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The Designs of Faulkner's "Yoknapatawpha saga" and Balzac's Human Comedy*

Jacques Pothier

All the biographers of Faulkner have agreed on his extensive reading of Balzac. It will of course remain impossible to point out just how much of Balzac Faulkner read and remembered. According to J. Blotner an 1897-99 set of *La Comédie humaine* in translation was in the library at Rowan Oak (*Library* 90-2). Susan Snell, after Joseph Blotner, asserts that both Stone and Balzac read "all" Balzac, and much of it aloud together (75). At the time, in his book-reviews for the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* such as "American Drama: Eugene O'Neill," Faulkner referred to Balzac's standard-setting work as a yard-stick of achievement (NOS 86-89). While emphasizing the limits of the exercise, several critics have made valuable attempts to chart the vast field of Faulkner's concrete debt to Balzac's plots and characters. In two articles in the *Mississippi Quarterly* Philip Cohen noted so many examples of influence that his studies look comprehensive.¹

Although the purpose of this essay is not to complement the instances of influence that Cohen collected, my unsystematic exploration of the Faulkner and Balzac canons allows me to contribute a few more blocks to the building. Faulkner's admiration for Balzac's first mature novel, *Les Chouans*, did not only develop in a parallelism between the Bretons' resistance to the armies of the French republic and that of the Confederate troops in the Civil War in *The Unvanquished* — the first section of both novels is entitled "L'Emboscade / Ambuscade", and "Vendée" in Faulkner is obvious. A few years later, when Faulkner was asked to prepare the screenplay for "The De Gaulle Story," a Warner Bros project, he naturally thought of setting his village community in Brittany and remembered the names of the protagonists in Balzac's novel — in which the peasants' names included "Pille-miche", "Marche-à-terre": hence Faulkner's choice of "Coupe-Tête" in the *De Gaulle Story* screenplay; "Chopine" after "Galope-chopine" in Balzac's *Chouans*. Ironically the French advisor to Warner Bros., Henri Diamant-Berger, criticized Faulkner's name-choice and commented: "there has never been a name like that in France" (Brodsky & Hamblin 3:383).

The plot of *Le Colonel Chabert*, a short novel, would have been appealing to young Faulkner. Like Donald Mahon, Chabert comes back from the war to find that he does not belong in the peace-time society anymore. But the plot more deeply foreshadows *Requiem for a Nun*: Chabert returns as the ghost of his wife's past; like Temple Drake in *Sanctuary*, she

* An early account of this research was read on the occasion of the inauguration of the Faulkner Foundation in Rennes in September 1994.

¹ Cohen's "Balzac and Faulkner" includes a bibliography of earlier notable treatments of Balzac's influence on Faulkner (326). Cohen claims that Faulkner must have read Balzac's *Histoire des Treize* (1833, *History of the Thirteen*, from which the title *These 13* could have been derived), *Les Chouans* (1829), *M. Gobseck* (1830, a striking model for Ab and Flem Snopes), *La Cousine Bette* (1847, *Cousin Betty*), *Le Cousin Pons* (1847, *Cousin Pons*), *Grandeur et Décadence de César Birotteau* (1837, *The Rise and Fall of César Birotteau*), *La Maison Nucingen* (1838, *The Firm of Nucingen*, referred to in "A Dangerous Man," which uses the same plot, a plot Faulkner will again use as Flem's manipulation of his wife and her lover in *The Town*), *Eugénie Grandet* (in which Grandet persuades his daughter to renounce her share of her mother's property, as Flem will in *The Town*), and of course *Les Paysans* (*The Peasantry*).

was a prostitute, and Chabert has not forgotten any more than Nancy. Chabert and Nancy strangely choose as their lawyer a man who is kin to the oblivious respectable wife: Derville, the former Mme Chabert's own lawyer, Gavin Stevens, the uncle of Temple's husband. Like Derville, Stevens tries to get the woman to face her past by threatening to expose her to her present husband.

The reality of influence is, however, debatable: for instance would it not be vain to claim that Flem Snopes is inspired by Rastignac, du Tillet or Nucingen, rather than by Dickens's Uriah Heep? In many ways, Faulkner creates Flem while breathing the air of a literary world inhabited by figures of cold-hearted go-getters: Flem is a variation on a type common in the nineteenth and early twentieth century novel, the age of triumphant capitalism, when such characters are read about in the novels of Balzac, Dickens, Twain, to name but a few.

Certainly both Balzac and Faulkner concurred in creating a cosmos of their own. In his classic introduction to the *Portable Faulkner*, Malcolm Cowley consciously endeavored to emphasize the "general *design* in which one novel [of Faulkner's] was linked to another", something which, he claimed, earlier critics had unduly ignored (xxxi-xxxii).²Cowley mentioned parenthetically that *La Comédie Humaine* "may have inspired" Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha series:

Just as Balzac, who may have inspired the series, divided his *Comédie Humaine* into "Scenes of Parisian Life," "Scenes of Provincial Life," "Scenes of Private Life," so Faulkner might divide his work into a number of cycles: one about the planters and their descendants, one about the townspeople of Jefferson, one about the poor whites, one about the Indians, and one about the Negroes. (xiii)

Yes, Faulkner just might have done so — but he did not. *Absalom, Absalom!* includes the map of Yoknapatawpha County, with the famous mention "William Faulkner, Sole Owner and Proprietor," but the story of Sutpen is about the tragic failure of a man with a driving design, who incidentally relies on a French architect to accomplish it. Which suggests that Cowley's underlying assumption — that Faulkner had a mimetic design similar to Balzac's — is debatable.

In this paper I shall examine the emergence of Balzac's socio-historical cycle with its articulation. Then I shall suggest how Faulkner may have appropriated the Balzacian ambition and followed it to some extent. Finally, I shall try and explain how ultimately the relationship between Faulkner's fictional world — what Faulkner would come to refer to as his "apocrypha" — and the outside world came to differ from the French model.

1.

Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha novels, with their recurring characters and unity of locale which create a fictional world which exists between the texts certainly embody the genre of the

²The phrase occurs in the 1967 "afterword" to the revised version of the 1946 introduction: although Cowley acknowledges that he had previously failed to make clear that Faulkner's subject was "not the South and its destiny," "but rather the human situation as revealed in Southern terms" (xxxii), Cowley retains the idea of a "design."

"social history sequence novels" that Balzac founded, as Elizabeth Kerr shows in her brief discussion of Faulkner's debt to the French sequence novel (5-11). The main devices which made *La Comédie Humaine* famous (recurring characters, sequence novels) occur first in Balzac's *Histoire des Treize* (1834). In her introduction to *Histoire des Treize* Rose Fortassier, after Maurice Bardèche, suggests that the idea of this trilogy of shorter novels may have come from Balzac's reading of James Fenimore Cooper's Leather-Stocking "trilogy," translations of which were available in France shortly after their publication in English (only *The Pioneers*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The Prairie* had come out then — *The Pathfinder* and *The Deerslayer* were to be published later, in 1840 and 1841)(Balzac, Pléiade 5:737). But the only example of sequence novels in Faulkner's work — i.e. the only formal imitation of the Balzacian genre — is the *Snopes* trilogy.

The main difference between Balzac's *Human Comedy* and Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha saga is not, as one might believe, that Balzac started out with his comprehensive plan, whereas Faulkner, hardly ever considered a comprehensive chronicle of Yoknapatawpha County. On the contrary: Balzac seems to have reached the idea — and phrase — of *La Comédie Humaine* over ten years after the first volume was published: it was *Le Dernier des Chouans*, whose title revealed the influence of James Fenimore Cooper.³ Once the system was set, Balzac's division of the world of *La Comédie Humaine* was deliberate. Although each of Balzac's novels could be read separately, its full meaning was to be revealed by placing it in the general sequence. Not only would each new short story or novel be first conceived as part of the general outline, but Balzac wanted to reorder his previous novels and short stories so they would fit in the general scheme. Proust praised Balzac for this "illumination rétrospective," in which the writer had given unity to his work in a last retrospective revelation: he found that the sense of unity was all the stronger for being a complete afterthought (as a matter of fact, it was not: the second half of Balzac's career shows him eager to fill out his now foreordained schedule), as if the works had strived of their own unconscious force for this unity of vision, while the composition was never limited by a necessary plan (Proust 137). The grand scheme was not just a practical way of dealing with a schedule of book-subjects which he might have had in mind: it was informed by a purpose, a meaning — the central meaning and design of *La Comédie Humaine*. This design was scientific: a systematic, comprehensive history of "manners in action" ("les mœurs en action") — a phrase which may incidentally be compared to Faulkner's recurring claim that life is motion. Therefore, each novel or short story should be seen as a fragment of a whole. In the short preface to his *César Birotteau*, Balzac wrote that

³Balzac's *Le Dernier des Chouans, ou la Bretagne en 1800* (*The Last of the Chouans, or Brittany in 1800*) was published in 1829. Chateaubriand had used the same style of title in *Les Aventures du dernier Abencérage* (1826). Balzac's title also recalls *Le dernier des Mohicans*. A translation of Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* (1826) had just been published. Cooper was a novelist whose narrative technique Balzac admired: he actually compared the Breton peasants (and later the peasants in *The Peasantry*) to "redskin Indians." Without waiting for Cooper's *Mohicans*, it had been common in the chronicles of the wars of Vendée to compare the peasants to redskins: in her notes to the Pléiade edition of Balzac's *Human Comedy*, Lucienne Frappier-Mazur quotes P.-V.-J. Bourmisseaux's *Histoire des guerres de la Vendée et des Chouans depuis l'année 1792 jusqu'en 1815* (Paris, 1819, 3.135-7): "The Red-Skins of America are no wilder" (my translation; Pléiade 8: 918, 1699).

In the 1834 edition, the title of the novel was shortened to *Les Chouans*. An extensively revised version — Balzac kept altering and rearranging his texts as they went through several sets of proofs and then successive editions — came out in 1834, as *Les Chouans ou la Bretagne en 1799*; in the *Comédie Humaine* collection of Balzac's works (Furne edition, 1845), it made up the only complete novel in the section entitled "Scenes of Military Life" with the short story "Une passion dans le désert," paraphrased by Faulkner in the uncollected "Idyll in the Desert."

this novel was only one side of a medal, whose other side was to be *La Maison Nucingen*. This pattern of counterpoint between two stories which aren't even formally similar foreshadows Faulkner's achievement in *The Wild Palms: César Birotteau* was a full-size novel in the omniscient tradition, while *La Maison Nucingen* was a shorter frame-narrative.

Balzac's all-embracing design was in the imperial mood of the time — interestingly Balzac has been dubbed "the Napoleon of literature."⁴ It was the time when France had attempted to submit the whole continent, when the scientific project of Buffon and Jussieu for a "Museum of Natural History" was being enthusiastically supported by the French Revolution in the breath with which it defined its worldwide mission to endow mankind with freedom. While Buffon claimed that Natural History could account for the whole and finite variety of nature, Balzac claimed that he would avoid portraits, but draw a comprehensive, systematic chart of social "species", or types, in France: there was, he claimed, a coherent *system* of society, which his work should mirror. Actually Balzac and Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, the then manager of the Museum of Natural History, praised each other.⁵ Young Balzac had been fascinated by the materialist spirit of the XVIIIth century: just as Newton had discovered the universal laws of gravity and Buffon had attempted a comprehensive description of "Natural History," he thought it possible to discover the universal laws of society.

