriveau, in the quarry which is being pursued by the huntress, results in a variation in the pattern of events where the weak become victims and are eliminated or subdued. Face to face with a power equal to her own, Antoinette must behave in a different way from the usual role of Célimène struggling against a weak Alceste.

After vainly pursuing the Duchesse for several months, Montriveau gets a lesson in social education from the Marquis de Ronquerolles, one

of the "treize", when he tells him: "ainsi va le monde". Contrary to the reactions of Raphaël de Valentin to whom Pastignac spoke without effect, Armand listens quietly and acts firmly. According to Ronquerolles:

Les femmes de notre faubourg aiment, comme toutes les autres à se baigner dans l'amour; mais elles veulent posséder sans être possédées. Elles ont transigé avec la nature. Nous connaissons ces sortes de femmes, la Parisienne pure... ta duchesse est toute tête, elle ne sent que par sa tête, elle a un coeur dans la tête, une voix de tête, elle est friande par la tête... He! bien, écoute. Sois aussi bien implacable qu'elle sera... Sois implacable comme la loi. N'aie pas plus de charité que n'en a le bourreau. Frappe. Quand tu auras frappé, frappe encore. Frappe toujours, comme si tu donnais le knout. Les duchesses sont dures, mon cher Armand, et ces natures de femmes ne s'amollissent que sous les coups; la souffrance leur donne un coeur, et c'est oeuvre de charité que de les frapper. Frappe donc sans cesse. (II, 644-645)

Montriveau takes Ronquerolles' advice and discontinues his visits to the home of the Duchesse. She no longer sees him, but encounters a menacing Armand from time to time at social gatherings. When she is brought to the stage where she expects some kind of harm to her person as a result of the veiled threats made by Armand, he abducts her and almost has her branded with a hot iron on her forehead. When he relents and releases her, not through weakness, but because the worst vengeance is no vengeance, and because the Duchesse has been sufficiently punished in the ordeal of waiting to be branded, she alters her previous attitude of the coquette as a result of Montriveau's display of force, and becomes far more flexible and malleable. She is transformed into a "femme de coeur". She can no longer despise him as weak as Diane de Maufrigneuse despised Victurnien, as it is in the nature of many intelligent women to have diminished respect for men with weak natures, and an admiration for



men of courage and iron constitution. They often despise commonplace men and exploit those who are simpletons.

This technique of Balzac to confront the strong with the strong, and the strong with the weak are the only two possibilities used by him in his portraiture of the grandes dames who are often of the "race des forts" by virtue of their perpetual struggle to achieve social prominence in a society where the philosophy is "mort aux faibles", as Raphaël discovered at Aix. In Béatrix, Béatrix de Rochefide trifles with the affections of Calyste du Guénic in the usual pattern until such time that Calyste, like Montriveau, decides to become a man of iron constitution. Although Béatrix was attracted to him and felt the urgings of passion, her calculating mind refused to allow her to submit to the desires which were aroused in her body. She could not control the forces of nature, but her body was unable to escape the control of her mind, and her intelligence dictated the part she should play.

As in the case of Montriveau, when Calyste was sufficiently frustrated by the coquetries of Béatrix, in a moment of lucidity, he decided to strike hard by attempting to push her off a cliff. The realisation by Béatrix that it was love or the excesses of love which did not hesitate to inflict physical harm on the object of the love, finally overcomes her stubborn will. Froce is therefore a solution which Balzac sees as essential when every other method fails in the courting of the grande dame. Raphael may well have succeeded if he had adopted the creed of the strong, instead of being weak like Foedora's other suitors who, according to Félicien Marceau, "sont assez nigauds pour l'adorer au lieu

de la battre."<sup>1</sup> According to Balzac in *Béatrix*:

Les femmes froides, frêles, dures et minces, comme est madame de Rochefide, ces femmes dont le cou offre une attache osseuse qui leur donne une vague ressemblance avec la race féline, ont l'âme de la couleur pâle de leurs yeux clairs, gris ou verts; aussi, pour fondre, pour vitrifier ces cailloux, faut-il des coups de foudre. Pour Béatrix, la rage d'amour et l'attentat de Calyste avaient été ce coup de tonnerre auquel rien ne résiste et qui change les natures les plus rebelles. (IX, 465)

Béatrix differs from the other coquettes in a special way. She is not only a "femme de tête" in her coquetries, but she seeks to destroy the happiness of others. She breaks up the growing attachment of Félicité des Touches for Calyste by persuading him to turn his affections away from Félicité to her. All this is done, of course, with the cleverness of the coquette, and with the usual hypocrisies, arousing him and refusing to submit. When she returns from Italy where she had fled with Gennaro Conti, an episode which Balzac introduced to parallel the liaison of Mme d'Agoult and Franz Liszt, she returns to France and exercises the same tyranny over Calyste as in the past. Although married, Calyste is still weak enough to be torn between his love for his wife and the passion he still feels for Béatrix. Far from wishing to conceal her relationship with Calyste, however, Béatrix not only demands from him a total renunciation of his wife, but she deliberately arranges for Sabine, his wife, to know about her existence and the feelings of her husband for her. It is only through the cleverness of Calyste's mother-in-law and the Grandlieu family that the plans of Béatrix are frustrated and Calyste reunited with

<sup>1</sup>Marceau, Félicien, Balzac et son monde, p. 96

his wife.

The Marquise d'Espard, Diane de Maufrigneuse, Antoinette de Langeais, Béatrix de Rochefide all live apart from their husbands, and their hardness is more pronounced than that of other grandes dames who, though coquettes as well, do not show the same "sécheresse de coeur". The women of the latter category are more inclined to yield to their passions, although circumstances influence their behaviour a great deal. Madame de Bargeton and the Duchesse de Chaulieu are both living with their husbands, but encourage the attentions of other men out of vanity, boredom or unhappiness.

In Les Deux Poètes, the first section of Les Illusions perdues, Mme de Bargeton, though living with her husband in Angoulême, attaches to herself Lucien Chardon (later Lucien de Rubempré) and conceives a passion for him which makes her defy the members of the local, snobbish high-society group and receive him regularly in her home. The Duchesse de Chaulieu, on the other hand, has her Canalis (Constant-Cyr-Melchior, baron de) who has been her lover for ten years. Madame de Bargeton abandons Lucien, however, when she leaves Angoulême and her husband to establish herself in Paris where she is advised by Mme d'Espard, a close relative who, as is to be expected, suitably corrupts her into a Parisian "femme de tête". The Duchesse de Chaulieu, however, is more generous with Canalis whom she includes in her husband's entourage when the family goes to Madrid where the Duke has been appointed as Ambassador.

In spite of being generous with Canalis, however, the Duchesse is not less domineering and demanding than the other grandes dames. In

Modeste Mignon, her coldness, cruelty and tyranny over Canalis are evident when, in his ambitions to secure a wealthy heiress in marriage, he attempts to court Modeste without first getting the permission of the Duchesse to embark on such a venture. However, she is reconciled to him when he abandons his projects and submits to her iron will. She needs to be less inflexible than the other ladies who are separated from their husbands, for the simple reason that she is more socially handicapped, and the inducements given to any suitor or lover would obviously need to be greater to overcome the repeated inconvenience of a husband's presence. Canalis would need to be fairly satisfied to preserve his association with the Duchess for ten years, but she still remains a grande dame in her will, strength and tyranny over Canalis.

Mme Evangélista de Casa-Réal in Le Contrat de mariage is also one of Balzac's "femmes de tête" in the kind of selfish education she gives to her daughter on the eve of her marriage and the methodical way she sets about ruining her son-in-law. The marriage contract forms the basis of negotiations between the two families headed by Maître Mathias, the family lawyer of Paul de Manerville, one of the "niais", and Solonet on behalf of Mme Evangélista. Because of her spendthrift nature, Mme Evangélista has squandered much of her daughter's inheritance, but hopes to conceal this by clever handling of the marriage contract. As a result of the bitterness and acrimony which develop on her part over the hard bargaining which takes place on both sides, she develops a hatred for Paul, and she goes to the extent of ruining him after his marriage while pretending to be a kind-hearted and helpful mother-in-law.

Certain embittered women seek revenge for a variety of reasons. To injure the interests of Paul whom she secretly hates, Mme Évangélista encourages her daughter to adopt the philosophy of a woman of fashion and base her marriage not on love, but on hypocrisy, artifice, calculation and coquetry. In her view, when two persons wish to marry and remain together for life with love as their only bond, they quickly exhaust the slender resources which only their feelings provide, and satiety, indifference and disgust are the inevitable consequences. According to her:

Une fois le sentiment flétri, que devenir?... Nous avons toutes une destinée en tant que femmes comme les hommes ont leur vocation. Ainsi, une femme est née pour être une femme à la mode, une charmante maîtresse de maison... Ta vocation est de plaire. Ton éducation t'a d'ailleurs formée pour le monde. Aujourd'hui les femmes doivent être élevées pour le salon comme autrefois elles l'étaient pour le gynécée. Tu n'est faite ni pour être mère de famille, ni pour devenir un intendant. Si tu as des enfants, j'espère qu'ils n'arriveront pas de manière à te gâter la taille le lendemain de ton mariage; rien n'est plus bourgeois que d'être grosse un mois après la cérémonie, et d'abord cela prouve qu'un mari ne nous aime pas bien. Si donc tu as des enfants, deux ou trois ans après ton mariage, eh! bien, les gouvernantes et les précepteurs les élèveront. Toi, sois la grande dame qui représente le luxe et le plaisir de la maison... Un mari, ma chère, est le seul homme avec lequel une femme ne peut rien permettre. (III, 836-838)

Mme Évangélista's motives for ruining Paul after his marriage are based on the bitterness engendered over the arrangement of the marriage contract, a situation which has historical accuracy, as the hard bargaining which frequently took place in France in the settling of the contract often led to much bitter feeling later between families. A break in relations was not unusual when the prospects imagined before actual bargaining began were unfulfilled when actual figures were later examined. Writing about this development, the Courtesse d'Agoult confirms

that ruptures of the kind Balzac describes in Le Contrat de mariage did in fact take place:

Notaires et avoués, mis en présence, se communiquaient 'les papiers'. On tâchait bien encore de jouer au fin en mariage, comme en chevaux, l'honneur n'obligeait pas; cependant, dans les 'études' tout prenait corps: chiffres réels, hypothèques, actes de naissance, contrats de vente ou d'achat, testaments, etc. Il n'y avait plus trop moyen de tricher. Désappointement réciproque: hésitations, reculades: rupture quelquefois.<sup>1</sup>

In Paul de Manerville's case, he is more sinned against than sinning, as his lawyer, the honest and able Mathias is the person responsible for preventing his over generous client from ruining himself by hasty conclusions and a too trusting nature. Mme Evangélista, however, does not forgive Paul for being shrewd, and her actions are a direct result of the failure of her scheme to dupe him. The ferocity of her vengeance in systematically ruining him after his marriage and reducing him to poverty, shows the kind of vengeance which a grande dame can wreak on a simple, trusting person. She is of the posterity of Cain in her strength and her clever calculations, and de Marsay calls her a "Mascarille en jupons", superior even to Gobseck:

Comparé à madame Evangélista, le papa Gobseck est une flanelle, un velours, une potion calmante, une meringue à la vanille, un oncle à dénouement... Si tu (Paul de Manerville) avais eu l'esprit d'être amoureux de cette femme avant d'épouser sa fille, tu serais aujourd'hui pair de France, duc de Manerville et ambassadeur à Madrid. (III, 874-875)

De Marsay may be right in his statement that the fault of Paul is

<sup>1</sup>Angoult, Comtesse d' (alias Daniel Stern), Mes Souvenirs, p. 242

that of marrying the wrong person. Mme Evangélista's husband died early, leaving her the care of her daughter Natalie, a problem which added difficulties to her volatile nature and sharpened her propensity for evil. Balzac saw the problems which arise in a life of celibacy or spinsterhood, whether enforced or otherwise, and he often commented on its harmful effects. In Le Curé de Tours, for example, he made a categorical assertion: "Le célibat offre donc ce vice capital que, faisant converger les qualités de l'homme sur une seule passion, l'égoïsme, il rend les célibataires ou nuisibles ou inutiles". (VI, 613)

Mlle Gazard is a case in point. She is a spinster who not only shows a ready inclination to place excessive emphasis on trifles, but she also has a narrowness of outlook which greatly influences her attitude to others. In Le Curé de Tours, she considers her pride to be irreparably hurt by the Abbé Birotteau, a mild-mannered person who unwittingly frustrates her efforts to form a group of whist players. Her situation as a "femme célibataire", like Mme Evangelista, adds the asperities of frustrated ambitions to a somewhat peevish nature, compounded by her loneliness, all of which impel her to pursue Birotteau to secure revenge.

In all the examples of the grandes dames of the aristocracy considered so far, there is a struggle involved in each case, whether this is concerned with the determination of a Mme d'Espard to remain as social queen by sacrificing her husband and children, or a Diane de Maufrigneuse to obtain pleasure in a society in which she cannot find happiness. In the case of Mme de Langeais, boredom from leading "cette vie creuse, exclusivement remplie par le bal, par les visites faites pour le bal",

(II, 500) inspires her to seek an introduction to Montriveau and to make her resolve to attach him to herself. Even in Mme Evangélista's case, her conspiracy against Paul originated in her daughter's diminished inheritance which she wanted to conceal while wishing at the same time to prevent her diamonds from being included in the marriage contract to help offset her daughter's diminished dowry.

The search for happiness is a basic part of the struggle for existence on the part of the grandes dames. This struggle often conflicts with the ambitions of men when they interact socially, and gives rise to certain crises which bring out the strong instinct for self-preservation in women, especially aristocratic women, who have learned early the methods for survival in the social jungle. When the grandes dames struggle among themselves, a great tenacity of purpose is shown. Perhaps, even more than with men, their dealings with those of their own sex who belong to their own social group, share the same ambitions and compete for the same prize, help to make them even more ruthless with one another, as only one of them can wear the crown of "reine de la mode" at anyone time. That is why friendships are few among the great ladies as self-interest is often an inhibiting factor.

#### THE MIDDLE CLASS

The vanity, indifference and heartlessness which Balzac showed to be a common feature of the old aristocracy are not confined to them alone, however, as there are other echelons on the hierarchical ladder of the grande where women of lower social rank are consumed by the same vices which are to be seen in the highest social circles. Those ladies of lesser social rank make every attempt to be accepted as equals by the old aristo-



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#### THE SOCIAL HIERARCHY

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cracy, so that they can share the social and other benefits which were still available under the Bourbon Restoration. Although the aristocracy as a class was abolished in 1789 and many of its members fled from France to Europe and elsewhere, many others remained in hiding in the country and, in more peaceful days, returned to re-occupy their lands and homes as well as continue their old habits.

While the Empire lasted, Napoleon felt the need for the support of the powerful families of the old aristocracy, and while he courted them, he proceeded to establish his own aristocracy, based not on birth or ancestry, however, but on service. According to the historian Albert Guérard:

Napoleon brought forcibly together incompatible elements: a new nobility of soldiers, politicians, and officials, and all the representatives of the old aristocracy he could coax, bribe and coerce into his service. The former Jacobins and the old Marquises had one another in cordial contempt. It took three quarters of a century for these classes to amalgamate.<sup>1</sup>

In La ferme abandonnée, Balzac shows the prejudices and the "snobisme" of the old aristocracy towards the new, especially in the provinces where prejudices on the part of the old families appear to be stronger. Referring to one such family, Balzac observes:

Cette espèce de 'famille royale' au petit pied effleuré par ses alliances ... les Navarreins, les Grandlieu, touche aux Cadignan, et s'accroche aux Balmont-Chauvry. Le chef de cette race illustre est toujours un chasseur déterminé. Homme sans manières, il accable tout le monde de sa

Guérard, Albert, French civilization in the nineteenth century (New York: The Century Co., 1914), p. 74

supériorité nominale; tolère le sous-préfet, comme il souffre l'impôt; n'admet aucune des puissances nouvelles créées par le dix-neuvième siècle, et fait observer, comme une monstruosité politique, que le premier ministre n'est pas gentilhomme. Sa femme a le ton tranchant, parle haut, a eu des adorateurs, mais fait régulièrement ses pâques; elle élève mal ses filles, et pense qu'elles seront toujours assez riches de leur nom. (III, 584)

Even though the titles of some members of the old aristocracy were not illustrious or only dated back a few years in the Ancien Régime, the prejudices against the new aristocracy were still great. Napoleon, it can be seen, had sown the seeds of conflict between the two aristocracies, as the old was perpetually contemptuous of the rising bourgeois generals and officials who were being made Princes, Counts and Barons by an Emperor who was himself a bourgeois in their eyes. The old aristocrats were forever tracing their titles down through the centuries, either to the time of the crusades or, further yet, to the very early invasion of the Franks, a race in whom it was believed, by the old aristocrats and even historians, the ancestors of the old aristocrats are to be found. According to Guérard, "Sieyès cried out against the French aristocracy: 'Let us send them back to their German marshes from whence they came!'" Many considered the Revolution of 1830 as the final emancipation of the Gallo-Romans held in subjection since the sixth Century".<sup>1</sup>

As a result of these widespread beliefs, it is not to be wondered at that an aristocracy created by Napoleon would be held in contempt by a class or group whose members prided themselves on their early ancestors, on their traditions, on their "naissance", on the fact that they had

<sup>1</sup>Guérard, Albert, p. 31

privileges of either having a "tabouret" at court, of driving in the company of the king and the queen in their carriages, of being presented at court and, as far as the grandes dames were concerned, of being kissed on the cheek by the queen. For the old aristocracy, "naissance" would naturally take precedence over "mérite".

In Le Bal de Sceaux, Balzac shows the Comte de Fontaine, one of the old aristocrats, though ruined by confiscations, constantly refusing the lucrative offers of Napoleon, an action on the Count's part which was very common among the old aristocratic families. The Count not only refuses to associate with the government or the court of Napoleon, but he had even refused to embark on any alliance in marriage with those whom he considered to be parvenus, in spite of his own poverty and the wealth of the family wishing the alliance:

Invariable dans sa religion aristocratique, il en avait aveuglément suivi les maximes quand il jugea convenable de se choisir une compagne. Malgré les séductions d'un riche parvenu révolutionnaire qui mettait cette alliance à haut prix, il épousa une demoiselle de Kergarouet sans fortune, mais dont la famille est une des plus vieilles de la Bretagne. (II, 727-728)

While old "Vendéens" and "Emigrés" like the Comte de Fontaine and others of the great families of the old aristocracy resist the encroachments of the new aristocracy seeking alliances, there are others of a later generation who find it expedient to their ambitions to accept such alliances. In Splendeurs et misères des Courtisanes, the Grandlieu family asks a huge financial price of Lucien de Rubempré in return for the hand of their daughter Clothilde in marriage. In Gobseck, the Vicomtesse de

Grandlieu is willing to entertain the suit of Ernest de Restaud for her daughter Camille, although the young Count's mother was born a Goriot. The prospects and the assurances that Ernest will be exceedingly wealthy are enough to ensure tentative consent on the part of the Vicomtesse.

During the Empire, the Comte Ferraud, in Le Colonel Chabert, also saw the wisdom of a marriage alliance as a means of making his way rapidly to fortune and power. Having become "l'objet des coquetteries de l'empereur, qui souvent était aussi heureux de ses conquêtes sur l'aristocratie que du gain, on promit au comte la restitution de son titre, celle de ses biens non vendus". (I, 1140) The young Count, therefore, took counsel of his ambitions, and later conceived the idea of achieving success not by openly accepting Napoleon's blandishments, but by seeking an alliance with the widow of Colonel Chabert, Napoleon's famous General.

As a result of the aristocratic birth and social position of the Count, however, Madame Ferraud, the wife of the Count, was accepted into the social milieu of the Faubourg Saint-Germain after suitable hesitations on the part of the Faubourg which felt the need to satisfy itself that "le mariage du jeune comte n'était pas une défection". (I, 1140) Napoleon himself was happy that the marriage "répondait à ses idées de fusion" in that the old aristocracy was allying itself to the new. Balzac is historical here, as he accurately represents the views of Napoleon when the Emperor was creating his new aristocracy.

Mme Ferraud, however, having become a new Countess by virtue of her alliance with the old aristocracy adopts the manners, behaviour and vices of her new environment: she becomes inspired with ambitions as

a result of her newly acquired social position. Vanity devours her.

According to Balzac:

Elle avait été séduite aussi par l'idée d'entrer dans cette société dédaigneuse qui, malgré son abaissement dominait la cour impériale. Toutes ses vanités étaient flattées autant que ses passions dans ce mariage. Elle allait devenir une 'femme comme il faut'". (I, 1140)

The Countess soon acquires the tastes and habits of a "femme à la mode" and, as she is wealthy, she is able to satisfy her social ambitions. Unfortunately for her, however, a blight in her life presents itself in the disenchantment of her husband who had hoped to secure rapid political advancement by his marriage, but with the disappearance of the Emperor and the return of the Bourbons, "la fortune politique du jeune Comte ne fut pas rapide. Il comprenait les exigences de la position dans laquelle se trouvait Louis XVIII". (I, 1140) In addition to this miscalculation on the part of the ambitious Count, he realises that he has made a bad marriage and this idea communicates itself to the Countess who, naturally, becomes afflicted with "un cancer moral":

Au premier retour du roi, le comte Ferraud avait conçu quelques regrets de son mariage. La veuve du Colonel Chabert ne l'avait allié à personne, il était seul et sans appui pour se diriger dans une carrière pleine d'écueils et pleine d'ennemis. Puis, peut-être, quand il avait pu juger froidement sa femme, avait-il reconnu chez elle quelques vices d'éducation qui la rendaient impropre à le seconder dans ses projets. (I, 1142)

In the midst of her problems, when she sees that the social position which she had acquired as a result of a fortuitous marriage, is becoming precarious as a result of her husband's regrets over the marriage,

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In the midst of her problems, when she sees that the social position which she had acquired as a result of a fortuitous marriage, is becoming precarious as a result of her husband's regrets over the marriage,

a regret made manifest when the Count commented adversely on the marriage of Talleyrand, she realises that her foot-hold in the Faubourg Saint-Germain where she lives is beginning to slip. The sudden reappearance of Chabert, her first husband, long thought to be dead, introduces a crisis of no little dimension in her life. Her whole legal and social position as the Comtesse Ferraud is now at stake. To appreciate the choice she makes, Balzac insists on her social ambitions which were gratified by her acceptance into the old aristocracy:

Madame la Comtesse Ferraud se trouva par hasard avoir fait tout ensemble un mariage d'amour, de fortune et d'ambition. Encore jeune et belle, Madame Ferraud joua le rôle d'une femme à la mode, et vécut dans l'atmosphère de la cour. Riche par elle-même, riche par son ami, qui, prôné comme un des hommes les plus capables du parti royaliste et l'ami du roi, semblait promis à quelque ministère, elle appartenait à l'aristocratie, elle en partageait la splendeur". (I, 1142)

The Countess puts her interests before Chabert's and therefore refuses to recognise his existence or answer his letters when he wrote informing her that he was alive. In fact, she was aware of his existence and whereabouts even before she remarried, a matter which Derville, Chabert's lawyer draws to her attention. Her actions and ambitions are consistent with those of the "femme de tête" who normally allows nothing or no one to interfere with her personal interests. Chabert's crime or misfortune is that he is still alive while the interests of the Countess require him to remain dead. When Derville manages to bring them together to effect a compromise, Chabert soon realises the heartlessness of the



Countess as he tells his lawyer: "J'ai eu tort de la choisir, de me fier à des apparences. Elle n'a pas de coeur". (I, 1153)

Unfortunately for Chabert, however, he too is one of the "faibles", as he is no match for the hard-headed, calculating woman of society which the Countess has become, especially when her very social existence is at stake. Chabert quickly and naïvely accepts the false explanations of the Countess who easily manufactures untruths to explain to a gullible Chabert why she did not respond to his letters. Chabert's trusting nature makes it easy for the Countess to deceive him. According to Balzac, his misfortunes had enhanced his good nature, and his suffering had enlarged his understanding and added to his magnanimity. He is thus an easy victim for the Countess who tricks him repeatedly into believing her, until one fine day he discovers by chance her hypocrisy and cruelty in planning to send him to Charenton to be confined there. In disgust at her treachery, deceit and heartlessness, he renounces all the advantages which the patient work of his lawyer had secured, abandons society, and ends his life in an "Hospice de la Vieillesse", no longer a man, according to Balzac, but number 164.

But if the Countess Ferraud shows that she is a "femme de tête" in her ruthlessness, egoism and coldness born of her social ambitions and her determination not to be a victim in the social jungle, Delphine de Nucingen on the other hand, another member of the new aristocracy, is a social pariah of the old aristocracy in Le Père Goriot. Her situation is almost diametrically the opposite of the Countess Ferraud's in that

her husband is not a member of the old but of the new aristocracy, and she is therefore condemned to ostracism by the Faubourg Saint-Germain. To enable her to penetrate into the social milieu of the Maufrigneuses and the d'Espards to share the company of the "déesses" who move in splendour in those gilded halls and ancient châteaux, Delphine can think of no better way than that of acquiring a lover in the person of Henri de Marsay. But alas! she discovers to her sorrow that she is still not socially accepted by the Faubourg Saint-Germain although her sister, Anastasie de Restaud, like the Countess Ferraud, has been readily received by the Beauséants and the Langeais.

Delphine's husband is of bourgeois stock, although his wealth has been able to secure for him the title of Baron, and when a wife is not herself of aristocratic birth, her husband's position decides the social status of the family. According to Felicien Marceau:

Sous la Restauration, une femme vivant dans une mansarde n'en aurait pu sortir que pour s'arrêter sur le trottoir. Pour les lions, le champ est libre. Pour les femmes, il est clos. Leur naissance, leur mariage les casent une fois pour toutes en un certain point dont elles ne s'éloigneront guère.<sup>1</sup>

Madame de Nucingen's position as the Baronne de Nucingen does not open the doors of the Faubourg Saint-Germain for her, while Anastasie has even been presented at Court: two sisters from the same family, belonging to different social "milieux" and, in many respects, having different social destinies merely on account of their marriage. In fact

<sup>1</sup>Marceau, Félicien, Balzac et son monde, p. 86

the difference of their social status has even affected the character of Delphine. According to Mme de Beauséant:

Restaud (le Comte de) a de la naissance, sa femme a été adoptée, elle a été présentée; mais sa soeur, sa riche soeur, la belle madame Delphine de Nucingen, femme d'un homme d'argent, meurt de chagrin. La jalousie la dévore, elle est à cent lieues de sa soeur; sa soeur n'est plus sa soeur; ces deux femmes se renient entre elles comme elles renient leur père. Aussi, madame de Nucingen laperait-elle toute la boue qu'il y a entre la rue Saint-Lazare et la rue de Grenelle pour entrer dans mon salon. Elle a cru que de Marsay la ferait arriver à son but et elle s'est faite esclave de de Marsay. (IV, 102)

Madame de Beauséant is right, as Delphine is ambitious, and is devoured by jealousy when she cannot equal the social triumph of her sister, even though she has gone to the extraordinary length of selling her virtue to de Marsay. The prejudices and snobbery of the old aristocracy helped to frustrate Napoleon's idea of fusion of the two aristocracies, and are indirectly responsible for the situation of persons like Delphine and the Countess Ferraud. Delphine, however, is too calculating to be weak, and in spite of the failure or the refusal of de Marsay to open the doors of the Faubourg Saint-Germain for her, she accepts the advances of Eugène de Rastignac and takes a calculated risk that the cousin of Mme de Beauséant will help her to fulfil her ambitions.

To be admitted into the society of the Beauséants, according to Balzac, "équivalait à un brevet de haute noblesse", as it was in the salons of these ladies where could be found "la foule des déités parisiennes". (IV, 52) For the "exclus", those men and women of the new aristocracy who lived for the most part in the Chaussée d'Antin, there was no

greater ambition than to be socially accepted in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and their actions are a direct manifestation of their frequently absorbing passion. According to Balzac: "Rastignac seul ignorait la fureur dont étaient saisies les femmes de la Chaussée d'Antin pour entrer dans le cercle supérieur où brillèrent les constellations de leur sexe". (IV, 165)

To achieve her social ambitions, Delphine sacrifices her father to her vanity, as her financial position is not in keeping with her aspirations. Goriot becomes a victim of her mania to succeed, not only from the fact that he is not fully accepted socially into her home, but also from the demands she makes on his purse. Her sister Anastasie is also of the same mould, as she, too, treats her father in much the same fashion. Anastasie has her Maxime de Trailles just as the Duchesse de Chaulieu has her Canalis, but each one has different motives for doing so. The Duchesse is the equal or superior in "naissance" and rank to the Baron de Canalis whom she attaches to herself, not as a result of social ambitions, but for the sake of personal amusement, pleasure and vanity. The association of Maxime de Trailles with Anastasie, his inferior in birth and social rank, shows that she is a victim of Maxime, as in Gobseck he exercises a tyranny over her while she sacrifices her husband, her family and also her father in the process of paying his debts and providing money for his other financial adventures. She feels the need to ape the manners and, it must be confessed, the vices of the haute aristocratie by having her own Maxime, but she is also a victim of her bourgeois birth as she even bears children for Maxime, a matter which the proud and aristo-

cratic Duchesse de Chaulieu would consider vulgar and bourgeois. In the Comédie Humaine, it is only the women of the new aristocracy who are over-generous in this way, as they not only have to struggle to get into the Faubourg Saint-Germain, but have to struggle even harder to remain there.

There is, perhaps, a suspicion of snobbishness in Balzac's attitude in refraining from showing more than the barest minimum of the grandes dames of the haute aristocratie having children outside their marriage, a not uncommon feature of the Restoration, but a situation which Balzac tends to emphasize more in the new aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. Mme de Castries' case is a good example of the "dérèglement" of the haute aristocratie, as she gave birth to a son for Victor von Metternich, the son of the Austrian Chancellor. It is true that Julie d'Aiglemont in La femme de trente ans bears children out of wedlock, but these are the very rare cases. In La Muse du Département, Dinah de la Baudraye, born Dinah Piedefer of solid bourgeois stock, bears two children for Etienne Lousteau, a Parisian journalist who, according to Hunt,

has had the execrable taste to print in his own name cards announcing the birth of their first child. Such an act would be incredible had Jules Janin not done the same thing when a child was born to him by the Comtesse de la Carte, a mistress he had stolen from Alfred de Musset.<sup>1</sup>

Balzac is certainly being historical in showing the misfortune of Dinah, but it is curious that he makes a bourgeois, a provincial wife, the victim of Lousteau's rashness and not a member of the haute aristocratie.

<sup>1</sup>Hunt, H.J., Balzac's Comédie Humaine, p. 339

In La Duchesse de Langeais, Antoinette has no history of having had a child born out of wedlock like the Duchesse de Castries, a point to bear in mind when one is tempted to see the Duchesse as a personification of the Marquise de Castries. Balzac would certainly have made use of such material, but it is this reticence in the use of such facts which has inspired the suspicion of snobbishness on the author's part. One advantage this reticence has in the historical accuracy of his portraiture of the grandes dames, is the fact that his judgments, if considered severe in some parts, are tempered by some amount of charitableness.

Anastasie de Restaud not only imitates the other ladies in the haute aristocratie just as the Countess Ferraud does, but her cruel action against her husband which occurs at the time of his death shows the mark of the "femme de tête". Manifesting little feeling towards him, she concentrates all her energies and her activities on discovering the whereabouts of his will which she suspects has been concealed because of her husband's intention to disinherit her. She calmly occupies herself with reading the Code Civil to assure herself of her proprietary rights as a widow, and when her husband dies, she shows scant respect for his body as she ransacks his bedroom in her search to discover the missing will. When her father dies, both she and Delphine show equal indifference, as they both fail to attend his funeral, leaving the arrangements to be made by Bianchon and Rastignac who are no relatives of the family.

The Duchesse de Carigliano in La maison du chat qui pelote is also a member of the new aristocracy whose situation shows a variation of the social problem of the new aristocracy vis-à-vis the old aristocracy.

The desire of the former for absorption into the latter, and the refusal of the old aristocracy to heed the demands for equality, created a multitude of problems, especially with the abolition of divorce in 1816. Couples like the Count Ferraud and his wife who were incompatible found that their marital situation was worsened by the new law, and this was specially so in the aristocracy where the mariages de convenance was almost universal, giving rise to many moral and social evils.

The title of the Duchesse de Carigliano goes back to the days of the Empire when her husband was Maréchal, duc de Carigliano, one of the shining lights of the period. Her maternal grandfather was a "fournisseur de vivres", and her father, the grandson of a mason employed on the construction of the 'château de Gondreville'. The Duchesse is therefore not of old aristocratic birth, but her title has sufficient lustre to make her influential. She succeeds in wooing Victor d'Aiglemont from his wife Julie in La Femme de trente ans, and, in La maison du chat qui pelote, the only novel in which she makes a full appearance, she attaches to herself Théodore de Sommervieux, the husband of Augustine, née Augustine Guillaume, the daughter of a respectable merchant. Augustine is one of the "faibles", and when she decides personally to appeal to the Duchesse to leave her husband alone, Balzac once more confronted the weak with the strong.

Unlike Anastasie and Delphine who give themselves to their lovers to render secure or to obtain their social positions, the Duchesse de Carigliano has not only been able to penetrate into and to be accepted by the Faubourg Saint-Germain, but she has even acquired a salon, matter which

sufficiently explains her social influence, in spite of the fact that she was not born nor married into the haute aristocratie. Balzac is historical here, as the Duchesse d'Abrantès, whose title dates from the Empire, also kept a salon. The philosophy of the Duchesse is also the same as that of Antoinette de Langeais, Diane de Maufrigneuse and the other coquettes of the upper aristocratic world. Having attained the pinnacle of social success, she turns out to be no different from the other ladies of the old aristocracy. Théodore de Sommervieux becomes, like Raphaël, the "premier valet" of the Duchesse whose vanity has been flattered by the attentions given her. As she tells Augustine her philosophy of life, it is clear that, as d'Almèras said, the "âme" of women never changes although they change their coiffure repeatedly:

Si j'ai tenu à l'avoir (Théodore) dans mon salon, c'est, je l'avouerai, par amour-propre... Je vous aime trop pour vous dire toutes les folies qu'il a faites pour moi... les choses extérieures sont, pour les sots, la moitié de la vie; et pour cela, plus d'un homme de talent se trouve un sot malgré tout son esprit... Sachez donc que plus nous aimons, moins nous devons laisser apercevoir à un homme, surtout à un mari, l'étendue de notre passion. (I, 228)

This is the philosophy which Mme Evangélista imparted to her daughter Natalie, and is the philosophy of the perpetual coquette, of the grandes dames who seek the attention of others and live on admiration and flattery. In La Femme abandonnée, Balzac asserted that all women wish to be amused understood or adored: "Or, que veulent toutes les femmes, si ce n'est d'être amusées, comprises ou adorées?" (III, 596) There is therefore a striking similarity between the actions of the ladies of the old and the new aristocracy. The social philosophies of the Langeais and



the Maufrigneuses of the old aristocracy become those of the new aristocracy when the Cariglianos manage to secure a position of influence, holding their "salons" and establishing their "royaume". The philosophy of success is the same, as it is Balzac's view that women at all levels will behave in much the same way, given the same attractions and ambitions, and subject to the same social laws which influence and determine their behaviour. Transform the circumstances of Delphine de Nucingen and she will imitate the Cariglianos.

#### LA FEMME DE COEUR

Balzac's views about the behaviour of the great ladies of the aristocracy are conditioned by his close observations of them rather than dictated by any preconceived notions or abstract conceptions of feminine behaviour, unrelated to how they behave in society. If it is observed that he portrays these great ladies in an unflattering light in which their bad qualities seem to be many and their good qualities few, it must be borne in mind that Balzac was concerned with the image of themselves which the grandes dames presented in society as a result of their actions. It is therefore these very ladies who are themselves the architects of their own unflattering portraiture. It must be noted, also, that the general image which the members of the aristocracy as a whole created for themselves, had a direct bearing on the dissatisfaction of the lower classes and the hostility which they showed towards the aristocracy during the Revolution and even in more peaceful times. (vide ch. VI,400)

It is, of course, tempting to suggest that if Balzac only portrays the aristocrats as a selfish and egoistic group, it is perhaps for the reason that he did not come into contact with those generous ones who must have shunned the brilliance and the glitter of social prominence to dwell in formal simplicity away from the pomp and panoply of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, nursing, according to Hunt,

The virtues and courtliness traditional to it, and eschewing that social brilliance and promiscuity which obtained then, as it always obtains, all the publicity that writers of memoirs and gossip columnists can confer! Has the history of this real French aristocracy, which still exists, ever been written? Balzac often did more than hint at its existence. He perhaps drew closest to in his sketch of the Marquis d'Espard in L'Interdiction, of the d'Esgrignons in Le Cabinet des Antiques, of the Du Guénic family in Béatrix.<sup>1</sup>

Hunt confesses Balzac's awareness of the fact that there were some aristocrats who lived unostentatious lives, mostly in the provinces, nursing the old virtues of a bygone age. The problem here, however, is the determination of the percentage of these old aristocrats who were probably still to be found and, even more important, the extent to which they affected the lives of others. If the aristocrats like the Baron du Guénic, the Marquis d'Esgrignon and the Marquis d'Espard were in the minority as facts show, and which can be concluded from the history of France prior and subsequent to the French Revolution, then it would be exaggerating the importance and the influence of this minority by introducing in the Comédie Humaine a greater number of the d'Esgrignons

<sup>1</sup>Hunt, H.J., Honoré de Balzac, p. 44

and the Du Guénics to achieve a balance which is notably absent from the history of the aristocracy in France.

In La Duchesse de Langeais, Balzac shows that he was fully conscious of the fact that there were indeed aristocrats like the Duc de Fitz-James, uncle of the Marquise de Castries, who profited from their privileged position of having an excellent education, dwelling in the comfort of elegant homes, having wealthy families and enjoying ample leisure which others of inferior position could not equal, and had some sense of justice and a "grandeur d'âme". Referring to the privileged position of the aristocrat which should inspire him with noble qualities, Balzac asserts:

Tout devrait élever l'âme de l'homme qui, dès le jeune âge, possède de tels privilèges, lui imprimer ce haut respect de lui-même dont la moindre conséquence est une noblesse de coeur en harmonie avec la noblesse du nom. Cela est vrai pour quelques familles. Ça et là dans le faubourg Saint-Germain se rencontrent de beaux caractères, exceptions qui prouvent contre l'égoïsme général qui a causé la perte de ce monde à part. (II, 576)

The last part of the quotation is of great importance. Balzac asserts that it is "l'égoïsme général qui a causé la perte de ce monde". The Revolution was not brought about by the virtues of the aristocracy, but by the vices of its members. Balzac therefore imitates history in showing that the bad qualities are those which are more obvious to every one and which have greater influence and consequences on human behaviour than, for example, beneficial actions. Balzac does not deny that there are aristocrats with a "noblesse de coeur", but shows that it is the

"noblesse sans coeur" which caused the "perte de ce monde à part".

Alfred Nettement confirms Balzac's assertions that there were only a few aristocrats, exceptions to the rule, who could not be classed as morally and intellectually decadent. Writing in 1835, he makes a categorical statement:

La plaie du siècle, le danger du présent, l'écueil de l'avenir, peut-être, c'est la décadence morale et intellectuelle des hautes classes de la société. A part quelques grandes et honorables exceptions, les plus beaux noms de la monarchie ne se portent plus, ils se traînent. La supériorité est séparée de l'aristocratie; celle-ci est restée dans les hautes classes, celle-là est descendue plus bas.<sup>1</sup>

It is to be expected that women will, in a large measure, follow the pattern of men in the aristocracy in so far as their desire to preserve their group as a privileged class is concerned. Their actions, however, are largely influenced by their nature, apart from external considerations like the home and the social milieu. They have an instinctive desire for admiration, flattery and attention, but love is often considered to be subordinate to material and social interests. The mariages de convenances are sufficient proof that love as an important element in the success and permanence of marriage was largely ignored in the planning of marriage alliances in the great families. However, the situation in which the great ladies found themselves in society with a multitude of attractions and the continual presence of a host of idle, often wealthy and titled men at the frequent balls and "soirées", gave

<sup>1</sup>Nettement, Alfred, Etudes de moeurs sur la femme au XIXe siècle, as quoted in Hervé Donnard, les réalités économiques..., p. 167

rise to competitions among themselves for masculine attention, a circumstance which produced all kinds of enmities, animosities and selfishness.

In Le Père Goriot, (IV, 277) Balzac expressed the view that Parisian women were often false, intoxicated with vanity, selfish, flirtatious and cold, although they were more ready than other women to sacrifice all other interests to their personal feelings when they truly loved. Capable of rising above pettiness, they often did not do so mainly because of the built-in restraints in aristocratic society for the grandes dames who were more concerned with appearance rather than the reality of things. If they had sentimental attachments, it was crucial for these to be concealed. According to Balzac, love for them was frequently an affectation, a commodity to be used by them to suit their own convenience.

L'amour à Paris ne ressemble en rien aux autres amours. Ni les hommes ni les femmes n'y sont dupes des montres pavoisées de leurs communs que chacun étale par décence sur ses affections soi-disant désintéressées. En ce pays, une femme ne doit pas satisfaire seulement le coeur et les sens, elle sait parfaitement qu'elle a de plus grandes obligations à remplir envers les mille vanités dont se compose la vie... S'il est des exceptions à ces lois draconiennes du code parisien, elles se rencontrent dans la solitude, chez les âmes qui ne se sont point laissé entraîner par les doctrines sociales, qui vivent près de quelque source aux eaux claires, fugitives, mais incessantes. (IV, 253)

Pauline is a good example of the true self-sacrificing love Balzac has in mind here as one of the exceptions, for she makes a number of sacrifices for Raphael while she remains quietly in the background of his life until such time as he decides to turn to her. By virtue of their social prominence, the grandes dames are in a situation where their

feelings will conflict with their social position, and if they sacrifice their social status to their feelings, there can be only one consequence: abandonment of society and of their "royaume" which they acquired by much effort and intriguing. Those who remain as the queens of society are those who have sacrificed their feelings for their social position. Like Diane de Maufrigneuse, they know how to love. Those who are abandoned and have to retire from society are the ones who love. As Balzac said in Béatrix: "Les femmes abandonnées sont celles qui aiment, les conservatrices sont celles qui savent aimer". (IX, 528)

Madame de Beauséant is a case in point, as she is one of those who love. She is among the few aristocratic "femmes de coeur", as she decides to risk her social position and her future on her love for the Marquis d'Ajuda-Pinto. Born Claire de Bourgogne in 1792, she married the Vicomte de Beauséant with whom she continued to live in the rue de Grenelle. She frequents the inner group of the highest aristocratic families, as she belongs to the little enclave called Le Petit Château where only the highest aristocratic families, the elite of the elite, are admitted. Mme de Sérisy, although born a Ronquerolles, and of legitimate aristocratic birth, is not admitted to Le Petit Château, a sufficient indication that there are hierarchical gradations among the genuinely old aristocracy. Balzac does not neglect to bring out these nuances of differences which existed historically, as the snobbery of the old aristocracy was not reserved for the new aristocracy alone, but was also in evidence when the very old met the not so old aristocracy.

Although described as one of the "reine de la mode" as a result of her ancestry, beauty and social position, Mme de Beauséant is not of the same ilk as the Marquise d'Espard and the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse. In Le Père Goriot, Balzac shows the usual "maison à trois personnes" in which the Vicomtesse has accepted and encouraged the attentions of d'Ajuda-Pinto with whom she formed a very strong attachment. Unlike Antoinette de Langeais, she does not trifle with the Marquis, and it is this attachment, sincerely felt in her heart and translated into positive actions of love, which is the cause of her undoing. She loves and becomes a "victime" as it is the Marquis who is the "homme de tête", a technique which is a reversal of the normal one where men are shown to be the victims of the "femme de tête". As Balzac said in La femme de trente ans, women are either "victime ou tyran. L'une ou l'autre alternative apporte une égale somme de malheurs dans la vie d'une femme". (I, 952) Once the Vicomtesse ceases to be the "tyran" or the "femme de tête", she becomes a "victime".

After years of fruitful and satisfying association with the Marquis in the "trinité conjugale" on which society had looked with complaisance, as the relationship was maintained with the usual aristocratic regard for appearances, a serious crisis develops in the life of the Vicomtesse when d'Ajuda-Pinto decides to marry Mlle de Rochefide, the daughter of a family more distinguished for its wealth than its aristocratic ancestry.

When the Duchesse de Langeais brings the news about the contemplated marriage of d'Ajuda-Pinto, Mme de Beauséant's anguish is all the more great due not only to the fact that she is being abandoned for someone

of inferior social status whose attractions are financial, but also because the whole fashionable world will know about her abandonment, thus bringing to an end her social position as queen. She is fully aware of the consequences of her abandonment, and when she gives her final ball before withdrawing from society to expiate in solitude her misfortune, the Faubourg Saint-Germain came out almost in a body to the Vicomtesse's home, not to sympathise, but to see how well the martyr to love was enduring her punishment. She was the picture of courage, however, disappointing her hypocritical friends who had hoped to find her dejected and in despair. She does shed a few tears in private, but courageously leaves Paris for Normandy "à Courcelles, aimer, prier, jusqu'au jour où Dieu me retirera de ce monde".

The Vicomtesse's tragedy is similar to Raphaël's: the seeking of love in an aristocratic society where vanity, hypocrisy and affectation are cardinal virtues. In love, sincerity and devotion are essential elements, and these must naturally conflict with those factors which are important for social success. Mme de Beauséant attempted the impossible task of serving two masters at the same time by trying to conciliate her sentimental with her social ambitions when the deity of love is just as implacable as that of La Mode. D'Ajuda-Pinto, on the other hand, thought only of his social ambitions and survived in the jungle of society, while Mme de Beauséant became its victim when she forgot the strong aristocratic creed for social success. As she wends her way to Courcelles, a sadder but by no means a wiser person, she embarks on yet another adventure of love which tends to confirm Félicien Marceau's



opinion of her as being one of those who are "vouées à l'amour, qui n'existent que pour l'amour".<sup>1</sup>

Gaston de Nueil in La Femme abandonnée is her next tyrant, as he discovers that she is living near to him and decides to pay her a visit in the hope of winning her love. His sincerity and straightforwardness influence the Vicomtesse's reception of him, although she is saddened by the suspicion that he considers her to be easy game for any adventurer on account of her past. Because of her nature, however, she finds it increasingly difficult to prevent herself from feeling the urgings of love and to resist the temptation which presents itself to abandon her resolutions to remain in solitude. To avoid the importunities of Gaston and to escape from her own inclinations which all urge her to yield, she leaves secretly for Geneva in the hope of eliminating the possibility of a second heart-break by fleeing the temptation, but is found by the persevering Gaston who succeeds in winning her love.

In Geneva, where the couple spends the next few years, it is a period of happy contentment in extra-marital love. Back in France, however, Mme de Beauséant is again abandoned, and for the same reason that she was previously sacrificed by d'Ajuda-Pinto for Mlle de Rochefide. Gaston considers that money is a stronger source of happiness than love, and he yields to the encouragements of his mother to marry Stéphanie de la Rodière who has "quarante mille livres de rente". But love is implacable especially when it is sacrificed for material interests.

<sup>1</sup>Marceau, Félicien, p. 126

Gaston commits suicide not long after his marriage, just as d'Ajuda-Pinto comes to regret his marriage with Berthe de Rochefide. When thwarted by circumstances, love finds a way to exact its own vengeance.

In La Duchesse de Langeais, the situation of Antoinette de Langeais bears many resemblances to that of Mme de Beauséant in so far as the consequences of her behaviour are concerned later in the novel when she comes to love Armand de Montriveau. It has already been shown that her actions, prior to the scene in Montriveau's apartment, reflect the clever policy of the "femme de tête" who, like Foedora, excites but does not yield to the passion which she arouses. When Montriveau succeeds in surpassing her strength and her iron will, she becomes quite submissive and allows her heart to rule her head.

It is important to examine this change in attitude of Antoinette prior and subsequent to this behavioral change, not only because it throws some light on Balzac's knowledge of feminine psychology, but also because Balzac repeats his technique in many other cases where the grande dame is to be or has been subdued by a lover. In the past, Antoinette's calculating mind would formulate cold and artificial responses to Armand's manifestations of love, and her ready-made replies to his questions and protestations of affection were filled with the cold logic of reason.

As she tells him on one occasion:

J'aime mieux passer à vos yeux pour une femme froide, insensible, sans dévouement, sans coeur même, que de passer aux yeux du monde pour une femme ordinaire, que d'être condamnée à des peines éternelles après avoir été condamnée à vos prétendus plaisirs, qui vous lasseront certainement... Pour la première fois, il entrevoyait la coquetterie de cette femme, et

devinait instinctivement que l'amour dévoué, l'amour partagé ne calculait pas, ne raisonnait pas chez une femme vraie. (II, 635-636)

When she finds out later that she is no match for Armand in the struggle of wills, a transformation takes place in her. Tears flow and, very shortly after, comes a confession of love from her together with an explanation for the change in her behaviour. According to her, when she realised that she did not have to struggle against a weak and powerless adversary, she came to respect, admire and love him for his strength. There is a good deal of psychological insight in feminine behaviour given in this explanation for Antoinette's changed attitude which is not altogether unexpected, as Balzac had shown that it was her social position which was responsible for her inhibitions. Now that a power greater than that which the social group wielded over the individual has imposed its will over Antoinette, it is not illogical to see her bend before the strength of Armand. According to her:

Maître pour maître, je voulais un homme grand. Plus je me sentais haut, moins je voulais descendre. Confiante en toi, je voyais toute une vie d'amour au moment où tu me montrais la mort... Mon ami, tu es trop fort pour te faire méchant contre une pauvre femme qui t'aime... Ces bourgeoises, auxquelles vous me comparez, se donnent, mais elles combattent. Hé! bien, j'ai combattu, mais me voilà... Mon Dieu! il ne m'écoute pas! s'écria-t-elle en s'interrompant. Elle se tordit les mains en criant:—Mais je t'aime! mais je suis à toi! Elle tomba aux genoux d'Armand—à toi! à toi, mon unique, mon seul maître. (II, 663)

Now that Armand has succeeded in breaking her stubborn will, he follows the advice of Ronquerolles to the letter by ignoring the now genuine transports of love from the Duchesse. When she finally leaves

his apartment with the expectation that she will see him the next day, she is not a little surprised that he neither calls nor sends a message. As the days pass without his reappearance, and no further visits from him have materialised, she sends message after message to him without avail. In desperation, she deliberately compromises herself by sending her servant openly with her carriage to wait for the better part of a day for Montriveau's answer to her messages. As the carriage is stationed in the street outside Armand's apartment, in full view of passers-by, this somewhat reckless action by the Duchesse confirms both the serious stage of her mental anguish and the extent of her new love which make her risk her reputation to prove to Montriveau the sincerity of her feelings. By sending the carriage with her armorial bearings emblazoned conspicuously on its doors to wait on the pleasure of Montriveau, the Duchesse defies the social conventions of her group for the sake of love.

The consequences of this open display of love, unfortunately, are the same as those for Mme de Beauséant. When Armand fails to respond to a last urgent message to come to a meeting with her on a specific night, in despair, she abandons Paris to retire to a convent somewhere in Majorca. The reasons for her retirement closely resemble those of Mme de Beauséant, as word had previously spread through the Faubourg Saint-Germain that her carriage was to be seen all day outside Armand's home. Her hypocritical friends naturally denied the rumours, but in such a way as to have them believed, and fashionable society, as

Taine remarked, does not tolerate the infringement of its laws.

Appearances must on all cases be observed, and while the group would look without disfavour on extra-marital relationships of its members, provided these relationships were not publicly flaunted which would compromise the group as a whole, the action of Antoinette, in openly avowing her love for Armand when she was still the legal wife of the Duc de Langeais, could only have as consequences either her voluntary or enforced ostracism.

In La Femme de trente ans, Julie d'Aiglemont's actions are the reverse of the situation Balzac presents in the transformation of Mme de Langeais from a "femme de tête" to a "femme de coeur". Married early to Victor d'Aiglemont, Julie discovers the unfaithfulness of her husband who becomes involved in liaisons with the Duchesse de Carigliano, Mme de Sérisy and others. The Marquise d'Aiglemont, like Mme de Beauséant, is also one of those who are "vouées à l'amour", as her marriage was a "mariage d'amour" which, in the first place is an unusual occurrence, and, after her husband's abandonment of his marital duties and his neglect of her, she later comes to love Lord Arthur Grenville. When Lord Grenville dies, she becomes frustrated and retires to Saint-Lange to expiate her sorrow in seclusion and, as she says, "y mourir doucement, sans témoins, sans importunités, sans subir les fausses démonstrations des égoïsmes fardés d'affections". (VI, 1025) Her retirement is only temporary, however, as a year later she attends a ball given by Mme Firmiani where she meets Charles de Vandenesse, one

of the dandies of the Comédie Humaine now bored and disappointed with life, but who attempts to seduce her. Instead of finding a "femme d'amour", he meets all the coquetries and calculations of a "femme de tête". There is an interesting variation here in the response of the Marquise to Charles. In the case of Mme de Beauséant, the Vicomtesse remained a "femme de coeur" and decided to leave Courcelles because she could not control her nature. Mme d'Aiglemont, on the other hand, has greater will power, although she, too, is dedicated to love as she later falls in love with Charles.

When she first expresses the wish to be introduced to him and subsequently extended an invitation to him to visit her, he formed the impression, like Gaston de Neuil, that he would quickly succeed in establishing a satisfying relationship. He is very soon undeceived, however, when he discovers that, at the age of thirty, the Marquise is now endowed with all the experience and the subtleties which a clever, intelligent and aristocratic woman can devise to obtain the attentions of a man without compromising herself in any way. Instead of being the easy prey he had fondly imagined her to be, he found that "la marquise était de ces femmes dont la conquête coûte trop cher pour qu'on puisse entreprendre de les aimer". (VI, 1069) Frequent visits to her home do not help as she is "plus habile que vraie". He finally adopts the tactics of Montriveau and discontinues his visits, returning only when he believes that she is sufficiently chastened and in a frame of mind to reciprocate his love. The result is always the same in the Comédie Humaine when the strong meets the stronger. The

effect on the Marquise is the same as Montriveau's tactics on the Duchesse de Langeais. According to Balzac: "Dès ce moment, ils entrèrent dans les cieux de l'amour". (VI, 1069)

La femme de trente ans is one of Balzac's very early novels and contains many imperfections in regard to the multiplicity of events and episodes, as well as some very doubtful analyses of motives. However, from the technique which Balzac employs in his later novels of confronting the weak and the strong, or the strong and the stronger, and showing that the grandes dames only submit to those who are at least equal in their strength of will, La Femme de trente ans as an early work, presents an interesting variation on feminine behaviour. A grande dame who is by nature a "femme d'amour" becomes a "femme de tête", just as the "femme de tête" becomes a "femme d'amour" in certain situations. Although anxious to get Rastignac to introduce her into the social côterie of the Beauséants, and fully aware of the heavy price which she must pay and has indeed paid to de Marsay in the pursuit of her social ambitions, Delphine de Nucingen, nevertheless, shows a surprising amount of artifice and coquetry in dealing with Eugène de Rastignac, which are very similar to those used on Charles de Vandenesse by Julie d'Aiglemont. According to Balzac in Le Père Goriot:

Aimante ou coquette, madame de Nucingen avait fait passer Rastignac par toutes les angoisses d'une passion véritable, en déployant pour lui les ressources de la diplomatie féminine en usage à Paris. Après s'être compromise aux yeux du public pour fixer près d'elle le cousin de Madame de Beauséant, elle hésitait à lui donner réellement les droits dont il paraissait jouir... Toutes les espérances de madame de Nucingen avaient été trahies une première fois... le véritable amour payait pour le

mauvais. (IV, 184-185)

Like Mme d'Aiglemont whose experience had taught her to be cautious and to conceal her affections, Delphine de Nucingen's reactions are basically the same. It is therefore not surprising that a person who is tender-hearted by nature can, by force of will, suppress natural impulses, assume a role and adopt an attitude in complete variance with the inclinations and temperament of that person.

In all the examples of the "femme de coeur" considered so far, the one outstanding similarity between them is the love which they come to feel either early or late in their lives. In the case of Madame Firmiani, however, Balzac describes not only a love which culminated in a "mariage d'amour" with Octave de Camps, but he portrays a grande dame who is naturally good in the sense that her actions which are motivated by praiseworthy impulses are also the instinctive manifestations of an unselfish person. Her "mariage d'amour" also differs from that of Julie d'Aiglemont. Unlike Julie who married for love and found, just as her father had predicted, that her husband did not share her feelings but was, instead, "ignorant, égoïste", Mme Firmiani not only loves Octave de Camps but her love is reciprocated.

It was pointed out earlier that Octave was persuaded to divest himself of his fortune which his father had acquired by despoiling another family, and Mme Firmiani advises him to make restitution as their marriage could only proceed if this were done. Later, Octave's uncle, M. de Bourbonne, comes to make inquiries from her about his



nephew when he heard rumours that she had systematically ruined him. He discovers to his very great satisfaction, however, the praiseworthy motives of Mme Firmiani which completely reassure and impress him with her integrity and her love for his nephew. Mme Firmiani is never shown to be party to any kind of malicious actions which the other ladies of her social group may initiate, and Balzac shows that she is very unlike the others whose egoism and hypocrisies he frequently emphasises. Even gossip which is a favourite female occupation and in which the aristocratic women often indulge to increase their own worth by destroying the reputation of others, Mme Firmiani avoids, and she even works actively against the other ladies whenever they attempt to malign a member of the group.

In Une Fille d'Eve, where she appears as Mme Octave de Camps, she is the only grande dame present at a ball who makes any attempt to save the wife of Félix de Vandenesse from ruining her marriage and her husband socially. She refuses to be a party to a conspiracy hatched by others to embarrass people whom they often call their friends. This conspiracy arose because the Comtesse Marie de Vandenesse happened to fall in love with Raoul Nathan as a result of the excessive happiness which she found in her married life, and which led successively to satiety, boredom and a desire for other amusements to permit her to escape the monotony of happiness. Balzac interprets in this way the fall of Eve in the garden of Eden which he attributes to the monotony of Eve's happy life in the garden, the natural outcome of an unvarying perfection which led to a revolt against her situation.

When the other ladies of the Faubourg Saint-Germain discover the

secret love of the Comtesse, they contrive to spread the information in order to embarrass the husband of the Countess who, for his part, had dared to make a "mariage d'amour", and to succeed in making his wife happy. The ladies encourage the Countess to embark on a liaison with Raoul by detailing all the virtues they saw in such a relationship, although they secretly hope to obtain material for gossip at the expense of both the Countess and her husband. When Marie attends a ball given by Lady Dudley to which Raoul is expressly invited by them without the knowledge of the Countess, the Marquise d'Espard, lady Dudley, Emile Blondet and others deliberately encourage the relationship by telling Raoul about the Countess' feelings for him. Only Mme Octave de Camps gives good advice to Marie when she enters, and Balzac cannot restrain himself from showing his admiration for Mme de Camps by the way he describes her: "Elle (Marie de Vandenesse) se tint debout, donnant le bras à madame Octave de Camps, excellente femme, qui lui garda le secret sur les tremblements involontaires par lesquels se trahissaient ses violentes émotions". (VIII, 860)

When Mme de Camps sees the danger to which Marie will be exposed if she continues to remain at the ball where Raoul will become aware of the effect his presence is having on her, Mme de Camps advises her to leave: "Prenez garde, ma chère, dit à l'oreille de Marie sa gracieuse et adorable compagne, allez-vous-en". (VIII, 860) This excellent advice is quickly contrasted with the spitefulness of the Marquise d'Espard who tells Raoul in no uncertain terms what is going on: "Mon

cher, dit Madame d'Espard à l'oreille de Raoul, vous êtes un heureux coquin. Vous avez fait ce soir plus d'une conquête, mais entre autres, celle de la charmante femme qui nous a si brusquement quittés". (VIII, 860) Not only does the Marquise tell him what is going on, but Emile Blondet reveals the extent of the aristocratic intrigue hatched by the "femmes sans coeur": "Lady Dudley t'a engagé à son grand bal précisément pour que tu la rencontres". (VIII, 861)

The behaviour of Mme de Camps can be considered outstanding when contrasted with the malicious actions of the others. Raoul is not of aristocratic birth, but has been expressly admitted into the society of the Dudleys and the d'Espards merely to encourage the liaison of Marie with someone whose background will later be the subject of reproach to Marie, not to mention the epigrams which will be directed against her husband. To this end, Lady Dudley went so far as to unearth some disagreeable facts about Raoul's ancestry, and she waits for the opportunity and the pleasure to "tirer quelque épigramme contre Vandenesse". To achieve this, she must endure the bourgeois company of Raoul which she cheerfully does because of the rewards which she anticipates. As she tells one of the ladies who expressed horror at the presence of Raoul in her company: "Il y a mon ange des plaisirs qui nous coûtent bien cher". (VIII, 892-893)

Balzac stresses the attitude of these aristocratic ladies who have no sense of loyalty to one another. The machinations organised against Félix de Vandenesse and his wife, legitimate aristocrats, were simply the work of idle women who had become malicious because of their

situation. They attached great significance to the fact that their boredom and unhappiness were not shared by others. Accounting for the motives behind their maliciousness in seeking to ruin the happy household of the Vandenesses, Balzac says they were "jalouses du bonheur de Félix; elles auraient volontiers donné leurs plus jolies pantouffles pour qu'il lui arrivât malheur". (VIII, 848-849)

Jealousy is a valid motive for explaining the actions of these ladies. In the case of the Marquise d'Espard, however, her behaviour to Marie is in keeping with her character in the Comédie Humaine, as she was instrumental in Mme de Bargeton abandoning Lucien de Rubempré (at that time Lucien Chardon) shortly after Anaïs left her native Angoulême with Lucien, her poet, to come to Paris. This incident takes place in the early stages of Un grand homme de province à Paris, the second part of Les Illusions Perdues. The Marquise d'Espard does not appear to like happy relationships, and it is significant that in the whole Comédie Humaine, Balzac does not show her as having a lover, although Félicien Marceau speculates that the Chevalier d'Espard, who is her brother-in-law and is at the home of the Marquise while the Marquis d'Espard, his brother, is living elsewhere, inspires many suspicions about his relationship with the Marquise. Nevertheless, as far as Balzac is concerned, no information is provided which can link her positively to a lover. In fact, Balzac expressly denies any such feminine characteristics in L'Interdiction when he categorically says that the Marquise is hardly a woman: "Elle n'est ni mère, ni épouse, ni

amante; elle est un sexe dans le cerveau, médicalement parlant...

elle est polie comme l'acier d'une mécanique, elle émeut tout, moins le coeur". (VI, 1192)

In Lady Dudley's case, she was still suffering from the fact that Félix de Vandenesse had abandoned her for Mme de Mortsauf in Le Lys dans la vallée, whereas Natalie de Manerville also bears Félix a grudge because of his obsession with the virtues of Mme de Mortsauf which he often detailed to Natalie. while attempting to win her affections at the same time, after the death of Mme de Mortsauf. There is usually a sordid history behind conspiracies of this kind, especially when jealousy is a motive, and the grandes dames whose two main preoccupations were their elegant appearance in society and the attentions they required from men, must have been involved in many mean intrigues to preserve their supremacy in the areas of their interest.

Mme de Mortsauf in Le Lys dans la vallée has been modelled, in part, after Mme de Berny who played a significant role in the development of Balzac as an artist. Mme de Mortsauf shows much generosity and kindness to Félix de Vandenesse whom she comes to love sincerely, but refuses steadfastly to break her marriage vows to the Comte de Mortsauf, even though his embittered nature as a result of his misfortunes as an Enigré makes him a most disagreeable husband. The Countess not only remains a virtuous wife, but succeeds in earning the respect and admiration of Félix to the extent that he finds it exceedingly difficult to begin a new relationship with someone else when the

Countess dies. Born a Lenoncourt, of undeniable aristocratic birth, as her father the Duc de Lenoncourt still frequents the Court of the king, she is a good example of virtue which Balzac shows could exist in the haute aristocratie.

In L'Envers de l'histoire contemporaine, Mme de la Chanterie devotes her later life to charitable works after various misfortunes, and she becomes the founder of a group, the "Frères de la Consolation" which gives all kinds of financial and other help to needy persons who would otherwise have either died from starvation, or suffered physically because of lack of funds to secure important medical treatment. Mme de la Chanterie has abandoned society, however, and lives in seclusion with the other members of the organisation who assist in the charitable work. She differs from the other "femmes de coeur" in the fact that she no longer takes any part in the activities of the social world of the Faubourg Saint-Germain and therefore has no social or material ambitions. Her presence in the Comédie Humaine, however, points to the fact that the philanthropic action of a genuinely religious and Christian minded member of the aristocracy, of which there were probably some notable examples in French life, must find a place in a work which has as its aim the writing of the history of moeurs of the French people.

The fact that there are very few Mme de Camps and Mme de Mortsauf in Balzac's work, as we pointed out earlier, is to be ascribed to the changing times rather than considered an inadequacy on the author's part. Balzac insists that the struggle for survival in which

the great ladies of the aristocracy took part was one where success could only be achieved by the strong, and that this lesson was very thoroughly learned. The generation of the Restoration differs from that of the Ancien Régime in many material respects. According to Alfred Nettement; "La femme, hâtons-nous de le dire... est bien moins coupable que le siècle où elle est venue. Tant de faux principes, tant de folles idées n'ont pu passer sans laisser dans l'atmosphère sociale je ne sais quelles ivresses que les plus sages respirent".<sup>1</sup> Even Th. Muret, a strong defender of the aristocracy who wrote articles for the monarchist journal, La Quotidienne, laments the disappearance of the traditional aristocratic virtues:

On personnifia le légitisme dans le monde du faubourg Saint-Germain. C'était la tête du parti, disait-on; à peu d'exceptions près, cette tête n'en était que le 'caput mortuum'... Cette prétendue tête du parti a vécu grasement dans ses hôtels et ses châteaux, les pères s'occupant d'enfler leurs revenus, parfois compromettant leur superbe blason dans des tripotages de la spéculation et de la Bourse, les fils se coiffant d'une casquette de jockey... dissipant argent et honneur avec d'ignobles courtisanes. Voilà où ils en sont—toujours sous réserve d'exceptions—les nobles salons de Paris.<sup>2</sup>

Muret's point about the exceptions to the general moral decadence has also been made by Balzac in La Duchesse de Langeais, and Balzac's observations about the changes in the aristocracy which have taken place in France of the Restoration and the July Monarchy are echoed by his contemporaries. The conclusion appears inescapable that

<sup>1</sup>Nettement, Alfred, Etudes de Moeurs sur la femme au XIXe siècle, as quoted in Hervé Donnard, Les réalités économiques... p. 167

<sup>2</sup>Muret, Th., A travers champs, (Paris, 1858), I, 213, as quoted in Hervé Donnard, p. 168

only the exceptional aristocrat still maintained the traditional virtues, and the grandes dames, as Nettement pointed out, are also victims of the times.

#### LA FEMME DE PASSION

Balzac makes a distinction between love and passion in the Comédie Humaine, or what can be called "l'amour-vertu" and "l'amour-passion". In a general sense, "la passion" is shown to be associated with or to bring about the last stage of development in an abnormal state of mind, regardless of whether this concerns the constant pursuit of an idea, a preoccupation with material interests or the tyranny of excessive emotions as, for example, in the quest of Balthasar Claes for the absolute in La Recherche de l'Absolu, the avarice of Félix Grandet in Eugénie Grandet and the sexual dissipations of Baron Hulot in La Cousine Bette. Love can also develop into a passion as, quite often, passion is shown to be a degree of love, or the ultimate stages of a love pushed into excess.

Apart from originating in love, however, passion can also arise from vanity or other desires which emanate from the social milieu, as Balzac asserts in La femme de trente ans: "En France l'amour-propre mène à la passion". (VI, 1059) In the preceding chapter, it was pointed out that Foedora's passion for social attractions resulted in certain physiological changes in her body.

Balzac gives a good illustration of the basic difference between love and passion in Pauline's unselfish love for Raphael who, on the



other hand, is himself being consumed by his passion which is manifested in the frenzy and the excess of his desires for Foedora. Balzac does not show any physiological changes in Pauline, a fact which is consistent with his idea that for love to be harmless, it must not become a passion. Love, or "l'amour-vertu", frequently conserves the object of the love while passion consumes it. Love makes sacrifices like those of Mme de Langeais and Mme de Beauséant, while passion is shown to be essentially selfish, as it often destroys others and sometimes even the person concerned as, for example, Louise de Macumer in Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées. In "l'amour-vertu", if anyone is destroyed or ruined, it is generally the person who loves and not the object of the love. The ruin or the destruction of others is therefore a necessary ingredient in differentiating between love and passion, as Balzac does show, on occasions, that disasters also occur in "l'amour-vertu".

In Le Lys dans la vallée, for example, Mme de Mortsauf sincerely loves Félix de Vandenesse, but she ultimately destroys herself by refusing to yield to her feelings. In La Duchesse de Langeais and Le Père Goriot, both Antoinette de Langeais and Mme de Beauséant love and are ruined socially. In the case of Diane de Maufrigneuse, however, her sexual passions have ruined, not her, but the "faibles" like Victurnien d'Esgrignon in Le Cabinet des Antiques and Daniel d'Arthez in Les secrets de la Princesse de Cadignan, as Victurnien is arrested and barely escapes imprisonment, while Daniel ceases to write and sacrifices a brilliant career as a novelist. Béatrix de Rochefide, on

the other hand, almost succeeds in ruining Calyste du Guénic, had his mother-in-law not intervened. There is therefore a nuance to be placed between "l'amour-vertu" and "l'amour-passion", and what is frequently called love in a general sense, ought to be considered passion as a result of the consequences which ensue.

In Balzac et son monde, Félicien Marceau commented on the destructive nature of love in the Comédie Humaine, but does not elaborate on the distinctions which Balzac sought to illustrate between love and passion. According to Marceau:

Il y a beaucoup d'amour dans la Comédie Humaine, mais assez généralement il nous y apparaît en fâcheuse posture, souvent vaincu ou, quand il triomphe, écrasant les amants. Défaite ou désastre, tels sont le plus souvent dans la Comédie Humaine, les avatars d'Eros.<sup>1</sup>

It is not love which succeeds in "écrasant les amants" however, but passion. It is true that there are many disasters as a result of "l'amour" in the Comédie Humaine, as Balzac believes these are the natural consequences of any love developed into excess, and Germaine Beaumont quotes Balzac's words to Mme de Berny in which Balzac shows the passionate quality inherent in love which is frequently an invitation to excess. According to Balzac: "Aimer, c'est sentir autrement que tous les autres hommes, et sentir violemment. C'est vivre dans un monde idéal, magnifique et splendide de toutes les splendeurs". (Albert Savarus, VIII, 645) Not all love develops into excess, however, as can

<sup>1</sup>Marceau, Félicien, p. 244

be seen from that of Pauline in La Peau de Chagrin and Mme Firmiani's for Octave de Camps in Mme Firmiani, and it would be to misinterpret Balzac's meaning here if one were to conclude that all love develops into a passion. However, as we pointed out, the disasters which affect others and not the person smitten by the love, are not to be indiscriminately ascribed to "l'amour-vertu" but, rather, to the excesses in which the characters indulge when under the tyranny of "l'amour-passion", often a development of "l'amour-vertu".

As far as the grandes dames are concerned, they have two main passions. One concerns their sensual passions, "l'amour-passion", inspired by frequent interaction with men and exacerbated by domestic difficulties as in the case of Mme de Sérisy or Béatrix de Rochefide. Naturally, as an excessive emotion, Balzac considers it harmful. The other absorbing passion is for social success. However, the combination of these two passions is frequently found in many of the grandes dames. To complete the variety of passions in the Comédie Humaine which men and society inspire in the grandes dames, there is at least one case of a romantic passion in which the individual is inflamed not so much with love, per se, but with the idea of love. Rosalie de Watteville is such a case.

In Albert Savarus, Rosalie, a jeune fille under the close supervision of her mother and living a cloistered life in Besançon, develops a romantic rather than a sensual passion for Albert Savarus. She has been brought up by a stern mother, bigoted rather than pious.

Rosalie gives every appearance of being a model of obedience, calm and submissive, but is, in reality, a seething, volcanic mass of pent up ambitions and romantic notions. When Albert comes to Besançon, she not only falls in love with him without his knowledge, a man whom she hardly knows, but she becomes obsessed with the idea of her love. She breaks open his letters which she secretly arranges to get, and forges his handwriting to the Duchesse d'Argaiolo which leads the Duchesse to believe that Albert is married.

The consequences of Rosalie's passion are harmful to Albert. He is abandoned by the Duchesse who now vanishes from sight due to her disappointment. After a fruitless search for her from country to country, Albert decides to end his life in the Grande Chartreuse. Balzac describes not only the actions of a young, unmarried girl madly bent on being loved, but the extent of her intrigues to which her romantically passionate nature impels her in her ambitions to secure the love of Albert. Germaine Beaumont calls this kind of passion "l'amour-gain, opposé au merveilleux amour-don qui s'épanche de l'inépuisable coeur de Savarus". (VIII, 648) "L'amour-gain" and "l'amour-don" could well be substituted for "l'amour-passion" and "l'amour-vertu". In Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées, Louise de Macumer causes the death of her husband and, finally of herself. Her excessively passionate nature easily overwhelms her with a jealousy she cannot control. This passion of Louise in her marital life is contrasted with the successful marriage of her friend Renée de l'Estorade, the opposite in nature and temperament to Louise, who achieves satisfaction in her marriage as a

result of mutual understanding with her husband.

Born a "blonde méridionale et pleine de sang", Louise was always of a tempestuous nature, and she marries her Spanish teacher, Felipe Henarez, to satisfy her romantic notions of love. But Louise is by nature tyrannical and demanding. Before her marriage, she even entertained the idea that she could have dominated Napoleon. She is in many respects a Rosalie de Watteville married to a "faible", as Felipe, her husband, apart from being much older than she, is of a melancholy nature. He is an exiled nobleman, of Moorish descent, poor, but belonging to a formerly titled family of very high rank, as he was once the Duc de Soria. By his own nature and as a result of the circumstances of his life, he is an easy victim of the tyranny of a passionate and self-willed Louise. She monopolizes him to such an extraordinary extent that he is brought to an early death, consequent upon her jealousy and the incessant drain upon his emotions. More in love with love than anything else, Louise remarries a young poet, Marie Gaston, and promptly isolates him and herself in a country house which becomes for her husband more of a cage than a home. Convinced that he is unfaithful to her, she deliberately contracts tuberculosis and ends her life in an excess of passion.

Louise's passionate nature not only takes the life of her first husband, but brings much unhappiness to her second, as his trips to Paris which his wife believed were engineered to see his mistress, were in reality to help a poor relative. Her "amour-passion" can be contrasted

either with the "amour-vertu" of Pauline who sacrifices herself for Raphaël, or with the unselfishness of Mme de Mortsauf who watches over the interest of Félix de Vandenesse like a mother and is even instrumental in getting him to meet influential aristocrats in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Renée de l'Estorade comments to Louise on the futility of her passion and the danger which this holds for marriage. It is a salutary commentary on the behaviour of Louise who became a victim of herself:

Notre vie est composée, pour le corps, comme pour le coeur, de certains mouvements réguliers. Tout excès apporté dans ce mécanisme est une cause de plaisir ou de douleur; or, le plaisir ou la douleur est une fièvre d'âme essentiellement passagère parce qu'elle n'est pas longtemps supportable. Faire de l'excès sa vie même, n'est-ce pas vivre malade? Tu vis malade en maintenant à l'état de passion, un sentiment qui doit devenir dans le mariage une force égale et pure. Oui, mon ange, aujourd'hui je reconnais: la gloire du ménage est précisément dans le calme, dans cette profonde connaissance mutuelle, dans cet échange de biens et de maux que les plaisanteries vulgaires lui reprochent. (VI, 268)

The case of Léontine de Sérisy in Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes also shows the development of love into passion for Lucien de Rubempré, and the consequences which ensue from this excessive attachment. The reasons for her extra-marital activities are to be found in Un début dans la vie in which Balzac portrays the Comte de Sérisy, her husband, a statesman and administrator, who has been married for fifteen years to Léontine. She has had an extraordinary addiction for passionate liaisons and, in many respects, she is like Diane de Maufrigneuse in her promiscuity, but without Diane's cleverness

and hardness. The Countess is more emotional, more "vouée à la passion", and having regard to the frequency and the number of her liaisons, there can be little question of love in her adventures which have spanned a fifteen year period. Balzac tends to suggest that it is because her husband is suffering from an unpleasant disease that Mme de Sérisy has seen fit to seek outside sexual satisfactions, and her husband to turn more or less a blind eye to her escapades, not only because of his genuine love for her which makes him indulgent, but because he does not forget his ailment and the fact that his wife has not separated from him because of it.