Unlike Faulkner, Balzac did not mind writing prefaces to his novels — actually he regularly did so. The general preface to *La Comédie Humaine* (1842) must be regarded as a manifesto, the keystone to the whole building. It reflects the debate in which intellectual circles had passionately taken sides a few years earlier — Goethe no less than Balzac — the controversy between Etienne Geoffroy Saint Hilaire and his former friend Georges Cuvier:

There is but one Animal. The Creator works on a single model for every organized being. "The Animal" is elementary, and takes its external form, or, to be accurate, the differences in its form, from the environment in which it is obliged to develop. Zoological species are the result of these differences. The announcement and defence of this system, which is indeed in harmony with our preconceived ideas of Divine Power, will be the eternal glory of Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, Cuvier's victorious opponent on this point of higher science, whose triumph was hailed by Goethe in the last article he wrote. (Maurage 1:liv).⁶

⁴Victor Hugo compares the writer to the emperor in his oration on Balzac's funeral: "M. de Balzac faisait partie de cette puissante génération des écrivains du XIX^e siècle qui est venue après Napoléon, de même que l'illustre pléiade du XVII^e siècle est venue après Richelieu — comme si, dans le développement de la civilisation, il y avait une loi qui fit succéder aux dominateurs par le glaive les dominateurs par l'esprit." (Victor Hugo, *Discours au Père-Lachaise*, 21 Aug. 1850). On finishing *The Country Doctor*, written partly in praise of Napoleon, Balzac also begs the comparison: "j'ai fait pour mon pays une grande chose. Ce livre vaut, à mon sens, plus que des lois et des batailles gagnées." (To Zulma Carraud, 2 Sept. 1833, quoted in Pléiade 9: 372).

⁵See Madeleine Fargeaud ("Balzac et les messieurs du Muséum," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 1965), mentioned by Castex (lxvii).

⁶"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 extérieures, 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. La proclamation et le soutien de ce système, en harmonie d'ailleurs avec les idées que nous nous faisons de la puissance divine, sera l'éternel honneur de Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, le vainqueur de Cuvier sur ce point de la haute science, et dont le triomphe a été salué par le dernier article qu'écrivit le grand Goethe." ("Avant-Propos", Pléiade 1:8; tr.). Geoffroy's argument was that the biological organization of all animals was basically the same, all organs being common and related according to a common, analogous structural pattern — there was an

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In this preface, Balzac also paid homage to a forerunner: Walter Scott, the father of the historical novel.⁷ Balzac's admiration for Walter Scott induced him to transfer the idea of a system from a vision of Society to the outline of a series of novels: a History of France in which the succession of centuries would be represented by a succession of novels. The original plan for a series of historical novels was discarded — though *Les Chouans*, which Balzac wanted to complement with *Les Vendéens*, a novel about the war seen from the republican vantage-point — still belongs to this original scheme. It was replaced by a synchronic "history" of French society in the nineteenth century. Balzac's reasoned and unified outline of his fictional monument (the architectural metaphor is Balzac's) divides it into three stages: "Studies of manners", "Philosophical Studies", and "Analytical Studies"⁸ — the effects, the causes and the principles of the "history of the human heart" in which what he at first entitled his "Social Studies" ("Etudes sociales") should consist.⁹ By way of the pseudonymous Félix Davin, Balzac asserts his ambition to be a French "Walter Scott plus an architect".¹⁰ He can and must erect a global theory of the whole social system, on the basis of a comprehensive rendering of the variety of human experience.

Balzac's interest in physiognomy is well known, but the theory which claims that a person's features revealed the major traits of his personality is only an aspect of a more general vision, which is connected to Balzac's famous opening descriptions. According to McCarthy, Balzac admired Cooper's capacity for conditioning the reader's response through his talent as a landscape artist (42-3). In the opening description Balzac sees a means to guide and condition the reader to the ideas he wants him to share. The setting reinforces the probability of the character, causes the reader to share the narrator's views on the character and the society he lives in. By way of Félix Davin, Balzac claims that "it [was] not enough to be a man, one must be a system."¹¹ The impressionistic opening description of the milieu in which the plot is about to unfold shows the narrator's perfect grasp of the diegetic world; it is like archeological evidence pointing to the deepest realities of the characters. Not only do Balzacian buildings reflect the manners of their inhabitants, but minute architectural details reveal their innermost characters, as Balzac explains in a digression from the description of the Claës House in *La Recherche de l'Absolu*:

Both public and private events of human life are so intimately linked to architecture that most observers can reconstruct the truth of nations or individuals in all their habits by examining the remains of their public monuments or of their domestic life. Archaeology is to society what comparative anatomy

original form that was manifested in all species. Conversely, Cuvier claimed that function was more fundamental than form: the differences between animal orders were fundamental and depended on different functions dictated by the environments; differences were brought about by a form of evolution whose laws were yet to be discovered. Incidentally, recent research in embryology converges with Geoffroy's intuition: see Gee.

⁷As early as 1835, the complete works of Walter Scott were available in a 29-volume French translation by A. J. B. Defauconpret.

⁸"*Etudes de moeurs*," "*Etudes philosophiques*," "*Etudes analytiques*."

⁹Letter to Mme Hanska, 26 oct. 1834, quoted by Castex (xiii-xiv).

¹⁰". . . il s'agit donc d'être . . . Walter Scott plus un architecte." (Félix Davin, Introduction to "*Etudes de Moeurs au XIX^e siècle*", 1835, *Pléiade* 1:1145)

¹¹"Il ne suffit pas d'être un homme, il faut être un système, disait-il." (*Pléiade* 1:1151)

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is to organized nature. A mosaic reveals an entire society just as a skeleton of an ichthyosaurus implies a whole past order of things. Everything is understandable, everything is linked.¹²

Balzac's description of French society has been so thorough that historians have relied on Balzac's work as a valuable document on French society in his time. Like Louis Chevalier, they have regarded it as an example of historiography, an account which satisfied the essential requirements of social studies.