Mme de Sérisy, however, has led a somewhat dissipated life, as she was the mistress of Victor d'Aiglemont, causing the disruption in the marital household and the retirement of Julie d'Aiglemont to Saint-Lange. Savinien de Portenduère, Auguste de Maulincour, M. de Beaudenord, Rastignac, have all courted her at one time or another. In Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes where she is portrayed at greater length than elsewhere, she becomes smitten with love for Lucien de Rubempré after having led a most promiscuous life of passion. From a frivolous and inconstant woman of passion, she falls in love, but her feelings develop into a passion which almost ruins the household of the Sérisy family:

Mme de Sérisy qui passait pour être une des femmes du monde les plus légères, avait eu pour le marquis d'Aiglemont, un attachement de dix années. Depuis le départ du Marquis pour les colonies, elle était devenue folle de Lucien et l'avait détaché de la duchesse de Maufrigneuse.  
(V, 421)

At the height of her love for Lucien, she discovers that he is also loved by Esther Gobseck. Jealousy smites the Countess who passes from rage to coldness against him. A month later, she is willing to accept Esther as her rival at the very moment when Lucien is arrested, and the extent of her feelings for him is reflected in her attempts to save his life. However, Balzac shows that her attachment to Lucien is now more in the nature of a passion, rather than love, an interpretation which seems inescapable from the excesses of her feelings which have inflicted her with a fever:

Enfin, elle en était arrivée à accepter la rivalité d'Esther, au moment où, dans ce paroxysme de tendresse, avait éclaté, comme une trompette du jugement dernier, la nouvelle de l'arrestation du bien-aimé. La comtesse avait failli mourir, son mari l'avait gardée lui-même au lit craignant les révélations du délire, et depuis vingt-quatre heures, elle vivait avec un poignard dans le coeur. Elle disait dans sa fièvre, à son mari: "Délivre Lucien, et je ne vivrai plus que pour toi. (V, 422)

When she is able to visit the prison where Lucien is confined, she attempts to burn legal documents which contain damning evidence against Lucien, and when she discovers that he has hanged himself, even the iron bars of the doorway yield to the force or the fury of her pent up emotions. As Balzac says, "dans les circonstances suprêmes, nos organes ont une puissance incalculée". (V, 487-488) The consequences of Lucien's death are serious for the mental health of the Countess. As Mme d'Espard tells Amélie Camusot: "Il paraît que la pauvre Comtesse dit des choses affreuses. On m'a dit que c'est dégoûtant!... Une femme comme il faut ne devrait pas être sujette à de pareil excès. C'est une passion purement physique... Il y a dans cette affaire des choses



monstrueuses". (V, 593)

Not only does Léontine suffer personally as a result of her passion for a now dead Lucien, but the disaster threatens to ruin the Sérisy household as well. In the midst of her passion for Lucien, the Countess had written him several letters which now fall in the possession of Jacques Collin, alias Vautrin, who is shocked by their passionate contents as he tells M. de Granville who is negotiating on behalf of the Sérisy family for their return:

J'ai le dossier de Madame de Sérisy et celui de la Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, et quelles lettres!... Les filles publiques en écrivant font du style et de beaux sentiments, eh! bien, les grandes dames qui font du style et de grands sentiments toute la journée écrivent comme les filles agissent. (V, 506)

Jacques Collin finally agrees to part with the letters in order to save Mme de Sérisy whose sanity is now at stake, but not before the idea of blackmail has sufficiently aroused the anxieties of the families and friends of the Sérisy and the Maufrigneuses. The Duc de Grandlieu summons his friend Henri de Chaulieu to ask him to inform the king about the situation involving the threat to two great aristocratic families brought about by the passionate letters of Léontine and Diane. The possibility of blackmail is the cause of much concern, as it is not in the interest of the monarchy that the aristocracy be brought into public disrepute. The frenzied desire to repair the passionate indiscretions of the two grandes dames, touches the very bulwarks of society, as before Lucien's death, the procureur-general was asked to be

kindly disposed to the prisoner, in view of his connections with the two great aristocratic families. When Léontine is finally cured of her "folie", however, through the efforts of Jacques Collin, he makes a salutary comment on the effect of aristocratic passions on society whose foundations are undermined by the escapades of women like

Léontine:

La comtesse tenait la lettre sur son coeur; elle était calme et paraissait réconciliée avec elle-même. A cet aspect le comte laissa échapper un geste de bonheur. -- Les voilà donc, ces gens qui décident de nos destinées et celles des peuples! pensa Jacques Collin... Un soupir poussé de travers par une femelle leur retourne l'intelligence comme un gant! Ils perdent la tête pour une oeillade. Une jupe mise un peu plus haut, un peu plus bas, et ils courent partout Paris au désespoir. Les fantaisies d'une femme réagissent sur tout l'Etat! Oh! combien de force acquiert un homme quand il soustrait comme moi, à cette tyrannie d'enfant, à ces probités renversées par la passion... La femme, avec son génie de bourreau, ses talents pour la torture, est et sera toujours la perte de l'homme. Procureur-général, ministre, les voilà tous aveuglés, tordant tout pour des lettres de duchesse ou de petites filles, ou pour la raison d'une femme qui sera plus folle avec son bon sens qu'elle ne l'était sans raison. (V, 664)

Antoine Adam in his critical edition of Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes published by Garnier-Frères in 1964, quotes Léon Gozlan to prove that a whole section of the novel has historical basis, and that the character of Léontine de Sérisy, for example, was very likely modelled on the known history of a certain Comtesse de Bxxx who also had problems with a blackmailer. According to Antoine Adam:

Toute une part de Splendeurs et misères ne serait que la mise au net des récits de Vidocq, et l'épisode de Mme de Sérisy, par exemple, serait inspiré de l'histoire d'une comtesse de Bxxx venue chez le préfet de police pour lui demander sa protection contre un maître chanteur. Balzac

tira peut-être un plus sûr profit de ses conversations avec Benjamin Appert, et l'on a conservé un billet de celui-ci, qui invite Balzac à se rendre à Neuilly pour y recevoir communication de certains documents. Il est même vraisemblable que Balzac tint à suivre les débats de quelque affaire criminelle.<sup>1</sup>

As far as the actions of Mme de Sérisy are concerned, they may occasion some doubt in the minds of certain persons about their "vraisemblance", especially in the description of the behaviour of the Countess who, for example, ignored the fact that her husband would discover her whereabouts, and openly visited the prison where Lucien was confined. Not only does she do this, but she shows so much concern for Lucien in the presence of her husband that one may form the impression that it is unlikely for a grande dame to behave in this way, especially when her husband is near to her. When she hears that Lucien has committed suicide, Balzac says that she gives a "cri terrible" and flies like an arrow to him "sans que ni monsieur de Sérisy ni monsieur de Bauvan pussent s'opposer à ses mouvements". When she is overcome with grief, at the sight of Lucien, "elle tomba la face sur le carreau de la cellule, en jetant des cris étouffés par une sorte de râle". She is taken away "par la voiture du comte vers son hôtel, couchée le long sur un coussin, son mari à genoux devant elle". (V, 488-489)

Any questioning of Balzac's psychology based on the behaviour of Mme de Sérisy in Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes would indicate an unawareness of the history of the Comte de Sérisy in Un début dans la vie

<sup>1</sup>Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes, ed. Antoine Adam (Paris: Garnier-Frères, 1964), p. xx

in which Balzac makes it clear that the Count's interests lie in giving his wife free rein to her inclinations and turning a blind eye to her activities, provided she remains his wife. He suffers from a great disadvantage in having a scrofulous disease of the skin, accompanied with a flushed countenance "que sa chevelure entièrement blanche mettait en relief". Sulphur baths were of no help to him, and he was obliged to confine himself for long periods to his "hôtel", allowing his wife much freedom of movement due to his condition. In addition to the situation of the Count which greatly explains Léontine's promiscuity, attention should also be paid to the temperament of the Countess who is well known in the Faubourg Saint-Germain for her extravagant behaviour, fits of "folie" which have earned her a description as "la fameuse Mme de Sérisy" as well as the adjective "légère" from Balzac himself. Even the aristocrats of le Petit Château have excluded her from their group, a sufficient indication that the Comtesse does not behave in a manner to suit the highest aristocratic families. The actions of Mme de Sérisy, therefore, are very much in keeping with her character and personality in the Comédie Humaine.

#### LA FEMME INFLUENTE

In Chapter I, the debt which Balzac owed to Mme de Berny, the Duchesse d'Abrantès, Mme de Castries, Mme Hanska and others, was emphasized to show the origin of his many contacts with the old and the new aristocracy, the use he made of these contacts, as well as the social influence which these women wielded in society and of which an ambitious

person could avail himself if he was strategically placed. When Balzac established the theory of "l'arrivisme" in his novels and showed how this was put into practice with highly satisfactory results by clever men like Rastignac, he also implied that there was some kind of social machinery available which the "arriviste" could use to lead him swiftly to the goals that he set himself to achieve. In Le Père Goriot, for example, a very inexperienced Rastignac makes a discovery about this social machinery:

Si d'abord il voulut se jeter à corps perdu dans le travail, séduit bientôt par la nécessité de se créer des relations, il remarqua combien les femmes ont d'influence sur la vie sociale, et avisa soudain à se lancer dans le monde, afin d'y conquérir des protectrices. (IV, 50)

The counter-part of the "arriviste", the 'sheath into which the blade is thrust', is the "femme influente", without whose aid the poor Rastignacs and the ambitious d'Ajuda-Pintos or de Marsays cannot succeed in their desires to achieve social success or acquire power. "On ne se figure pas de quelle utilité sont les femmes de Paris pour les ambitieux en tous genres. Elles sont aussi nécessaires dans le grand monde que dans le monde des voleurs. (V, 590-591) However, for the "théorie de la société" to work, there must not only be a system, but women within the system with the necessary temperament and inclination to lend themselves to the ambitions of men, and in the haute aristocratie where so many compete for the eligible men of ability, there is little difficulty for an intelligent and ambitious man to find a "femme influente" to act as his "protectrice".

It was very likely as a result of his own personal experience that Balzac was able to see the power to which women had access, especially those

women whose ancestry, titles, marriage and, most important, beauty, placed them in a strategically important social position, and which opened to them avenues to many sources of influence. In Le Lys dans la vallée, Mme de Mortsauf advises Félix de Vandenesse about the part which women could play in his life if he made the right choices and showed some shrewdness in the type of woman whom he chose to have as an influential friend and protectress. Mme de Mortsauf has many of the qualities of Laure de Berny, and it is probably as a result of the excellent advice which Laure frequently gave Balzac that Mme de Mortsauf attempts to guide Félix de Vandenesse in Paris by writing a long letter to him pointing out the many reefs in the sea of Parisian society, and the most useful method to adopt in charting a clear course to arrive as speedily as possible to his social goals. According to her: "La plupart des jeunes gens perdent leur plus précieuse fortune, le temps nécessaire pour se créer des relations qui sont la moitié de la vie sociale". (I, 409) She therefore expounds the philosophy of the usefulness of women to ambitious men, the same kind of philosophy which Rastignac gave to Raphaël de Valentin in La Peau de Chagrin, although she is careful to make distinctions among the variety of women whom he will meet, as not all will have the inclination to serve his interests:

Les femmes influentes sont les vieilles femmes, elles vous apprendront les alliances, les secrets de toutes les familles, et les chemins de traverse qui peuvent vous mener rapidement au but. Elles seront à vous de coeur; la protection est leur dernier amour quand elles ne sont pas dévotes; elles vous serviront merveilleusement, elles vous prôneront et vous rendront désirable... Suis-je suspecte en vous disant d'éviter les jeunes femmes, toutes plus ou moins artificieuses, moqueuses, vaniteuses, futiles, gaspilleuses; de vous attacher aux femmes influentes, ces imposantes douairières, pleines de sens... et qui vous serviront si bien. (I, 409-412)

Mme de Mortsauf is certainly on very sure ground when she mentions the influence of the douairières, as the Comtesse d'Agoult in her writings gives confirming evidence of the role and the power of these ladies of the haute aristocratie:

Les femmes, on ne l'ignore pas, recevaient dans cette société d'origine chevaleresque, des hommages fervents et constants. Jeunes, elles y régnaient par la beauté; vieilles, elles commandaient au nom de l'expérience; elles gardaient la préséance au foyer, le privilège de tout dire... elles décidaient souverainement de l'opinion dans les délicatesses de la bienséance et dans les délicatesses de l'honneur. De leur accueil dépendait le plus souvent la faveur dans le monde et l'avancement à la cour des jeunes gentilshommes.<sup>1</sup>

One important fact which emerges from Mme de Mortsauf's advice to Félix, is the greater influence wielded by the douairières over the jeunes femmes, and the sincerity of the former over the latter. However, in the Comédie Humaine, it is the grandes dames like the Duchesse de Maufriageuses and the Duchesse de Chaulieu, by no means douairières, who frequently use their influence for the Rubemprés, de Marsays and the d'Esgrignons, as the younger ladies like the Duchesse de Maufriageuse are the ones frequently involved on the social and the sentimental levels with the younger generation. The grandes dames have a great advantage over the douairières and, consequently, a greater influence with men at all levels of society. These grandes dames are young and beautiful, and beauty is an "open sesame" in the Comédie Humaine as it was in the early nineteenth Century. In La Peau de Chagrin, the eagerness of the Duc de Navarreins to help Foedora fills Raphael with sorrow and disgust. The Marquise d'Espard, also, has no difficulty in getting the ready ear and

<sup>1</sup>Agoult, Comtesse, Mes Souvenirs, p. 259

eager attention of highly placed government officials. The douairières, on the other hand, fashion the rules of the clan and wield influence in matters concerning general decorum, traditions and the social group as a whole, but the influence of the grandes dames extended into politics, government and, even, the judiciary. Quite often the monarch found himself unable to refuse the many favours asked him by these ladies.

It is worth noting, however, that the influence which Mme de Mortsauf asserts is more authoritative and sincere with the douairières was wielded only in the social sphere of the clan. Jules Bertaut describes these vieilles dames as being similar to the ancient Sibyls, but whose influence was confined to the social activities of the group. There is no mention of governmental influence:

Les personnes qui trônaient vraiment dans ces hôtels et les châteaux, qui en étaient le prolongement, celles qui étaient sans conteste les reines de ce vieux quartier, autour desquelles on s'assemblait avec respect et dont on tenait la parole pour des oracles, c'étaient les douairières.<sup>1</sup>

The influence of the dowagers is not all beneficial, however, as they are the "survivantes" of the Ancien Régime and have not learned the lesson that they live in a new age when the aristocracy must change with the times. The first great disadvantage which they have to face is their solitude which gives them a ready inclination to gossip and to indulge in other disagreeable pursuits. In La Femme de trente ans, the old Comtesse de Listomère-Landon, born in the 1740's, now lives

<sup>1</sup>Bertaut, Jules, Le Faubourg Saint-Germain sous L'Empire et la Restauration, p. 28



alone during the days of the Empire. When her niece Julie d'Aiglemont goes to visit her, Balzac shows her steeped in the past:

Toujours exhalant la poudre à la maréchale, contant bien, causant mieux, et riant plus d'un souvenir que d'une plaisanterie. L'actualité leur déplaît. Quant une vieille femme de chambre vint à annoncer à la comtesse (car elle devait bientôt reprendre son titre) la visite d'un neveu qu'elle n'avait vu depuis le commencement de la guerre d'Espagne, elle ôta vivement ses lunettes, ferma la 'Galerie de l'ancienne cour' son livre favori. (VI, 690)

When the Countess discovers the melancholy of her niece Julie, the eagerness she displays to ferret out the secrets of Julie's marriage betrays her solitude and explains the joy with which she greeted the opportunity for some distraction: "Elle pense joyeusement que sa solitude allait être réjouie par quelque intrigue amusante à conduire". (VI, 690) This self-enforced idleness of the aristocracy is compounded in the Countess' case by her solitude, a situation fraught with unpleasant possibilities, as it has already been pointed out what serious consequences ensue in the malicious behaviour of several grandes dames towards Marie de Vandenesse in Une Fille d'Eve, not to mention the evil gossip which idle minds circulate in the Faubourg. In Le Curé de Tours, the clan of Mme de Listomère is the real architect of many of the misfortunes of the Abbé Birotteau, as the family frivolously encourages him to embark on litigation with Mlle Gamard, motivated by their own need for distraction than by a real desire to help.

Generally speaking, the age and solitude of the douairières make them singularly unqualified to advise the younger generation, as

they are largely out of touch with the times. The reading material of the Comtesse de Listomère-Landon is the Galerie de l'ancienne cour, and this tendency to live in the past is to be paralleled with the preoccupation of the Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry in La Duchesse de Langeais who "avait dans le parchemin de sa cervelle tout celui du parchemin du cabinet des chartes et connaissait les alliances des maisons princières duciales et comtales de l'Europe... Aussi nulle usurpation de titre ne pouvait-elle lui échapper". (II, 680) When these dowagers have to advise the younger generation, they cannot transfer their ideas from the past of the Ancien Régime to the tragic realities of their presence in the Restoration with all its revolutionary pressures at work, manifesting themselves in all kinds of change. When Louis XVIII saw the wisdom of confirming the grant of the Charter to the people, the old aristocracy was not as far-sighted as their king to recognise his appreciation of the fact that times had changed.

In Le Cabinet des Antiques, the Vidame de Pamiers gaily introduces Victurnien d'Esgrignon to Diane de Maufrigneuse because in the previous Century it was common practice for the gay, young, cavalier bachelors to pursue women to their heart's content. But the Vidame does not appreciate the fact that the Restoration differs greatly from the Ancien Régime in that money, for example, is no longer a plentiful commodity, and that recklessness or dishonesty on the part of the young 'gay blades' will earn them a certain trip to Sainte-Pélagie. Victurnien is saved from imprisonment by the influence of Diane de Maufrigneuse who persuaded the

"président d'un tribunal de Ressort", M. Camusot, to be kindly disposed to him. But the clearest evidence available to the old aristocrats does not convince them that times have changed, and the Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry advises Antoinette de Langeais to have her Montriveau as a lover provided she does not abdicate "le droit de faire des ducs de Langeais". The Duc de Grandlieu is even more specific when he tells her: "Renoncez à votre salut en deux minutes s'il vous plaît de vous damner; d'accord! Mais réfléchissez bien quand il s'agit de renoncer à vos rentes". (II, 690) Morality is therefore considered by the Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry as subordinated to the "religion de l'aristocratie", and it is aristocrats like the Princesse and the Duc de Grandlieu who influence the younger generation to practise the morality of the Ancien Régime.

In Modeste Mignon, the aunt of the Duc d'Hérouville, though penniless like the Comte de Fontaine in Le Bal de Sceaux whose case we pointed out earlier, steadfastly refuses to have the Duc, her brother, marry the daughter of a rich banker, although they have looked in vain for a rich aristocratic heiress. The fortunes of the great banking empires of the Mongenod and the Nucingen families are rejected in turn by the proud, aristocratic Mlle d'Hérouville who considers Nucingen's wealth "trop turpidement ramassée", refusing to heed the admonitions of the king even though he "taxa publiquement Mademoiselle d'Hérouville de folie". (VII, 508-509) Because their ideas belong to another age, their influence on others can only serve to hurt the general cause of the

aristocracy vis-à-vis the lower classes.

In Le Cabinet des Antiques, Balzac gives a graphic description of the clothing of the douairières which is consistent with their anachronistic ideas and attitudes:

Sous ces vieux lambris, oripeaux d'un temps qui n'était plus, s'agitait en première ligne huit ou dix douairières, les unes aux chefs branlants, les autres desséchées et noires comme des momies; celles-ci roides, celles-la inclinées, tout encaparaçonnées d'habits plus ou moins fantasques en opposition avec la mode... je n'ai jamais plus retrouvé nulle part, ni chez les mourants, ni chez les vivants, la paleur de certains yeux gris, l'effrayante vivacité de quelques yeux noirs. (II, 1080)

What one may be inclined to consider a caricature by Balzac of the douairières whose ideas and clothing all reflect the tragedy of their old philosophies and even clothing in a new age, is confirmed by Jules Bertaut and, even more important, by the Comtesse d'Agoult. Bertaut sees these ladies as "images périmées et un tantinet ridicules... jadis belles peut-être, maintenant enlaidies, décrépitées, ravagées par le temps, acoquinées au coin de leur feu, les pieds sur les chenets, dans leur salon dénudé".<sup>1</sup> Mme d'Agoult, on the other hand sees them as the relics of a bygone age, but still powerful, tyrannical, and wielding the greatest possible influence as Mme de Mortsauf suggested:

Présentée à la cour, il fallait l'être ensuite aux vieilles dames douairières du Faubourg Saint-Germain. C'était leur droit... les plus âgées n'allaient plus dans le monde depuis longtemps. Paralysées de tout, hormis la langue, elles ne quittaient pas leur paravent, leurs chenets, leur 'bergère' antique, leur chat familial, leur tabatière et leur bourbonnière. Elles ne recevaient, en dehors de leur descendance, que de rares visites de noces; on y restait dix minutes au plus, puis on n'y retournait pas. C'était assez, l'usage était satisfait. Les vieilles dames vous avaient vue... Sourdes et criardes, elles avaient prononcé,

<sup>1</sup>Bertaut, Jules, p. 28

haut et dru, de leur voix rauque, sur les yeux, les dents, la gorge, la main, le pied... Elles avaient dit: 'elle est fort bien', ou: 'elle n'est pas bien' et prévenu ainsi, de leur arrêt, l'opinion du monde. Les plus jeunes entre ces dernières... ne s'écartaient pas trop de la soixantaine... il fallait les fréquenter pour se mettre en bon renom. Quand on quittait les tentures éraillées, les boiseries enfumées, les vieux cadres poudreux... on se sentait rajeuni d'un demi siècle.<sup>1</sup>

The Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry, however, to whom Mme de Mortsauw wrote, is instrumental in getting Félix de Vandenesse admitted into the highest aristocratic milieu, le Petit Château, and she becomes not only his protectrice, but his amie. Through her influence, Félix meets Mme d'Espard, the Duchesse de Langeais, the vicomtesse de Beauséant, the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse and the other social deities of the world of fashion. His social success is assured because of "les soins de la princesse".

In Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées, Louise de Macumer, whose father is the Duc de Chaulieu, is instrumental in obtaining the title of Comte for the father-in-law of her good friend Renée de l'Estorade, while Louise's mother secures the appointment by King Charles X of Canalis as an "attaché" to accompany them to Madrid. In Modeste Mignon, Canalis approaches the Duchesse on behalf of Ernest de la Brière for whom he requests the appointment as "Comte". In Splendeurs et misères des Courtisanes, the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse secures a royal patent for the appointment of Lucien Chardon as Lucien de Rubempré, and in Les Illusions perdues, the Marquise d'Espard is instrumental in arranging for du Châtelet to be made Comte. It has already been pointed out that Mme de

<sup>1</sup>Agoult, Comtesse d', Mes Souvenirs, pgs. 290-291

Maufrigneuse secured the promotion of a member of the Judiciary, M. Camusot who, according to Balzac, "pour un très léger service rendu, mais capital pour la duchesse, lors de la plainte en faux portée contre le jeune comte d'Esgrignon par un banquier d'Alençon ... de simple juge en province il avait passé président, et de président juge d'instruction à Paris". These instances of influence can be multiplied almost ad nauseam in the Comédie Humaine.

In Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes, Balzac presents an interesting duel between two influential ladies, the Marquise d'Espard and Diane de Maufrigneuse who both vie in their efforts to prove that one is more influential than the other. The Marquise hates Lucien de Rubempré and wants him executed for the alleged murder of Esther Gobseck, while Diane and Léontine de Sérisy have a personal interest in seeing him freed from prison. To secure her ends, the Marquise d'Espard appeals to Mme Amélie Camusot, the wife of the judge engaged in examining Lucien, the very person whom Diane had promoted from Alençon, and she tempts her to influence her husband in the appropriate direction. According to Amélie who discusses with her husband the promises made by the Marquise: "Elle a parlé d'une vacance à la Cour royale, elle connaissait la Garde-des-Sceaux -- Votre mari, madame, a une belle occasion de se distinguer" says the Marquise. The wily Mme Camusot is aware that Diane de Maufrigneuse and Mme de Sérisy also have an interest in Lucien whom they wish to save, and she promptly goes to the Duchesse to find out whether the bidding will be higher. Her shrewdness is rewarded by the plain words of the Duchesse who is more specific in her promises than Mme d'Espard:

Je suis fidèle à ceux qui me servent, vous le savez. Le Roi espère beaucoup du courage de ses magistrats dans les circonstances graves où il va se trouver bientôt; je mettrai votre mari en avant, je le recommanderai comme un homme dévoué au Roi... Notre Camusot sera d'abord conseiller, puis premier n'importe où. (V, 394-395)

Amélie Camusot is left to consider with her husband which of the two grandes dames has made the better offer, and which is more influential: "Laquelle des deux est la plus puissante?" she wonders aloud. By clever intriguing, she applies pressure to Mme d'Espard who becomes even more insistent and precise in her promises: "Ecoute! dit la marquise, je vous promets la décoration de la Légion d'Honneur, immédiatement, demain". (V, 594) All this behind the scene bargaining has the obvious effect of subverting the course of justice, as in the opinion of the presiding judge, Lucien is guilty, although he is rapidly changing his mind as forces more powerful than he ~~are blowing a powerful wind:~~

"Lucien est coupable, reprit le juge, mais de quoi? — Un homme aimé par la duchesse de Maufrigneuse, par la comtesse de Sérisy, par Clotilde de Grandlieu n'est pas coupable, répondit Amélie". (V, 402)

Lucien solves the problem of which side has the greater influence by committing suicide, but not before Balzac has shown how the integrity of the Judiciary is undermined by ambition on the one hand and influence on the other, emphasizing the role played by the grandes dames whose energies are phenomenal when either reputation or the object of their interest is at stake. When Léontine de Sérisy visits the prison on one occasion to use her personal influence there, Balzac describes her attitude as reflecting the general one of the great ladies of the aris-

tocracy who place their own interests and those of the social code of their sex above the laws of the land. When Camusot tells her that it is too late to save Lucien, she replies:

Il ne peut pas, il ne doit pas être encore trop tard, ajouta-t-elle avec une intonation de despote. Les femmes, les jolies femmes posées, comme l'est madame de Sérisy, sont les enfants gâtés de la civilisation française. Si les femmes des autres pays savaient ce qu'est à Paris une femme à la mode, riche et titrée, elles penseraient toutes à venir jouir de cette royauté magnifique. Les femmes vouées aux seuls liens de leur bienséance, à cette collection de petites lois déjà nommée assez souvent dans La Comédie Humaine, Le Code Femelle, se moque des lois que les hommes ont faites. Elles disent tout, elles ne reculent devant aucune faute, devant aucune sottise; car elles ont toutes admirablement compris qu'elles ne sont responsable de rien dans la vie, excepté de leur honneur féminin et de leurs enfants. Elles disent en riant les plus grandes énormités! (V, 470-471)

Because of their beauty and titles, the grandes dames can influence men to secure many advantages. Balzac gives an example of the effect which the receipt of a letter from one of these "délités" has on a Minister of Government:

Nommez la puissance femelle madame la marquise d'Espard, avec qui devait compter un ministre; cette femme écrit un petit billet ambré que son valet de chambre porte au valet de chambre du ministre. Le ministre est saisi par le poulet au moment de son réveil, il le lit aussitôt. Si le ministre a des affaires, l'homme est enchanté d'avoir une visite à rendre à l'une des reines de Paris, une des puissances du Faubourg Saint-Germain, une des favorites de MADAME, de la Dauphine ou du Roi. Casimir Périer, le seul premier ministre réel qu'ait eu la Révolution de Juillet, quittait tout pour aller chez un ancien premier gentilhomme de la chambre du roi Charles X. (V, 590-591)

It is interesting to speculate on the probable influence of a grande dame who was not blessed with beauty. Such a personage is not to be found among the "haute aristocratie" in the Comédie Humaine.



THE TYRANNY OF SOCIETY: THE 'FEMME VICTIME'

When Mme de Mortsauf wrote to Félix de Vandenesse to give him advice about the sources of influence in society, she did not fail to mention in clear terms the role played by the society of the Faubourg Saint-Germain in his life, absolute obedience to which was essential if he wanted to achieve any position of prominence at all. This influence or, rather, tyranny wielded by the group and exercised in the name of society, having unwritten laws, but which are no less implacable than the laws of the State, permeates the length and breadth of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. When Taine wrote that "le monde avait les exigences d'un roi absolu et ne souffrait pas de partage",<sup>1</sup> he only confirmed what Mme de Mortsauf wrote to Félix de Vandenesse in Le Lys dans la vallée:

Les lois ne sont pas toutes écrites dans un livre, les mœurs aussi créent des lois, les plus importantes sont les moins connues; il n'est ni professeurs, ni traités, ni écoles pour ce droit qui régit vos actions, vos discours, votre vie extérieure, la manière de vous présenter au monde ou d'aborder la fortune. Faillir à ces lois secrètes, c'est rester au fond de l'état social au lieu de le dominer. (I, 398)

The persons who have the principal role in making the unwritten social laws of the group, in formulating opinion and exacting the severest penalties for their breach, are the douairières, for as Mme d'Agoult points out, they "décidaient souverainement de l'opinion dans les délicatesses de la bienséance et dans les délicatesses de l'honneur. De leur

<sup>1</sup>Taine, H., Les origines de la France Contemporaine, p. 172

accueil dépendait le plus souvent la faveur dans le monde et l'avancement à la cour des jeunes gentilshommes".<sup>1</sup> When they give a good opinion about the appearance of any of the jeunes femmes, they paved the way for her social success, or condemned her to anonymity if they found her unattractive. Their judgments are considered "des arrêts", and their opinions hailed as "des oracles".

The Faubourg Saint-Germain where these "Sibyls" live with the other grandes dames who also possess a certain amount of influence themselves, is a geographical area which has been compared to a kind of Republic, having its frontiers, its iron laws and its subjects, or perhaps, victims. According to Robert Burnand:

Le Faubourg Saint-Germain est, si l'on peut risquer cette image paradoxale, une sorte de république, qui a ses frontières, ses moeurs, son code de vie, ses lois. Socialement, quel que soit le titre qu'on porte, les feuilles de frasier héraldique, ou les perles dont sont fleuries les couronnes, tous sont égaux; quels que soient même la fortune et le train de maison. On ne cherche à écraser, à éblouir quiconque.<sup>2</sup>

Burnand makes two errors in his description of the attitude of the aristocrats to one another. Theoretically, all the aristocrats were considered equals, but there were surprising prejudices and discrimination to be found in their treatment of one another. It is certainly not true as Burnand suggests that "socialement... tous sont égaux". It is also common historical knowledge that the poor aristocrats from the provinces

<sup>1</sup>D'Agoult, Comtesse, Mes souvenirs, p. 259

<sup>2</sup>Burnand, Robert, La vie quotidienne en France en 1830 (Paris: Hachette, 1943), p. 100

were regarded rather contemptuously by those who lived in Paris, and more so if the Parisian aristocrats were wealthy. Nor is it true to say that "on ne cherche à écraser, à éblouir quiconque", as Mme Ancelot reports that the ambition of a grande dame was to become a "femme à la mode", the same assertion made by Balzac throughout the Comédie Humaine. Referring to one of these ambitious ladies, Mme Ancelot shows that her preoccupation is not only to be "reine", but to see her rivals belong to constellations of lesser brilliance:

Emma n'a jamais aimé qu'elle seule au monde, et dans ce moment, absorbée par une idée, il n'y a plus de jours, plus d'heures, plus rien qui marque le temps pour elle, la vie est toute entière dans ce qui l'occupe. L'emporter, triompher, tout est là, le reste n'existe plus... il vaudrait mieux être au premier rang dans un village qu'au second dans Paris... Mon pouvoir s'augmenta de tout l'éclat de mes rivales détrônées... n'être plus la première, est-ce que c'est vivre?<sup>1</sup>

Balzac also expressly indicates that there were hierarchies within the aristocracy, as Mme de Sérisy, for example, was not admitted to the home of the Duc de Grandlieu, nor was she accepted into Le Petit Château. Balzac's assertions get corroboration from Lady Morgan, a British aristocrat who kept a journal of her visit in France during the Restoration. According to this lady:

But though a coterie may huddle together in the entresols of the Tuileries, or amid the solemn gloom of the Faubourg, — and from their admission to the assemblies of the Duchesse de Berri, may call themselves la société du château; and though an inferior satellite of lesser light may revolve around this orbit, with less distinguished appellation of le petit château — still their existence is almost unknown to the great, the enlightened, the stirring society of Paris.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ancelot, Mme, 'la femme à la mode', Les Français peints par eux-mêmes, pgs. 58-59

<sup>2</sup>Morgan, Lady, I, 214

The Faubourg Saint-Germain was a special social and politically corporate entity, due to the fact that its members were motivated by one great ambition of maintaining their privileged position within the country. From this desire there arose the generally uniform policy of snobbery, prejudice and even hatred for the exclus. For the grandes dames living within this geographical and social milieu, there was also a uniformity in their pleasures and social ambitions. Because their actions were, for the most part, guided by the general laws of the group, obedience tended to be absolute. According to Jules Bertaut:

Par l'importance sociale des familles qui le (le Faubourg) composaient, par la nature de leurs idées morales et politiques... il décida parfois la marche des événements. Le Faubourg fut alors comme un être organisé, une manière d'individu, ayant ses lettres de noblesse, son éducation, ses mœurs, ses préjugés, ses amours et ses haines.<sup>1</sup>

Rule on the part of the Faubourg, and obedience from its members, are the two aspects which explain the social behaviour and the subsequent fate of the grandes dames. One great disadvantage which they had to face within their group was the fact that the older women, the dowagers who were out of touch with realities, were the ones who were the social arbiters of behaviour within the Faubourg. It naturally follows that with such models to imitate, the new generation learned the maxims of the old and repeated many of the errors made during pre-revolutionary times. Mme de Langeais, for example, is a victim of her social position, as she not only gets the wrong kind of advice from the Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry, the Vidame de Pamiers and the Duc de Grandlieu, but even prior

<sup>1</sup>Bertaut, Jules, Le Faubourg Saint-Germain sous l'Empire et la Restauration, p.7

to the getting of this advice, Balzac shows that the education of the group had so conditioned the Duchesse's thinking that her actions became an unconscious but inescapable reflection of the maxims of those among whom she had been brought up and with whom she had associated.

When analysing Antoinette's attitude towards Montriveau in which she displays insensibility to his feelings, Balzac describes her as having "plus d'entêtement que de caractère, plus d'engouement que d'enthousiasme, ... plus de tête que de coeur", but he is careful to point out that her behaviour is conditioned by the milieu, as she is "moins vieille de coeur, que vieillie par les maximes de ceux qui l'entouraient, et comprenant leur philosophie égoïste sans l'avoir appliquée". (II, 154) If the Duchesse is the product of her milieu, it not only explains why Balzac considers her to be the symbol of her caste, but why he emphasizes the important fact that Montriveau struggles, not so much against the woman Antoinette, but against the Faubourg Saint-Germain represented in the Duchesse de Langeais with all its codes, iron laws and penalties which hang over Antoinette's head like a sword of Damoclès.

This is a good deal of educational psychology to be found in Balzac's explanation of the attitude of Mme de Langeais or, for that matter, Diane de Maufrigneuse, or any of the grandes dames. A person is not born with an attitude, but acquires it through imitation. Imitation takes place when the action of the person imitated has value for the subject who is observing. A young, inexperienced girl is naturally attracted to the elegance of the grandes dames and her obvious

popularity with members of both sexes. This process of observation is constantly in operation, and imitation takes place either consciously or subconsciously. Later, attitudes are formed more or less rapidly, depending on the environmental situation and the frequency with which the object of observation is seen by the subject who is imitating. Attitudes, therefore, arise from imitative behaviour, and three professional psychologists assert that man, through imitation, becomes the product of his social environment: "Socially, he tends to become what his environment makes him. Attitudes are often tinged with emotions, and may be displayed in emotional as well as in rational behaviour".<sup>1</sup> In determining the extent of the influence which a group like the Faubourg Saint-Germain can exert on the individual, Otto Klineberg, a social psychologist, confirms that the behaviour of the individual is conditioned by the norms set by the group, and that individuals who have personal views subordinate them to the crowd. "The whole is always different from the sum of its parts, that it even determines the nature of the parts and that a group therefore has a reality different from that of the sum of its individual members".<sup>2</sup> There is also evidence according to Klineberg that the "group situation increases the amount of conformity", and he lists several reasons for this fact of which the two most important are the practical need to participate in the social

<sup>1</sup>Garrison, K.C., Kingston, A.J., McDonald, A.S., Educational psychology (New York, 1964), p. 301

<sup>2</sup>Klineberg, Otto, Social Psychology, (New York, 1954), p. 451

and economic exchanges of the community and punishment for transgression. "Even the leader or the genius must in a sense 'follow' the group, though he is not without influence upon its future course".<sup>1</sup>

The grandes dames are therefore conditioned by the group which also prevents them from having freedom of behaviour by a rigorous application of penalties as we pointed out in the case of Mme de Beauséant and Mme de Langeais. Perhaps, the influence of the Faubourg on personality and character development can be better seen and Balzac's social psychology better appreciated in a brief examination of the case of Louise de Chaulieu in Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées. There is a period of innocence preceding Louise's introduction into society which is contrasted with her later transformation into a "femme du monde", another victim of her social caste. Before she is launched out formally into society, she must be completely outfitted for her new role. A week is spent with corset makers, after which she must see Janssen the operatic shoemaker. Victorine the dressmaker is also her constant companion, not to mention the glovemaker who must make the required measurements, orders to be sent to the person who supplies underclothing, hats, ribbons, etc. She must be provided with a dressing case, toilet service, scent boxes, fans, prayer book, cashmere shawls, riding boots and a plethora of such paraphernalia which must transform her from a former Carmelite at Blois into what Balzac calls "une fille du monde". Vanity can only result from such preparations.

<sup>1</sup>Klineberg, Otto, Social Psychology, (New York, 1954), p. 476

Before she becomes the property of society, Louise has ample freedom at her disposal, but after that there can only be submission to the requirements of her new position. Louise contemplates with mixed emotions the great plunge she is about to take: "Quel délicieux moment! Je m'appartiens encore, comme une fleur qui n'a pas été vue et qui vient d'éclorre". (VI, 57) When she enters the social round of activities for the first time, she writes to Renée de l'Estoradé in ecstasies: "Voilà quinze jours ma chère que je vis de la vie du monde: un soir aux Italiens, l'autre au grand Opéra, de là toujours au bal. Ah! le monde est une féerie". (VI, 74)

The process of change soon begins, however. She observes her mother's movements and actions and imitates her. She acquires the ability, just like the other coquettes, to "baisser les yeux et me donner un coeur de glace sous un front de neige". (VI, 56) She encounters all the evils and the vices of fashionable society and, of course, is educated by them. At first she is shocked at the maliciousness of the men and the women of her class: "J'ai entendu force commérages sans piquet sur des gens inconnus... J'ai vu la plupart des femmes et des hommes prenant un très vif plaisir à dire ou entendre certaines phrases... il y a des intrigues multipliées". (VI, 61) After her marriage, she forms her own salon and becomes one of the unofficial "reines" of fashion, sacrificing her precious freedom and her marriage life for the pleasure of social conquests: "Depuis quatre heures, jusqu'à deux heures du matin, j'appartiens à Paris". Competitions, rivalries, companions who are not friends occupy her time. The tragedy of her life and those who are in a similar situation can be seen from her perpetual social preoccupation, her hardness and, moreso, her solitude, as even the visitors to her home



are "les gens qu'on appelle des amis". She has become another "femme du monde".

Mme de Beauséant's treatment of Eugène de Rastignac is also a case in point to illustrate the influence of the group on the actions of the individual. She had previously shown Eugène the polished courtesy and bland graciousness of manner of a great lady, but she suddenly reacted curtly to him when he paid her a visit at an inopportune time. Suffering all the pangs of jealousy, grief and despair which can fill the heart of a woman who has been abandoned for another, the facts of which will soon be known by every member of the Faubourg, all the words, gestures, manners of a lifetime spent in her social caste, reveal themselves in a moment of unguarded behaviour by the Vicomtesse: "Monsieur de Rastignac, il m'est impossible de vous voir, en ce moment, du moins! Je suis en affaire". (IV, 145) The love problems of the Vicomtesse do not satisfactorily explain the harshness in her tone of voice, and Balzac lays great emphasis on her attitude. There is, in fact, more than a suspicion of superiority in her manner.

Eugène who had become an observer, noticed that her glance, the inflexion in her voice, betrayed "l'histoire du caractère et des habitudes du caste". Even though she gets a feeling of guilt about the way she has just treated her cousin and invites him to dinner to expiate, as it were, the harshness of her words, Eugène is nevertheless amazed at her behaviour: "Rampe, supporte tout. Que doivent être les autres, si dans un moment, la meilleure des femmes efface les promesses de son amitié, te laisse là comme un vieux soulier. Chacun pour soi, donc?" (IV, 146)

One thing is clear. The Vicomtesse has become a prisoner of the social customs of the aristocracy where the hard, perpetual struggle for social survival has produced the kind of person who amazes Eugène. There are not many cousins of the grandes dames who arrive fresh and inexperienced from the Provinces and become the means whereby these ladies may have a twinge of conscience. They have so little opportunity of showing their real nature, of allowing their old personality to reassert itself, that the part played in society for such a long time becomes part and parcel of their character. It is no longer a question of a pose or an attitude adopted, but a way of life for the grandes dames.

The influence of La Mode on the lives of the grandes dames is considerable. La Mode constituted the aggregate of aristocratic women, beautiful, elegant, well dressed, intelligent and fashionable, who congregated in salons and, among themselves, tacitly recognized, at intervals, the most beautiful, elegant and popular among themselves as the uncrowned queen of the group. This was an honour and an achievement valued above every thing else in the social existence of the aristocratic women. To become queen, one had to possess certain special qualities which no one could define or identify, but which all superior aristocratic women must have to make the grande dame accepted as prima inter pares of the other feminine deities. This indefinable nature of La Mode is well brought out by Mme Ancelot who describes the ambitions of a grande dame to continue to be reine de la mode, but who is even unaware of the qualities, attributes or traits necessary to achieve this distinction.

If she knew this, it would be much easier to maintain her position as reine de la mode:

Emma continua: Que de sacrifices n'ai-je pas faits? Que de soins n'ai-je pris pour assurer mes succès et conserver ma place de femme à la mode, dans un temps où la gloire est si capricieuse et les places si difficiles à garder? Il m'a fallu autant d'habileté que de bonheur, autant d'adresse que de beauté, autant de calculs que de chances favorables! Si j'avais écouté parfois mon plaisir, mon caprice, mon coeur, je risquais tout. Cette puissance est comme les autres, enviée, disputée, attaquée chaque jour, car la réputation et le pouvoir d'une femme à la mode sont, comme la réputation et le pouvoir d'un homme d'état, à tout moment remis en question et en danger... Depuis le jour où Emma s'était emparée de cette faveur inexplicable, capricieuse, frivole et puissante en même temps, qui donne le sceptre de la mode, sa vie avait été changée! Plus d'amitié!... Les femmes ne furent plus à ses yeux que des rivales... Qui pourrait dire en effet comment et pourquoi l'on devient une femme à la mode, quels sont les moyens, quel est le but: est-ce avec l'éclat de la beauté, ce seul pouvoir incontesté de la femme? Non, car souvent la plus belle passe inaperçue... Nul n'a pu fixer les règles de ce jeu dangereux où avec tant de choses à perdre l'on en a si peu à gagner! Aussi tout fut-il employé par Emma pour réussir, et faute de certitude sur les causes de sa faveur, elle n'en voulut point laisser sans les tenter: parents, amis, fortune, tout fut sacrifié à cet insatiable désir de briller. La vanité, l'orgueil, l'égoïsme, étouffèrent la sensibilité, la tendresse et la bonté.<sup>1</sup>

La Mode which ruled the social lives of the grandes dames and imposed its own tyranny, also led to rivalries and competitions. This is not difficult to understand, as all were determined to triumph over one another. D'Alméras considers that men are a prime cause for rivalry among women, and this also helps to explain the fierce competition among the grandes dames. According to this historian:

Rivales professionnelles, qui aiment trop les hommes pour ne point se

<sup>1</sup> Ancelot, Mme, 'La femme à la mode', Les Français peints par eux-mêmes, pgs. 59-60

hair, elles organisent incessamment des concours de toilettes et de beauté. Dans les salons, au bal, au théâtre, sur les promenades, dans les rues, elles luttent pour la conquête du mari, de l'amant, et elles ne s'habillent que pour se dévêtir. Elles furent ainsi, les femmes de la Restauration, comme celles de tous les pays, de tous les temps.<sup>1</sup>

In order to preserve her superiority, Foedora banishes love from her range of emotions, as the "reine de la mode" must be "sans coeur". With no established rules for a grande dame to follow in acquiring her greatest social ambition and superiority over the other ladies, it is assumed almost automatically that hardness and egoism would be an advantage. Beauty, in a general way, is recognised as being important, and the Marquise d'Espard, for example, has a rigid method of preserving hers and concealing her age. But to be young and beautiful does not necessarily secure a position as "reine" in the Comédie Humaine, as there are only six such queens. Léontine de Sérisy, though beautiful, is not numbered among the six, nor is Louise de Macumer. Nor is there anything specific which can explain why the Marquise d'Espard, Diane de Maufrigneuse and Mme Firmiani lose their sceptre as queen. Not being sure what rules or qualities apply or do not apply, the ambitious ladies attempt to increase their merit by denigrating their rivals, circulating as much gossip as might detract from others, and having friendships of the variety like that of Molière's Arsinoé and Célimène minus their quarrel. When Mme de Beauséant is on the verge of being abandoned by d'Ajuda Pinto, the Duchesse de Langeais obligingly brings the news of Miguel's treachery to the

Vicomtesse.

In Les Secrets de la Princesse de Cadignan, Diane de Maufrigneuse asserts that "pour faire les amitiés sincères et durables entre femmes, il faut qu'elles aient été cimentées par de petits crimes". She and the Marquise d'Espard appear to be on friendly terms, as they look at each other and laughingly squeeze hands. But it is all hypocrisy. The same insincerity is found in the reaction of the ladies to the rumour which spread about the liaison of Marie de Vandenesse and Raoul Nathan. According to Balzac: "Mais la comtesse fut défendue par ses amies, par lady Dudley, Mesdames d'Espard et de Manerville avec une maladroite chaleur qui put donner quelque créance à ce bruit". (VIII, 893) The same thing occurs when Mme de Langeais compromises herself over Montriveau. The Baron de Maulincour is the first to carry the good news to a Faubourg languishing in "ennui". "Aussitôt, cette nouvelle fut télégraphiquement portée à la connaissance de toutes les côteries du Faubourg Saint-Germain... Presque toutes les femmes niaient le fait, mais de manière à le faire croire". (II, 677)

As far as the grandes dames are concerned, they have a genuine interest in or motive for discrediting other women. They find themselves pitted against one another because of similar ambitions fostered by La Mode, and any action which furthers their ambitions is considered by them to be justifiable. But when men also indulge in the same kind of behaviour as women, it tends to show the hollow nature of the aristocracy as a whole, and indicates the very few loyalties which they had for one another.

Mme Ancelot confirms Balzac's views that the grandes dames are victims of la Mode, and this is particularly obvious when they forget the lesson taught by the Foedoras:

Quant à la brillante duchesse de Romillac, c'était vraiment une redoutable rivale. Son rang, sa fortune, son éclat dans ce pays des vanités, auraient pu triompher. Ils s'occupèrent d'elle pendant un mois, mais elle eut l'imprudence de se compromettre avec le bel Edouard d'Arcy, et pour une femme à la mode qui doit mettre au nombre de ses armes les plus dangereuses des espérances adroitement exploitées dans l'intérêt de sa puissance, aimer réellement, c'est abdiquer.<sup>1</sup>

The tyranny of la Mode is fully in evidence when it exacts the severest penalties on the Beauséants and the Langeais, and its power is also in operation, though concealed, when there is obedience and not rebellion. But when the 'traces' are brought down either by accident or design, la Mode settles its account with the erring member. The Comte Ferraud, on the other hand, though not ruled by la Mode, owes his obedience to the whole group, as he must await the decree of the Faubourg on his marriage with the widow of Colonel Chabert, and approval is only given when the group is satisfied that there was no desertion on his part.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the unfortunate situation of women in the aristocracy was their position in marriage where they repented at leisure for haste of their parents to conclude arranged marriages. The abolition of divorce in 1816 aggravated the situation, and the absence of husbands in the homes of many of the grandes dames in

<sup>1</sup>Ancelot, Mme, 'La femme à la mode', Les Français peints par eux-mêmes, p. 59

the Comédie Humaine, is a direct result of such a situation. Many of the grandes dames rebel against their position and deliberately choose lovers in a calculated attempt to assert or reassert their individuality. They reason like the Duchesse de Langeais: "Que prouve un mari? Que jeune fille, une femme était richement dotée, ou bien élevée, avait une mère adroite, ou satisfaisait aux ambitions de l'homme; mais un amant est le constant programme de ses perfections personnelles". (II, 590)

But there are other consequences which eventuate from this revolt against the established practice of the mariages de convenance. Women were in a position much inferior to men in society, as any open indiscretion on women's part was enough to ruin them financially and socially while men were under no such threat. Balzac points to the penalties exacted by society against such an erring wife in La Muse du Département:

Bah! dit le petit La Baudraye, le duc de Bracciano que sa femme a mis en cage, et à qui elle se fait voir tous les soirs dans les bras de son amant, va la tuer... Vous appelez cela une vengeance?... Nos tribunaux et la société sont bien plus cruels... on laisse vivre la femme avec une maigre pension, le monde lui tourne alors le dos; elle n'a plus ni toilette ni considération, deux choses qui selon moi sont toute la femme, dit le petit vieillard. (IX, 126)

Death and poverty are some of the consequences which women suffer, and which have been the subject of much adverse criticisms by writers of the period. Certain articles of the Code conferred tyrannical powers on husbands who could kill their wives if they were found "en flagrant délit", and other injustices abounded in the Code of the period. If, however, a

woman is sexually molested, even though this would be unlikely in the aristocracy where women travelled in their carriages, it is a crime punishable by imprisonment

... à condition que la victime viendra étaler devant les tribunaux son déshonneur et sa flétrissure... à condition qu'elle rentrera dans la société pour y être montrée du doigt et poursuivie de joyeux demi-mots et d'équivoques grossières.<sup>1</sup>

According to the Code, satisfaction can only be obtained by a public humiliation of oneself.

Balzac blames society as a whole for the unfortunate situation of women and the group in particular in the case of the grandes dames, since the Code is equally unjust as the Faubourg Saint-Germain in their respective tyrannies. The mariage de convenance leads to the "ménage à trois", and it is the social milieu which encourages the search for "amants", fosters rivalries and competitions for the position of "reine de la mode". Rivalries engender selfishness and lead to "l'individualisme" or "le bonheur individuel", as the grandes dames seek their own happiness regardless of the sum of unhappiness brought to others. La Mode spawns the "femme sans coeur"; and if these queens for a day have the weakness to yield to their sentimental feelings rather than continue to be stony-hearted, they become the victims of La Mode.

There is very little escape for the aristocratic lady who ventures to live a prominent social life and to allow herself to be ruled by her

<sup>1</sup>Soulié, F., Le Conseiller d'Etat, p. 183, as quoted in J.S. Wood Sondages 1830-1848, (University of Toronto press, 1965), p. 68



heart instead of her head. Even if she renounces social prominence and lives a retired life like Sabine du Guénic, there are still misfortunes which await her, as her husband will most likely attach himself to someone else in the fashionable salons, as he has nothing else to do with his time but attend the various receptions, balls and "soirées" to secure amusement. At these functions he will likely see the imperfections of a wife who remains at home and does not beautify herself like the other ladies whom he will meet and who will consider it their duty to wean the husband from his wife.

How can all of this be changed or reformed? Balzac makes no proposals, but points to the abuses of a society which is filled with victims who are even more unfortunate in the closed, social caste of the aristocracy. In a moment of lucidity, Félix de Vandenesse is amazed at the number of such victims whom he recognises and identifies by name:

Je vis plusieurs de ces victimes qui vous sont aussi connues qu'à moi: Madame de Beauséant partie mourante en Normandie... La duchesse de Langeais compromise... Madame d'Aiglemont n'a-t-elle pas vu la tombe de bien près... Le monde et la science sont complices de ces crimes pour lesquels il n'est point de Cour d'Assises... Mon Dieu! appartiens-je donc à la race des tigres? (I, 531-532)

Balzac can be considered to belong to the "mouvement féministe" of the period, of which George Sand was a prominent member in defending the rights of women and eloquently pointing out their inferior position in society.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE FAMILY

In explaining the circumstances which led to the accelerated disintegration of the aristocracy and the second exile of the Bourbons, Balzac points to the fact that the weak structure of the family played a most significant part. His assertions about the breakdown of family relationships, evident within the group, are all the more worthy of deep consideration when it is realised that Balzac had witnessed and, at the time of writing, was witnessing many of the things he was describing.

The greatest possible importance is attached by Balzac to the family and, ipso facto, to the institution of marriage. In the Avant-Propos to the Comédie Humaine, Balzac states that he regards "la Famille et non l'individu comme le véritable élément social". (XV, 375) In espousing the cause of family unity in the Comédie Humaine, Balzac expresses the view that all animals have a special instinct, and that man's is for family life: "Chaque animal a son instinct. Celui de l'homme est l'esprit de famille". (VI, 91) A country is strong when it consists of united families all bent on defending the common treasure, family unity. A country or social class is weak when it is composed of scattered individuals to whom it matters little whether they obey seven persons or one, a Russian or a Corsican, so long as each member keeps his

own plot of land, blind in his égoïsme and to the fact that the day is not far off when even his individual possessions will be taken from him. These views reecho throughout the Comédie Humaine.

For society to be preserved to be made strong, it is Balzac's view that the family must be united. Hardly anyone will disagree with this point of view. The surest way to weaken and destroy the solidarity of a nation is to attack family ties and create internal dissensions between father, mother and children. This is an observation which applies equally well to exclusive group like the aristocracy. Perhaps, even more so, and Balzac sees the extent to which the aristocracy suffered by ignoring this very plain fact. To erode the authority of parents, or to allow it to be eroded, to sacrifice the interest of the family for personal advancement while exaggerating the importance of self, or the individual, is, in each case, to sap the strength of the family as a group and promote the evils of what Balzac calls l'individualisme.

The doctrine of l'individualisme is of greater harm to the aristocracy than to the other social classes. To maintain its survival, the continuation of the caste system and its claimed superiority as a class, group unity and solidarity of interests are essential to the aristocracy. Loyalties in and outside the family are therefore of crucial importance, as without this, not even the king as head of the aristocratic family can be secure in his position in a monarchical system of government.

If father and son are not united, and such lack of unity is general among aristocratic families, there is little likelihood that the

older and the younger generation can achieve a unity outside the family when this has not been achieved within. This logic applies specifically to the situation of the aristocracy in the early nineteenth Century. The erosion of the authority of the father or, on the other hand, the disregard of the right of children for a happy family life by parents who occupy themselves, not with promoting the welfare of their families, but with the pursuit of the chimera of social success or other ambitions, serve, in Balzac's view, to undermine the family and, consequently, the position of the king and the monarchy. The disintegration of the family is, therefore, one of the great follies of the aristocracy, the cancer which they themselves introduced into their vie intérieure and which, in turn, reached out to engulf the whole aristocracy:

Tout pays qui ne prend pas sa base dans le pouvoir paternel est sans existence assurée, là commence l'échelle des responsabilités et la subordination qui monte jusqu'au roi. Le Roi, c'est nous tous. Mourir pour le roi, c'est mourir pour soi-même, pour sa famille. (VI, 91)

If the family is important, however, marriage, which is the first step towards starting a family, must have at least equal importance, and in La Physiologie du mariage, Balzac is quite clear that the institution of marriage must be treated with the utmost seriousness and respect:

Le mariage peut être considéré politiquement et moralement, comme une loi, comme un contrat, comme une institution; loi, c'est la reproduction de l'espèce; contrat, c'est la transmission des propriétés; institution, c'est une garantie dont les obligations intéressent tous les hommes: ils ont un père et une mère, ils auront des enfants. Le mariage doit donc être l'objet du respect général. (XII, 932)

The last sentence of the above quotation is of great importance,

as marriage was by no means held in respect, and this Balzac criticizes in the Comédie Humaine, especially in the practice of arranged marriages which frequently resulted in the separation of husband and wife, or the prolonged absence of the husband from the home. The abolition of divorce did not improve matters, and it became a familiar experience of men and women to marry in haste and repent at leisure.

One noticeable feature in the lives of the grandes dames which we already pointed out, is the absence of husbands from the home, or what Balzac calls "le mariage sans le mari". In a few aristocratic marriages in the Comédie Humaine, the husbands do appear, but they either carry on extra-marital relationships, or are passive witnesses to the promiscuity of their wives. In L'Interdiction, the Marquise d'Espard, physically, though not legally, separated from her husband and children, lives alone, although she receives regular visits from the Chevalier d'Espard, her brother-in-law, not to mention Rastignac who has ambitions of making her either his mistress or his protectrice.

In Les Secrets de la Princesse de Cadignan, Balzac tells the marital history of Diane de Maufrigneuse, now the Princesse de Cadignan. When the Duchesse d'Uxelles, Diane's mother, saw that the Duc de Maufrigneuse, thirty-six years of age, stood well at court in spite of his poverty, she proposed the marriage of her daughter with the Duke simply because of her own social ambitions. Diane became the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse to satisfy the social desires of her mother who, for her part, had also calculated that the newly married wife would be allowed much freedom in keeping with the normal pattern of aristocratic marriages.

When an heir was born to the Duke and Duchess, the Duke left his wife at home and travelled from garrison to garrison, spending only the winters in Paris, but absenting himself from the home. He not only gave his wife complete freedom of action, but he also gave her a week's warning before returning to visit the home, periodically, in keeping with normal aristocratic practice of maintaining the fiction of marriage. By this week's warning notice which Diane received from her husband, she was naturally able to avoid any compromising situation in her marriage. When it is recalled that Diane is credited with having had a history of thirty lovers, the disrespect which her promiscuity gives to the institution of marriage becomes obvious.

The Comte de Sérizy, as we pointed out in Chapter III, is not only aware of the amoral nature of his wife, but he too, like the Duc de Maufrigneuse, allows his wife considerable freedom of action which she, in turn, utilises to acquire a host of lovers. Like Diane de Maufrigneuse, she does not love her husband, and the relationship between husband and wife is far from being what would be expected in a family where there is family unity. In Le Père Goriot, when Mme de Beauséant prepares to leave the marital home where she still lives with her husband, the coldness of the relationship between wife and husband is illustrated by the indifferent words the Vicomte utters to his wife in making a feeble attempt to dissuade her from abandoning society: "La vicomtesse, croyant n'y rencontrer que l'étudiant (Rastignac), y vint après avoir dit adieu à monsieur de Beauséant, qui s'alla coucher en lui répétant: 'Vous avez

tort, ma chère, d'aller vous enfermer à votre âge! Restez donc avec nous". (IV, 291)

In Modeste Mignon and Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées, the Duc de Chaulieu's attitude to his wife betrays an indifference similar to that of the Vicomte de Beauséant, The Duc complaisantly countenances the ten year relationship of his wife and Canalis, her lover, and he even goes to the extent of arranging for Canalis to accompany them to Madrid as an attaché, but "attaché à la Duchesse". In Modeste Mignon, when the Duchesse is recuperating from her illness caused by the sudden shock of the bad news given her by Canalis that he is preparing to marry Modeste, the Duc visits his wife and sympathises with her, but without the least bit of sincerity: "Ah! vous allez mieux, ma chère, s'écriait-il avec cette joie factice que savent si bien jouer les courtisanes à l'expression de laquelle les niais se prennent". (VII, 596)

The number of unfaithful husbands and wives in the Comédie Humaine is considerable. In Les Illusions Perdues, M. de Bargeton is the docile husband of Anaïs de Bargeton who encourages visits from Lucien Chardon with whom she later goes off to Paris. Victor d'Aiglemont, on the other hand, engages in liaisons with Mme de Sérisy and the Duchesse de Carigliano, and he is directly responsible for the unhappiness of his wife in La Femme de Trente ans.

The case of the Duchesse de Langeais, while being a typical one of marital estrangement in the aristocracy, contains many important aspects which explain the reason for the breakdown of the relationship between husband and wife in marriage. Referring to the marital situation

of Antoinette in La Duchesse de Langeais, Balzac shows that the reasons for the failure of their marriage was a clear case of incompatibility:

En 1818, monsieur le duc de Langeais commandait une division militaire, et la duchesse avait, près d'une princesse, une place qui l'autorisait à demeurer à Paris, loin de son mari sans scandale. D'ailleurs, le duc avait, outre son commandement une charge à la Cour, où il venait, en laissant, pendant son quartier, le commandement à un maréchal-de-camp. Le duc et la duchesse vivaient donc entièrement séparés de fait et de coeur à l'insu du monde. Ce mariage de convention avait eu le sort assez habituel de ces pactes de familles. Les deux caractères les plus antipathiques du monde s'étaient trouvés en présence, s'étaient froissés secrètement, secrètement blessés, désunis à jamais. Puis, chacun d'eux avait obéi à sa nature et aux convenances. Le duc de Langeais, esprit assez méthodique que pouvait l'être le chevalier de Folard, se livra méthodiquement à ses goûts, à ses plaisirs, et laissa sa femme libre de suivre les siens, après avoir reconnu chez elle un esprit éminemment orgueilleux, un coeur froid, une grande soumission aux usages du monde... (II, 587)

Several important observations are to be made from the above quotation. First, there is the mariage de convention which brings together incompatible couples; the pacte de familles which caters not to the interests of the couple, but to those of the two families who consider their own personal desires before those of the contracting parties; the incompatibility of the two partners whose characters are "les plus antipathiques du monde"; the "séparation de corps" of husband and wife who go their own separate way while maintaining the fiction of marriage; the 'freedom' of the married woman who acts like a divorcee, encourages the attention of men while she still maintains a decent show to avoid being socially and financially ruined if she openly flaunts her association with her lovers; the consequences of the abolition of divorce where incompatible couples like Antoinette and her husband are tied to each other despite the complete breakdown of the marriage.



Aristocratic families, as Balzac points out throughout the Comédie Humaine, continued the custom of arranged marriages not only because of aristocratic tradition, but because of an anxiety to secure suitable alliances with wealthy and influential families either in or out of the aristocracy. The ideal situation for families seeking to marry their children is, of course, the arrangement of a marriage with a wealthy aristocratic heir or heiress which all were anxious to do to further the influence of the family. The most serious drawback to this ambition, however, was the fact that few, very few of these could be found, and the dilemma facing families was whether to arrange a marriage for their children into the wealthy bourgeoisie, or to accept a poor aristocrat with only a name to offer. This was the crisis of the aristocracy which Diane de Maufrigneuse succinctly summarised to Victurnien d'Esgrignon in Le Cabinet des Antiques, as she is about to leave him in Alençon to return to Paris:

Il faut maintenant payer les dettes, dit Chesnel; et vous ne pouvez plus, monsieur le comte, faire autre chose que vous marier avec une héritière -- Et la prendre où elle sera, dit la duchesse. -- Une seconde mésalliance! s'écria mademoiselle Armande. La duchesse se mit à rire. -- Il vaut mieux se marier que de mourir, dit-elle en sortant de la poche de son gilet un petit flacon donné par l'apothicaire du château des Tuileries. Vous êtes fous ici? ... vous voulez donc rester au quinzième siècle quand nous sommes au dix-neuvième? Mes chers enfants, il n'y a plus de noblesse, il n'y a plus que de l'aristocratie. Le Code civil de Napoléon a tué les parchemins comme le canon avait déjà tué la féodalité. Vous serez bien plus nobles que vous ne l'êtes quand vous aurez de l'argent. Epousez qui vous voudrez, Victurnien, vous anoblirez votre femme, voilà le plus solide des privilèges qui restent à la noblesse française... Tout est perdu, même l'honneur dit le Chevalier en faisant un geste. (II, 1224-1225)

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alliances by the wealthy bourgeoisie are two reasons for intermarriage between the two classes. On the other hand, when two aristocratic families with similar ambitions can be found, and who have a son and daughter who can be brought together in marriage in the interest of both families in spite of the age differential between the couple, then no stone is left unturned to arrange such a marriage, regardless of the personal disinclinations of the couple. There is certainly no protest made by the couple who take it as a matter of course that the family will arrange the marriage. The case of Antoinette de Langeais shows just such a marriage and the frequent result. Married in 1816 at the age of eighteen, by 1818, Antoinette was living alone. The calculations made by Antoinette's mother show that it was social ambitions and not concern for the welfare for her daughter which brought about the marriage, as all she saw was social influence:

La duchesse de Langeais était une Navarreins, famille ducal, qui, depuis Louis XIV, avait pour principe de ne point abdiquer son titre dans ses alliances. Les filles de cette maison devaient avoir tôt ou tard, de même que leur mère, un tabouret à la Cour. Antoinette de Langeais sortit de la profonde retraite où elle avait vécu pour épouser le fils aîné du duc de Langeais. (II, 586)

In Les Illusions perdues, the father of Anais de Bargeton selects a husband for his daughter just like many others parents in the Comédie Humaine. "Il se résolut à marier sa fille, moins pour elle que pour sa propre tranquillité". He not only ignores his daughter's temperament and inclinations, but, wishing to marry her without a dowry, he selects a husband who expresses willingness to marry his daughter without the usual

financial or proprietary arrangement:

Il lui fallait un noble ou un gentilhomme peu spirituel, incapable de chicaner sur le compte de tutelle qu'il voulait rendre à sa fille, assez nul d'esprit et de volonté pour que Naïs pût se conduire à sa fantaisie, assez désintéressé pour l'épouser sans dot... Dans ce double intérêt, monsieur de Negrepelisse étudia les hommes de la province et monsieur de Bargeton lui parut être le seul qui répondit à son programme. (IV, 388)

The attributes, or lack of them, which M. de Bargeton brings to his marriage with a young 'teenage' girl sufficiently explain why Naïs subsequently entertains the attentions of a young and handsome Lucien Chardon whom she encourages to visit her at her home, in spite of opposition from the local high-society group. And there should be no wonder, too, that the marriage takes such a turn, as M. de Bargeton, a "quadragénaire fort endommagé par les dissipations amoureuses de sa jeunesse, était fort accusé d'une remarquable impuissance d'esprit". (IV, 388) The hypocrisy of the whole marriage is clearly illustrated by the way in which Naïs' father persuaded her to marry M. de Bargeton, pointing out, among other things, that she would have liberty to carry on liaisons which her beauty and marital freedom allowed: "Elle conduirait à son gré sa fortune à l'abri d'une raison sociale, et à l'aide des liaisons que son esprit et sa beauté lui procureraient à Paris. Naïs fut séduite par la perspective d'une semblable liberté" (IV, 388) Fortunately, there is no issue from the marriage, a situation which would bode ill for the health and happiness of children born to such parents and in such an unstable home.

If a daughter's future was often planned by parents with the

insouciance which their own narrow, personal interests dictated, this patent injustice was frequently compounded by cheating over the dowry. It was not unusual for parents to persuade the 'would be' bridegroom, interested in new social connections, to dispense with the dowry, but to sign, of course, as having received it. In Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées, before the Duc de Chaulieu will consent to the marriage of his only daughter, Philippe Henarez has to acknowledge receiving Louise's fortune in the marriage contract, although the Duke retains the sum involved. Louise sets out the situation to Philippe: "Allez me demander dans la matinée à mon père. Il veut garder ma fortune: mais vous vous engagerez à me la reconnaître au contrat sans l'avoir reçue, et vous serez sans aucun doute agréé". (VI, 156) The consequences of this dishonesty are felt in the private lives of their daughters after marriage. Mme du Tillet, for example, tells her sister Mme Félix de Vandenesse how much she suffers from the fact that her husband never lets her forget that her personal fortune which he never possessed was dishonestly kept from him.

To escape through the loophole found in the law abolishing the droit d'aînesse there developed the widespread habit of cheating on the dowry in order to secure sufficient funds to endow the surviving heir to carry on the family name and preserve the family wealth. Having refused to increase the size of the family in order to continue their proprietary power, many aristocrats, however, attempted to offset the consequences of the law sanctioning equality, by robbing their daughters to enrich their sons, made poorer by the equal distribution of wealth and

property. The aristocrats did not appreciate the wisdom in the abolition of an unjust law, the effects of which created jealousies and resentment among children.

The consequences of the new law are expressed in the words of Julie d'Aiglemont, who sees the harm to family unity which results, as a policy of chacun pour soi is the logical outcome of the scramble by children to secure the equal division of property among themselves:

Je nie la famille dans une société qui, à la mort du père ou de la mère partage les biens et dit à chacun d'aller de son côté... Nos lois ont brisé les maisons, les héritages, la pérennité des exemples et des traditions. Je ne vois que décombres autour de moi. (VI, 1042-1043)

But even though some aristocrats believe that the answer to the law lies, if not in cheating on the dowry, in reducing the size of their families, these manoeuvres are fraught with dangerous consequences to the continued existence of the aristocracy. The robbing of their daughters divided those families, as their unity was impaired when the husband never allowed his wife to forget that she came from a dishonest family. On the other hand, the limitation on birth involved the shrinkage in the size of the aristocracy. In La Fausse Maîtresse, the problem of whether to have a small or large family is well exemplified in the plight of the Marquis de Ronquerolles and others:

Le marquis de Ronquerolles eut le malheur de perdre ses deux enfants à l'invasion du choléra. Le fils unique de madame de Sérizy, jeune militaire de la plus haute espérance, périt en Afrique à l'affaire de la Nacta. Aujourd'hui, les familles riches sont entre le danger de ruiner leurs enfants si elles en ont trop, ou celui de s'éteindre en s'en tenant à un ou deux, un singulier effet du Code civil auquel Napoléon n'a pas

songé. (X, 16)

Circumstances militated to undermine the foundation of the aristocracy not only by the disintegration of the family by égoïsme, but also by the invention of a method to combat the abolition of the droit d'aînesse which succeeded in shrinking the size of the aristocracy. While this social class was destroying itself within the family, it was also getting smaller and smaller, a strange combination of circumstances which no one, not even the bitterest enemies of the aristocracy, foresaw. That Balzac's assertions about this curious development in the situation of the aristocracy is based on solid historical fact, is confirmed by more than one historical source. According to Tolédano:

L'étroite solidarité familiale de l'Ancien Régime reposait sur le domaine, sur la terre où vivaient, groupés autour du chef, parents, collatéraux et domestiques, ces 'famuli' qui, comme à Rome, faisaient partie de la 'famille', l'ensemble formant une petite société fermée et patricale dont les membres étaient unis entre eux par des liens d'affection autant que par les intérêts matériels. En rétablissant le mari et le père dans sa puissance d'antan, mais en maintenant la suppression du droit d'aînesse, l'Empire ne rebâtissait qu'à demi la structure familiale; et le partage entre tous les enfants du domaine paternel, partage conforme au principe d'égalité, devait amener dans un jour lointain, -- la terre ne pouvant s'agrandir comme la famille -- la limitation des naissances et la désertion des campagnes, c'est-à-dire les coups les plus graves qui eussent jamais été portés à l'institution.<sup>1</sup>

In the Provinces, marriages are the obsession and the speciality of the great families, and intrigues are numerous to secure suitable marital alliances. In Béatrix, the Du Guénic family are interested in Calyste marrying Charlotte de Kergarouet, an insipid creature, according to Balzac, who would certainly bore a Calyste interested in romance,

<sup>1</sup>Tolédano, A.D., pgs. 12-13

great loves and passion. While he is tormented and inflamed with passion over Béatrix, his mother tells him:

Epouser Charlotte de Kergarouet, dégage le deux tiers des terres de ta famille. En vendant quelques fermes, mademoiselle de Pen-Hoel obtiendra ce grand résultat, et cette bonne fille s'occupera de faire valoir tes biens. Tu peux laisser à tes enfants un beau nom, une belle fortune." (IX, 434)

Calyste gets advice inconsistent with his personal feelings, but manages to resist the family pressures, a development which Balzac sometimes allows to the male aristocrat, but hardly ever to the unmarried girls of the Comédie Humaine.

In Modeste Mignon, however, Modeste argues for a daughter's right to select her own husband, and she proceeds to do this in the novel, but with her parents' grudging consent and cooperation. Balzac explains this unusual resistance to parental inclinations by showing that Modeste's ancestry is really Germanic in origin, and that docility is not a characteristic of the Teutons. As there is this strong Teutonic element in the family background of Modeste's parents who, incidentally, are of solid bourgeois stock, Balzac excuses Modeste's determination and spiritedness on the ground of her ancestry and her social class.

Julie d'Aiglemont, on the other hand, marries against her father's inclinations, though not consent, and finds not only disenchantment in her marriage, but solitude and despair. Having insisted on marrying for love, her age, however, education, cloistered youth, inexperience, made her singularly unqualified to accurately judge the qualities of her hus-



band. By showing the failure of Julie's marriage, Balzac tacitly argues for some parental authority in the arrangement of marriages to prevent similar disasters, but he clearly indicates that a compromise between parents and children is the best way out of the dilemma of absolute choice by either parents or children.

This commonsense attitude of Balzac makes him criticize severely the entire procedure adopted in the mariage de convenance where hypocrisies on the part of the couple before marriage are calculated more to harm a marriage than to preserve it. When negotiating parents have found a prospective husband for their daughter, according to Modeste:

On lui permet de venir voir une jeune personne, l'acée dès le matin à qui sa mère ordonne de bien veiller sur la langue, et recommande de ne rien laisser passer de son âme, de son coeur, sur sa physionomie, en y gravant un sourire de danseuse, achevant sa pirouette, armée des instructions les plus positives sur le danger de montrer son vrai caractère, et à qui l'on recommande de ne pas paraître d'une instruction inquiétante. Les parents, quand les affaires d'intérêt sont bien convenues entre eux, ont la bonhomie d'engager les prétendus à se connaître l'un l'autre, pendant des moments assez fugitifs où ils sont seuls, où ils causent, où ils se promènent, sans aucune espèce de liberté, car ils se savent déjà liés. Un homme se costume alors aussi bien l'âme que le corps, et la jeune fille en fait autant de son côté. Cette pitoyable comédie, entremêlée de bouquets, de parures, de parties de spectacles, s'appelle 'faire la cour à sa prétendue'. (VII, 425-426)

Modeste neatly criticises this whole hypocritical procedure by calling it "le vaudeville des prétendus".

The Comtesse d'Agoult confirms Balzac's assertions that the Aristocracy of the Restoration continued the tradition of the mariage de convenance and that aristocratic families consistently ignored the wishes or inclination of their children who were sacrificed for the sake of

family alliances:

On sait que, dans l'opinion française, un mariage d'inclination est réputé sottise ou folie, pis que cela, chose malséante et de petit monde. Le mariage, aux yeux des Français, c'est un arrangement, un calcul; deux fortunes qui se joignent pour créer une fortune plus grande, deux crédits qui s'associent pour fournir un crédit plus grand. Les deux plus grands crédits réunis, c'est idéal. On ne croit point à l'amour en France, on en rit, on croit moins encore à la fidélité conjugale, on s'y soustrait gaiement; aussi le divorce a-t-il toujours paru chez nous chose complètement inutile.<sup>1</sup>

Balzac's descriptions of the grandes dames who act as if they are divorcees get confirmation from an aristocratic source. Mme d'Agoult makes it plain that marriage was far from being a respectable institution, but was an opportunity for many to improve their social alliances. In a number of cases, this would include escape from poverty by marrying into the bourgeoisie.

There are some aristocrats in the Comédie Humaine, however, like the Comte de Fontaine in Le Bal de Sceaux who, despite their poverty, prefer not to compromise on their dignity and marry into the new aristocracy, merely for the sake of financial reward. Needless to say, many of these are of the old breed, the survivants of the Ancien Régime who never forget the glories of the previous Century, while condemning the Revolution and its consequences. The sister of the Marquis d'Esgrignon, Mlle Armande, refuses the offer of marriage of Du Croisier, a wealthy bourgeois, who sends the offer through Chesnel, the loyal notary of the d'Esgrignon. When Mlle Armande refuses the offer of marriage and prefers to live out her life as a spinster, the Marquis only

<sup>1</sup>D'Agoult, Comtesse, pgs 209-210

then accepts her as a true sister. As she is the daughter of parents from a marriage considered by the Marquis to be "une horrible mésalliance", she was never accepted as a true d'Esgrignon by her brother. She redeems herself in the eyes of the Marquis by indignantly refusing the blandishment of marriage from a member of the bourgeoisie.

In Modeste Mignon, the aunt of the Duc d'Hérouville refuses to allow her nephew to marry either the heiress of Mongenod or de Nucingen, millionaire bankers. In spite of the poverty of the d'Hérouville family, Mlle d'Hérouville prefers to sacrifice her comfort or, rather, her nephew's comfort, in order to maintain her notion of superiority over the bourgeoisie. The curious twist of fate in this particular case is the fact that Mlle d'Hérouville even resists pressures from the king to have her nephew marry the daughter of Delphine de Nucingen who was anxious to see a Nucingen secure a tabouret at court. When the Duke, at thirty three years of age, finally decides to show some independence of mind and seek the hand of Modeste Mignon who, like Mme de Nucingen's daughter, is a wealthy bourgeois heiress, he finds to his chagrin that his aristocratic name and high title were no longer a passport for marriage into the wealthy bourgeoisie. Modeste rejects him as a husband in favour of Canalis' secretary, a curious turn of the tide for the aristocrat, living in poverty with only his name left to him to secure some financial benefit from the ambitious bourgeoisie.

There are two important points to bear in mind when considering the consequences of the mariage de convenance on the family life of the

grandes dames. First, there is the unhappiness of many wives who chafe under the yoke of either a tyrannical husband, or experience anguish ever the fact that they must cohabit with a husband whom they do not love. Secondly, there is the unfortunate position of children born to incompatible couples in loveless marriages.

The practice of granting a dowry to women embarking upon marriage led to many abuses which increased the suffering of women in marriage, as suitors who were concerned only with the financial rewards of marriage were attracted to the dowry and not the person. By continuing to grant dowries, parents postponed the day when the mariage d'amour would be considered the rule and not the exception as it was in the early nineteenth Century. Julie d'Aiglemont proposes the abolition of the dowry as an essential step for the promotion of the frequency of the mariage d'amour and the disappearance of the mariage de convenance:

La beauté, les vertus ne sont pas des valeurs dans votre bazar humain, et vous nommez société ce repaire d'égoïsme. Mais exhédérez les femmes! Au moins accomplirez-vous ainsi une loi de nature en choisissant vos compagnes, en les épousant au gré des voeux du coeur. (VI, 1042)

Julie's proposal reflects the anguish of many wives who suffer severely in their marital life. The unhappiness of women appears to be more great than that of men due, no doubt, to their temperament and biological make up. The physical side of love which is essential for marital happiness cannot be enjoyed, but must needs be endured with a husband who is detested. Quite often the grandes dames refuse to continue the comedy of the marital bed, and cohabitation ceases between wife and

husband. In some marriages, however, where there is not such a final breach, both parties submit to the duty of physical love without any relish. The effect on the self-esteem of men who are little affected by such a situation due to their own biological nature, is not as great or harmful as that on women who feel humiliated in the physical submission of themselves to someone whom they do not love. Béatrix sees this important difference in the lives of men and women in loveless marriages as sufficiently explanatory of the fact that "les femmes pleurent en assistant à un mariage, tandis que les hommes y sourient; les hommes croient ne rien hasarder, les femmes savent à peu près ce qu'elles risquent". (IX, 503)

In La femme de trente ans, to save herself from continued unhappiness and misery in her marriage, Julie d'Aiglemont attempts suicide:

Cui, j'ai voulu me donner la mort; mais, j'ai manqué du courage nécessaire pour accomplir mon dessein. Je me méprise! Dans un de ces moments, j'ai pris du laudanum; mais j'ai souffert et je ne suis pas morte. J'avais cru boire tout ce que contenait le flacon, et je m'étais arrêtée à moitié. (IX, 1040-1041)

In Le Père Goriot, it is accepted almost as a matter of course that the Vicomtesse de Beauséant should have a lover in accordance with the morality of the times. So carefully does Balzac describe the activities or, perhaps, the promiscuities of the fashionable aristocratic crowd, that the reader becomes conditioned by the aristocratic morality, and never bothers to ask himself why the Vicomtesse should have considered it necessary to have a lover in the person of d'Ajuda-Pinto. Nor does

Balzac explain in Le Père Goriot the reason why Mme de Beauséant abandoned the marital bed for the illicit pleasures of the trinité conjugale with d'Ajuda-Pinto. This explanation is reserved for La femme abandonnée, a kind of sequel to Le Père Goriot although, curiously enough, the novel was written much earlier:

Je n'ai pas eu la haute vertu sociale d'appartenir à un homme que je n'aimais pas. J'ai brisé, malgré les lois, les liens du mariage... Si j'eusse été mère, peut-être aurais-je trouvé des forces pour supporter le supplice d'un mariage imposé par les convenances. A dix-huit ans, nous ne savons guère, pauvres jeunes filles, ce que l'on nous fait faire. (III, 607)

The Vicomtesse de Beauséant is not the only grande dame to refuse to continue the hypocrisy of a marriage which only exists in appearance and not in reality. In Béatrix, for example, Mme de Rochefide declares to Calyste du Guénic that her reason for leaving her husband to go off to Italy with Gennaro Conti was simply a refusal to continue the mockery of the mariage de convenance: "J'ai préféré l'éclat d'un malheur irréparable à la honte d'une constante tromperie". (IX, 429)

One important point made by Mme de Beauséant in the quotation above is the fact that her attitude would have been different in her marriage if she had been the mother of children. Her actions would have been governed by the additional responsibility of a family, and there is the clear suggestion that she might have endured the unhappiness of marriage for the sake of her children. Mme de Mortsauf, in Le Lys dans la vallée, is very unhappy with her husband, an old émigré, and even though she is very much in love with Félix de Vandenesse, she endures her

unhappiness and refuses to sacrifice her marital vows out of love and a strong sense of duty to her children.

The other unfortunate consequence arising out of the mariage de convenance is the plight of children. Not infrequently they are the offspring of the lover who has superseded the husband in the affections of his wife. In Gobseck, for example, the Comtesse de Restaud confesses to her husband that all of her children are not his, a suspicion which the Count had long entertained. According to Balzac, this is one of the many marital problems of the Count which help to bring about his early death.

In La femme de trente ans, Julie d'Aiglemont points out that children who are fathered by husbands who are not loved by their wives also run the risk of being unloved. In addition to this alarming, but logical development in the mariage de convenance, there is also the fact that children fathered by the lover sometimes get better treatment from their mother. Julie finds a convenient expression to describe the situation of a wife whose children, like Mme de Restaud's, do not all have the same father. She calls it "les deux maternités de la vie sociale", and considers that a child whose father is the unloved husband, can only be "l'enfant du devoir et du hasard". Lamenting the fact that her own daughter, Hélène, is not the child of her lover, Lord Arthur Grenville, Julie confesses the anguish which this causes her;

Je suis condamnée à la fausseté; le monde exige de continuelles grimaces, et sous peine d'opprobre nous ordonne d'obéir à ses conventions. Il existe deux maternités monsieur. J'ignorais jadis de telles distinctions.