If we consider that the study of societies of all periods must result in a continuous, homogeneous, and precise description of those societies, in their unity and diversity, their present characteristics and the surviving elements of their past, and above all the relationships that must exist between their highest forms and what Maurice Halbwachs has called 'the biological substructure of all social life'; if such is our definition and ambition, we may consider that the *Comédie humaine* gathers together all the needed givens.¹³

The early reception of Faulkner's work also blurs the borders between sociology and literary criticism. All Faulkner scholars know George Marion O'Donnell as the author of one of the earliest influential papers on "Faulkner's Mythology." But O'Donnell also had a political agenda, and when he vented his sociological views on "The Tenant Farmer in the South" with Richmond Croom Beatty, words or phrases out of *Sanctuary* would naturally flow from his pen:

. . . there exists one class of people which the sociologists — because of their major premise: faith in universal human improvement — have never been able to understand. This is the class sometimes referred to as the "po'whites." These people are poor indeed, and many of them are tenant-farmers. They live, as if by choice, in squalor and indolence. Before the sterner varieties of religion went out of fashion, it was customary to explain them by saying that they were depraved. We believe that, if Sociology is to mature, it must come first to the realization that this loosely defined but easily recognizable class is, generally, beyond salvation. The sociologists of the future, in other words, will have to make their truce with the Problem of Evil — as every other man has had to do, and every science, and every art.

What would happen with respect to this class, if sent in numbers to the model village [proposed by W. T. Couch], would be that the homes in such villages would, in many cases be *burned piecemeal*

¹²"Les événements de la vie humaine, soit publique, soit privée, sont si intimement liés à l'architecture, que la plupart des observateurs peuvent reconstruire les nations ou les individus dans toute la vérité de leurs habitudes, d'après les restes de leurs monuments publics ou par l'examen de leurs reliques domestiques. L'archéologie est à la nature sociale ce que l'anatomie comparée est à la nature organisée. Une mosaïque révèle toute une société, comme un squelette d'ichtyosaure sous-entend toute une création. De part et d'autre, tout se déduit, tout s'enchaîne." (Pléiade 10:657-58)

¹³ "Si l'on considère — et pour toutes les époques — que l'étude sociale doit aboutir à une description continue, homogène et précise des sociétés, dans leur unité et leur diversité, dans leurs caractères actuels et dans la survivance de leur passé, enfin et surtout dans les rapports qui existent entre leurs formes les plus hautes et ce que Maurice Halbwachs appelait la substructure biologique de toute vie sociale; si telle est la définition — l'ambition — on peut penser que *La Comédie humaine* en rassemble toutes les données." Quoting this homage, Castex somewhat triumphantly concludes: "While writing the novelistic account of his time, he was founding social history and the history of manners": Balzac's work provides both sociologists and historians with "a method, a model and a schedule." (xxxiii-xxxiv; my translation)

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by the "peasants" themselves for firewood, the rotating gardens by midsummer would be weed-ridden, the radios torn to pieces (no frightful loss), the bookcases tobacco-spattered, and the schoolhouse befouled [emphasis added].¹⁴

Some of the most famous case-studies in the Chicago school of sociology used stylistic devices which Balzac pioneered. To set out the synthesis of their studies, sociologists have portrayed fictional communities which embodied the features of their type. They would describe "Cornerville" as part of "Eastern City", or "Southerntown," "Old City" and "Old County" in the Old South.¹⁵As the best field-workers realized, the presentation of the material gathered in sociological case-studies entailed problems of subjective involvement, and so not only anthropology, but also literature or psychoanalysis offered useful models, because they took the subjectivity of any writing for granted and presented elaborate strategies to deal with it.¹⁶

Balzac's characters are so richly described that a lot of critical energy has been invested in finding out what real-life persons they might have been drawn from. Such search is irrelevant, since Balzac often mentions that one character is just another example of a type found in another, earlier story; actually, a typical trope of Balzac's is the *antonomasia* — the metaphoric use of either well-known historical names or the names of his own characters. In *The Country Doctor*, when Doctor Bénassis is referred to as "the Napoleon of the valley," he is merged with a type the reader is obviously expected to figure out. Benassis successfully develops a provincial country community and does pay homage to Napoleon as the reformer of the nation. Similarly the title of *The Muse of the Department* refers to the main character of this novel, Dinah de la Baudraye, also described as "the Sapho of Saint-Satur." (Pléiade, 4: 643) As he is drawn into the complicity of humour, the reader is made to share the narrator's omniscient mastery of the milieu.

The precision of Balzac's description of towns and houses has encouraged readers to see his novels as guide-books, analyzing with exquisite detail the intimate personality of a place as if it was an actual character; hardly had *Eugénie Grandet* been published that local inhabitants

¹⁴ Quoted in Grimwood (162). Grimwood notices that the manners of the farmers are described with the very words which Faulkner will use in the opening page of *The Hamlet* (*Novels 1936-1940* 731). But for reasons of chronology Beatty and O'Donnell can only remember Faulkner's *Sanctuary*: "the people of the neighborhood had been pulling down [the Old Frenchman place] piecemeal for firewood" (*Novels 1930-1935* 184).

¹⁵In Whyte's *Street Corner Society* "Cornerville" is a type of slum-community in Boston, which is referred to under the pseudonym "Eastern City." Dollard's study is about one "Southerntown." Davis and the Gardners describe the relationship between "Old City" and "Old County" in the rural Deep South.

¹⁶Stein suggests that there is a kinship between the Chicago schools of sociologists and writers: "Theodore Dreiser's novels deepen and reinforce [Robert E.] Park's research; Sinclair Lewis' novels about life in the Midwest confirm the Lynds' observations. . . . The interplay of literary and sociological techniques for community exploration is quite intimate. Good novelists always show the implications of the events portrayed on the growth of their characters just as do good sociological life histories. City novelists have developed techniques for representing the multiplicity of urban experience which deserve attention. A developed literary imagination is a great help in doing, and no less in reporting, a community study." (300-301) For instance Stein finds the Lynds' "continual use of contrasting images" to be "probably more devastating than the direct ironies of Sinclair Lewis or Thorstein Velben because the stylistic mechanisms remain unnoticed. . . . [T]his one element is worth highlighting because it casts light on a dimension of community study which is usually neglected in sociological discussions of research reports or methodology: the vital way in which the style of the report affects the scientific quality of the research." (309-310)

would point out Grandet's house in Saumur, much as people would nowadays compare features of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County with those of the real Lafayette County and argue about Faulkner's fuzzy respect for documentary evidence. Yet Balzac seems to have fended off in advance such interpretations in the epilogue to the early editions of *Eugénie Grandet*: "Every *département* has its Grandet"; or, as he put it elsewhere, "give or take a few local habits, all small towns look alike."¹⁷ Actually, later research showed that for most novels and stories set in various other French provinces, Balzac drew his inspiration from his native Touraine: regionalism was deliberately avoided. *Eugénie Grandet* is set in Saumur, which stands for just any town but Tours: as the novel is meant to have its place in the series of "Scenes of Provincial Life," it represents a typical provincial town, as opposed to Paris. Saumur is, then, a signifier in the system of a discourse, not an actual place.