Je ne suis mère qu'à moitié, mieux vaudrait ne pas l'être du tout. Hélène n'est pas de 'lui'. Ma pauvre petite Hélène est l'enfant de son père, l'enfant du devoir et du hasard; elle me pousse irrésistiblement à protéger la créature née dans nos flancs... Si elle tombait à l'eau, je m'y précipiterais pour l'aller reprendre. Mais elle n'est pas dans mon coeur... A mesure que ma pauvre petite grandit, mon coeur se resserre. Les sacrifices que je lui ai faits m'ont détachée d'elle, tandis que pour un autre enfant mon coeur aurait été, je le sens, inépuisable. (VI, 1037-1038)

That there were some women who must have felt about their children as does Julie d'Aiglemont, there is little doubt. Nowadays when the peculiar situation of the aristocracy no longer exists, there might be some scepticism about admitting that there could have been women who gave birth to children and yet felt as detached from them as does Julie. Nevertheless, there seems to be a good deal of logic in Julie d'Aiglemont's statement, bearing in mind the suffering of women not loved by their husbands, the motives of parents in arranging the marriage of their daughters, and a natural desire of women to love and be loved. These factors all militate to shatter the harmony of family life and make for its disintegration.

Another kind of problem which the family had to face was its division into two or more groups, with children supporting either the mother or the father, or neither of them, or else giving lukewarm support to both. In Une fille d'Eve, the Comte and the Comtesse de Granville have four children, a surprisingly large number considering the dilemma caused by the abolition of the droit d'aînesse. The children live in a divided home, however, as the mother and father, by agreement, are separated after ten years of married life, although they still live in the same huge



family mansion, but in separate wings.

The Comtesse de Granville brings up her two daughters Marie Eugénie and Marie Angélique without the guidance of her husband with whom she has no contact. Preoccupied with religion, the Comtesse is excessively protective of her two daughters, and even refuses to allow them to associate with their brothers whom the Comtesse considers too badly brought up to be allowed to mingle with their sisters, educated with stern religious principles.

The consequences of such a family arrangement are not difficult to imagine. The girls, according to Balzac, felt no bond with their brothers, and vice versa. When the two sisters married, their brothers were absent from the wedding, a not unexpected development, in view of the lack of family unity on all sides. Balzac insists that as they are divided in life, so are they in heart, and even though, in many families, there is not a physical separation, it is not at all unusual to find that the family is not animated by one spirit. In Le Rouge et le Noir, Mathilde de la Mole addresses her father by letter, and even in her most embarrassing moment when she writes to inform him that she is pregnant, there is never mention of a word like love in her letter, but "votre amitié". Nor is there any real esprit de famille. "Le comte Norbert ne voyait son père que des instants; ils étaient fort bien l'un pour l'autre, mais n'avaient rien à se dire".<sup>1</sup>

The lack of family unity in the case of the Comte de Granville,

<sup>1</sup>Stendhal, Romans et Nouvelles, I, 476

his wife and children is not an isolated one in the Comédie Humaine. In fact, apart from rare exceptions, that is the history of the aristocratic families. When Louise de Chaulieu, in Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées, leaves the Carmélite order at Blois where she was a novice to return to Paris and her parents' home, she does not know how she will be met by her mother

... qui a été si peu mère que je n'ai reçu d'elle en huit ans que les deux lettres que tu connais. En pensant qu'il était indigne de moi de jouer une tendresse impossible, je m'étais composée en religieuse idiote, et suis entrée assez embarrassée intérieurement. Cet embarras s'est bientôt dissipé. Ma mère a été d'une grâce parfaite; elle n'a pas témoigné de fausse tendresse... elle ne m'a pas mise dans son sein comme une fille aimée. (VI, 45)

If there is little love lost between mother and daughter, there is an equal lack of warmth between sister and brother. When Louise is shown her brother Alphonse de Rhétoré, the young man "est venu sans trop se presser". (VI, 48). After he shakes hands, he is told by his father to kiss his sister, an act which he dutifully performs on both cheeks, saying to Louise: "Je suis de votre parti contre mon père". While Louise respectfully thanks him, in conformity with the attempt of all concerned to keep up appearances, her thoughts are filled with the obvious hypocrisy of everyone, and the meaningless and insincere display of family affection. She says to herself: "Mais il me semble qu'il (Alphonse) aurait bien pu venir à Blois quand il allait à Orléans voir notre frère le comte à sa garnison". (VI, 48)

Louise takes up life with her parents at Paris, and quickly realises that she is not part of a family, but an individual like the

others. Her mother, the elegant Duchesse de Chaulieu, is ceaselessly occupied with her social duties of dining out, receiving guests in her home, giving entertainment of various kinds, going to theatres, balls, concerts, soirées, to the extent that she is not only frequently away from the house, but even when she is at home, she is closeted in her boudoir, spending a considerable amount of her time at her toilet.

Louise complains bitterly to her friend René about the invisibility of her mother who, to make matters worse, "reçoit un jeune homme". This visitor is none other than Canalis, the lover of the Duchess.

According to Louise, it is a miracle of virtue to love the people who live with her under the same roof, as she sees so little of them.

As for the absent, they do not exist:

Ma mère dîne souvent en ville. Je ne m'étonne plus du peu de souci de ma famille pour moi. Ma chère, à Paris, il y a de l'héroïsme à aimer les gens qui sont auprès de nous, car nous ne sommes pas souvent avec nous-mêmes. Comme on oublie les absents dans cette ville! (VI, 52)

The absence of family unity is also evident in the behaviour of Louise's brother who shows her nothing but scorn and indifference. His greatest problem is jealousy of his father: "Quoique duc et jeune, il est jaloux de son père, il n'est rien dans l'Etat, il n'a point de charge à la cour; il n'a point à dire: Je vais à la Chambre". (VI, 58)

Louise alone stays in the huge house, spending endless hours in meditation. Her father is absorbed in public business, affairs of state, and his own amusements. Her mother is never at home; nor do they, according to Louise, practise self-examination, as they are constantly

in company and have hardly any time to reflect. Father and mother live a life of hypocrisy, each goes his own separate way. As for the family, it does not exist. According to Louise, reflecting on the fiction of marriage maintained by her mother and father:

Quel joli couple! Combien de pensées singulières m'ont assaillie en voyant clairement que ces deux êtres également nobles, riches, supérieurs, ne vivent point ensemble, n'ont rien de commun que le nom, et se maintiennent unis aux yeux du monde". (VI, 51)

Rastignac's bitter reflection as he leaves the home of Mme de Beauséant after being the object of the harshness of the Vicomtesse, can well be repeated by Louise: "Chacun pour soi, donc?"

The disunity of the family echoes like a wearisome refrain throughout the Comédie Humaine. In Le Lys dans la vallée, Félix de Vandenesse feels disgust at the fact that his brother who has always rejected him now feels inclined to associate with him after Félix has secured influential friends in Le Petit Château, the highest social and, naturally, influential group within the aristocracy. Social success gives back Félix de Vandenesse not only a brother, but a family as well:

Mon frère Charles, loin de me renier, s'appuya dès lors sur moi; mais ce rapide succès lui inspira une secrète jalousie qui, plus tard, me causa bien des chagrins. Mon père et ma mère, surpris de cette fortune inespérée, sentirent leur vanité flattée, et m'adoptèrent enfin pour leur fils; mais comme leur sentiment, était en quelque sorte artificiel, pour ne pas dire joué, ce retour eut peu d'influence sur un coeur ulcéré; d'ailleurs, les affections entachées d'égoïsme excitent peu les sympathies; le coeur abhorre les calculs et les profits de tout genre. (I, 428)

Balzac's insistence on the lack of family unity is, of course, to prove that disunity within the family cannot have any other consequence

but disunity and disintegration within the aristocratic group as a whole. Just as he examines Raphael's physiological deterioration before proceeding to show the sociological disintegration, Balzac concentrates on the family and then moves to the whole group. From the particular, he moves to the general.

Is Balzac right, however, in the reasons which he advances as being among the most important which led to the ultimate disintegration of the aristocracy? Certainly, the unity of the family is of crucial importance to the stability of any social group which prides itself on self-sufficiency and maintains an exclusiveness on the political and social levels from other classes in the nation. Balzac's argument that the aristocracy undermined their foundation when they neglected the family has an irresistible logic, especially when there is available evidence to prove that the family had lost its solidarity. P. de Sagnac in La formation de la société française moderne, sees family disunity as being a fait accompli from as far back as pre-Revolution days when, according to him:

Le mariage n'est plus dans le grand monde de la Cour, et même de la Ville, considéré comme un lien sacré. La vie de famille est absente. Tout pour le divertissement, la jouissance, la parade, l'intrigue, le succès d'amour-propre.<sup>1</sup>

Taine also asserts that the husband and wife led separate lives, each party having his or her own household or, at least, apartments, servants, equipage, receptions and even social friends or associates. The wife had

<sup>1</sup>De Sagnac, P., La formation de la société moderne (Paris, 1946), II, 206

her own personal retinue of solicitors and protégés and, like her husband, her own friends, enemies, ambitions, disappointments and rancorous feelings.<sup>1</sup>

The habits of the eighteenth Century were continued in the nineteenth, as Jules Bertaut describes the separation of the husband and wife in the same way that Taine shows them apart in the late eighteenth Century. According to Bertaut:

Pendant toute la première année de son mariage, la jeune femme n'allait pas dans le monde sans son mari, sa mère ou sa belle-mère. Plus tard, au contraire, on la rencontrait, mais généralement seule, car les maîtresses de maison avaient horreur de recevoir ensemble le mari et la femme: cela glace les conversations, disait Mme de Chastenay.<sup>2</sup>

Because of the exigencies of the aristocratic society, the custom of the mariage de convenance and the pressures of the times, weaknesses were created within the family so that affection for husband, wife and children was almost non-existent due, among other things, to the ambitions of parents. Tolédano not only makes specific reference to the family, sundered by interest, but he shows that it has been replaced by a group of individuals bearing the misnomer of the family:

Un visiteur de marque, Walter Scott, écrit dans sa relation, d'un voyage à Paris: 'J'ai peu vu la France. Tout étranger devait lui sembler un ennemi: chaque famille s'isolait. Je fréquentais à Paris plus d'Anglais et d'Allemands que de Français'... Mais ce n'était point des étrangers seulement que s'isolaient les familles françaises; elles s'isolaient les

<sup>1</sup>Taine, H., Les origines de la France Contemporaine, p. 172-174)

<sup>2</sup>Tolédano, A.D., La vie de famille sous la Restauration et la Monarchie de Juillet (Paris, 1943), p. 54

unes des autres. Une barrière semblait s'élever contre elles pour les séparer; que dis-je, au sein d'une même famille, l'époux se dressait contre l'épouse, le fils contre le père.<sup>1</sup>

As far as husband and wife were concerned, Stenger reports that in the nineteenth Century, the marital life of the aristocrat was liberally interspersed with endless infidelities, just as Balzac describes it, and which we pointed out in Chapter III. According to Taine: "Un mari surprenant sa femme, lui dit simplement: Quelle imprudence, madame! si c'était un autre que moi".<sup>2</sup> Stenger, on the other hand, relates an episode about the Comtesse du Cayla who embarked on a liaison with the "Duc de Rovigo auquel son fils avait beaucoup trop ressemblé".<sup>3</sup> The aggrieved wife of the Duke was not a little resourceful in getting revenge for this infidelity on the part of her husband with Mme du Cayla, for, according to Stenger,

elle avait jugé à propos de s'armer d'une carafe d'eau et d'en verser le contenu sur les deux amants. Je ne puis avoir aucun doute sur la véracité de l'anecdote. Elle me fut racontée, une demi-heure après, par un homme qui était dans la pièce attenante, et qui avait tout entendu.<sup>4</sup>

Not only did women get children outside of marriage but their husbands committed similar infidelities. According to Henri Carré:

<sup>1</sup>Tolédano, A.D., La vie de famille sous la Restauration et la Monarchie de Juillet (Paris, 1943), p. 54

<sup>2</sup>Taine, H., p. 174, footnote 1.

<sup>3</sup>Stenger, G., p. 390

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 390

Les Montbarey cherchèrent leur plaisir chacun de son côté. Le mari le tenait, dit-il, dans ses mémoires, à la 'décence extérieure', et ses 'écarts' n'eurent d'autres suites fâcheuses que la naissance de quelques enfants naturels. La femme fut ouvertement la maîtresse du marquis de Pezay.<sup>1</sup>

There are dissenting opinions to be noted, however, on the rather grim picture which Balzac presents about the absolute breakdown of marriage within the aristocracy. There is evidence available to show that, here and there, there were to be found successful marriages which prospered in spite of the difficulties of the mariage de convenance. Tolédano makes reference to the household of Augustin de Rémusat as evidence of such a marriage: "Ce ménage Rémusat est un ménage heureux. Après dix-neuf années, l'affection entre les deux époux, trop souvent coupée par la vie, mais reliée par les lettres, demeure aussi tendre qu'aux premiers mois".<sup>2</sup> He does not indicate whether this was a mariage d'amour. Tolédano also quotes an anonymous British observer of French manners who

note que la liberté accordée en France à la femme mariée, jure avec les contraintes auxquelles est soumise sa vie de jeune fille... quoique le mariage d'amour soit, affirme témérairement l'anonyme, à peu près inconnu en France, l'affection ardente et fidèle de la femme mariée reste exemplaire, son dévouement peut-être poussé jusqu'à l'héroïsme, et il faut que son mari soit un être bien bas et dépravé pour qu'elle lui retire son amour.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Carré, H., La Noblesse de France et l'opinion publique au XVIIIe siècle (Paris, 1920), p. 189

<sup>2</sup>Tolédano, p. 138

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, p. 138



It is Balzac's contention that there is no love to begin with in these arranged marriages, and evidence certainly supports him in this respect. The statement in the quotation from Tolédano that the husband must be "bien bas et dépravé pour qu'elle lui retire son amour" is, in fact, self-contradictory, as the observer himself asserts that the mariage d'amour is "inconnu", and there can be no question of withdrawing a love which never existed. Secondly, the anonymous person does not take into account the sensibilities of the grandes dames, many of whom considered that physical love in marriage with an unloved husband was revolting. In addition, marriage was not considered seriously, but treated as a game with each side attempting to get the better of the other in the arrangement. As we have noted earlier, Mme d'Agoult herself describes how much conjugal fidelity was considered of no consequence whatever: "On ne croit point à l'amour en France, on en rit; on croit moins encore à la fidélité conjugale, on s'y soustrait gaiement; aussi le divorce a-t-il toujours paru chez nous chose complètement inutile".<sup>1</sup>

There is evidence in the Comédie Humaine to show, however, that there were a few successful marriages, although judgment must be reserved as to whether they were happy. In Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées, Renée de Maucombe marries M. de l'Estorade whom she does not love, but manages to make her marriage a successful one. In addition, she secures the political advancement of her husband. She bears children and manages to secure quiet contentment in seeing her husband succeed and the marriage

<sup>1</sup>D'Agoult, Comtesse, p. 209-210

prosper, despite the great disparity in their ages. Her children are also healthy and well brought up. She does not desert her husband for the glamour of social life, nor does Mme de Mortsauf, in Le Lys dans la vallée, turn away from her husband in spite of the many trials to which she is subjected by her husband, and the importunities of Félix de Vandenesse on the other hand.

The marital life of the Nucingens also show a partly successful marriage from the fact that there is complete understanding between husband and wife who live together under the same roof. Each leads a separate life, and each is aware of the fact that the other has a lover, yet the family manages to continue as a family and to live together without disharmony, although it is clear that they function as individuals rather than as a unit. The happy marriages, not the successful ones, in the Comédie Humaine, are rare. We do not get a glimpse of the marital happiness of Mme Firmiani and Octave de Camps, although evidence points to a happy and successful marriage between them, for obvious reasons: their marriage is a mariage d'amour.

Tolédano quotes the Comtesse Dash and a novelist to show that there were some aristocrats who were aware of their marital and parental responsibilities:

Ainsi les grandes dames, toutes frêles et minces qu'elles fussent, à la mode 'sylphide' de l'époque, tout absorbées qu'elles étaient par leur vie mondaine qui ne durait que deux mois mais qui avait 'de quoi tuer un grenadier', y ajoutaient encore 'le soin de leur ménage et de leurs enfants qu'elles n'abandonnaient à personne'. Comme nous apprend Victorine Collin, 'il existe bon nombre de comtesses, de marquises, attachées à leurs devoirs, chérissant leurs enfants, et mettant un ordre infini dans leurs

affaires. Point d'intrigues, point de licence, elles ont des moeurs, de la religion, elles sont bonnes... Et ces femmes... trouvaient moyen de préparer le quatre à six de la fin de la matinée (théâtrale), c'est-à-dire la réception -- l'assemblée, en province -- et l'aimable causerie où elles redevenaient les reines.<sup>1</sup>

If the Comtesse Dash means that among the grandes dames were to be found, here and there, persons who did have a high regard for their families, it must be conceded that this was likely the case, but the assertion that these ladies still had "le soin de leur ménage et de leurs enfants qu'elles n'abandonnaient à personne" while pursuing their social pleasures, must be contested on two grounds. The social life of a grande dame undermined the family as we pointed out in the case of Louise de Chaulieu. Secondly, the historian F.B. Artz specifically mentions that the convent of the Sacré-Coeur was the familiar abode of aristocratic children.<sup>2</sup> Those who did not go into the convent were in the minority, and this was due in many cases to parents of firm religious persuasion who played no part in the social life of the times, but preferred to stay at home and overwhelm their children with religious teaching. The aristocrat who was concerned with religion was in the minority. The criticism Balzac is making of the system of marriage and the effects on children is contained in the very point made by the Comtesse Dash who tries to prove that good parents were to be found among those who were "absorbées" by the "vie mondaine". What Balzac asserts is the opposite, and this is

<sup>1</sup>Tolédano, p. 177-178

<sup>2</sup>Artz, F.B., France under the Bourbon Restoration, (1814-1830) (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), p. 258

not only logical but factual. The lesson is clear: the times, the society, the traditions have undermined the institution of marriage.

According to Mme D'Agoult who refers to the choice of husband by parents:

S'il est bon catholique, tant mieux; s'il ne l'est -- Clothilde a converti Clovis -- et tout est dit... et ainsi se consomment ces tristes mariages sans amour et sans vertu, ces marchés cyniques auxquels la noblesse française a donné le nom de mariage de convenance, ces unions indissolubles où nulle sympathie, ni de l'âme, ni de l'esprit, ni des sens n'est consultée et auxquelles, si l'on y regardait de près, il ne faudrait peut-être pas attribuer une médiocre part dans l'appauvrissement des anciennes races et dans la décadence des mœurs. Les familles travaillent elles-mêmes à leur ruine. Elles introduisent la mort aux sources de la vie.<sup>1</sup>

The problem of the education of girls has been touched on by many writers prior to the nineteenth Century, and Balzac was no exception. In 1845, although he did not know that five years later he would be in his grave, he drew up a catalogue of actual and projected works in twenty-six volumes. To the ninety-seven novels, short stories and other études he was producing and did produce by 1848, were added the titles of fifty-one new ones, most of which, unfortunately, did not take shape. Among the casualties were three novels on education: Les Enfants, Un Pensionnat de demoiselles, Intérieur de collège. It was Balzac's intention to write these novels, but death prevented the completion of his work.

In Albert Savarus, however, Balzac mentions the issues involved in the education of girls and shows that there were two courses generally

<sup>1</sup>Agoult, Comtesse d', p. 216

followed by the aristocracy in bringing up their children:

L'éducation des filles comporte des problèmes si graves, car l'avenir d'une nation est dans la mère, que depuis longtemps l'université de France s'est donné la tâche de n'y point songer. Voici l'un de ces problèmes. Doit-on éclairer les jeunes filles, doit-on comprimer leur esprit? Il va sans dire que le système religieux est compresseur: si vous les éclairez, vous en faites des démons avant l'âge: si vous les empêchez de penser, vous arrivez à la subite explosion si bien peinte dans le personnage d'Agnès par Molière. (VIII, 659)

The problem neatly posed by Balzac is whether to repress the inclinations of girls, or to allow them all the enlightenment and education which the times seem to require. Whether, in short, to encourage an Agnès or a Célimène, Balzac himself opts for a midway course between these two extremes, but he shows in the Comédie Humaine that the aristocracy adopted either one or the other extreme in the education of their daughters. Curiously enough, however, these two almost diametrically different methods of education produced the same kind of grande dame of high society, despite the marked difference in their upbringing and education. This peculiar situation will be examined later, but for the moment it should be pointed out that Balzac considers the entire method of the upbringing and education of children unsatisfactory:

Examinez avec quelle admirable stupidité les filles se sont prêtées aux résultats de l'enseignement qu'on leur a imposé en France: nous les livrons à des bonnes, à des demoiselles de compagnie, à des gouvernantes qui ont vingt mensonges de coquetterie et de fausse pudeur à leur apprendre contre une idée noble et vraie à leur inculquer. Les filles sont élevées en esclaves et s'habituent à l'idée qu'elles sont au monde pour imiter leurs grand'mères. (XII, 1022)

When it is the wish of parents that their daughters should not

follow the normal custom of entering the convent, but should stay at home to be kept under their supervision, their ideas about what kind of instruction their daughters are to receive, and what material they should read, reveal their shortsightedness. In Les Illusions Perdues, Anaïs de Bargeton is "abandonnée à elle-même ou, par un plus grand malheur, à quelque mauvaise femme de chambre". (IV, 385) Later, she is educated by the Abbé Niollant who knows Italian and German, and who teaches these two languages to Naïs, in addition to "le contrepoint". To overcome her solitude, the Abbé overwhelms Naïs with "le grec et le latin, et lui donna quelque teinture des sciences naturelles. La présence d'une mère ne modifia point cette mâle éducation chez une jeune personne déjà trop portée à l'indépendance dans la vie champêtre". (IV, 386)

In Le Lys dans la vallée, M. de Mortsaufr fares no better than Naïs de Bargeton, as

sa première éducation fut celle de la plupart des enfants de grande famille, une incomplète et superficielle instruction de laquelle suppléaient les enseignements du monde, les usages de la Cour, l'exercice des grandes charges de la couronne ou des places éminentes. (I, 303)

Chateaubriand relates that his mother's education consisted of "la lecture de Fénelon, de Racine, de madame de Sévigné, et nourrie des anecdotes de la cour de Louis XIV; elle savait tout Cyrus par coeur".<sup>1</sup>

At home or in the convent, there is the same kind of éducation

<sup>1</sup>Chateaubriand, p. 20

futile. The Comtesse d'Agoult reports that in the Couvent Sacré-Coeur which she attended, her education was geared to her future social life. The covent authorities reasoned that a well brought up young lady who was expected to take her place in salons or ballrooms, should learn "avec ou sans goût, avec ou sans dispositions naturelles, la danse, le dessin, la musique".<sup>1</sup> She criticises as senseless and absurd, the whole method of this early training or education given in the convent: "Que dire, qu'enseigner dans de telles éducations qui ne soit puérilité, futilité, vanité qu'un souffle emporte".<sup>2</sup>

Balzac says the same thing as Mme d'Agoult. In Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées, Louise de Chaulieu, a product of the convent, also, steps out of one role as a Carmelite into another as a prospective socialite débutante, and Balzac shows the elaborate preparations made by her parents to introduce her into society after she returns to the family. There should be no surprise at this development, however, as at Blois, the girls were trained to fill the glittering social role later in life, while being instilled with ideas of their superiority over persons in the other social classes. This early education naturally served to perpetuate the social inequalities between the different classes and engender lasting enmities.

In Le Rouge et le Noir, Stendhal shows that Mathilde de la Mole, like Louise de Chaulieu and Mme d'Agoult, is also a victim of her

<sup>1</sup>D'Agoult, Comtesse, pgs. 180-181

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pgs. 180-181

éducation futile. Mathilde, according to Stendhal,

avait été, au couvent du Sacré-Coeur, l'objet des flatteries les plus excessives. Ce malheur jamais ne se compense. On lui avait persuadé qu'à cause de tous ses avantages de naissance, de fortune, etc., elle devait être plus heureuse qu'un autre. C'est la source de l'ennui des princes et de toutes leurs folies. Mathilde n'avait point échappée à la funeste influence de cette idée.<sup>1</sup>

In Le Contrat de mariage, Mme Evangélista makes clear to her daughter that success in the social world must be her great ambition, an advice which not only echoes the ideas of other parents, of the authorities at the Convent, but illustrates clearly what Balzac meant when he said that girls believe that they have come into the world "pour irriter leurs grand-mères":

Natalie, nous avons toutes une destinée en tant que femmes comme les hommes ont leur vocation. Ainsi, une femme est née pour être une femme à la mode... Ta vocation est de plaire. Ton éducation t'a d'ailleurs formée pour le monde... Tu n'es faite ni pour être mère de famille, ni pour devenir un intendant. (III, 838-839)

Like Balzac, Mme d'Agoult attacks this kind of short-sighted policy in education and training, while lamenting the fact that girls are woefully ill prepared for the important roles in life: "De notre conscience, rien; de nos devoirs futurs, comme femme et comme mère, rien: d'histoire naturelle, rien: la nature, c'est Satan".<sup>2</sup>

When girls are kept at home instead of being sent off to the convent in the customary manner, Balzac shows that the outcome of the

<sup>1</sup>Stendhal, Le Rouge et le Noir, p. 517

<sup>2</sup>D'Agoult, Mme., p. 482



education given at home is the same as that given at the convent, as both girls and boys are

trop tôt exposés au feu du monde, ils en voient les passions, ils en étudient les dissimulations... Une mère doit donc en gardant ses enfants prendre la ferme résolution de les empêcher de pénétrer dans le monde, avoir le courage de s'opposer à leurs désirs et aux siens, de ne pas les montrer. (VI, 253)

We said earlier that girls brought up in the role of either an Agnès or a Célimène both turn out to be more or less the same kind of grande dame later in life, and this curious development can well be illustrated in the case of Rosalie de Watteville in Albert Savarus. In spite of a very strong religious upbringing and almost complete restrictions placed on her movements, her reading, clothing, friends, she acquires a passion for love which leads to the ruin of the relationship between Albert Savarus and the Duchesse d'Argaiolo. In Une fille d'Eve, Marie de Vandenesse reacts against a similar upbringing and embarks on a liaison with Raoul Nathan.

In Rosalie's case, her educational history sufficiently explains her subsequent behaviour. Brought up, or confined within the walls of the huge hôtel de Rupt in Besançon by an excessively pious mother who scarcely leaves her home, so devoted is she to "le cher archevêque", Rosalie finds herself "fortement comprimée par une éducation exclusivement religieuse, et par le despotisme de sa mère qui la 'tenait' sévèrement par principes". Like Mme d'Agoult who confesses that her education in the convent taught her nothing about the problems of life,

Rosalie ne savait absolument rien. Est-ce savoir quelque chose que d'avoir étudié la géographie dans Cuthrie, l'histoire sainte, l'histoire ancienne, l'histoire de France, et les quatre règles? Dessin, musique et danse furent interdits, comme plus propres à corrompre qu'à embellir la vie. (VIII, 671-672)

In the process of enforcing the virtues of a rigid religious education, Rosalie's mother, unfortunately, thought neither about her daughter's future role in life, nor about her temperament. She merely considered her own personal wishes and inclinations and imposed her will in an arbitrary fashion on a daughter who appeared to be submissive, but was, in reality, a seething, pent up volcano of emotions:

A dix-sept ans, Rosalie n'avait lu que les Lettres édifiantes et des ouvrages sur la science héraldique. Jamais un journal n'avait souillé ses regards. Elle entendait tous les matins la messe à la cathédrale où la menait sa mère, revenait déjeuner, travaillait après une petite promenade dans le jardin, et recevait les visites assise près de la baronne jusqu'à l'heure du dîner; puis, après, excepté les lundis et les vendredis, elle accompagnait madame de Watteville dans les soirées, sans pouvoir y parler plus que le voulait l'ordonnance maternelle. (VIII, 672)

Rosalie habitually wore simple, checked cotton dresses, but on Sundays and in the evening, her mother allowed her silk. The cut of her dresses, made at Besançon, almost made her ugly, while her mother tried to borrow grace, beauty and elegance from Parisian fashions. Rosalie never wore a pair of silk stockings, nor "des brodequins", but always cotton stockings and leather boots. On great occasions and "des jours de gala", she was dressed in a muslin frock with her hair simply adorned. According to Balzac:

Cette éducation et l'attitude modeste de Rosalie cachaient un caractère de fer... Mais ces qualités ou ces défauts, si vous voulez, étaient aussi

profondément cachées dans cette âme de jeune fille, en apparence molle et débile, que les laves bouillantes le sont sous une colline avant qu'elle ne devienne un volcan. (VIII, 673)

Rosalie behaves later in the novel in keeping with her limited and severe education, and her reactions and revolt are the direct result of the bigotry and tyranny of her mother. A similar situation is also to be found in the household of Mme de Granville in Une fille d'Eve, where the two daughters of the Comtesse live separated from their father and their two brothers. Marie Angélique and Marie Eugénie de Granville do not have friends of their own age group, but suffer in the company of their mother's friends who, according to Balzac, are stiff-backed old ladies, dry and rigid. The conversation of these ladies frequently turns on their several ailments, on the shades of difference between preachers or confessors, or on the most trifling events in the religious world which might be found in the Royalist newspaper, La Quotidienne. The men have cold and mournfully impassive faces, having reached the age when a man becomes churlish and irritable: "L'égoïsme religieux avait desséché ces coeurs voués au devoir et retranchés derrière la pratique". (VIII, 824)

In the Granville home, a kind of religious Sanhedrin held court and, apart from having Jansenist doctrinarians as confessors, Marie Angélique and Marie Eugénie had to endure the daily sight of wearisome persons in their home, with their sunken eyes and frowning faces. There was no joy or gaiety for the two girls, only religious principles and gloom.

The consequences of such an education or upbringing, are predictable. They longed for liberty and fled into marriage to escape the esclavage of their home life. Later, as Mme Félix de Vandenesse, Marie Angélique, whose cloistered life had been a part of her education in her mother's home, becomes a prey to the temptations of Raoul Nathan. The restrictive home life of Marie, without friends and companions, without education of a suitable sort, help to push her to the edge of marital infidelity, as she wished to taste the joys of an illicit relationship. Her association with Lady Dudley, the Marquise d'Espard and others of the same ilk corrupt her, and it is only through the resourcefulness of her husband that she is saved from committing adultery. Her behaviour, however, is consistent with that normally associated with the grandes dames who are habituées of certain salons and other social gatherings, and her liaison with Raoul puts her in the company of the Beauséants and Langeais of the Comédie Humaine.

It is significant, however, that in the case of Rosalie de Watteville and the two Granville sisters, the home is without the guidance and counsel of a father. Balzac blames the absence of the father as an important factor in the disintegration of the family. Whether he is absent from the home because of disharmony within the family, or because he is one of the casualties of the emigration, the disappearance of the head of the home does not make for solidarity in the family. The death on the scaffold of many heads of families brought, in its train, strains and stresses within the family, as the burden of educating children devolved completely on the surviving parent. The loss or the absence of

the father in the family is another erosion of the strength of this important social unit.

In losing the solidarity of the family, the aristocracy lost its most important unifying force. With this loss, there appeared a host of mutually suspicious individuals, jealous of the success of the other, behaving like enemies, and pursuing their own private interests and individual ambitions. The education of girls for social pleasures and adornment of salons, the competition and rivalries among them, the passion for La Mode are the destructive influences which Balzac calls the plaies incurables within the vie intérieure of the whole aristocratic group. Passion for social pleasures, individualism, egoism, destroy the family and, in so doing, erode the entire foundation of the aristocracy. According to Louise de Chaulieu, one of the late generation of aristocrats:

Sais-tu mon enfant quels sont les effets les plus destructifs de la Révolution?... En coupant la tête à Louis XVI, la Révolution a coupé la tête à tous les pères de famille. Il n'y a plus de famille aujourd'hui, il n'y a plus que des individus... En proclamant l'égalité des droits à la succession paternelle, ils ont tué l'esprit de famille, ils ont créé le fisc! Mais ils ont préparé la faiblesse des supériorités et la force aveugle de la masse, l'extinction des arts, le règne de l'intérêt personnel et frayé les chemins à la conquête. Nous sommes entre deux systèmes: ou constituer l'Etat par la famille, ou le constituer par l'intérêt personnel: la démocratie ou l'aristocratie, la discussion ou l'obéissance, le catholicisme ou l'indifférence religieuse, voilà la question en peu de mots. (VI, 91)

The consequences of poor education and upbringing are legion in the Comédie Humaine. One other consequence is the alienation of the other social classes. In Les Illusions Perdues, Mme de Bargeton, spared

the repressive religious education which was the lot of many others who did not go into the convent, acquires the doctrine of superiority.

Badly educated by the Abbé de Niollant, Naïs "prit une excellente opinion d'elle-même, et conçut un robuste mépris pour l'humanité. Ne voyant autour d'elle que des inférieurs et des gens empressés de lui obéir, elle eut la hauteur des grandes dames". (IV, 346) Naïs' misfortune in Angoulême is the fact that she had neither brothers, sisters, nor persons of her own age group to associate with her. Receiving no opportunity to train herself to consider the interest of others, she lived for herself alone:

Flattée dans toutes ses vanités par un pauvre abbé... elle eut le malheur de ne rencontrer aucun point de comparaison qui l'aidât à se juger. Le manque de compagnie est un des plus grands inconvénients de la vie de campagne. Faute de rapporter aux autres les petits sacrifices exigés par le maintien et la toilette, on perd l'habitude de se gêner pour autrui. Tout en nous se vicie alors, la forme et l'esprit. N'étant pas réprimée par le commerce de la société, la hardiesse des idées de Mademoiselle de Negrepelisse passa dans ses manières, dans son regard. (IV, 386)

The curious misfortune of the aristocracy is revealed in the above quotation, that of being forced by the abolition of the droit d'aînesse to have their properties divided equally among their offspring, leading inevitably to the disintegration of the proprietary power of the great families. The abolition of the law led to the limitation in size of aristocratic families and consequently to lonely children like Naïs. This aspect has already been touched on. (vide p.288) However, in the face of the danger presented by the abolition of the droit d'aînesse, many families sought to avoid the consequences by restricting the

number of their children. In doing so, however, they fell into another danger: the risk of becoming extinct if there was no male surviving heir.

In Naïs' de Bargeton's case, we pointed out that she has neither brother nor sister, a consequence of the policy of limiting the size of the family. In addition to the disadvantage of having no companionship in the home, the educational and emotional development of an only child took an unfortunate direction. The acquisition of prejudices, of that hauteur which Balzac specifically mentions, are only two aspects of the consequences of Naïs' early upbringing and education which reveal themselves clearly when she later interacts on the social level with either the new aristocracy or members of the bourgeoisie.

Le Cabinet des Antiques also contains a good example of the kind of prejudices instilled into or acquired at an early age by aristocratic youth, and found more or less in every aristocratic family. Victurnien d'Esgrignon, the only son of the Marquis d'Esgrignon, is the spoilt child of the house. Like Anaïs de Bargeton, he is the only child of the family. In him the Marquis sees himself as he was in his very young days, and he proceeds to instil in him the kind of ideas which characterised the education of the youth of the Ancien Régime, but which are inconsistent with the changed times of the Restoration. In fact, not only are these ideas out of tune with the times, but they constitute a positive danger for the future of the aristocracy:

Le dogme de sa suprématie fut inculqué au comte Victurnien dès qu'une

idée put lui entrer dans la cervelle. Hors le Roi, tous les seigneurs du royaume étaient ses égaux. Au-dessous de la noblesse, il n'y avait pour lui que des inférieurs, des gens avec lesquels il n'avait rien de commun, envers lesquels il n'était tenu à rien, des ennemis vaincus, conquis, desquels il ne fallait faire aucun compte, dont les opinions devaient être indifférentes à un gentilhomme, et qui tous lui devaient du respect. (II, 1092)

Just like Mme de Bargeton and Mathilde de la Mole, Victurnien never recovered from the evils of this early education and the pernicious doctrines inculcated in him by the family. It is, perhaps, by their snobbery and their insolence, more than anything else, that the aristocracy alienated the feelings of the other social classes.

Education, therefore, is of crucial importance in the formation of the jeune fille. The lack of proper training resulted in the appearance of a host of young women adorning the salons with only one ambition, that of eclipsing one another in elegance, fiercely competing for the attention of men, whether married or unmarried.

Outside of the family group, there is similar disunity to be found among relatives, as we have shown existing among parents and children. In Chapter II, it was shown how Raphaël de Valentin was refused help by his close relative the Duc de Navarreins, and this brief incident in the novel is symptomatic of what takes place on a wider scale in the Etudes de Mœurs. In Ursule Mirouet, for example, a similar display of selfishness is to be found in the unfortunate circumstances of Savinien de Portenduère.

When Mme de Portenduère, Savinien's mother, learns of the imprisonment of Savinien for debt, she writes beseeching letters to her



relatives the Kergarouets and the Portenduères, appealing to them for financial assistance. It was to no avail. Rescued from prison, at last, by the help of their neighbour, Doctor Minoret, Savinien realises that the family no longer exists. "Il n'y a plus de Famille aujourd'hui, ma mère, il n'y a que des individus" (VIII, 506) he utters in despair.

The king, group and family unit are the three components of the whole aristocratic family. This 'trinity' which comprised the three divisions of the aristocratic family, is considered by Balzac as forming a social or family unit, with the king as the head of the 'trinity'. After showing the disintegration of the parental family, Balzac moves to the group, and makes it clear that the same evils of individualisme are at work, like a cancer, within the vie intérieure of the whole aristocracy. In addition, the disintegration of the family leads to the disintegration of the group, as he pointed out in *Les Paysans*: "Le chacun chez soi', 'chacun pour soi', l'égoïsme de famille tuera l'égoïsme oligarchique". (III, 1032)

The king was considered the primus inter pares among the aristocracy who, theoretically, considered themselves equal in birth. While the king was also considered the equal of the other aristocrats, his position as king made him the social and political head of the aristocratic family. During the Ancien Régime, he expected the members of the aristocracy to be present around him at court and, according to Taine, to be present there even became an obligation. Absence in the sovereign's eyes would be considered a sign of independence as well as indifference.

In Le Cabinet des Antiques, the king's position as head of the aristocratic family is amply illustrated by the fact that Diane de Maufrigneuse, without any hesitation, goes to him for help to save Victurnien d'Esgrignon from prison for forgery. The king, on the other hand, does not request the Minister concerned with justice to intervene in the case, but gives Diane money from his private purse in an attempt to retrieve the situation. According to Diane: "J'ai cent mille francs que le Roi m'a donnés sur sa Casette pour acheter l'innocence de Victurnien". (II, 1205)

In Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes, the king is again asked to help save the reputation of two influential families, the Maufrigneuses and the Sérizys, who are involved in the affair of Lucien de Rubempré, and are now threatened with possible blackmail. In Le Bal de Sceaux, the Comte de Fontaine also seeks the king's help in arranging a suitable marriage for his daughters. Not only does the king assist wherever he can, but as the titular head of the aristocracy, in situations affecting their public reputation, he realises that it would not be in the interest of this class to allow its members to bring public disrepute on the whole aristocratic family.

If the king is considered the head of the aristocratic family, then it follows that the group constitutes or should constitute a family. During the Ancien Régime, the aristocracy faced no kind of danger of the dimension which it had to face later from the Revolution and its aftermath. Persons were in quiet possession of their lands and their wealth, and

congregated around the person of the king, following him in the chase, or indulging in other leisurely pursuits. Women, in like manner, surrounded the queen. But this aristocratic family with its traditions of apparent solidarity, received its greatest test of unity in the Revolution. Some of the aristocrats, loyal to the king and queen, followed them into exile, while others, thinking more of their own personal interests, either stayed behind, or attempted to work out their salvation on their own. Personal ambitions dictated the course of action of many of them, rather than the common interests of the group as a whole, and this 'thin edge of the wedge', called "individualisme" by Balzac, strengthened by the Revolution, rapidly increased as hostility to the aristocracy continued and personal dangers multiplied:

Chaque famille ruinée par la révolution, ruinée par le partage égal des biens, ne pensa qu'à elle, au lieu de penser à la grande famille aristocratique, et il leur semblait que si toutes s'enrichissaient, le parti serait fort. Erreur. (II, 598)

Loyalties to the group which appeared to have existed before vanished in the face of the severities of the Revolution, and it became a case of each man for himself. During the Restoration, there was even disenchantment with the king who was considered by some aristocrats to have acted the part of a traitor in treating the aristocrats of the Empire on terms of equality with those of the Ancien Régime. The aristocracy simply continued to follow a policy of "chacun pour soi".

Jules Bertaut relates that when the Duchesse de Berri was arrested, the melancholy tidings of the failure of this last attempt of the aris-

tocracy to raise its head in an uprising in the Vendée did not prevent the Faubourg Saint-Germain from dancing in their salons that very evening, as if nothing had happened. The epitaph of the aristocracy was being written in this display of indifference, as the inhabitants of the Faubourg were pursuing their own pleasures and thinking of their own individual interests instead of those of the group. Bertaut gives this account about the arrest:

C'est une stupeur dans tous les camps. Cependant, si grande est la force de l'habitude qu'on ne peut s'empêcher de se réunir le soir même et de danser. Apponyi qui a appris la nouvelle se rend par politesse au bal de Mme de Rumford, pensant n'y trouver personne. A sa grande surprise, il rencontre tous 'ses' habitués, qui sont les plus grands noms: 'Excepté MM de Caraman et de Pange, personne n'a manqué, et l'on a dansé comme si de rien n'était. Enfin, ajoute-t-il, on pourrait être à la veille du Jugement dernier que l'on danserait, l'on s'amuserait encore".<sup>1</sup>

This lack of interest and solidarity in the aristocratic family manifests itself at all levels in the Comédie Humaine. We have already pointed out the insincerity of the grandes dames who deliberately encourage Mme de Vandenesse to embark on a liaison with Raoul Nathan in order to have material for gossip. In La Duchesse de Langeais, the Baron de Maulincour rushes with the news to a gossipy Faubourg that Antoinette has compromised herself by allowing her carriage to be parked openly outside Montriveau's apartments. These examples of lack of solidarity among the group can be multiplied. In Ursule Mirouet, when Savinien de Portenduère is imprisoned for debt at Sainte-Pélagie, he is visited by his friends Henri de Marsay and Eugène de Rastignac who bring him, not help, but advice. According to de Marsay:

<sup>1</sup>Bertaut, J., p. 225

Voulez-vous mon avis, mon cher enfant? Je vous dirai comme au petit d'Esgrignon: Payez vos dettes... et mariez-vous en province avec la première fille qui aura trente mille livres de rente... Je vous porte ce toast: 'A la fille d'argent'".

To emphasize the indifference of de Marsay and Rastignac to the plight of Savinien, Balzac points out that the two dandies not only consider Savinien to be an ex-friend, but their conversation as they leave shows that their concern is hypocritical: "Les jeunes gens ne quittèrent leur ex-ami qu'à l'heure officielle des adieux, et sur le pas de la porte ils se dirent: 'il n'est pas fort! - Il est bien abattu! - se relèvera-t-il?'" (VIII, 481)

That the aristocracy has changed consequent upon the Revolution, is brought out by Balzac in a comparison between the solidarity of the aristocratic group during the Ancien Régime, and the marked disunity and Individualisme of post-Revolutionary times. According to Balzac:

Aujourd'hui le nom, la position, la fortune ne sont plus des pavillons assez respectés pour couvrir toutes les marchandises à bord. L'aristocratie entière ne s'avance plus pour servir de paravent à une femme en faute. La femme comme il faut n'a donc point, comme la grande dame d'autrefois, une allure de haute lutte, elle ne peut rien briser sous son pied, c'est elle qui sera brisée. (VIII, 103, Autre Etude de femme)

The writing is clearly on the wall signifying the disintegration of the aristocracy as a group and as a separate class. Not being able to maintain its unity as a family, it cannot do so as a group. Balzac takes some delight in elaborating the many follies and égoïsmes of this class, whose members have failed to learn the simple lesson that in unity lies strength. Family selfishness is stronger than class selfishness as we

pointed out earlier (vide p.323)

Stendhal notes the same lack of solidarity in the Aristocracy as does Balzac. In Le Rouge et le Noir, the Marquis de la Mole is under no illusions about the disunity which exists among the aristocratic group. In the secret discussion which takes place before Julien Sorel goes off to England on a secret journey, the Marquis advises his colleagues to secure five hundred men as evidence that the aristocracy can secure some solidarity among themselves by this display of self-help. Not only is he aware that this hoped for solidarity will not materialise, but he already sees the complete disintegration of the aristocracy and its traditions: "Je ne vois plus que des 'candidats' faisant la cour à des majorités' crottées".<sup>1</sup> Julien also sees the cancer of égoïsme which is eroding the entire strength of the aristocracy: "Chacun pour soi dans ce desert d'égoïsme qu'on appelle la vie".<sup>2</sup> This is the very observation of Rastignac in La Duchesse de Langeais.

There can be no doubt that Balzac has carefully analysed the weaknesses of the aristocracy which led to its ultimate disintegration. Destroy the foundation and the structure crumbles. From the home, he moves to the group, and then to the whole social class with the king included. His arguments have a convincing logic, not to mention the historical corroboration which he gets for each of the many plaies incurables he points out as being responsible for the ultimate disappearance of

<sup>1</sup>Stendhal, p. 580

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 524

a so-called privileged class. Louise de Chaulieu sums up this entire process of aristocratic disintegration in words which embody Balzac's own pet ideas:

Tout pays qui ne prend pas sa base dans le pouvoir paternel est sans existence assurée. Là commence l'échelle des responsabilités et la subordination qui monte jusqu'au roi. Le roi, c'est nous tous! Mourir pour le roi, c'est mourir pour soi-même, pour sa famille, qui ne meurt pas plus que ne meurt le royaume... Un pays est fort quand il se compose de familles riches, dont tous les membres sont intéressés à la défense du trésor commun: trésor d'argent, de gloire, de privilèges, de jouissances; il est faible quand il se compose d'individus non solidaires, auxquels il importe peu d'obéir à sept hommes ou à un seul, à un Corse, pourvu que chaque individu garde son champ: et ce malheureux égoïste ne voit pas qu'un jour on le lui ôtera. (VI, 92)

## CHAPTER V

### DETERMINISM

It was Balzac's belief that human nature is fashioned and modified by the social milieu, local environment (which includes the home) and the influence of individuals and groups. He was firmly convinced that society and man exercised a reciprocal influence on each other. In his view, man is what he has been fashioned into by society, but he, in turn, is capable of making an impact on the environment and obtaining certain modifications. The nature of the actions of man is a direct consequence of contacts with the social milieu whose hidden rules, applied from birth to the individual, are instinctively obeyed, even though the individual is not aware of their existence. In Pathologie de la vie sociale, Balzac expounds the idea of man being a product of his environment:

L'homme est élevé bien ou mal. Il forme un être à part, avec son caractère plus ou moins original:... il obéit à toutes les fantaisies que la société a développées en lui, à toutes les lois qu'elle a portées sans chambres, ni rois, sans opposition, ni ministérialisme, et qui sont les mieux suivies; il s'habille, il se loge, il parle, il marche, il mange, il monte à cheval ou en voiture, il fume, il se grise et se dégrise, il agit suivant des règles données et invariables, malgré les différences peu sensibles de la mode, qui augmentent ou simplifient les choses, mais les suppriment rarement. (XII,1517)

From the above views of Balzac, it is not difficult to under-



stand why Antoinette de Langeais is seen by him as the symbol of her caste, the product of her environment, the epitome of the aristocracy. Born and bred in the selfish, social clique of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, Antoinette has been fashioned by the whole group with its prejudices, snobbery, self-interest which run rife within the clique at all levels of the social hierarchy.

Mme de Beauséant, as we pointed out in Chapter III (vide page 268) behaves to Eugène de Rastignac in a manner which shows that she has not escaped the education or "formation" of the aristocratic environment. Even though she is speaking to her cousin, the haughty, imperious manner typical of a grande dame, reveals itself to an astonished Eugene.

Environment, therefore, has a deterministic influence on Balzac's characters in the Comédie Humaine. They are influenced by the broad milieu like Paris and the Provinces, apart from evolving, also, in a way which is consistent with the area where they reside. Consistent with Balzac's notions, Paris and the Provinces would obviously produce different kinds of individuals in the Comédie Humaine, and these two geographical and social areas play a great role in shaping the events in the lives of the grandes dames. According to Lavater whose ideas Balzac endorsed:

Il est vrai que tout ce qui entoure l'homme agit sur lui; mais d'un autre côté il agit aussi sur les objets extérieurs et s'il en reçoit des modifications, lui-même modifie ses entours. De là vient qu'on peut encore juger du caractère d'homme par son habillement, sa maison, ses meubles—placé dans ce vaste univers, l'homme s'y ménage un petit

monde à part, qu'il fortifie, retranche, arrange à sa manière, et dans lequel on retrouve son image.<sup>1</sup>

As Balzac found confirmation for his own views on environment in scientific opinions, he fashioned his work around the basic idea that man is explained by the group and milieu within which he conducts his life. As events are the result of a complicated network of causes and effects, so is human life in the social milieu affected and altered by the age or epoch in which the individual lives, by all kinds of laws, by his occupations, professions, friends, social contacts, even the atmosphere of the area. In Eugénie Grandet, for example, it will be recalled that the melancholy, forbidding nature of Félix Grandet's home in Saumur has an influence on the entire family.

In Béatrix, Balzac declares that there are buildings whose influence is visible on the persons who live near them. According to him, it is difficult, for example, to be irreligious under the shadow of a cathedral like that of Bourges, as the soul that is constantly reminded of its destiny by imagery finds it less easy to fall by the wayside. In like manner, the Baron du Guénic, in Béatrix, one of the genuinely old aristocrats imbued with the old ideas of honour and duty, lives in his ancestral home, preserved as a living symbol to remind him not to fail in his ancient duties to which he considers himself still bound by the motto of Fac on the écusson of his coat of arms. The

<sup>1</sup>Lavater, J.C., L'art de connaître les hommes par la physionomie

(Paris, 1927), p.272

hangings and draperies are centuries old, and the Baron, still mindful of the ancient duties of service of the old Nobles ('Faire' est le grand mot de la chevalerie), went off to offer his sword to the Duchesse de Berri when she attempted a last rising in the Vendée. But alas! the Baron was alone. He mentioned sadly to his wife on his return: "Tous les barons n'ont pas fait leur devoir". (IX, .263)

The Baron, it must be remembered, lives in an old world atmosphere, face to face with all the hangings, draperies, paintings of the past which forcibly remind him of the duties and obligations of his ancestors. On the other hand, the later generation of aristocrats have neither trappings nor panoply to remind them about their ancestral traditions of service. The disappearance of the old atmosphere brings with it a loss of ancient notions about service and duty once held dear by the original nobles.

Balzac's theory is that monuments shape the soul and inculcate certain attitudes in the individual by influences which he cannot see or determine, but which are there, nevertheless, and inescapable. In Guérande, the Baron du Guénic lives within the old ancestral home which has stood for centuries. With the disappearance of these homes and the changing of the times (Revolution, Empire, Restoration), attitudes of the aristocrats have changed just as the milieu and the epoch have done:

Aujourd'hui les beaux hôtels se vendent, sont abattus et font place à des rues. Personne ne sait si sa génération gardera le logis patrimonial, où chacun passe comme dans une auberge; tandis qu'autrefois, en bâtissant une demeure, on travaillait, on croyait du moins travailler pour une famille éternelle... Il est des monuments dont l'influence est

visible sur les personnes qui vivent à l'entour. (IX, 256)

A probable consequence of the disappearance of the old homes is that the aristocracy has lost sight of its ancient duties in the mushrooming of modern homes. The extent to which this has influenced behaviour cannot be accurately determined, although Balzac sees that a new breed of aristocrats are emerging with the changing times and the changing architecture:

Quand partout l'âme est rappelée à sa destinée par des images, il est moins facile d'y faillir. Telle était l'opinion de nos aïeux, abandonnée par une génération qui n'a plus ni signes ni distinctions et dont les moeurs changent tous les dix ans. (Béatrix, IX, 256)

The building or monument, in Balzac's view, is only one of the many deterministic influences which play a part in fashioning human nature and the social life of individuals. Other influences are Paris and the Provinces, and, of course, the Faubourg Saint-Germain, the narrower social milieu. In addition, the home exercises its own kind of influence, and so does heredity. The starting point of this vast network of factors which explain the behaviour of the grandes dames, is to be found with the marital couple, and the kind of children which are born to them in marriage. Heredity must therefore be a factor of much importance.

The mariage de convenance was responsible for the union not only of incompatible couples as we pointed out in the case of Antoinette de Langeais and others in Chapter 4, but also for uniting a couple where the husband was often more than three times the age of his wife.

In Béatrix, the Baron du Guénic marries Fanny Ireland, although he is considerably older than her and, in the same novel, M. de Faucombe marries a 'teen-ager' although he is sixty years of age. In Les Illusions Perdues, M. de Bargeton, "assez nul d'esprit et de volonté", marries a very young Anaïs de Negrepelisse, but no children issue from the marriage.

In the case of the Bargetons and others where such a misalliance involving old age, unintelligence and youth is so pronounced, it is not difficult to conceive the consequences. Balzac, however, does not often show the physical consequences which result in the offspring of such marriages, but it does not seem unreasonable to assert that the children of such couples are more liable to show physical and mental deficiencies than those whose parents do not have a wide age and intelligence gap between them.

In Modeste Mignon, the Duc d'Hérouville, the holder of a proud, aristocratic name is nothing but a puny individual, gaunt and frail. What has caused this physical degeneration in the race of the d'Hérouville from a once sturdy people to an almost dwarfish descendant?

According to Balzac's question:

Comment la race des forts et des vaillants, comment la maison de ces fiers d'Hérouville, qui donnèrent le fameux maréchal à la Royauté, des Cardinaux à l'Eglise, des capitaines aux Valois, des preux à Louis XIV, aboutissait-elle à un être frêle, et plus petit que Butscha? C'est une question qu'on peut se faire dans plus d'un salon de Paris, en entendant annoncer plus d'un grand nom de France et voyant entrer un homme petit, fluet, mince, qui semble n'avoir que le souffle, ou de hâtifs vieillards, ou quelque création bizarre chez qui l'observateur recherche à grand'peine un trait où l'imagination puisse retrouver les

signes d'une ancienne grandeur. (VII, 508)

The explanation of such physical deficiency lay in the policy of a large part of the aristocracy of marrying within the aristocratic family in order to avoid alliances with the bourgeoisie. The stubborn, old aristocrat who refused to sacrifice his prejudices could not bear to ally himself, for example, with Napoleon's new aristocracy. The Comte de Fontaine in Le Bal de Sceaux is such a case:

Malgré les séductions d'un riche parvenu révolutionnaire qui mettait cette alliance à haut prix, il épousa une demoiselle de Kergarouet, sans fortune, mais dont la famille est une des plus vieilles de la Bretagne. (II, 728)

Other aristocrats married not only within the aristocracy, but within their own family. In Béatrix, for example, Félicité des Touches knows of the plans of the Grandlieus to unite the two branches of their family, headed on the one hand by the Duc de Grandlieu, and on the other, by the Vicomte de Grandlieu: "Félicité connaissait les projets du duc et de la duchesse qui destinaient la dernière de leurs cinq filles au Vicomte de Grandlieu". (IX, 496)

Balzac blames such marriages for leading to the dégénérescence of the aristocracy. In La Fausse Maîtresse, Clémentine Laginska, wife of Adam Mitgislak Laginski, makes a comparison between her husband and Comte Thaddée Paz. Paz is superior in strength and physical attraction to her husband, facts which "indiquaient la dégénérescence forcée des familles aristocratiques assez insensées pour toujours s'allier entre

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elles". (X, 44) Mme d'Agoult echoes Balzac's criticisms of this system of inter-marriage, part and parcel of the mariage de convenance, as being directly responsible for the "dégénérescence de la race".

Et ainsi consommaient ces tristes mariages sans amour et sans vertu... ces unions indissolubles où nulle sympathie, ni de l'âme, ni de l'esprit, ni des sens, n'est consultée, et auxquelles, si l'on y regardait de près, il ne faudrait peut-être pas attribuer une médiocre part dans l'appauvrissement des anciennes races et dans la décadence des mœurs.<sup>1</sup>

While the consequences of heredity are more noticeable in the lives of aristocratic men rather than women in the work of Balzac, the case of Rosalie de Watteville and that of Modeste Mignon show to what extent heredity can play a part in the lives of Balzac's characters. A personality trait which Rosalie inherited from two generations of ancestors reappeared in her. Apart from the environment in the Hôtel de Rupt which was inordinately repressive, Rosalie's own nature, acquired from her heredity, was sufficiently strong to enable her to resist for a time some of the overpowering influences of her home and the dull, country area. The cloistered and sheltered existence she led, plus a repressive education, did not succeed in subduing the tempestuous nature which she inherited from her ancestors. This important fact means that environment, in the view of Balzac, is not the only factor to shape the character of individuals. Balzac asserts that the decisive character and romantic daring of the famous Wattevilles

<sup>1</sup>D'Agoult, Comtesse, p. 216



étaient revenus dans l'âme de sa petite nièce, encore aggravés par la ténacité, par la fierté du sang des de Rupt. Mais ces qualités ou ces défauts, si vous voulez, étaient aussi profondément cachés dans cette âme de jeune fille, en apparence molle et débile, que les laves bouillantes le sont sous une colline avant qu'elle ne devienne un volcan. (VIII, 673)

The consequences of Rosalie's heredity are that, being of a tempestuous nature, she is inflamed with an excessive passion for Albert Savarus which leads her to break open his letters and forge his handwriting in letters to the Duchesse d'Argaiolo to whom she falsely represents Albert as being faithless. When the husband of the Duchesse dies, Rosalie announces the marriage of herself and Albert in a letter to the Duchesse which ingeniously gives the impression that it was intended for some one else, but sent to her in error. Albert's relationship with the Duchesse is, of course, ruined, while Albert retires from a society a disillusioned person.

Rosalie's moral crimes may be explained on the ground of heredity. According to Balzac:

Les physiologistes et les profonds observateurs de la nature humaine, vous diront à votre grand étonnement peut-être, que dans les familles, les humeurs, les caractères, l'esprit, le génie, reparaissent à de grands intervalles absolument comme ce qu'on appelle les maladies héréditaires. Ainsi, le talent, de même que la goutte, saute quelquefois de deux générations. Nous avons, de ce phénomène, un illustre exemple dans George Sand en qui revivent la force, la puissance et le concept du maréchal de Saxe, de qui elle est petite-fille naturelle. (VIII, 673)

In Modeste Mignon, as we pointed out in Chapter IV (vide page 290), Modeste's show of independence in claiming the right to choose her

own husband is largely explained by heredity. Her mother Bettina Wallenrod is of the race of the Teutons, while her father is of Italian origin. Balzac ascribes Modeste's firmness to the strong German background of her mother. When Modeste's sensiblerie fills her with enchantment over the poetry of Canalis and makes her sacrifice the usual timidity of a young girl and write a host of letters to the poet, an extraordinary action, Balzac explains her behaviour on the grounds of heredity, as he considers the Germans to be very sensitive to the emotions of the heart and, consequently, impetuous as is the case with Modeste.

Heredity is also very likely responsible, in part, for the fact that Diane de Maufrigneuse has a history of thirty lovers. Her mother, the old Duchesse d'Uxelles, was the mistress of the Duc de Maufrigneuse under the Empire, and she gave her daughter in marriage to the Duke, her old lover. With such a family history behind Diane, one may speculate on the significance of the fact that the promiscuities of the mother reappear, albeit in a much greater extent, in the daughter.

Léontine de Sérisy also has a history of innumerable lovers. We do not get a history of her family tree, however, to permit any sort of conclusion on the influence of heredity. All Balzac relates is the fact that she is born a Ronquerolles, and that her husband's deficiencies are a contributory factor to her amoral escapades. Her brother, the Marquis de Ronquerolles, is numbered among Diane de Maufrigneuse's lovers, not to mention the fact that he was similarly

connected to Mme de Restaud whom he considered "un cheval pur sang". A well known critic asserts that, even before Zola, Balzac saw the influence of heredity. According to Jean Pommier: "Bien avant Zola, et de façon plus discrète, Balzac faisait jouer l'hérédité: qu'on relise de ce point de vue sa Comédie". (Modeste Mignon. VII, 319)

The family also shaped the lives of the grandes dames. The disappearance of many heads of families during and after the Revolution not only effectively removed one of the strong bulwarks of the home, a guide and counsellor to his children, but also added problems of an emotional and financial kind to his wife whose temperament and actions, in turn, influenced the personality and behaviour of her children. This eventuality was not only reserved for families where the husband was either absent from the home because he was executed during the Revolution, or in voluntary exile, but also those who are separated like the Duc and Duchesse de Langeais as a result of the incompatibilities they discovered in their marriage.

In the Comédie Humaine, Balzac relates that the Duchesse d'Uxelles, Diane de Maufrigneuse's mother, was the mistress of the Duc de Maufrigneuse. While Balzac does not give the marital relationship of the Duchesse and her husband, from her promiscuities with the Duc de Maufrigneuse, it is not unreasonable to suppose that she behaves like a divorcee, and that her husband, absent from the home in the usual aristocratic fashion, behaves in a manner similar to his wife's. No doubt, it is behaviour of this kind, indulged in by her mother and, very likely, her father, which can be seen as contributing to Diane's

delinquencies.

From the example set by their parents, the grandes dames follow in their own lives the model which they witnessed so often. In the home of the Duc and Duchesse de Chaulieu, Canalis, the lover of the Duchesse, is a frequent visitor to the home, a fact which Louise, their daughter, quickly notices. The social preoccupations of the mother and the political ones of her father reduce the daughter to loneliness. Even love is non-existent. When, for example, Louise needed her mother's loving care and affection at an early period of her life, she was sent off, instead, to a convent. According to Louise: "J'ai vu que le couvent ne remplace jamais une mère pour des filles".

This lack of love which Louise experiences in her childhood and youth is directly responsible for the development of a passionate disposition later in her life, and which reveals itself after she returns from the convent. She becomes inflamed with passion for Felipe Henarez whom she marries, but whose death and her own she causes. Her behaviour is an acceptable psychological interpretation of her inordinate desire to possess love to make up for the deficiencies of her childhood. It is this deficiency, created by and in the home, which has largely determined the subsequent nature of her character and personality.

Education, also, determines the behaviour of individuals. Louise de Bargeton, in Les Illusions perdues, is taught hardly anything which can be seriously applied to the many personal and social

problems then facing a woman in the changing times of the Empire and Restoration. She has to fill the role of wife and a mother, but acquires information on matters inconsistent with or irrelevant to the times and her own roles as a woman and wife. Marie Angélique de Granville and her sister Marie Eugénie who appear in Une fille d'Eve, do not get any sensible training in their lives which can be beneficial to them later on. In fact, the austerity of their religious education results in suffering and unhappiness for both when they undertake marriage. Marie Angélique, for example, was on the verge of committing adultery. Balzac blames the early education of Marie and, of course, the milieu for the unfortunate developments in the life of Marie.

In Le Bal de Sceaux, the spoiled, pampered Emilie de Fontaine, rejects as husband Henri de Longueville. Although she is sincerely in love with him, she turns her back on Henri for no other reason than the fact that she discovers he is not an aristocrat. This snobbish, prejudiced attitude, inherent in the behaviour of Emilie, has been aggravated by a too obliging father who could not come to terms with his responsibilities as a firm parent and discipline a wayward daughter, even though, early in her youth, he saw the kind of person she was to become. Emilie swears that she will only marry a Peer of France, and will not be persuaded to change her mind even though Henri de Longueville has all the qualities and attributes, social rank excluded, which she requires in a husband. When she does not succeed in finding the Peer she longs for, she marries, instead, her elderly uncle, the Comte de Kergarouët, a fate as horrible as it appears to be deserving

for a stubborn, self-willed and snobbish Emilie, even though her actions are due in a large measure to the weaknesses of her parents and other influences of environment. According to Balzac's spokesman Félix Davin:

Paris, la cour et les complaisances de toute une famille ont gâté mademoiselle de Fontaine; cette jeune fille commence à raisonner la vie, elle comprime les battements instructifs de son coeur, lorsqu'elle ne croit plus trouver dans l'homme qu'elle aimait, les avantages du mariage aristocratique qu'elle a rêvé. (II, . 145)

From the home, onto the social scene, the environment there, too, shapes the actions and the personality of the grandes dames. The Vidame de Pamiers encourages Victurnien d'Esgrignon, in Les Cabinet des Antiques, to pursue Diane de Maugrigneuse with, as it turns out, lamentable consequences for the young man. The Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry and the family council gathered around Antoinette de Langeais placidly tell the young Duchesse to continue to have her lover, but to have an eye for appearances. Nor did the brilliant aristocratic Society of the Faubourg discourage women from attending and giving balls, soirées, raouts, etc., where fabulous sums of money were spent on their appearance, carriages, the upkeep of their châteaux, all for the sake of earning the admiration of men and women whose envy also flattered their vanity.

Selfishness, inevitable in the almost universal desire and competition of women to outshine one another, compounded by the general, observable pattern of behaviour among the aristocrats, determined the attitude and way of life of the grandes dames. Help and sympathy in

time of need were almost non-existent. When the Vicomtesse de Beauséant, for example, was in despair over the desertion of the Marquis d'Ajuda-Pinto, the Duchesse de Langeais, her friend, quickly arrived to bring the news about the Marquis' proposed marriage to Mlle de Rochefide.

It goes without saying that the grandes dames, who have to live in a society where the weak do not survive, must adjust their ideas and beliefs in order not to be eliminated from the brilliant social milieu, or be out of step with the changed times. Mme Ancelot gives a good idea of the selfish society of the aristocrats in a description of the hard-heartedness of the rich Marquis d'Aligre towards the poor aristocrats. The Marquis, it appears, was one of the very few among the returning Emigrés who possessed an immense fortune at a time when many, according to Mme Ancelot, were dying from starvation. Approached by one of his friends, the Comte de L., for a loan to help him in his dire financial strait, the Marquis d'Aligre took a book out from his writing desk whose leaves were covered with figures and signatures. He asked the Count to place his signature and the sum required in the book, a matter which the Count hastened to do in the belief that this was a record of the debt he was contracting. The Marquis, however, closed the book and said:

Cette somme jointe aux autres, fait tant... Ce total était, il faut le dire, fort considérable. Eh bien! ajouta-t-il, c'est ce qui m'a été demandé depuis un an: si j'avais satisfait à toutes ces demandes, il y a longtemps qu'il ne me resterait rien. J'ai donc été obligé de faire pour les autres ce que je fais pour vous... de refuser complètement.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ancelot, Madame, Les salons de Paris (Paris, 1833), p. 106

The Marquis d'Aligre was only one of a kind whose selfishness was usual within the aristocratic coterie and which encouraged others to do likewise.

If buildings, as we have shown in the case of the Baron du Guénic, have a deterministic effect in the lives of individuals, it follows that a wider geographical area, Paris and the Provinces for example, must also, each in its own way, influence the behaviour of the grandes dames. In La Muse du Département, Balzac divides France into two zones:

La France au dix-neuvième siècle est partagée en deux grandes zones: Paris et la province, la province jalouse de Paris, Paris ne pensant à la province que pour lui demander de l'argent. Autrefois, Paris était la première ville de province, la Ville. Maintenant, Paris est toute la Cour, la Province est toute la Ville. ( IX , pgs.45-46)

The role which Paris plays in the work of Balzac is immense. As far as the aristocracy is concerned, the majority of its members live in the capital, while only a few live in the Provinces. This is due, of course, to special reasons or circumstances. Some of the very aristocrats like the du Guénics, the d'Uxelles, the Troisvilles, to take a few notable examples, have either never moved from, or have returned to the Provinces where life goes on with less frenzy, less noise and tumult. And it is for this reason, the 'sound and fury' of Paris, involving what Balzac calls l'usure vitale, that Paris holds a special, deterministic influence for the grandes dames.

In Paris "s'agitent des hommes, des passions et des nécessités. Vous vous mettrez forcément à d'horribles luttes, d'oeuvre à oeuvre,



d'homme à homme, de parti à parti, où il faut se battre systématiquement pour ne pas être abandonné par les siens". (IV, p. 120) Les Illusions perdues) Paris is the sphere where passions of all kinds are indulged in to an extraordinary extent. Fortunes are rapidly made and lost. Pleasures and despair are more pronounced and far more frequent than in the provinces. And this situation is due not only to the fact that there is a concentration of people thronging this geographical area, greater than any other of similar size in France, but also because the most important people, events and opportunities for ruin, not to mention myriads of other attractions, are to be found there.

It is in Paris that Eugène de Rastignac meets Vautrin, alias Trompe-la-mort, who corrupts the young provincial. It is in Paris that Eugène sees the value to him of influential women and allies himself to Delphine de Nucingen. It is in Paris where adultery seems to have the hue of a social virtue. But Balzac is not deceived, nor is he silent in his condemnation. By attaching himself to Delphine in order to make his way in the world, Eugene has enslaved himself to another man's wife, and wanders through the pages of the Comédie Humaine as Delphine's convenient, perpetual lover, no hero, but a tragic, solitary and even depraved figure.

Raphaël de Valentin, the symbol of all those many young men whose ideas and attitudes are altered in the Comédie Humaine, is initiated by Rastignac into the mysteries of Paris. Eugène passes on to another inexperienced youth the symbolic apple of corruption

with which the 'serpent' Vautrin had tempted him in Le Père Goriot. Victurnien d'Esgrignon, another Raphael, fresh from the provinces, is corrupted in like manner by de Marsay, the Vidame de Pamiers and, most important, by Diane de Maufrigneuse.

Balzac never wearies of identifying the social crimes in Paris. Just like Raphaël, Eugène and Victurnien, Calyste du Guénic and Savinien de Portenduère fall victims to the 'apple'. The symbolism in La Peau de Chagrin of the actions of individuals in Paris where, for example, the Rastignacs and the Foedoras determine the behaviour of the Raphaëls whose whole character is suitably altered, is explained and amplified in the wider orchestrations of the Etudes de Mœurs. Every young man who arrives in Paris where his character alters, is simply another Raphaël with a different name. Every grande dame who behaves like a coquette is more or less another Foedora. As we pointed out in Chapter II, Balzac's novels are all, in a sense, philosophical, in that they reflect the author's philosophy or view of man. The symbol of Raphaël and Foedora which runs throughout the Comédie Humaine is only one example of this fact.

The rush to Paris from the Provinces is partly explained by Balzac in his preface to Le Cabinet des Antiques as being the result of economic and social factors. Boredom also plays a part as will be pointed out:

L'Aristocratie, l'Industrie et le Talent sont éternellement attirés vers Paris, qui engloutit ainsi les capacités nées sur tous les points du royaume, en compose son étrange population et dessèche l'intelligen-

ce nationale à son profit. La province est la première coupable de cette impulsion qui la dépouille. Un jeune homme se produit-il en donnant des espérances, elle lui crie: à Paris! Des qu'un négociant a sa fortune faite, il ne pense qu'à la porter dans Paris, qui devient ainsi toute la France. (II, . 294)

Balzac's ideas about the influence of the capital on the lives of individuals are rather commonplace now. We know, for example, that the huge metropolises are constantly drawing young men and women from their homes in quiet country districts. Films, Theatres, Radio, Television and the Press appear to be the chief architects of an insidious but inadvertent propaganda about the attractions of 'big-city' life, which encourage a flight from the country areas to the cities with its greater attractions, its greater evils, sufferings, loneliness and crimes.

It is in Paris, however, against a background of pleasures and vices, of great fortunes and crushing poverty, of monumental despair and of a perpetual struggle to survive, that the lives of the grandes dames are spent. There is, quite naturally, therefore, a difference in the pattern and the pace of life of those who live in or retire to the Provinces. Mme de Beauséant, for example, in La Femme abandonnée, retires from Paris to Courcelles in Normandy where she finds the obscurity and anonymity she longs for to expiate in solitude the errors of her ways in Paris.

It was pointed out in Chapter III how Louise de Chaulieu becomes a grande dame after marriage, holding court in her salon, proud, supercilious and cold, following the pattern of life in the

aristocratic milieu of Paris where the young and innocent Carmelite was transformed by the social milieu of Paris. In contrast to Louise, Renée de Maucombe who left the Carmelite order, not for Paris, but for the Provinces, is transformed in another way, the very opposite of her friend. This contrast made by Balzac is not accidental but deliberate, as he wishes to show the outcome of the lives of two girls from the same convent, similar in outlook, birth, age and innocence, but whose lives become quite different as a result of the difference in the milieu.

Commenting on the fate of those who arrive from the Provinces to be ruined in Paris, Balzac shows how and why the d'Esgrignons, Portenduères and the other niais succumb:

Le Cabinet des Antiques est l'histoire de ces jeunes gens pauvres chargés d'un grand nom, et venus à Paris pour s'y perdre, qui par le jeu, qui par l'envie de briller, qui par l'entraînement de la vie parisienne, qui par une tentative d'augmenter sa fortune, qui par un amour heureux ou malheureux. Le Comte d'Esgrignon est la contre-partie de Rastignac, qui réussit là où le premier succombe. (Préfaces, XV, 295)

What happens in Le Cabinet des Antiques is repeated in a general fashion throughout the Comédie Humaine. The grandes dames, however, are of the posterity of Cain. Like Rastignac in the quotation above, they quickly learn the lesson of the times and adjust their views and their lives accordingly. They triumph over circumstances instead of being victims like Raphaël. For, as Balzac remarks, "il faut se battre systématiquement pour ne pas être abandonné par les siens."

Unlike the numerous young, male aristocrats who arrive in

Paris from the Provinces to be ruined in one form or another, there are hardly any grandes dames who arrive in the metropolis and succumb. Those who leave the country areas for Paris have a different fate there. The same advice which Rastignac gives to Raphaël de Valentin, Ronquerolles passes to Armand de Montriveau. The grandes dames are also quickly told: "ainsi va le monde". Educated by their friends in the ways and customs of Paris, in a very short time they become typical Parisiennes, hard, vain, egoistic and cold.

Mme de Bargeton, in Les Illusions perdues is a good example of the provincial grande dame who leaves the Provinces for Paris. When she arrives there from her native Angoulême, she is the object of much mocking laughter and jesting by the experienced dandies de Marsay and Rastignac. The Marquise d'Espard, however, quickly takes Nais under her protective wing, and the tutored provincial is very quickly transformed. Even her country airs and attitudes vanish. She abandons her poet Lucien Chardon (later to become Lucien de Rubempré) whom she had brought with her from Angoulême. She does not even hesitate to become a party to a plot engineered by the malevolent Marquise d'Espard to humiliate Lucien and ruin him socially, a strange turn of events, indeed, from Nais's previous feelings for her poet in Angoulême where she had defied her snobbish, high society friends and continued to receive and entertain him in her drawing room.

Mme de Bargeton's transformation in Paris has a logic behind it. In the capital where the déités of the fashionable world dress

with perfect taste and conspicuous elegance, these fashionable people do not hesitate to mock and ridicule those who arrive from the Provinces with their patent lack of ease, poor choice of colour in clothing, provincial cut of dress, or inelegant coiffure. In changing from the provincial to the Parisian in apparel and tastes, attitudes and behaviour also alter until a complete transformation takes place. The tendency to change and adjust to a new milieu, operates with all people, in every different environment, but with varying degrees of change depending on the individual.

In the Provinces, a different kind of transformation takes place. While the aristocrats in Paris spend their energies, health and wealth inconstant rounds of social pleasures, in the Provinces the area of activity is far narrower, and the whole atmosphere and activities are different. Privacy is non-existent, as every one knows one another's business, ambitions, and even plans. In Eugénie Grandet, Balzac declares:

Une ménagère n'achète pas une perdrix sans que les voisins demandent au mari si elle était cuite à point, une jeune fille ne met pas la tête à sa fenêtre sans y être vue par tous les groupes inoccupés. Là donc, les consciences sont à jour, de même que ces maisons impénétrables, noires et silencieuses n'ont point de mystères. La vie est presque toujours en plein air... il ne passe personne dans la rue qui ne soit étudié. Aussi, jadis, quand un étranger arrivait dans la ville de province, était-il gaussé de porte en porte. (V,736)

Because of this open air aspect of life in the provinces and the limited sphere of activities, there are, in Balzac's words, "espionnages continuels". Rivalries, hatreds, vengeance, slander,

gossip are more effective in the Provinces because of the nature of the milieu. On the other hand, provincials do not have the passions for pleasure, luxury, expensive clothes, operas, balls and other preoccupations ruled by vanity and which ruin the lives of those in the large metropolises, causing untold suffering and unhappiness to many. Spared these harmful and expensive attractions, the Provinces produce people of a different kind. According to Balzac, life takes place there within " le théâtre étroit de la province dont les coulisses ne sont pas périlleuses". (Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées, VI,67). In Pathologie de la vie sociale, Balzac also declares that it is the malady called civilisation which has abridged the lives of those dedicated to vanity, pleasures and other social passions: "Plus les sociétés sont civilisées et tranquilles, plus elles s'engagent dans la voie des excès". (XII,1522-1523)

In the Provinces there appears to be the very opposite of the enlightenment and attractions which are a common feature of Parisian life. In contrast to Paris, there is a dull, tedious monotony which shrivels the individual in the same way that a plant or flower, denied fresh air and sunlight, takes on a different aspect or hue. This seems to be Balzac's thesis. As he says of Dinah de la Baudraye:

Malgré ses projets arrêtés, les lieux communs, la médiocrité des idées, l'insouciance de la toilette, l'horticulture des vulgarités envahissent l'être sublime caché dans cette âme neuve, et tout est dit, la belle plante dépérit. Comment en serait-il autrement? (La muse du Département, IX,46)

Denied the excitement of Paris, and dwelling in the obscurity and anonymity in some backward provincial town like Nemours or Guérande, the individual reacts physiologically to the milieu. From a physiological to a social reaction is but a short step for the ambitious and talented in the Comédie Humaine, as Balzac shows that they attempt to escape the tedium of provincial life which dulls their wits and deadens their intelligence. In Paris, the lively faces, the constant interplay of intelligent minds, the myriad appeals to all the senses, stimulate the mind and uplift the individual. All this is absent in the Provinces.

In Ursule Mirouet, Mme de Portenduère refuses to consider the idea of her son embarking on a military career, as she prefers to keep him near to her in Nemours. She has her own plans to marry him to a "demoiselle d'Aiglemont" who has 15,000 francs a year. These marital plans, normal for the Provinces, but hateful to an ambitious young man, are frustrated when her son Savinien leaves the Provinces vowing never to return. According to Balzac:

L'ennui d'une vie sans air, sans issue et sans actions, sans autre aliment que l'amour des fils pour leurs mères, fatigua tellement Savinien qu'il rompit ses chaînes, quelque douces qu'elles fussent et jura de ne jamais vivre en province. (VIII, 475)

The ambitious and the talented do not suffer the Provinces.

In Albert Savarus, Balzac asserts of Besançon that "nulle ville n'offre une résistance plus sourde et muette au Progrès".(X,668) The society there is stiff, solemn, backward but, of course, proud and



haughty beyond all comparison. As for intelligence, an awareness of the great figures of literature and the arts, nothing: "De Victor Hugo, de Nodier, de Fourier, les gloires de la ville, on ne s'en occupe pas".

(X, 668-669)

In Béatrix, Guérande in Brittany shows the same phenomenon of resistance to progress and civilization. The town drowns in the past and civilization seems to have left it far behind:

Qui voudrait voyager en archéologue moral et observer les hommes au lieu d'observer les pierres, pourrait retrouver une image du siècle de Louis XIV au fond du Poitou, celle de siècles plus anciens au fond de la Bretagne. La plupart de ces villes sont déchues de quelque splendeur, dont ne parlent point les historiens plus occupés des faits et des dates que des moeurs... là, les maisons n'ont point subi de changement... Nulle d'elles n'a senti sur sa façade le marteau de l'architecte... Toutes ont leur caractère primitif... ces vieilleries, qui résistent à tout, présentent aux peintres les tons bruns et les figures effacées... Les rues sont ce qu'elles étaient il y a quatre cents ans. (IX, 243)

The same can be said for Angoulême, in Les Illusions perdues, "condamnée à la plus funeste immobilité". (IV, 381) As for the families which live there, "les créations du luxe moderne, elles les ignorent". (IV, 383)

Given this background of immobility, of resistance to progress, to the advancements of literature and the arts, provincials react in a given way to their situation — the environment withers the individual.