2

Balzac's systematic generalization of individual characters or descriptions may foreshadow Faulkner's displacement of the setting of *Soldiers' Pay* from Oxford, Mississippi, to Charlestown, Georgia, although in *Soldiers' Pay* Faulkner hardly sought a sociological description. But Faulkner's shift to the matter of Yoknapatawpha meant that the emphasis was to be on the idiosyncratic rather than the typical. In *The Town* and *The Mansion*, Faulkner's most Balzacian late novels, a sense of the whole society of Jefferson is provided by many sociologically meaningful sketches of background characters and scenes of Jefferson life, but with Faulkner, after Sherwood Anderson, the characters are freaks rather than types — touching evidence of the intractability of the human heart. Whereas Balzac generalized that there was one Dinah in every *département* (*The Muse of the Department*), Ratliff enshrines the uniqueness of Eula, the reincarnation of Helen of Troy.

Susan Snell's biography of Phil Stone brings out what Stone and young Faulkner saw in the French master. Stone's reading of Balzac was influenced by Willard Huntington Wright's artistic credo in *The Creative Will*, a book he strongly advised Faulkner to study (Snell 80). Wright's interpretation of Balzac, personal as it may be, certainly shaped Faulkner's early references to Balzac. This is how Wright described Balzac's practice:

Balzac, a profound philosopher, follows the method of nature and lets the effects result from a bringing together of fundamental causes and life forces. Balzac creates first a terrain with an environmental climate; and the creatures which spring from this soil, and which are part of it, create certain unescapable conditions, social, economic, and intellectual. Furthermore, the generation of characters that follow are, in turn, the inevitable offsprings of this later soil, fashioned by all that precede them. (44-45, in Snell 144)

¹⁷"Chaque département a son Grandet." (*Eugénie Grandet*, "épilogue des premières éditions", Pléiade 3: 1201) "A quelques usages près, toutes les petites villes se ressemblent." (*La Femme abandonnée*, Pléiade 2: 463) In *Le Médecin de campagne*, Bénassis warns his visitor: "Vous ne verrez dans le canton rien que vous n'avez vu ailleurs, toutes les chaumières se ressemblent." and "les moeurs simples doivent être à peu près semblables dans tous les pays." (Pléiade 9: 440, 448)

The idea of men springing from the soil occurs recurrently in Faulkner's early works and comments. The gospel of environmental determinism was not, however, Balzac's — he was more interested in how typical characters would develop when set in different backgrounds. A frequent plot in Balzac is what happens when one character intrudes in a society, or how characters adapt, or fail to adapt to the background they have to live in, and what happens when they move to another milieu.

Yet such misinterpretation would be attractive in a South which was in search of a new pride. A Mississippian "Human Comedy" would address the demand for sectional identity and coherence, as Balzac's account of the social body had helped France define itself in the uncertain time of King Louis-Philippe, an inheritor of the monarchic order who identified with the demands of the rising liberal *bourgeoisie*. Stone was anxious to have his gifted friend turn out to be — as Balzac would have put it — the Balzac of the South: in the preface to Faulkner's *Marble Faun* poems, Stone insisted that the author "has roots in this soil as surely and inevitably as has a tree" and insisted that "all universal art became great by first being provincial." After *Soldiers' Pay* and *Mosquitoes*, Stone enthusiastically encouraged Faulkner to get started on a double novel which he must have regarded as the promising beginning of a Southern "Human Comedy." A Sartoris book and a Snopes book must have been started at the same time (Meriwether 38). They were *Flags in the Dust*, and the manuscript cryptically entitled "Father Abraham." Scenes of town-life in one book would have been offset by scenes of rural life in the second one, just as Balzac contrasts "Scenes of Parisian Life" with "Scenes of Provincial Life."¹⁸ But when Stone became disappointed with the turn Faulkner's writing took — away from Wright's principles — he bitterly asked Faulkner to return the volume he had lent him, on the grounds that he had obviously not read any of it. Later, in a 1931 letter to Louis Cochran, Stone was to declare that "his 'present discouragement' over Faulkner's career stemmed from his skepticism about whether Faulkner's 'having his roots in the soil' would 'ever be articulate in prose.'" (Snell 144)

The many details of plot and character in *Flags in the Dust* which seem inspired by Balzac including the distinct classes of society — the aristocratic Sartorises, the middle-class Benbows, the rural McCallum or the Negro servants all have to deal with the outcome of the war — suggest that Faulkner was acutely aware of the example of Balzac, as Cohen has shown, but he later introduced his legacy with veiled irony. From Cuvier, the founder of comparative paleontology, Balzac derived an optimistic confidence in the meaningful detail, be it a detail in a character's clothes or environment, or a feature of his face, as index to the deeper essence of the person. Balzac and Cuvier's naive confidence in the powers of science and literature is mirrored and mocked through Horace Benbow, in the original text of

¹⁸Balzac does not actually contrast "Scenes of Provincial Life" with "Scenes of Country Life," but with "Scenes of Parisian Life." Both Balzac's "Scenes of Parisian Life" and "Scenes of Provincial Life" examine the issue of the individual's relationship with a social environment; in the classic tradition of the European novel, the individual's struggle to adjust to this milieu is the mainspring of the plot. His "Scenes of Rural Life" are a more personal attempt to chart and describe the structure of French society. Like historian Jules Michelet, whose *Le peuple* was published in 1846, Balzac introduces the idea of the common people in his world, and he does so by describing the class-structure of rural France, first in an attempt to provide an idealistic guideline for the relationship between the enlightened ruling classes and the people, stirred up by the revolutionary era and ready to rise again (*The Country Doctor* describes how a doctor who, for obscure reasons, had decided to settle away from the world, found a *Sleepy Hollow* set in a valley of the Alps, managed to turn it into a bustling economic center), then in a disenchanting warning on the fall of order, civilization and the arts as the uneducated sons of the Revolution take over in *The Peasantry*.