The mania of the Provinces is, of course, marriage, and even from infancy, according to Balzac, this is prearranged with a local family. Those who have to get a husband later from among the eligible local elite fare no better in their selection than those whose choice is arranged from the cradle. Mediocrity is the common feature of all

husbands. The physiological effect of such a provincial life is clearly stated by Balzac:

Elles (les demoiselles) n'ont à choisir qu'entre des médiocrités; les pères de familles ne marient leurs filles qu'à des garçons de province; personne n'a l'idée de croiser les races, l'esprit s'abâtardit nécessairement; aussi, dans beaucoup de villes, l'intelligence est-elle devenue aussi rare que le sang y est laid. L'homme s'y rabougrit sous les deux espèces, car la sinistre idée des convenances de fortune y domine toutes les conventions matrimoniales. Les gens de talent, les artistes, les hommes supérieurs, tout coq à plumes éclatantes s'envoient à Paris". (La Muse, IX,46)

The consequences of all this mediocrity are more insidious on women: "L'esprit se rouille aussi bien que le corps... la femme perd alors le charme de l'imprévu".(IX,50) In fact, according to Balzac, women have to contend with three inferiorities. First of all, she is inferior simply because of her sex. Secondly, because her husband is a provincial nonentity, unambitious, possessing all the commonplace bourgeois attitudes and ideas. And, finally, "la troisième et terrible infériorité qui contribue à rendre cette figure sèche et sombre à rétrécir, à l'amoinrir, à la grimer fatalement", is the fact that any amorous escapade indulged in by a superior woman is not with some brilliant, elegant dandy like de Marsay or Rastignac, but with some nondescript provincial bachelor, far more unintelligent and dull than husbands: "Or, en province, s'il n'y a point de supériorité chez les maris, il en existe encore moins chez les célibataires".(IX,46) In choosing a lover to commit the fashionable aristocratic indiscretions, the superior provincial woman sees her inferiority compared to her

counterpart in Paris. And because all provincial women suffer the same disadvantages, Balzac places them in one category: "A Paris, il existe plusieurs espèces de femmes... mais en province, il n'y a qu'une femme, et cette pauvre femme est la femme de province".(IX,45)

Women are, therefore, in a very special sense, prisoners in the provinces. They are prisoners of old-fashioned ideas, customs, traditions, of circumstances. Fashions, for example, which are the rage of Paris never get down to the back water of sleepy, provincial towns, and for obvious reasons: the inhabitants there have still not accepted the Parisian fashions of, perhaps, twenty years before, and it will take that much time to catch up with what is fashionable in Paris at any given time.

As for beautifying herself, wearing elaborate gowns and showing off her attributes to good effect, these feminine habits are non-existent. Provincials behave like provincials. In fact, to behave like a Parisian in the Provinces would cause a local scandal. Balzac describes the resignation of these women to the way of life shaped by the milieu:

Si une Parisienne n'a pas les hanches assez bien dessinées, son esprit inventif et l'envie de plaire lui font trouver quelque remède héroïque: si elle a quelque vice, quelque grain de laideur, une tare quelconque, elle est capable d'en faire un agrément, cela se voit souvent: mais, la femme de province, jamais! Si la taille est trop courte, si son embonpoint se place mal, eh! bien, elle prend son parti et ses adorateurs, sous peine de ne pas l'aimer, doivent l'accepter comme elle est, tandis que la Parisienne veut toujours être prise pour ce qu'elle n'est pas. De là ces tournures grotesques, ces maigreurs effrontées, ces ampleurs ridicules, ces lignes disgracieuses offertes avec ingénuité, auxquelles toute une ville s'est habituée, et qui étonnent quand une femme de

province se produit à Paris ou devant des Parisiens. (IX,49)

It has been pointed out that Mme de Bargeton had to adjust to the Parisian milieu soon after her arrival from Angoulême, (vide p.350), and it can now be appreciated in what respects the femme de province differs from the Parisienna.

In Balzac et son monde, Félicien Marceau advances the view that there are manifest differences in individuals who come from different provincial towns. In a comparison between Calyste du Guénic, born in Guérande, Brittany, and Mme de Rochefide, a Norman, he asserts that:

Les Bretons possèdent une nature de courage qui les porte à s'entêter dans les difficultés... Mais Béatrix, née sur la lisière de la Normandie et de la Bretagne, appartenant à la race des Castérans, l'abandon avait développé chez elle les férocités du Franc, la méchanceté du Normand. (IX,353)

Such a view of environment certainly echoes Balzac's thoughts.

It must not be imagined, however, that because the Provinces differ vastly from Paris, it does not have its dramas or even its passions. For example, it was pointed out earlier that the mania there was marriage. It will be shown later in what respect life in the still, calm atmosphere there also takes its toll on the individual, how passions still abound under the apparent calm, and conflicts and other overcharged emotions are exacerbated by rivalries, hatreds, enmities, calumnies and the secret, perpetual spyings of neighbours, friends and enemies. In La Peau de Chagrin, Foedora withdraws from the passion of love but

is still a victim of her passion for society and its pleasures. While Provincials are spared the frightful race towards debt in which the spendthrift habits of fashion conscious Parisians propel them, they consume themselves more or less rapidly in other ways.

In this matter of determinism, Balzac gives his reader his own interpretation of the sociological development of the grandes dames and the aristocracy. This interpretation of the influences which fashion human nature is far from exhaustive. Nor can it be said that Balzac's system of determinism constitutes an infallible method for character or personality analysis, or one that is the most valid. There are doubtless other modern theories for analysing human character which have displaced Balzac's nineteenth century ideas. However, Balzac's theories remain what he intended them to be: his own personal conception of man and his milieu at a specific period in time.

#### CRISIS OF CHANGE

The social changes witnessed by Balzac are an expected consequence of the political upheavals evident during the latter part of the previous century and the early part of the new one and which Balzac uses to show the deterministic influence on the attitudes and behaviour of the aristocracy. In Autre étude de femme, the case of Talleyrand is symbolic of the changes which took place among many aristocratic families. Talleyrand, asserts Balzac, was the last of the great seigneurs français. This Duke leaves four children, two boys and two

girls. His fortune is split up among them, and each, in turn, becomes the father and mother of children who must needs live with the strictest economy on the ground or first floor of a large house. Henceforth, in Balzac's words,

La femme du fils aîné qui n'est duchesse que de nom, n'a ni voiture, ni ses gens, ni sa loge, ni son temps à elle, elle n'a ni son appartement dans son hôtel, ni sa fortune, ni ses babioles; elle est enterrée dans le mariage comme une femme de la rue Saint-Denis l'est dans son commerce: elle achète les bas de ses chers petits enfants, les nourrit et surveille ses filles qu'elle ne met plus au couvent. Vos femmes les plus nobles sont aussi devenues d'estimables couveuses. (VIII, 92)

With these changes in the political, financial and social life of the aristocracy, the grandes dames are no longer like those of pre-Revolution days, even though their promiscuities are more or less similar, and the temptation to conceive of them as being much the same as their ancestors of the eighteenth Century must be resisted. The mental vision which one's fancy conjures up in a personal image of what those charming beings, the Duchesses or grandes dames should be, is rudely shattered by the portraiture of Balzac who observed them in real life after the Revolution had removed their privileges and the interregnum of the Empire had eroded their exclusiveness. Balzac dissipates the fanciful conceptions of those whose notions of the aristocratic ladies cloak them in an aura of delicacy, sylphide grace, unselfishness and generosity. Instead, he bares their faults and exposes their weaknesses. To get a good example of how these supposedly charming beings behave, he suggests observing them when they get together: "Pour savoir jusqu'où va la cruauté de ces charmants êtres que

nos passions grandissent tant, il faut voir les femmes entre elles".

(Modeste Mignon, VII, 609)

The mingling of the aristocratic blood with that of the bourgeoisie, although detested is also a part of the change of the times. And there is hardly a question of choice in the matter, either, as the only alternative is starvation or death. Wealth, the great equalizer, is now possessed by the bourgeoisie. The Duc de Grandlieu, the personal friend of the Monarch and one of the elite among the aristocracy, walks on foot on the boulevards of Paris, umbrella in hand. In La Peau de Chagrin Raphaël de Valentin is reduced to writing memoirs to get money to live, while, on the other hand, the legal process does not hesitate to commit Savinien de Portenduère to prison. Balzac does not weary of emphasizing these changes brought with the passage of time and manifested in les mœurs.

Mais quant à la grande dame, elle est morte avec l'entourage grandiose du dernier siècle... les duchesses aujourd'hui passent par les portes sans qu'il soit besoin de les faire élargir pour leurs paniers... Je suis encore à comprendre comment le Souverain qui voulait faire balayer sa cour par le satin ou le velours de robes ducales, n'a pas établi pour certaines familles le droit d'aînesse par d'indestructibles lois. Napoléon n'a pas deviné les effets de Code qui le rendait si fier. Cet homme en créant ses duchesses engendrait nos 'femmes comme il faut' d'aujourd'hui, le produit médiat de sa législation.  
(Autre étude de femme, VIII, 91)

The lesson seems clear that equality, more than anything else, sounded the death knell of the aristocracy. Mme Ancelot even sees changes in the physical appearance of those who once carried a great name in the aristocracy:

Je vis là aussi, le marquis de Boufflers; mais il était vieux, court, gros, mal habillé; et j'ai regretté de l'avoir vu ainsi; cela me gâtait l'image que je m'étais faite de ce charmant cavalier d'autrefois, si élégant, si spirituel et si gracieux. Il en était de même pour son beau-fils le marquis de Sabran: rien non plus en lui ne faisait valoir son esprit distingué.<sup>1</sup>

Political circumstances dictate trends in manners which, in turn, effect changes. The idle aristocracy with traditions of luxury, elegance and ease, are involved in a struggle with the other social classes long considered their inferiors, but now their political equals. As is to be expected, the bourgeoisie makes inroads into the ranks of the aristocracy until such time that, at a later date, they completely absorb this once closed caste. The Duc and Duchesse de Grandlieu are willing to accept as their son-in-law the bourgeois Lucien de Rubempré. The Vicomtesse de Grandlieu is disposed to accept into the family the grandson of a retired vermicelli maker, while Savinien de Portenduère allies himself with the bourgeois Ursule Mirouet.

Balzac's historical accuracy about these changes in the pattern of life among the aristocracy gets strong confirmation in the following conversational exchange between two gentilshommes recorded in the Press of 1829:

L'organisateur du 5 septembre, 1829, expose à son tour cette thèse, avec moins de dogmatisme et sous la forme plaisante d'un dialogue entre gentilshommes: — 'Vous, manufacturier! Monsieur le Comte! et vos

<sup>1</sup>Ancelot, Madame, Les Salons de Paris (Paris: Martin-Boursin, 1883) page 33



seize quartiers!

-----'Marquis, le blason ne suffit plus pour marier nos filles!

-----'La révolution vous gagne!

-----'Non, mais la fortune nous laisse... Vous oubliez, Marquis, que le malheur des temps a voulu que l'argent devint nécessaire pour faire respecter la naissance.

-----'Ainsi, l'abbé Coyer aura dit juste, et l'on verra de grands Seigneurs peser et mesurer dans une boutique...<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>L'Observateur (Paris, 1829) as quoted in Hervé Donnard  
Les réalités économiques et sociales dans la Comédie Humaine, p. 77

## CHAPTER VI

### LA PENSÉE AND ITS RAVAGES

Balzac's intention in depicting the aristocracy in the Etudes de Moeurs was not only to describe the individual actions of its members, their personalities, attitudes, postures and ambitions, but to interpret and explain the significance of these in relation to their own group, and the effect produced on the other social classes. His confessed aim as an artist was not only to describe but to interpret human action, and in this interpretation of the behaviour of the aristocracy which he observed, he applied his own medico-philosophic concept of man to account for their behaviour.

As Balzac expressed it in the Etudes Philosophiques, man's life is seriously affected by passions, desires, dreams, ideas, ambitions, in a word all that he calls "la pensée" which accumulates in him like a kind of fluid discharging electrical impulses which erode his vital energies, sap him and, finally, bring about his death like Raphaël de Valentin's. His vices, his immoderate desires, his hatreds, in short all his excesses constitute l'usure vitale on the human organism. In the same way that man is affected by "la pensée" which is the aggregated effect of a variety of passions in his life leading him to death and destruction in the Etudes Philosophiques, in the Etudes de Moeurs, the aristocracy is affected by

the infusion of "la pensée" manifested in its various forms. What takes place on the human organism in the Etudes Philosophiques also occurs on the social organism in the Etudes de Moeurs.

Balzac has quite clearly transposed his medico-philosophic concept of "la vie humaine" from the Etudes Philosophiques into "la vie sociale" in the Etudes de Moeurs, explaining the sociological in terms of the physiological. In the Avant-Propos, for example, he asserts that "la vie sociale ressemble à la vie humaine", for "la pensée" is "l'élément destructeur". (XV, 374) Just as man is the human organism, society is the social organism. The aristocracy, therefore, has an "être corporel" just as we pointed out earlier in Chapter III (vide p. 263) where the Faubourg Saint-Germain, the home of the Parisian aristocracy, is considered "comme un être organisé, une manière d'individu". This social organism is therefore subject to disintegration on the social level just as Raphael withers and dies on the physiological one.

In this transposition of the système of Balzac, the aristocracy is afflicted with "la pensée", the poison or cancer in the blood stream of the group which quietly undermines the foundation of the whole caste. It crumbles when the social fabric is sufficiently eroded. Like termites and rodents which labour patiently at destroying a structure, invisible but active, attacking sturdy pillars in unseen locations, it is only when the structure collapses that the destruction within the foundation and framework becomes visible. Such is the manifestation of "la pensée" on the aristocracy.

There is, however, one basic variation in the effect of "la pensée" on the social organism in the Etudes de Moeurs which departs from its normal effect on the human organism in the Etudes Philosophiques. Social and financial ruin, desolation, solitude, more than death, are shown to be the frequent consequences of "la pensée" in the Etudes de Moeurs. In the Etudes Philosophiques, death and physical ruin are the physiological consequences of the infusion of "la pensée" in the lives of individuals. For example, Raphaël de Valentin dies of tuberculosis, Balthasar Claes in La Recherche de l'absolu dies, physically worn out by his fruitless search for the absolute. Louis Lambert also dies, having first become mad due to an accumulation of "la pensée" brought about by the richness of his meditations. In the other Contes Philosophiques, Balzac's spokesman, Félix Davin, sums up the role of "la pensée":

Dans l'Adieu, l'idée du bonheur exaltée à son plus haut degré social, foudroie l'épouse... Dans le Réquisitionnaire, c'est une mère tuée par la violence du sentiment maternel... dans l'Elixir de longue vie l'idée hérédité devient meurtrière à son tour... Dans Maître Cornélius... c'est l'idée avarice tuant l'avare dans la personne du vieil argentier. (XV, 120-123)

In the Etudes de Moeurs, all passions, either individually or collectively, constitute "la pensée" which is shown to bring death sometimes, but, more often, general misfortune either on the person concerned, or on himself and those around him. In Le Père Goriot, old Goriot is obsessed with his love for his children and dies as a result of his obsession or passion, called la paternité by Balzac, but which has all the ingredients of "la pensée". Félix Grandet, on the other hand

amasses millions, but his obsession for gold and money, "la pensée", creates around him a desert of broken lives and blighted hopes. Baron Hulot in La Cousine Bette wreaks havoc in his home and on himself, and is an eloquent example of moral and physical degradation and depravity, all as a result of his sensual passions, or what Balzac would call "la pensée".

Behind these examples taken at random, one can see the tragedy of Raphaël de Valentin face to face with "la pensée". The characters in the novels of the Etudes de Moeurs create their own misfortune by the way they live, and their submission to the tyranny of their passions which act like a cancer and destroy them. The passion of Mme d'Espard or of Mme de Nucingen is for social success, just like the ambitions of Foedora, while Diane de Maufrigneuse's or Léontine de Sérisy's perpetual search is for pleasures from which they hope to derive happiness, a fruitless adventure which brings on all the consequences of "la pensée". The grandes dames all create their own misfortune by their vanities, spendthrift habits, pleasures which, allied to other passions or ambitions, constitute "la pensée", thus leading, not to death, as in the case of the characters in the Etudes Philosophiques, but to a social eclipse, a social death, solitude and anonymity.

It is in their ideas, first of all, that the cancer of "la pensée" introduced itself into the organism of the aristocracy. Its members were convinced that they were superior to other mortals as a result of their Frankish blood, a Teutonic race which subdued Gaul in the early

sixth century, and to whom the aristocrats traced their earliest origin. The case of the Marquis d'Esgrignon illustrates this belief. His full name is Charles-Marie-Angé-Carol, Marquis d'Esgrignon, or des Grignon, according to his ancient titles. His surname Carol, however, "était le nom glorieux d'un des plus puissants chefs venus jadis du nord pour conquérir et féodaliser les Gaules". (VI, 1068) He thus traces his ancestry to the conquering race and takes it for granted that the nobles descended from a race of conquerors must be superior. His passion which constitutes "la pensée" lies in his pathetic belief in his superiority, "sa race", and the "dogme de la suprématie" which he passes on to his son Victurnien. Like Raphaël's passion, that of the Marquis leads, not himself, but his son to tragedy, and this should occasion no surprise considering the "culte de la noblesse" instilled in Victurnien:

Le dogme de sa suprématie fut inculqué au comte Victurnien dès qu'une idée put lui entrer dans la cervelle. Hors le Roi, tous les seigneurs du royaume étaient ses égaux. Au dessous de la noblesse, il n'y avait pour lui que des inférieurs, des gens avec lesquels il n'avait rien de commun, envers lesquels il n'était tenu à rien, des ennemis vaincus, conquis, desquels il ne fallait faire aucun compte, dont les opinions devaient être indifférentes à un gentilhomme, et qui tous lui devaient du respect. (VI, 1068)

The same mania for la noblesse is seen in l'Interdiction.

In spite of his nobility of mind in restoring the wealth of the Jeanrenaud family whose ancestors were despoiled of their wealth by ancestors of the marquis, M. d'Espard brings up his children to believe in the superiority of the aristocrat, for Balzac specifically mentions that "il se croyait par le sang au-dessus des autres hommes". (VI, 1255) He also

discharged his educational responsibilities to his children in typical aristocratic manner: "Il avait élevé ses enfants dans ses principes, et leur avait communiqué dès le berceau la religion de sa caste". (VI, 1255) The tragic consequences of these notions in the boys:

enfantèrent chez eux une fierté royale... leurs manières en harmonie avec leurs idées et qui eussent paru belles chez des princes, blessaient tout le monde rue de la Montagne-Sainte-Geneviève". (VI, 1255)

The street in question here is the abode of the lower classes among whom the Marquis is now living, having become estranged from his wife. Poor but proud, humbled but snobbish, living among the classes populaires but refusing them equality, it is not difficult to see or to appreciate how this education of the young, "la religion de la haute naissance", develops into a passion, "la pensée", with aristocrats who ignore the egalitarian claims of the other social classes, remain wedded to the views of their ancestors and to the eighteenth Century, secreting the cancer of "la pensée" in their lives.

In Le Bal de Sceaux, the Comte de Fontaine is of a similar mould as the Marquis d'Esgrignon and the Marquis d'Espard. Although ruined by confiscations, "ce fidèle Vendéen refusa constamment les places lucratives que lui fit offrir l'Empereur Napoléon. Invariable dans sa religion aristocratique, il en avait aveuglément suivi les maximes". (II, 727) The belief in his superiority inspires a passion for his "grand nom" which, in turn, communicates itself to his daughter Emilie de Fontaine who refuses the love of the bourgeois Henri de Longueville. Not only does

she suppress her own love for him, but her culte du grand nom makes her marry her uncle the Comte de Kergarouet, an octogenarian, simply because he is an aristocrat. The conception she has of her "naissance" constitutes "la pensée".

In La femme abandonnée, the wife of a provincial aristocrat "élève mal ses filles et pense qu'elles seraient toujours assez riches de leur nom". (III, 584) Balzac is not alone, however, in pointing out this "culte de la noblesse" in the aristocracy. In Mémoires d'outre-tombe, Chateaubriand relates his father's perpetual preoccupation:

... passion dominante de mon père, passion qui fit le noeud de ma jeunesse... Monsieur mon père aurait volontiers, comme un grand terrien du moyen âge, appelé Dieu, 'le gentilhomme de là-haut', et surnomme Nicodème (le Nicodème de l'Evangile) un 'saint gentilhomme'.<sup>1</sup>

And Chateaubriand adds a few pages later as if to make sure that the reader does not lose sight of the significance of his words: "Une seule passion dominait mon père, celle de son nom".<sup>2</sup> Here, too, is confirming evidence of "la pensée" operating in an aristocratic family, as one can clearly see the "culte du grand nom".

In Chateaubriand's personal life, one also sees the tragedy of this unfortunate passion of his father. Chateaubriand's orgueil alienated even the king. According to Stenger: "Le roi ne l'aimait pas... Chateaubriand n'était pas assez courtisan: il manquait de tact; il laissait

<sup>1</sup>Chateaubriand, 11-12

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 18



tomber sur les gens, de ses lèvres méprisantes, des mots trop vifs, dont ils lui gardaient rancune".<sup>1</sup> Never satisfied, obsessed with his grand nom, unhappy, overwhelmed with debts as a result of his vanity and his "pensée égoïste", he was a tragic, lonely figure. Such are the consequences of the passion for "la noblesse".

The grandes dames are, of course, of the same proud, aristocratic species as men, but with this difference: they are even more snobbish, scornful and contemptuous of others who do not belong to their clan. The case of Mme de Portenduère and her son in Ursule Mirouet is a good example for illustrating the consequences of "la pensée" or a passion for la noblesse which she allowed to develop in her. Poor, with an only son, Savinien de Portenduère, she lives in Nemours. In the provinces, aristocratic exclusiveness is even more pronounced than in the Metropolis. When Savinien leaves Nemours for Paris, he behaves just like any other aristocratic young man whose education follows the eighteenth Century tradition: He spends all his money in a whirl of social activities and is promptly imprisoned for debts. Hasty appeals to his mother bring no result, as her relatives, the Kergarouets and the Portenduères do not come to her assistance. Doctor Minoret, her neighbour, an octogenarian, is willing to pay Savinien's debts, if he is asked. The proud Mme de Portenduère, in spite of pleadings of the Abbé Chaperon, refuses to call on the Doctor whom she labels "ce petit Minoret". She not only refuses to forget that she is a Kergarouet in order to save her son, but she even expects the

<sup>1</sup>Stenger, 87

venerable Doctor Minoret to call upon her and offer his money and services. According to her: "Mais pourquoi, sachant que j'ai besoin de lui, ne viendrait-il pas?". (VIII, 484)

The attitude of Mme de Portenduère towards the Doctor reflects the general one of the aristocracy towards those who are considered their inferiors. Doctor Minoret sums up their attitude: "Les nobles ne se croient jamais obligés par nous autres bourgeois. En les servant nous faisons notre devoir, voilà tout". (VIII, 512) Mme de Portenduère is obsessed with "la religion aristocratique" which constitutes "la pensée", for she stubbornly refuses to allow her son to marry Ursule, the ward of Doctor Minoret, even though her son is now free as a result of the personal efforts of the Doctor who not only goes to arrange the release himself, but personally arranges the liquidation of all of Savinien's debts.

Savinien is chastened by his experience in prison and realises that "les nobles ne sont plus solidaires". He decides that the best course for him to take is to marry any person whom he loves, regardless of social rank, provided, of course, she has "un million de dot et si elle est suffisamment bien élevée". (VIII, 506) In spite of the fact that his choice for a wife is the ward of the man who rescued him from prison, and having due regard to Savinien's very conservative views about his marital partner who must needs have considerable wealth apart from being well brought up, his mother will not hear of such a marriage. Notwithstanding their poverty, such an alliance in his mother's eyes

venerable Doctor Minoret to call upon her and offer his money and services. According to her: "Mais pourquoi, sachant que j'ai besoin de lui, ne viendrait-il pas?". (VIII, 484)

The attitude of Mme de Portenduère towards the Doctor reflects the general one of the aristocracy towards those who are considered their inferiors. Doctor Minoret sums up their attitude: "Les nobles ne se croient jamais obligés par nous autres bourgeois. En les servant nous faisons notre devoir, voilà tout". (VIII, 512) Mme de Portenduère is obsessed with "la religion aristocratique" which constitutes "la pensée", for she stubbornly refuses to allow her son to marry Ursule, the ward of Doctor Minoret, even though her son is now free as a result of the personal efforts of the Doctor who not only goes to arrange the release himself, but personally arranges the liquidation of all of Savinien's debts.

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would be the last dishonour on a proud name. Savinien cannot believe his ears as he questions his mother further:

Si j'aimais une jeune personne comme par exemple la pupille de notre voisin, la petite Ursule, vous vous opposeriez donc à mon mariage?  
 ----- Tant que je vivrai, dit-elle! Après ma mort, tu seras seul responsable de l'honneur et du sang des Portenduère et du Kergarouet.  
 ----- Ainsi, vous me laisseriez mourir de faim et de désespoir pour une chimère qui ne devient aujourd'hui une réalité que par le lustre de la fortune. (VIII, 506)

Mme de Portenduère is wedded to an idea, a "chimère" to use her son's word. For her, there has been no Revolution. Living quietly in the Provinces, she still has her consuming passion, for Savinien "connaissait la rigidité des principes de sa mère, son culte de l'honneur, sa loyauté, sa foi dans la noblesse". (VIII, 501) There is no lack of independent historical evidence to support Balzac on this point. Among those which can be cited to confirm Balzac's assertions, the case of the Duchesse de Luynes mentioned by Jules Bertaut may be quoted as evidence of the stubborn passion for "la noblesse" of the old aristocracy:

Elle n'avait jamais voulu changer quoi que ce fût à son train de vie depuis 1789. Elle avait conservé strictement les modes de l'ancien régime et portait chez elle le fichu, le petit bonnet et les amples robes. Elle parlait de Louis XVI, de la Cour, de la société, comme si la tourmente révolutionnaire n'avait jamais eu lieu: elle recevait les mêmes amis que jadis, dans le même cadre et avec un personnel domestique aussi nombreux.<sup>1</sup>

Just like the aristocrats described by Bertaut of whom the Duchesse de Luynes is but one typical example, Mme de Portenduère is

<sup>1</sup>Bertaut, Jules, p. 97

responsible for her son's misfortune on account of her outmoded ideals. Trying to plead Savinien's case for marriage with Ursule, the Abbé Chaperon tells her in effect that she is a living anachronism when he says: "Espérons que votre cher fils vous apprendra ce qui se passe à Paris en fait d'alliance". (VIII, 491) She not only refuses to heed the sign of the times, but her plans for restoring the importance of the aristocracy are short-sighted, if not stupid: "Rabaisser la richesse, c'était dans les idées de madame de Portenduère élever la Noblesse et ôter toute son importance à la Bourgeoisie". (VIII, 510) It is not difficult to imagine that there must have been many aristocrats who shared the sentiments of Mme de Portenduère.

Blame for Savinien's plight must be laid squarely at the door of his mother and her passion. When he arrives in Paris for the first time, he binds himself to another man's wife, as he becomes "attaché au char de madame de Sérisy". (VIII, 477) Thereafter, he goes from 'pillar to post', as he falls in love with yet another married woman. "Sans oser quitter madame de Sérisy, le pauvre enfant devint amoureux de la belle comtesse de Kergarouet". (VIII, 477-478) The lady in question this time is none other than the former Emilie de Fontaine who is herself a victim of her aristocratic education and the "religion aristocratique" of her father. (vide p. 368) The consequences of the crimes of parents, moral or otherwise, are frequently visited on the heads of their children. Such are the effects of "la pensée".

In Modeste Mignon, Mlle d'Hérouville is similarly wedded to

"la religion aristocratique". She refuses to consent to the marriage of her nephew, the Duke, with someone who is not of aristocratic birth. Balzac pities the Duke and blames the antiquated notions of these great ladies:

Mademoiselle d'Hérouville eut des prétensions énormes, en désaccord avec l'esprit du siècle, car les grands noms sans argent ne pouvaient guère trouver de riches héritières dans la haute noblesse française, déjà bien embarrassées d'enrichir ses fils ruinés par le partage égal des biens. Pour marier avantageusement le jeune duc d'Hérouville, il aurait fallu caresser les grandes maisons de Banque, et la hautaine fille d'Hérouville les froissa toutes par des mots sanglants. (VII, 507)

The ideas and passions of the aristocracy explain their actions. Their exclusiveness and their snobbishness all originate from their beliefs that they are a master race. Their behaviour, therefore, is consistent with their notions. In Besançon, for example, there is a physical separation maintained between the aristocracy and the other classes, just as in Paris the Faubourg Saint-Germain is a separate geographic area. Balzac describes the exclusiveness of the clan in Besançon in the following way:

Jamais un étranger, un intrus ne s'est glissé dans ces maisons, et il a fallu, pour y faire recevoir des colonels ou des officiers titrés appartenant aux meilleures familles de France, quand ils en trouvaient dans la garnison, des efforts de diplomatie que le prince de Talleyrand eût été fort heureux de connaître pour s'en servir dans un congrès. (Albert Savarus, VIII, 669)

This exclusiveness, typical of the aristocracy, gives rise to enmity and hatred in the other social classes. In Les Illusions Perdues, for example, the hatred in Angoulême is open just as the physical division

of the area is clearly demarcated between the old part of Angoulême where the aristocrats live and L'Houmeau, the home of the Bourgeoisie:

L'Houmeau, malgré son active et croissante puissance, ne fut qu'une annexe d'Angoulême. En haut la Noblesse et le Pouvoir, en bas le Commerce et l'Argent; deux zones sociales constamment ennemis en tous lieux; aussi est-il difficile de deviner qui des deux villes hait le plus sa rivale... Il est facile de concevoir combien l'esprit de caste influe sur les sentiments qui divisent Angoulême et l'Houmeau. (IV, 347)

Hatred and rivalries are the natural result of this physical and social division.

In spite of this exclusiveness, however, on the part of the aristocracy in Angoulême, Lucien Chardon, as a result of his astonishing good looks, manages to penetrate into the inner sanctum of the group and be invited into the home of Anaïs de Bargeton. Anaïs, somewhat of a dilettante in tastes, and encouraged by the poetic gifts of Lucien as well as by his handsome looks, defies the clan and receives Lucien into her home whenever he calls. Naïs' friends are quite contemptuous of Lucien when they meet him socially. They even called Mme de Bargeton Naïs, an intimate form of the Christian name Anaïs, a matter which Lucien dares not imitate, however, even though he is in favour with Anaïs: "Les intimes de ce clan... s'appelaient, hommes et femmes, par leurs petit noms, dernière nuance inventée pour mettre une distinction au coeur de l'aristocratie angoumoisine". (IV, 404)

Lucien continues to visit the Bargeton home, but he becomes more and more aware of the vast condescension with which he was favoured by the friends of Mme de Bargeton. He was called "un être sans conséquence". (IV,

404) When he visited the lady privately and one of the clan happened to pay a visit at the same time, he was met with an overwhelming graciousness that well-bred people often use towards their inferiors. Lucien thought them kind in the beginning, but soon discovered "le sentiment d'où procédaient ces fallacieux égards". (IV, 403) Their specious amiability was due to their scorn.

Stendhal records the same habit of the aristocrats to express contempt when Julien Sorel is given the following warning about the clan: "Vous n'avez pas l'idée de ce mépris là. Il se montrera par des compliments exagérés".<sup>1</sup> In Lucien Chardon's case, he detected the patronizing airs of the aristocrats and the "accablante politesse dont use les gens comme il faut avec leurs inférieurs". (IV, 403) They stirred his gall and confirmed him in his bitter republicanism. Such are the consequences of the snobbery of the aristocracy on those who must endure their insolence.

What happens to Lucien happens to all those who are not of the clan and who must interact with the aristocracy. The studied insolence and open contempt of the clan for their supposed inferiors, fill the pages of the Comédie Humaine. In Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes, Lucien, now Lucien de Rubempré, courting Clothilde De Grandlieu, had never been invited to dine with the young lady's parents, an action which would have constituted acceptance of him as an equal. Worse still is the cleverly snobbish attitude of Clothilde's father who makes Lucien keep his distance by calling him "Le sire de Rubempré. Cette nuance,

<sup>1</sup>Stendhal, Le Rouge et le Noir, p. 442



aperçue par toute la société de ce salon, causait de vives blessures à l'amour-propre de Lucien, qui s'y sentait seulement toléré". (V, 127)

While Lucien is touched to the quick by the aristocratic nuances in the speech and manner which he interprets as contempt, the grandes dames are not so delicate in disguising their feelings, and many do not scruple to show their open contempt in their words, facial expressions and manner. In Modeste Mignon, at the invitation of the Duc d'Hérouville, Modeste goes to the Château de Rosebray to take part in the chase proposed by the Duc d'Hérouville and gets a frigid reception.

Modeste se serait traversé le doigt d'une aiguille en mettant la main sur une pelote, elle n'aurait pas été si vivement atteinte qu'elle le fut par le coup d'oeil glacial, hautain, méprisant que lui jeta la Duchesse de Chaulieu. (VII, 609)

In Le Père Goriot, while Eugène de Rastignac is admiring the beauty of Delphine de Nucingen, Mme de Beauséant is busy pointing to the lady's bourgeois origin: "Voyez comment elle prend et quitte son lorgnon! Le Goriot perce dans tous ses mouvements". (IV, 149) Louise de Chaulieu expresses in plain words what the other grandes dames feel but rarely so eloquently verbalize: "Quels que soient le génie et les qualités d'un bourgeois ou d'un homme anobli, je n'ai pas dans le sang une seule goutte pour eux". (Mémoires, VI, 61)

While the consequences of the culte de la noblesse are many and varied, they all converge to bring misfortune on the clan. And this should occasion no surprise as the "culte" is considered an "excès", a passion and, consequently, "la pensée". Refusal to marry with the

bourgeoisie while intermarrying even within their own families, leads to hostility and enmity on the one hand, and decadence on the other. When, for example, Du Croisier's offer of marriage proposed to Armande d'Esgrignon though their loyal Notary Chesnel is indignantly refused by the lady concerned, "Du Croisier, homme haineux et capable de couvrir une vengeance pendant vingt ans, conçut pour le notaire et pour la famille d'Esgrignon, une de ces haines sourdes et capitales, comme il s'en rencontre en province". (II, 1073)

As we mentioned earlier, Lucien Chardon is confirmed in his Republicanism while conceiving a hatred for the aristocracy. Balzac therefore explains through the private lives of individuals, how the attitude of the aristocracy alienated those not belonging to their social class. The numberless snubs, undisguised contempt and scorn meted out, add fuel to the anger of people, for as Balzac says, with justice, wounds made by the tongue or eyes never heal: "Sachez-le bien; de toutes les blessures, celles que font la langue et l'oeil sont incurables." (II, 1065)

Marriage and a preoccupation with la noblesse are not the only two passions of the aristocracy which constitute "la pensée". The search for money is a never ending aristocratic occupation in the Provinces as well as in Paris. With this "chasse à l'or" must also be coupled the quest of the grandes dames in Paris for "le plaisir" from which they hope to derive happiness or satisfy their vanities.

According to Balzac, one of the dominating passions of the clan, if not, perhaps, the most dominating, was the lust for money, not as an

end in itself, but as a means of gratifying other passions. In the case of the grandes dames, their other passions were egoism, "la fureur d'être reine", and, of course, vanity as expressed in luxurious apartments and châteaux, elegance in dress, social splendour, etc. In short, while the desire for money was consuming their thoughts and vanity and egoism devouring their hearts, idleness and pleasures were sapping their vitality and dissipating their energies.

In Le code des gens honnêtes, Balzac mentions not only the quest of the coin, but indicates some of the consequences which ensue therefrom:

L'argent par le temps qui court, donne la considération, les amis, le succès, les talents, l'esprit même: ce doux métal doit donc être l'objet constant de l'amour et de la sollicitude des mortels de tout âge, de toute condition. Mais cet argent, source de tous les plaisirs, est aussi le but de toutes les tentatives. (XIV, 59)

The origin of this passion for money in the 19th century aristocrat goes back to his problems and mode of life in the previous century. Taine relates the extraordinary extravagance of the aristocrats of the Ancien Régime. The two Villemer brothers, for example, built country cottages costing from 500,000 to 600,000 livres. One of them had "40 chevaux pour monter quelquefois à cheval au bois de Boulogne".<sup>1</sup> One lady whom the Marquis de Mirabeau saw with hired horses, replied to his astonishment as follows: "Ce n'est pas qu'il n'y en ait 70 dans nos écuries, mais il n'y en ait point qui ait pu aller aujourd'hui".<sup>2</sup> Taine wonders

<sup>1</sup>Taine , 168

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 167

where the pleasures of the aristocrats would be if they studied the price of things. The pleasures of these people would cease if they were reasonable. Even more important, how can the exquisite be reached if one grudges money? If the aristocrats reasoned in this way as seemed likely, it explains their extraordinary extravagances recorded by Balzac and their even more extraordinary debts. If they spend more than they earn, it is not difficult to see what consequences will ensue.

P. de Sagnac notes that the aristocrat was spending more than he was earning, as his properties were shrinking in size and, consequently, in income, while his extravagance and his debts were increasing. In addition, absenteeism from the land showed that the ancient function of the original nobles in charge of his land and overseeing his property had vanished:

L'absentéisme des grands propriétaires, la consommation de leurs revenus à Paris, à Versailles et dans les villes, ou en de splendides résidences, la baisse de la rente foncière dans les années difficiles, l'épuisement du sol qui ne reçoit pas les engrais nécessaires, l'abandon de vastes étendues à la friche, n'ont cessé d'être signalés par les physiocrates, comme Mirabeau, 'L'Ami des hommes' et par Lavoisier et aussi par Arthur Young, dont on sait l'indignation devant les landes désertiques du prince de Soubise et de ses pareils. Dans ces conditions, sauf les exceptions des domaines des grands Seigneurs agronomes, comme le duc de Liancourt, le rendement des terres possédées par des nobles tend à baisser, alors que la population augmente. Viennent de mauvaises récoltes, et la terre de France ne pourra plus nourrir son peuple. La Noblesse ne remplit donc plus le rôle foncier qui fut le sien dès l'origine de la monarchie.<sup>1</sup>

The Revolution supervened and, with it, came confiscation of the great Châteaux and sale of large tracts of lands belonging to the aristo-

<sup>1</sup>P. de Sagnac, pages 218-219

cracy. When many of the Emigrés returned to France during the Empire, Henri Carré relates that they were dissatisfied almost to a man with the properties restored to them. A vast majority were considerably poorer than they were during the Ancien Régime. According to Henri Carré: "On disait qu'environ 40,000 étaient dépourvues de moyens d'existence: des parents et des amis en recueillaient quelques-uns".<sup>1</sup> The fact of the matter is that because the lands of the clan in the provinces were less costly than those in Paris, the lands of the provincial aristocracy were more easily sold. Once these small holdings in the country were sold to the peasantry, for example, it was almost impossible to get them back. As far as the Bourgeois is concerned, he esteems himself fortunate to possess and keep lands formerly held by the aristocracy, and will not therefore easily part with them. Deprived of their homes in the provinces, many of the provincial aristocracy drifted into the cities to swell the ranks there of the idle and the unemployed.

To compensate those who suffered loss of property during and after the Revolution, the Government voted a large sum of money to pay those whose lands were unrecoverable. This windfall satisfied few and dissatisfied many. Money was still a scarce commodity, but many of the clan, though poorer as a result of the Revolution, were still determined to live just as they did during the previous century. Such were the ambitions of the grandes dames who considered it in the nature of things for them to be unreasonable and spendthrift in financial matters.

<sup>1</sup>Carré, Henri, page 586

There are two consequences which eventuated from this quest for money. The grandes dames with nothing to do with their time, wished to have the means to keep up their social position which was all important to them. Secondly, the heartlessness and cruelty of the grandes dames were a direct result of their social ambitions, compounded by the fact that money was also a scarce commodity. The case of the Marquise d'Espard is but one eloquent example. The d'Esgrignons and the Portenduères, young men from the provinces who mortgage their future and become overwhelmed in debt in order that the vanities of these ladies may be satisfied, provide an example of the side effects of the consequences of the "chasse à l'or" of the grandes dames. On the other hand, there are those who have their lovers but must visit the money lender or the gaming house to continue an old, aristocratic vice, or to pay for the privilege of keeping company with the clan.