Sanctuary: "It was as though from that tiny clot of knuckles he was about to reconstruct an edifice upon which he would not dare to look, like an archeologist who, from meagre sifting of vertebrae, reconstructs a shape out of the nightmares of his own childhood . . ." (SO 141-2). In *Sanctuary*, Benbow may share Balzac's vision of the world as system, but Faulkner's ironic mode is critical of the fallacy of social archaeology.

If Faulkner may to some extent have thought of the sequence of his books as a Linnean inventory of the Southern social realm, which the example of *Flags in the Dust / Father Abraham* may suggest, he never deliberately attempted to organize his texts according to sociological criteria. The history of his career displays a few instances of Balzacian classification: they bear witness to Faulkner's recurring comparison of his Yoknapatawpha material with Balzac's world. On February 18, 1927 (the fruitful winter in which Faulkner was busy with *Flags in the Dust* and had probably put *Father Abraham* aside), he wrote Horace Liveright that he was working on "a collection of short stories of [his] townspeople," designated in the contract as *A Rose for Emily and Other Stories* (SL 34-35). The collection was eventually published as *These 13*, a title (but in no way contents) probably borrowed from Balzac's trilogy *Histoire des Treize* (*The Thirteen*). Like *L'histoire des Treize*, made up of "Ferragus", "La Duchesse de Langeais" and "La Fille aux yeux d'or," *These Thirteen* consists of three sections, which belong to different sub-genres of the short story. In Balzacian terms, the first two sections of Faulkner's collection look like two series of "studies of manners", and the last one may be compared to Balzac's "philosophical studies": there are four "scenes of military life" and six "scenes of provincial life" (Yoknapatawpha stories). The most famous short stories of the middle section, "A Rose for Emily" and "Dry September," both achieve a striking portrait of the closed society of the southern town through the classic Balzacian character of the lonely woman watched over by the whole provincial community.

A few years later, Faulkner started a five-page manuscript he solemnly entitled "Golden Book of Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha County," which did not go further than a biographical sketch on John Sartoris; he was to revive this genre when Cowley asked him to help him with the *Portable Faulkner* project, to which he was to contribute with the addition of the Compson Appendix.¹⁹ These later instances of Balzacian classification of the world of Yoknapatawpha may be complemented by Faulkner's map and chronology in *Absalom, Absalom!*²⁰

In the essay I quoted from at the opening of this paper, after comparing Balzac's design and Faulkner's and attempting to divide Faulkner's work into a series of cycles, Malcolm Cowley went on to consider yet another valid division Faulkner might have adopted, "by families." As Elizabeth Kerr has noticed, the fact is that Faulkner did not choose to lay out his work: "Faulkner . . . did not give external clues to the relationships between his works except by his map of Yoknapatawpha County and by the explicit trilogy form of *Snopes*"(7). Some sort of organization of the work could be necessary for the editor of the *Portable Faulkner*; as a

¹⁹Blotner mentions the five-page manuscript of "The Golden Book of Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha Country in Mississippi as compiled by William Faulkner of Rowanoak", dated 1932, which consists in a 700-word biographical sketch of John Sartoris (*Biography* 1:791).

²⁰Daniel Ferrer aptly claims that this chronology only pretends to support the diegetic world behind the novel, as if there was "such a thing as a recoverable story, outside the text and somehow independent of the text" (47). Unlike Balzac, Faulkner never consistently tried to avoid the contradictions between his works, or even within each novel.

matter of fact the introduction revealed Cowley's hesitation about what plan his collection should follow. It is Cowley's design, not Faulkner's, which reminds one of Balzac's.

Why would he insist on such divisions? Lawrence Schwartz has described Cowley as an agent in the conscious effort to forge the mythical identity of America necessary in the post-war fight against communism. Like Geoffroy Saint Hilaire after the French revolutionary turmoil, Cowley was looking for classifying criteria to chart the "world" of Yoknapatawpha county which had not been systematically charted before, and might serve the ideological purpose of the era.

A few years later, Faulkner did provide help in charting this world, coming up with a spatial classification of his short stories for the volume of *Collected Stories*, another Cowley idea (*SL* 277). Organizing the Yoknapatawpha material by geographic — or mock-geographic — cycles was actually closer to the spirit of Balzac's *Human Comedy* than the chronological divisions of *The Portable Faulkner*. By the end of his career, Faulkner sometimes adopted the critics' Balzacian view that his subject was his "imaginary country and county" — as opposed to its inhabitants — and expressed the sense that there was an urgency for him to complete the work.²¹ Possibly under the influence of his critics, Faulkner seemed to move closer to the Balzacian novel.²² Looking back, he told Jean Stein in the famous 1955 interview: "With *Soldiers' Pay* I found out writing was fun. But I found out after that not only each book had to have a design but the whole output or sum of an artist's work had to have a design. . . . I created a cosmos of my own. I can move these people around like God." (*LG* 255) He was returning to an old plan with a vengeance, adopting the Balzacian concept of the *design* which Cowley had thought of, and out-Balzacking Balzac by making his world not only a tableau of a nation, but "a kind of keystone to the universe."

3

After outlining the history of the idea of a "Human Comedy," I shall now focus on Faulkner's only sequence novels, the *Snopes* trilogy, and compare it with Balzac's "Scenes of Country Life." The history of Faulkner's *Snopes* novel actually looks like the history of Balzac's *Les Paysans*.