Money is a sine qua non for the old as well as the new aristocracy. The new nobility needs money to be accepted by the old as we pointed out earlier in the cases of Lucien de Rubempré and Ernest de Restaud who must be very wealthy to be considered as possible sons-in-law by the two branches of the Grandlieu family. On the other hand, the old aristocrat resents his poverty even more because it places him on an equal footing with the lower classes when he feels the need to parade his superiority by his carriages, his horses, his servants and his châteaux.

As far as the grandes dames are concerned, vanity, perhaps, more than anything else, inspired their passion for money. Balzac defines

vanity as follows:

Comme la vanité n'est que l'art de s'endimancher tous les jours, chaque homme a senti la nécessité d'avoir comme un échantillon de sa puissance, un signe chargé d'instruire les passants de la place où il penche sur le grand mât de cocagne au sommet duquel les rois font leurs exercices. Et c'est ainsi que les armoiries, les livrées, les chaperons, les cheveux longs, les girouettes, les talons rongés, les mitres, les colombiers, le carreau à l'église et l'encens par le nez, les particules, les rubans, les diadèmes, les mouches, le rouge, les couronnes, les souliers à la poulaine, les mortiers, les simarres, le menu-vair, les éperons, etc., etc., étaient successivement devenus des signes matériels du plus ou moins de repos qu'un homme pouvait prendre. (XIV, 617-618)

Mme d'Espard's financial ambitions are inspired by her social pretensions, for Balzac makes it plain that her conduct was "inspirée par sa passion dominante, la vanité, les conquêtes et les plaisirs auxquels tiennent tant de femmes". (VI, 1230) Among her salon guests are de Marsay, de Ronquerolles, de Montriveau, de la Roche-Hugon, de Sérizy and a host of others, identified by name, which Balzac enumerates to show the glittering company kept by the Marquise, the entertainment of whom would require considerable financial resources. Where was all this money to come from? She cleverly plans to dispose of her husband in order to have the income from his estates. And there should be no surprise at her scheme to get money, for her debts were alarming.

When Popinot goes to visit her to get further details about her application for an interdiction which she has made, he sees the luxury of her apartments, "La loge, la cour, les écuries, les dispositions de cette demeure, les fleurs qui garnissaient l'escalier, l'exquise propreté des rampes, des murs, des tapis, et il compte les valets". (VI, 1231)

Popinot gets the Marquise to admit in an indirect way that the cost of maintaining such a lavish household is enormous, and Balzac himself informs the reader that "l'hôtel d'Espard exigeait de nombreux domestiques, le train de la marquise était considérable". (VI, 1231) Restignac, the frequent visitor of the Marquise advises Popinot that "un train pareil demande pour l'écurie, pour l'entretien des voitures et l'habillement des gens, entre quinze et seize mille francs". (VI, 1240) Added to this expense are the furnishings which cost "cent mille francs". Include also "la table, les gages des gens, les grosses dépenses de maison" which come to about 60,000 a year. These figures, based on the cost of the Jeanrenaud's household which the Marquise alleges her husband is bearing, are taken as a guide by Popinot to estimate the expenses and debts of the Marquise's own household which must certainly be greater. According to the Judge: "S'ils (les Jeanrenaud) dépensent soixante mille francs, dit le juge, combien dépensez-vous donc?". (VI, 1240)

In Gobseck, the extravagance of the Comtesse de Restaud is amply revealed. When the money-lender receives a pro-note presented by Maxime de Trailles and counter signed by the Countess, he goes to visit her to satisfy his curiosity regarding the circumstances why a woman of the Comtesse's social position would attach her signature to such a document when consequences, embarrassing to her, can ensue. What he discovers is significant. He sees that vanity is the passion which reduces the aristocracy to debt, suffering and misery: "Je trouvai dans la cour une nuée



de valets qui brossaient leurs livrées, ciraient leurs bottes ou nettoyaient de somptueux équipages. Voilà me dis-je, ce qui amène ces gens-là chez moi". (VI, 1342)

Balzac is right when he blames the mode of life of the aristocrats, their luxury, their extravagance, all inconsistent with their financial resources, but which are the main reasons for their indebtedness, poverty and misfortunes. On the question of wages, Jules Bertaut gives some idea of the sums paid the employees of the aristocrats "à l'année"<sup>1</sup>

L'homme d'affaires	6,000
Le commis sous ses ordres	1,500
Le piqueur (premier cocher)	2,500
2 palefréniers à 500 chacun	1,000
Le cuisinier	2,500
2 aides de cuisines à 300 l'un	600
1 laveur de vaisselle	200
La lingère	800
2 ouvrières sous ses ordres à 250 l'une	500
Le jardinier	2,000
Le maître d'hôtel	2,500
3 valets de pied à 500 l'un	1,500
Le groom	300
La femme de charge	1,000
La première femme de charge	800
La deuxième femme de charge	800
Le valet de chambre	1,800

There are many omissions in this list which Bertaut asserts Tony Révillon has drawn up. According to Bertaut, there is no mention of "le ou les suisses", "les coureurs de villes", "le maître à danser", "le professeur d'équitation" and "le maître d'armes". When the salaries or wages of these persons are taken into account, the amount is very high indeed. According to Bertaut: "Une maison montée avec cette

<sup>1</sup>Bertaut, Jules, pgs. 43-44

profusion de domestiques suppose une fortune considérable: Tony Révillon l'estime au moins à 300,000 francs de rente"<sup>1</sup>

As evidence of his importance, the aristocrat would employ most of the above personnel, if not all, for as Balzac remarked in his definition of vanity, the need was felt to "instruire les passants de la place où il penche sur le grand mât de cocagne au sommet duquel les rois font leurs exercices". (vide page 383) The expenses mentioned above by Bertaut are for wages only. There were stables to maintain, food to be supplied for dozens of horses, uniforms for servants and lackeys, etc. On the question of the personal expenses of the grandes dames, some idea may be obtained from the fact that the persons frequently employed to help these ladies maintain their elegance and beauty are the couturières whose bills are usually extraordinary. Then there are the tailleur de corsets, the cordonnier de l'Opéra, the gantier, the lingère, modiste, the sellier, and a host of other personnel. That symbolic figure and social analyst Vautrin mentions to Rastignac the expenses incurred by vanity which apply equally well to men as to women:

Si vous voulez faire figure à Paris il vous faut trois chevaux et un tilbury pour le matin, un coupé pour le soir, en tout neuf mille francs pour le véhicule. Vous seriez indigne de votre destinée si vous ne dépensiez que trois mille francs chez votre tailleur, six cents francs chez le parfumeur, cent écus chez le bottier, cent écus chez le chapelier. Quant à votre blanchisseuse, elle vous coûtera mille francs. Les jeunes à la mode ne peuvent se dispenser d'être très-fort sur l'article du linge: n'est-ce pas ce qu'on examine le plus souvent en eux? L'amour et l'église veulent de belles nappes sur leurs autels. Nous sommes à quatorze mille. Je ne vous parle pas de ce que vous perdez au jeu, en paris, en présents; il est impossible de ne pas compter pour deux mille francs l'argent de

<sup>1</sup>Bertaut, Jules, pgs. 43-44

poche. Ajoutez à ces nécessités premières, trois cents louis pour la pâtée, mille francs pour la niche... J'oublie le valet de chambre et le groom. (Le Père Goriot, IV, 180)

The wages mentioned by Vautrin have been pointed out already, and the cost involved is enormous.

As we indicated earlier, the aristocrats were no longer the rich Seigneurs and Grandes Dames of the previous Century, and by persisting in their expenses and their extravagance, vanity or "la pensée" helped to lead to their ultimate ruin. When Gobseck sees the horses and the lackeys at the home of the Comtesse and understands the reason why the aristocrats are reduced to frequent visits to the moneylender, the whole tragedy of a social class bent on preserving a façade of wealth and luxury while misery and poverty lurk within the gilded halls of their châteaux, is patiently revealed.

Apponyi supports Balzac when he discloses that many of the grandes dames of the Restoration were poor and indebted, even though some were still surrounded by luxury. For many however, there was crushing poverty:

Il n'a presque une famille de notre connaissance, dit Apponyi, qui n'ait fait des pertes très sensibles de fortune par la suppression des charges qu'elle avait toutes. Toutes ces belles dames qui vivaient dans le plus grand luxe, entourées d'hommages et de richesses, ont aujourd'hui à peine de quoi vivre... Et il cite la duchesse d'Esclignac 'qui n'a que des dettes, des enfants, un mari désordonné', la duchesse de Guiche, 'une de nos grandes élégantes, entourée maintenant d'un tas de nippes, d'inutilités pour lesquelles personne ne lui donnera un sou. Elle cherche à vendre ses diamants'. M. et Mme d'Astorg 'qui ont tout perdu: il ne leur reste que des dettes et des enfants'.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Bertaut, Jules. p. 204

Money is the alpha and the omega for the grandes dames, as their ambitions cannot be satisfied without it. Gobseck, that solitary figure in the Comédie Humaine sums up the role of money for the grandes dames when he remarks in Gobseck: "La vanité ne se satisfait que par des flots d'or". (VI, 1337)

To the evil of "la pensée" manifesting itself in the quest for money must be added "la chasse au plaisir" which also acts like a cancer or blight on the lives of the grandes dames. The social situation of the grandes dames, was such that they were confined to social occupations such as adorning the ballrooms and decorating the salons where they reigned as "constellations", "dées" or "reines". Seeking to find happiness, they pursue pleasures, and discover to their cost that unhappiness, not happiness, is the only result. Diane de Maufrigneuse explains to the Marquise d'Espard that behind her escapades was this never ending search for happiness: "Mais à travers tant d'aventures, je le sens, je n'ai pas connu le bonheur. J'ai fait bien des folies, mais elles avaient un but, et le but se reculait à mesure que j'avançais". (VIII, 275)

Pleasure is like wine, it flatters to deceive. Those who devote their lives to it, regardless of their intentions, subject themselves to a tyranny which is inflexible. Balzac gives a physiological explanation of the effect of pleasure on the organism when he asserts in la fille aux yeux d'or that it is like certain medical substances; to constantly obtain the same effect, it becomes necessary to double the dose, and this is the beginning of the road to ruin and disaster. He therefore chastises

the aristocracy for the "chasse au plaisir":

Mais abordons les grands salons aérés et dorés, les hôtels à jardins, le monde riche, oisif, heureux, renté. Les figures y sont étiolées et rongées par la vanité. Là rien de réel. Chercher le plaisir, n'est-ce pas trouver l'ennui?... N'étant occupés qu'à se fabriquer de la joie, ils ont promptement abusé de leurs sens, comme l'ouvrier abuse de l'eau-de-vie. Le plaisir est comme certaines substances médicales: pour obtenir constamment les mêmes effets, il faut doubler les doses, et la mort ou l'abrutissement est contenu dans la dernière. (I, 805)

To illustrate the consequences which ensue from this "chasse au plaisir", the case of the Comtesse de Restaud may be cited. When Gobseck goes to her home for the first time, he is informed that she is asleep and will only be awake at mid-day. When he enquires whether the Countess is ill, a supposition which he believes will explain this late rising, he gets an answer which is quite common in aristocratic circles: "Non, monsieur, mais elle est rentrée du bal à trois heures". (VI, 119)

When the money-lender returns at the stroke of mid-day, he finds the Countess barely up. Admitted to her bedroom, he finds 'confusion worse confounded', as the bedroom is in complete disarray, just as it was left after the departure of the Countess for a ball. The Countess is now numb from the pleasures of the previous night's activities. Stockings, dress, garters, gloves, girdle are lying pell-mell about the room. This is the scene which greets the money-lender at mid-day, an hour when honest tradesmen and industrious men of commerce are long at work earning their livelihood. Balzac shows the consequences of this life of dissipation on the features of the Countess:

La figure de la Comtesse ressemblait à cette chambre parsemée des débris d'une fête... ces vestiges d'un amour foudroyé par le remords, cette image d'une vie de dissipation, de luxe et de bruit, trahissaient des efforts de Tantale pour embrasser de fuyants plaisirs. Quelques rougeurs semées sur le visage de la jeune femme attestaient la finesse de sa peau: mais ses traits étaient comme grossis, et le cercle brun qui se dessinait sous ses yeux semblait être plus fortement marqué qu'à l'ordinaire. (VI, 1341)

The Countess secreted the poison of "la pensée" into her life when she married into the aristocracy and resolved to live like a grande dame. Maxime de Trailles, the lover of the Countess, adds his quota to the lady's misfortunes by his gambling and his debts. Her diamonds which go to Gobseck are but a symbol of her plight.

But, perhaps, the most serious consequence which arises from the various ambitions and passions of the Countess, is the death of her husband, the Comte de Restaud, who discovered that he was not the father of all his children who bore his name. Misery, suffering and despair carry the Count to an early grave, all on account of "la pensée" in his wife. Balzac describes him as a wasted, emaciated figure, the victim of his wife's passions: "Le chagrin éteignait tous les sentiments humains en cet homme, à peine âgé de cinquante ans que tout Paris avait connu si brillant et si heureux". (VI, 1378) Just as vanity and the quest for pleasures on the part of his daughters bring about Goriot's early death, the Count de Restaud suffers a similar fate. Such are some of the consequences of "la pensée" on the lives of others.

The case of the Comtesse de Restaud is symbolic of the consequences which ensue when a class of women, for want of occupations, dedicated themselves to imitating their ancestors and competing among

themselves in the salons and ballrooms. True, they were helped to preserve this aristocratic tradition by men, almost as idle, and who, according to Louise de Macumer,

roucoulent des phrases d'amour ou se contentent de l'exprimer en regards envieux. Vraiment, il y a dans ce concert de désirs et d'admiration une si constante satisfaction de la vanité, que maintenant je comprends les dépenses excessives que font les femmes pour jouir de ces frêles et passagers avantages. (VI, 193)

Boredom also compounds the problem and partly explains "la chasse au plaisir", as the ladies know not what to do with their lives. The anguish of Mathilde de la Mole who cannot find happiness is the same as the lament of Diane de Maufrigneuse to the Marquise d'Espard. (vide page 38) According to Mathilde: "Quels avantages le sort ne m'a-t-il donnés: illustration, fortune, jeunesse! hélas! tout, excepté le bonheur".<sup>1</sup>

Mme de Beauséant, on the other hand, is a different kind of victim of "la pensée" when she creates her own misfortune by the visions of happiness which she imagines will result in her liaison with d'Ajuda-Pinto. A prisoner of her rêves, she ignores plain common sense when she entertains every hope that the relationship between herself and the dashing Portuguese will continue forever. Blind to the treachery of Miguel as a result of her ambitions, her feelings, her hopes, in short, "la pensée", misfortune finally overtakes her as reality reasserts itself in her life when the unmarried d'Ajuda sees an alliance with an unmarried and wealthy Mlle de Rochefide. Stupidity, caused by the tyranny of her feelings, is the cause of her unhappiness in this episode as well as that

<sup>1</sup>Stendhal, Le Rouge et le Noir, p. 492

involving Gaston de Nueil when she retires to Normandy.

For Léontine de Sérisy, as for Diane de Maufrigneuse, social success, vanity, a passion for Lucien de Rubempré constitute "la pensée". For the Comtesse Ferraud, "la pensée" takes the form of a hard and cruel egoism which leads to the ultimate ruin of Colonel Chabert. Egoism has its victims just like vanity. The femmes sans coeur are all egoists, and the suffering of others is caused by their égoïsme or "la pensée". In le Contrat de mariage, Mme Evangélista de Casa-Réal and her daughter Natalie, just like the Comtesse Ferraud, behave in a heartless manner towards Paul de Manerville. The consequences of "la pensée" in the grandes dames therefore take a variety of forms, but which, taken collectively, lead to the disintegration of the group as a whole. To "la pensée" of individualism within the family and the aristocratic clan must be added that which is manifested in the private lives of individuals. The disintegration begun in the family is continued at the social level with serious, tragic consequences for a social class which ceased to have any moral fibre, wealth, occupations or economic importance to permit it to survive into the second half of the nineteenth Century.

In La Peau de Chagrin, Balzac identifies two kinds of "misères" that arising from poverty and that from luxury. In a moment of rare courage, Raphaël de Valentin speaks about his poverty to Foedora:

Il y a deux misères, madame: celle qui va par les rues effrontément en haillons, qui, sans le savoir, recommence Diogène, se nourrissant de peu, réduisant la vie au simple; heureuse plus que la richesse peut-être, insouciant du moins, elle prend le monde là où les puissants n'en veulent plus. Puis la misère du luxe, une misère espagnole, qui cache la mendicité



sous un titre: fière, emplumée, cette misère en gilet blanc, en gants jaunes, à des carrosses, et perd une fortune faite d'un centime. L'une est la misère du peuple; l'autre celle des escrocs, des rois et des gens de talent. (VII, 1127)

The aristocracy belongs to the second category, and Raphaël is right that behind the facade of wealth and luxury, of elegance and finery, are concealed poverty and misery, what Balzac calls "la misère des grandeurs des riches".

The grandes dames are the counterparts of those men "en gants jaunes" mentioned by Raphaël. The Countess de Restaud, for example, beautiful and elegantly dressed, is admired by the young men like Eugène de Rastignac. She has her carriages and her liveried servants who wait upon her pleasure. But behind this facade of splendeurs crouches la misère as Gobseck discovers when he goes to visit her: "Tout était luxe et désordre, beauté, sans harmonie. Mais déjà pour elle ou pour son adorateur, la misère, tapie là-dessous, dressait la tête et leur faisait sentir ses dents aigues". (VI, 1341)

Disunity within the family, marital unhappiness, lovers' debts to be paid, all kinds of social problems are implaceable in the toll that they take of the individual. For the Countess de Restaud, Maxime de Trailles is her evil genius, although her own social ambitions are also responsible, in large measure, for her misère. When she goes to visit Gobseck who gets her diamonds finally, Derville pities her: "Quelque terrible angoisse agitait son coeur, ses traits nobles et fiers avaient une expression convulsive, mal déguisée. Ce jeune homme (Maxime) était devenu pour elle un mauvais génie". (VI, 1358) At the end of the story in Gobseck, Balzac

continues to emphasize the unhappiness of the Countess amid her luxury. Her ferocious egoism makes her engage in a duel of wits with a husband, dying as a result of marital unhappiness. Heartless and cruel, the only concern of the Countess is to discover the whereabouts of her husband's will in order to ensure that she is not disinherited, even if this means concealing or destroying it when it is found. And as her husband remains in his room with the door closed and only hours away from his death, the Countess keeps a wakeful vigil outside his door, day and night, calmly reading the Code Civil to discover her legal, proprietary rights. The results of her passions, however, "les ravages de la pensée", are all very clear, as even her famous beauty has vanished. When Derville visits the home to interview the Count,

Elle mit sur sa figure ce masque impénétrable sous lequel les femmes du monde savent si bien cacher leurs passions. Les chagrins avaient déjà fané ce visage: les lignes merveilleuses qui en faisaient autrefois le mérite, restaient seules pour témoigner de sa beauté. (VI, 1371)

In Une fille d'Eve, Marie-Eugénie de Granville, married to Ferdinand du Tillet, is loaded with diamonds by her husband, but is wretched and unhappy because her husband's affections go to another woman. The Marquise d'Aiglemont, on the other hand, retires to Saint-Lange to expiate the misery of an unhappy marriage. Antoinette de Langeais is one of the queens of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, but her marriage no longer exists in fact though it does in law. Unhappy in love and marriage, she leads an aimless, empty, social life of vanity and hypocrisy. When love and happiness do beckon, however, in the person of Armand de Montriveau, her aristocratic

education, her rigidity of views, the power of the clan are such that she cannot yield to her feelings which would involve her immediate abdication as a society queen, but also because to do so would necessitate the abandonment of the aristocratic way of life which fashioned her into the kind of grande dame she is. When she finally compromises herself for Montriveau, the decision is too late. She gets no compensating joy or happiness. Her heartbreak is such that she retires into solitude, and dies on a lonely island in the Mediterranean.

Mme de Beauséant's life is also one of fleeting joy and lasting pain. Unhappy in her marriage, she turns to a lover but meets with disappointments and unhappiness. She does not even have the comforting reward of children to assuage her grief. Saddened by two major misfortunes in her extra-marital love life, she, too, retires from society and vanishes from sight in the Comédie Humaine.

The misères of the grandes dames are many and varied. Like Foedora, their disappearance from the social scene is also inevitable, as their social eclipse is the natural consequence of the ravages of "la pensée". The case of the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse is one of the more outstanding examples of this fact. In Les secrets de la Princesse de Cadignan, Balzac shows the final chapters of a grande dame who has disappeared socially from the aristocratic stage of fashionable life. When it is considered what part the beautiful Duchesse had played under the Restoration; how she had been one of the queens of Paris, leading a life so gay, so fashionable, so luxurious, that even "la luxueuse existence en aurait remontré peut-être

aux plus riches femmes à la mode de Londres", (VIII, 270) it was touching to see her now in a mere nutshell of a home, "son humble coquille" according to Balzac, situated in the rue de Miromesnil, not at all in the fashionable Faubourg Saint-Germain. According to Balzac:

La femme à peine servie convenablement par trente domestiques, qui possédait les plus beaux appartements de réception de Paris, les plus jolis petits appartements, qui y donna de si belles fêtes, vivait dans un appartement de cinq pièces: une antichambre, une salle à manger, un salon, une chambre à coucher et un cabinet de toilette, avec deux femmes pour tout domestique. (VII, 270)

The sins of the Duchesse are visited on her son Georges de Maufrigneuse, "beau comme Antinous, pauvre comme Job". (VIII, 270) and who lives in "un petit entresol sur la rue, composé de trois pièces délicieusement meublées". (VIII, 270) How are the mighty fallen! Even the magnificent Château in Sancerre which had belonged to her ancestors, the D'Uxelles, "la terre d'Anzy dont le magnifique château bâti par Philibert de Lormes et qui depuis cinq cents ans, appartenait à la maison D'Uxelles, (IX, 29) is sold to meet financial obligations and needs.

On the historical side, the Duchesse d'Abrantès, Balzac's friend who introduced him to so many contacts in the aristocratic world and educated him about the age of Napoleon, is a case in point to illustrate the end of a grande dame who had a passion for society while accumulating staggering debts just like the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse. Mme d'Abrantès died in poverty as Mme Ancelot relates:

J'appris depuis qu'il y avait encore eu dans les tristes moments qui précédèrent et qui suivirent cette fin cruelle, les contrastes frappants

de sa vie. A côté de suprêmes grandeurs, on y avait vu de prodigieux abaissements. Elle était morte sur un grabat, dans une mansarde; la charité royale avait dû pourvoir même un cercueil, et Chateaubriand, cette gloire de nos gloires littéraires, suivit à pied son convoi, entouré des hommes les plus illustres de notre époque.<sup>1</sup>

As for the "misère de la grandeur" of Mme d'Abrantès, Mme Ancelot

may be quoted again to show the extent of the folly of the Duchesse:

Un soir, on riait de bon coeur, et la duchesse était joyeuse entre tous; quand la conversation languissait, elle avait quelque bonne histoire bien drôle sur des femmes de la cour impériale, et jamais une verve plus intarissable n'avait fait jaillir de ses paroles de plus folles plaisanteries; on en oubliait l'heure du thé, qui se prenait d'ordinaire chez elle à onze heures. Ce soir-là, minuit avait sonné depuis longtemps, lorsqu'on s'assit autour de la table. Et, pourquoi ce long retard? C'est que, le matin même, le besoin d'argent s'était fait sentir d'une façon tellement impérieuse, que l'argenterie toute entière avait été mise en gage, et, au moment de prendre le thé, on s'était aperçu que, de petites cuillers étant de première nécessité, il fallait en aller emprunter à une amie.<sup>2</sup>

Why didn't the Duchesse postpone the soirée or abandon the idea entirely in view of her poverty? Perhaps she, like Mme de Beauséant at her final farewell ball, had to go through with the function, better to defy society rather than suffer a quiet martyrdom. She was a victim of her own desires.

The ravages of "la pensée" are seen by no less a person than Charles de Vandenesse. He recognises the writing on the wall signifying the obituary of the aristocracy when, in La femme de trente ans, he sees "les femmes les plus élégantes, les plus titrées... Ici sont les célébrités

<sup>1</sup>Ancelot, Mme, p. 122

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 91

du jour, renommées aristocratiques et littéraires. Là, des artistes, là des hommes du pouvoir". (VI, 1049) In spite of this brilliant, aristocratic gathering, he sees nothing but hypocrisy, prejudices, vices, moral and physical dégénérescence. His indictment of the clan takes the form of a catalogue of their vices which all exist because of their various passions.

He sees:

1. de petites intrigues
2. des amours mort-nés
3. des sourires qui ne disent rien
4. des dédains sans cause
5. des regards sans flamme
6. beaucoup d'esprit, mais prodigué sans but
7. that "nulle emotion n'est vraie"
8. that there are "phrases insignifiantes" and "ravissantes grimaces", and he cautions: "Ne demandez pas un sentiment dans les coeurs"
9. that there is no individuality, as "Femmes, idées, sentiments, tout se ressemble".

His judgment is a condemnation of the aristocracy: "Les individualités ont disparu. Les rangs, les esprits, les fortunes ont été nivelés, et nous avons tous pris l'habit noir comme pour mettre en deuil de la France morte. Nous n'aimons pas nos égaux". (VI, 1049-1050)

One important consequence of the ravages of "la pensée" which added to the problems of the aristocracy, is the effect which was produced on the other social classes and caused by the various passions of the clan. The search for equality by the Bourgeoisie and the classe populaire was made easier by the extravagance of the clan and the latter's realisation that an alliance with the Bourgeoisie was their only salvation. By undermining their own interests individually and as a unit, ipso facto the

aristocracy increased the importance of the Bourgeoisie and the other classes at their expense. Most important, however, their pretensions, their stiff, arrogant, snobbish attitudes, "la pensée", alienated the other groups and united them in a common opposition. Where there was mistrust of the Bourgeoisie by the peasants, to quote one example, both these classes became united to oppose the aristocracy which they regarded as their common enemy.

It must not be forgotten, too, that the vision of poverty which some members of the clan presented, did little to convince the other classes of the inferiority of the latter and the superiority of the former when money, to add to the lustre of a great aristocratic title, was the very commodity which was lacking. Balzac himself asserts in L'Interdiction that "Tout le monde refusait les privilèges de la noblesse à un noble sans argent". (VI, 1255) Not only was the clan losing "face" before the other classes by its poverty, its debts and behaviour, but the lines of opposition, of a struggle of class versus class, were clearly drawn and rigidly pursued between the clan, the "haves", and the other classes, the "have nots", and thus symbolising for Balzac an ancient struggle, "cette vieille lutte des patriciens contre les plébéiens". (Oeuvres Diverses, XIV, 1276)

Balzac is right. Mme de Beauséant who is considered by Félicien Marceau to be a different breed of grande dame from the others is, however, every bit as snobbish an aristocrat as one could find in the Comédie Humaine. Her treatment of Delphine de Nucingen is but one example of this. Mme de Langeais is no less contemptuous of the plébéiens when, for example, she

tramples the name of Goriot and is even snobbish and frigid towards Eugène de Restignac. Louise de Macumer cannot bring herself to appreciate the merits or virtues of an author of non-aristocratic birth, even though he may be outstanding in his art. These ideas, rigidly held and translated into action by the grandes dames, earn the enmity and opposition of men like Du Croisier who quietly bide their time until they can wreak their own vengeance. The class struggle is therefore very much in evidence here, as the aristocracy despises the Bourgeoisie, and Balzac specifically mentions the hatred of the Bourgeoisie for the Aristocracy, "des haines de maison à maison, entre femmes bourgeoises et nobles, qui durent jusqu'à la mort, et grandissent encore les fossés infranchissables par lesquels les deux sociétés sont séparées". (Les Illusions Perdues, VIII, 669)

Leaving the Bourgeoisie to go the Peasantry, there is the same hostility towards the Aristocracy which is symbolized in the remarks of old Fourchon, a peasant in Les Paysans: "Vous voulez rester les maîtres, nous serons toujours ennemis aujourd'hui comme il y a trente ans. Vous avez tout, nous n'avons rien. Vous ne pouvez pas encore prétendre à notre amitié". (III, 1004-1005)

The hatred of Du Croisier in Le Cabinet des Antiques, the confessed hostility of the peasant Fourchon are symbolic of the class struggle and the adversaries of the Aristocracy. The termites which constitute "la pensée" within the foundation of the clan and destroy it are "l'individualisme" or the doctrine of "chacun pour soi", disunity, the pursuit of money and pleasures, egoism, blind, inveterate prejudices.



all kinds of ambitions, desires, dreams which collectively destroy the influence of the class, humble its pride and disperse its members who later vanish into the Bourgeoisie.

Torn by internal dissensions, each grande dame is shown to be seeking her own individual happiness and finding, instead, suffering, poverty, debts, mésalliances with other social classes, an end to all their privileges, sale of their châteaux, the outward manifestation of their self-conceit. In short, ruin and desolation on the social level, a social death, just as Raphaël de Valentin is face to face with physical death in La Peau de Chagrin. Here then lies the real symbolic significance of the shrinking peau de chagrin, the slow but ceaseless disintegration of a caste at its own hand, just as Raphaël is the architect of his own demise. The influence of La Peau de Chagrin traverses the length and breadth of the Etudes de Moeurs. Philarette Chasles spoke for Balzac when he said: "Dans ce livre, il y a toute une époque". (XV, 382)

## CONCLUSION

The history of French manners, "l'histoire oubliée par tant d'historiens" (XV, 372) which Balzac set himself the task of writing, is contained in the Etudes de Moeurs, and we have already shown in Chapter I (vide page 33 et seq.) where Balzac was not only a close observer of his times, but that he carefully and faithfully copied what he saw. As far as the grandes dames are concerned, the Etudes de Moeurs attempt not only to describe the actions of persons whom Balzac was observing in real life, to report the faits accomplis in novel after novel, but in these studies the author also attempted to explain why these ladies acted as they did, what effect was made on the group as a whole by their behaviour, and what consequences eventuated therefrom. Each volume is an attempt to pay off, as it were, an historical debt which Balzac cheerfully assumed, as well as to impose a kind of cosmos on the chaos of contemporary society, to dissect, analyse, interpret and conclude. According to Harry Levin:

Every volume may be ticked off, in more intimate terms, as a debt acquitted. In paying off his obligations to society, which itself had been plunged into a state of moral bankruptcy, he was likewise contributing toward its redemption. The threads of vindication, expiation, and rehabilitation are deeply woven into the specific patterns and the collective fabric of the Comédie Humaine.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Levin, Harry, p. 156

Balzac's work is historical from two points of view. As a work of art, as a documentary on the private life of the grandes dames, the wealth of details available from independent sources confirm the exactness of the portraiture of these ladies, their motives, ambitions, passions. Balzac is therefore faithful to the letter of aristocratic behaviour. Secondly, Balzac is also historical in observing the spirit of the times, as the pressures of post-Revolutionary times confronted the grandes dames with crisis upon crisis which their education, traditions and outlook made them ill-adapted to handle. Their behaviour is therefore quite consistent with the times and the attitudes of the group which go back to the days of the Ancien Régime.

Balzac emphasizes aristocratic exclusiveness and the economic and moral decadence of the caste. He reveals the hierarchy within hierarchy, and points out the marital alliances and misalliances of the clan within their own group and with the Bourgeoisie. He writes about individualism and lack of solidarity at all levels of the group; about social changes; about the struggle of class versus class. He has not neglected to point out, in particular, the blind, unreasoning stubbornness of the caste, rigid in their ideas, living in the past, rejecting the plainest evidence of the changed times. When the Duc de Chaulieu tells his daughter, for example: "La Révolution continue, elle est implantée dans la loi... écrite sur le sol... elle est toujours dans les esprits". (Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées, (VI, 96)), this is not only a hard, unpalatable fact, but few, very few, are

willing to believe it and act accordingly. Even the Duc de Chaulieu himself who gives such a lucid view of the times does not practise what he preaches, and in Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes, he is still persuaded that the King can intervene in the judicial process to save the name and reputation of two great aristocratic families. When Mme de Sérisy goes to the Procureur-général to attempt to influence him in saving Lucien de Rubempré, and she mentions the name of the King, the judge replies as follows:

Madame, dit en souriant et à haute voix le Procureur-général, le Roi n'a pas le moindre pouvoir sur le plus petit juge d'instruction de son royaume, ni sur les débats d'une Cour d'assises. Là est la grandeur de nos institutions nouvelles...(V, 471)

The judge emphasizes, quite rightly, the "institutions nouvelles", for times have changed. The failure of the aristocracy to read properly the spirit of the times made the Revolution, in Balzac's words, "d'autant plus formidable". (VI, 90). The clan had stubbornly refused to face up to the realities of life and ignored the most imminent danger.

It is in the behaviour of the grandes dames, especially, that the vices of the clan are most manifest. Idle, gossipy, cruel, pleasure seeking, egoistic, spendthrift, indebted, vain, proud, contemptuous and insolent, they sum up the moral and social decadence of the group as a whole. Their contempt for other social classes exacerbated animosities which smouldered into hatred lasting right to the grave. Balzac does not weary of describing the decadent Aristocracy. In La Duchesse de Langeais, for example, he condemns severely a multitude of their vices:

Ce défaut de vues larges, et ce vaste ensemble de petites fautes; L'envie de rétablir de hautes fortunes dont chacun se préoccupait; un besoin réel de religion pour soutenir la politique; une soif de plaisir qui nuisait à l'esprit religieux, et nécessita des hypocrisies; les résistances partielles de quelques esprits élevés qui voyaient juste et que contrarièrent les rivalités de cour; la noblesse de province, souvent plus pure de race que ne l'est la noblesse de cour, mais qui, trop souvent froissée, se désaffectionna; toutes ces causes, se réunirent pour donner au Faubourg Saint-Germain les moeurs les plus discordantes. (II, 582)

And this judgment of Balzac is all the more sincere when it is considered that the author himself was a monarchist and believed in the continued existence of the aristocracy as an important social necessity. His conscience as an historian, however, would not let him alter the interpretation of facts to satisfy his own private political creeds. And this view he expressly interpolates in the novel Modeste Mignon:

En effet, quand les grandes choses humaines s'en vont, elles laissent des miettes, des 'frusteaux', dirait Rabelais, et la Noblesse française nous montre en ce siècle beaucoup trop de restes. Certes, dans cette longue histoire des moeurs, ni le Clergé ni la Noblesse n'ont à se plaindre. Ces deux grandes et magnifiques nécessités sociales y sont bien représentées; mais ne serait-ce pas renoncer au beau titre d'historien que de n'être pas impartial, que de ne pas montrer ici la dégénérescence de la race, comme vous trouverez ailleurs la figure de l'Émigré dans le comte de Mortsauif (voyez le Lys dans la vallée), et toutes les noblesses de la Noblesse dans le marquis d'Espard (voyez l'Interdiction). (VII, 508)

Historians, critics, scholars and novelists have confirmed the accuracy of Balzac's portraiture of the aristocracy. We have already asserted in Chapter I (vide page 60) that scholars and archaeologists have confirmed Balzac's descriptions of places, sites and even monuments. As far as people are concerned, a penetrating critic like Ramon Fernandez praises Balzac's aristocratic portraits which he asserts have only

been equalled by Proust who, however, had to deal with a far less complex situation. In spite of the complexities of the problems involved,

Balzac a su se débrouiller et se réperer dans ce laciis avec une précision et une finesse qui, après lui, n'ont été égalées dans le roman français que par Marcel Proust; et encore ce dernier n'avait à peindre, une fois introduit dans le sanctuaire, qu'un tableau beaucoup moins complexe. Les nobles de Proust sont des souvenirs de leur propre passé; ceux de Balzac sont encore pris dans un drame où leur passé met en péril leur avenir. Or, ces nobles, Balzac les avait connus dans le train de leur vie et de leur originalité... On peut dire avec une bonne conscience que la Comédie Humaine est le dernier écran, avant Marcel Proust, où se projettent, en plein relief, les hommes et les femmes de cette caste difficile à connaître, et plus encore à comprendre.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of the disintegration of the aristocratic class, Philippe Bertault asserts that, prior to 1940, it was possible to encounter in several districts of Paris as well as in the Provinces, "des ilots de société" where individuals, the remnants of a vanished social class, were behaving just as Balzac had described them in the Comédie Humaine. And, as added support to the exactness of Balzac's portraits, Balzac's contemporary, Stendhal, portrays the aristocracy along the same lines as does Balzac, and comes to the same conclusions about the behaviour of the clan.

As with Balzac's contemporary, so with his successors in the twentieth century. According to Philippe Bertault, Albéric Cahuet and Paul Bourget, treating the 20th century aristocratic survivors of the vanished class in novels like l'Emigré, L'Etape and L'Ecuyère, "discernaient exactement, dans les moeurs et les caractères des descendants,

<sup>1</sup>Fernandez, Ramon, pages 121-123

les mêmes marques, les mêmes travers que lui-même (Balzac) avaient si bien observés!<sup>1</sup>

When the different stories of the Comédie Humaine are all examined, the picture of the nineteenth century emerges very clearly indeed. A great part of the social history of France is contained in the private life of the grandes dames. And this is not difficult to understand. Balzac is not satisfied with relating facts, but he must give the family tree of his characters, education, family and social milieu to explain the behaviour of the grandes dames. When all these whys and wherefores are given and understood, one can appreciate why the Maufrigneuses and the Langeais will always be proud and insolent, why the belief of superiority is so inveterate in the group. Ramon Fernandez appreciates Balzac's technique when he asserts that behind Balzac's characters, heredity, the home, education and the milieu play a most important part:

Considérons cet exemple. Balzac avait à exprimer, c'est-à-dire à faire passer de sa conscience au lecteur, le fait suivant: une jeune fille (Rosalie de Watteville), de sa fenêtre, regarde un homme qui excite sa curiosité: se promener dans un jardin. Tolstol, ou Stendhal, ou Dickens, ou Dostoïevsky eussent simplement décrit l'action, en en indiquant ou en en suggérant les causes, ou peut-être même sans rien indiquer du tout, car il arrive que, chez le grand romancier, l'intensité d'une vision se communique directement et immédiatement au lecteur. Pour Balzac au contraire, cet acte, 'avant de se produire', doit justifier ce qu'on pourrait appeler son 'état psychologique', entendu dans un sens analogue à celui d'état civil. Ce n'est pas seulement l'état de jeune fille, c'est encore la famille de telle jeune fille, de Rosalie,

<sup>1</sup>Bertault, Philippe, page 59

son hérédité, sa région géographique et la sociologie de la petite ville qui sont invoqués pour cet accouchement.<sup>1</sup>

Balzac begins where history books usually leave off. He goes into the home, tears the curtains aside and shows the reader individuals instead of a family, the ambitions of all, the squalid desires and contemptuous passions of the mighty. He penetrates beyond manners to morals, beyond public events to private lives. He achieves historical continuity in the coordination of his novels by the use of reappearing characters. He produced a formula of human life to explain not only the human organism, but the social as well, a formula which is as ingenious as it is credible. In spite of the many difficulties involved in portraying the aristocracy, a class to which Balzac did not belong, there is no evidence at our disposal which does not confirm the fact that the author has been just to this class. Even as late as 1961, Hervé Donnard stated with candor: "Tout tend à prouver que Balzac a été sévère mais juste à l'égard de la noblesse".<sup>2</sup> There is therefore ample confirmative evidence that Balzac has not tampered with history. It is to Robert-Dumas that the last word must be given, however, as he sums up Balzac's historical method and identifies the author's historical conscience, all of which accurately represent our own views:

<sup>1</sup>Fernandez, Ramon, pages 21-22

<sup>2</sup>Donnard, page 165



Il (Balzac) présente pêle-mêle le beau et l'horrible, le bon et le mauvais, le moral et l'immoral. Balzac ne se croit pas le droit de choisir; il est plus historien que romancier, il doit à son siècle la vérité, et il la lui montre toute nue. Il se peut que beaucoup fassent la grimace et ne trouvent pas dans ses études, l'humanité flattée; Balzac est persuadé qu'il l'a faite ressemblante, cela lui suffit.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Robert-Dumas, Ch. Honoré de Balzac, XXV, 1924, as quoted in Marc Blanchard Témoignages et Jugements sur Balzac, page 255.

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