In 1833, Balzac wrote down his workplan for the next year. It included a "scene of country life", "Qui terre a guerre a," or "Le Garde."-- ("Who has land has war" or "The Warden"). The story was to merge with another project, "Le Grand Propriétaire" ("The Great Landlord" 1835) to become Balzac's most ambitious novel, *Les Paysans* (1844), which was to remain unfinished. The earliest drafts of Faulkner's *Snopes* novel almost certainly date back to the composition of *Sartoris* in 1926-7, developing into the remarkable draft entitled "Father

²¹See his letter to Else Jonsson, 20 Oct. 1955, in *SL*, 387.

²²I am indebted to Karl Zender's work for calling attention to the metaphorical invasion of the voices of the modern world in Faulkner's novels, from the loud-speakers in *Pylon* to the blaring radios in the prologues of *Requiem for a Nun*. Faulkner was well aware of the pressure of the vulgar voices of twentieth century America, but the artist's tiny voice (as Gresset has noted, this was a biographical datum) was not constantly as self-assured as the Nobel Prize speech wished it was.

Abraham".²³One of the longest of these drafts almost borrows Balzac's title, "The Peasants."²⁴ As the subjects of a novel, the Snopeses seem to be discarded, until eventually Faulkner takes up "The Peasants" again at the end of the 1930s. Like Balzac's project, it has become considerable; and Faulkner now thinks of a trilogy. For the time being, he manages to get round to a first novel, whose working title, "The Peasants", is eventually replaced by *The Hamlet*. For fifteen years it seems that Faulkner's own "Scenes of Country Life" will remain unfinished, as Balzac's *Paysans* were. But the trilogy is eventually completed when *The Town* and *The Mansion* round off the Snopes cycle.

Balzac's *Les Paysans* stands out in the French master's *Comédie Humaine*, because in this novel Balzac is not content with exploring a fraction of French society. The novel involves three social classes, the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie and the rural people, in a class struggle — a precedent which was not lost on Karl Marx (and Georg Lukács). An impressive combination of characters are put in action, so that *Les Paysans* can be seen as a microcosm of the whole *Comédie Humaine*, set in the postage-stamp of a provincial section of Burgundy.

Although many details of the plot of *The Hamlet* can be traced to *Les Paysans* (including the minor role of blacks, which made it easier to compare the Mississippi back-country to the French province), the argument of Faulkner's novel is very different: the rise of the landless peasants does not occur under the influence of the bourgeoisie and at the expense of the land-owning aristocrats, as it does in Balzac; in *The Hamlet* Flem Snopes rises to become a member of the provincial bourgeoisie by exploiting the peasantry more shrewdly than the local elite do: so this elite just absorbs him with reluctant fascination.

In the wake of his deepest admiration for Balzac's art, Faulkner had written *Flags in the Dust*, in which the various classes were involved in parallel patterns. The static Southern order was mainly threatened by the silent rise of the Snopes parasites, like a conspiracy of mainland pirates, to borrow a metaphor of Balzac's, which is at the heart of his *Histoire des Treize*.²⁵ Faulkner's *Snopes* trilogy can be seen as a shorter Yoknapatawpha saga. *The Hamlet* accounts for rural life at the turn of the century, as the old plantation order has already crumbled without the peasants realizing it. The latter volumes develop into a chronicle of a small Southern town through the later changes of the twentieth century, as two World Wars, a Depression, the Civil War in Spain, the Cold War, all affect the lives of the people of Jefferson. Meanwhile Flem Snopes responds and adapts to circumstances with a flexibility he owes to personal character as well as to his absolute disregard for Southern good manners. The *Snopes* trilogy is also a shorter "Human Comedy", made up of "Scenes of Country Life" and "Scenes of Provincial Life", standing in a place comparable with Balzac's *Paysans* to his *Comédie Humaine*. But the comparison of the whole *Comédie Humaine* with what Malcolm Cowley (and others, both before and after the *Portable Faulkner*) have called the "Yoknapatawpha Saga" remains problematic.

In *Father Abraham*, Balzacian influence is obvious in the plot and characters. In the opening scene, Flem stands behind the window of his recently remodeled bank, watching his

²³See James B. Meriwether's introduction to his edition of *Father Abraham*.

²⁴In the 30-volume edition of Balzac's *Comédie Humaine* which Blotner records, the title is translated as *The Peasantry* (*Library* 91). However, in his discussion of the work with Phil Stone, Faulkner may have come across the original French title.

²⁵Beck also describes them as pirates: *Man in Motion*, 21

wife and the mayor: this relationship had been the essence of the plot of the short novel *La Maison Nucingen*, one of the few Balzac texts which Faulkner actually refers to in his works — in the short story "A Dangerous Man." The first two paragraphs of the "Father Abraham" draft sound little like Faulkner, and more like Balzac, so much do they explain the meaning of the character:

He is a living example of the astonishing byblows of man's utopian dreams actually functioning; in this case the dream is Democracy. He will become legendary in time, but he has always been symbolic. Legendary as Roland and as symbolic of a form of behavior; as symbolic of an age and a region as his predecessor, a portly man with a white imperial and a shoestring tie and a two gallon hat, was . . . (*FA* 13)

According to these opening sentences, the unnamed character is not fully rounded: he is a figurehead, almost an allegory of the hidden ugly face of democracy. This opening suggests that Faulkner's novel would have been a political pamphlet against the overlooked consequences of public life as the Reconstruction had (dis)organized it. In his introduction to *Les Paysans*, Balzac similarly outlined his political message: he wanted to dispell the romantic liberal illusions about the people which Rousseau's pre-revolutionary doctrine had spread.²⁶

In *Father Abraham*, Flem Snopes revisits the standard Balzacian plot of the Parisian intruding in the provinces, with a Southern twist. Flem is cast as a Northerner, a symbol of the cities in the North, an outsider in the South. But Faulkner does not retain this late embodiment of the post-war carpet-bagger in the fully developed version of the character. In "A Rose for Emily", Homer Barron is a more typical Balzacian recreation: he comes into town and steals the attention of the lonely maid. What is hardly Balzac-like is that he dies in the process. Faulkner's concern at this stage is not American society in general, but the Southern community, an Emily's house with an outside and an inside — a house whose inside cannot be kept purely virginal like the old lady's privacy, and which any outside intrusion will soil.

In a 1931 public letter, Faulkner expressed the traditional political views of the white supremacists about lynching (McMillen and Polk). The contrast between Faulkner's openly reactionary political stand and the implication of short stories such as "Dry September" is huge. However, the view expressed in this politically very uncorrect letter is, I find, on one level perfectly consistent with the view expressed in the remarkable short story about lynching in a Southern community, "Dry September," which was published almost simultaneously. In both texts, lynching seems to happen because of strangers. But "Dry September" further underlines the determinant influence of the climate, and what we now read as a splendid exercise in metaphoric atmosphere can also be seen as a fine exercise in Balzacian stage-setting.

²⁶As Philip Cohen has noticed, the first move in Balzac's novel, as well as in Faulkner's *Hamlet*, consequently shows a condescending representative of the ruling-class (Blondet in Balzac, Jody in Faulkner) being outwitted by one of the peasants (Fourchon, Ab Snopes), so that the aristocrats's command of society is immediately questioned ("French Peasants" 388-9). It must however be noted that the first chapter of *The Hamlet* was "Barn Burning" until a comparatively late stage in the composition; in the *Father Abraham* drafts, no such early warning occurs.

"Balzac," Cohen writes, "is very much, among other things, a political writer, whereas Faulkner's fiction is almost apolitical." ("Balzac and Faulkner" 350) This view can be defended about Faulkner's major novels, after the turning point of *The South and the Fury*, but not about the unaltered early drafts of *Father Abraham*. Snell comments that Phil Stone welcomed the political subject of *Father Abraham* — the decline of the Southern ruling-class and "the rise of the Redneck."²⁷ Actually it could be argued that Faulkner laid aside *Father Abraham* because the Snopes matter was too openly political, and he was not comfortable with an approach which was so little his own. The *literary* Faulkner who wrote "Dry September" contended with the wisely secret political *Faulkner* who wrote the *Commercial-Appeal* letter defending lynching in 1931.

Balzac and Faulkner shared an acute sensitivity to the political situation of their times. In both cases, the political situation could seem unstable. Faulkner's South was trying to recover the status it had been deprived of by the defeat, while in Balzac's France the old monarchic regime was struggling to "restore" the old ways after the violent turmoil of the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. The social background of both authors made them natural standard-bearers for the old ruling class who were trying to prove that their order was not only the best, but the only possible one.

As he moves to his major novels and short stories, Faulkner is not only painting the life of a Southern postage-stamp of a county, but gearing his interest to individuals pathetically indifferent to their present environment, such as Benjy Compson. The typical Faulknerian hero belies Balzac's credo — "does not society modify Man, according to the conditions in which he lives, into men as manifold as the species in Zoology?"²⁸—and insists on his dignity in the face of society's discourse. No better example of this difference can be found than the Snopeses themselves: in *The Town* and *The Mansion*, although Ratliff of Stevens will describe them as a race of rodents (a metaphor Balzac earlier applied to the French peasantry), no reader can help seeing that they are all very different from each other, and from their type — only Flem Snopes is really *a* Snopes.

When Faulkner really starts his Snopes novel in the late 1930s, his outlook on the relationship of man with society is very different from Balzac's. His use of descriptions, or maps, chronologies and other appendices reflects this development. Like Balzac, he makes the apocryphal world of Yoknapatawpha exist in the space between the novels and short stories. In Balzac, reappearing characters confirm the type, bridge gaps between novels to tie them into a continuous fictional account of the world. In Faulkner characters reappear in other novels to play various parts, not necessarily complementary or consistent with earlier ones. Knowing the character from an earlier story hardly helps — it can even prove a problem. As Daniel Ferrer has suggested about Faulkner's chronological chart in *Absalom, Absalom!*, such data must be faulty, to show that even an "objective" account is but one version of the truth, and should therefore be shown to be fragile.

²⁷Snell 197, quoting Meriwether, "Early Notices" 152. The three volumes of *Snopes* are inscribed "to Phil Stone," and the *Town* inscription is complemented by the cryptic sentence "he did half the laughing for thirty years," which may read like a confession of indebtedness. Although Stone confessed that he had not originated the name Snopes, he claimed that he had supplied Faulkner with some "christian" names, such as Admiral Dewey and Wallstreet Panic (Snell 198).

²⁸"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 variété en zoologie?" (Balzac, "Author's Introduction"/"Avant-propos de *La Comédie Humaine*, Pléiade 1:8)

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A metatextual reading of Faulkner's works could suggest that his system is the antithesis of Balzac's. Most of the novels show distrust for the literal meaning of organized discourse, especially when it attempts to account for the relationship between living persons. Sutpen and his design, based on the premise that everything can be acquired or planned, make up a mock-portrait of the artist as Balzac: Sutpen, like Balzac — or Faulkner — cheats with his legacy and his name. He comes back to his home country to "improve on God."²⁹ According to Mr Compson, Sutpen named all the inhabitants of his world (*Novels 1936-1940* 50), thus "competing with the registry office," to use Balzac's description of his own attempt.³⁰ Like Balzac, Sutpen endeavors to recreate a world out of the data patiently gathered from objective observation. In the long elaborations of *The Mansion*, even Ratliff holds forth on the importance of the Balzacian "mill-yew" in shaping Flem's personality (*M* 139). But as Uncle Buck and Buddy read the old books of the McCaslin plantation, as Isaac McCaslin reads the Good Book, meaning turns out to lie as much in what the books keep silent as in what they say.

In Faulkner the description of a setting is ironic. It does not function, as it does in Balzac, to reinforce the meaning of the novel, but to undermine it, to disprove and invalidate it. Faulkner opens the space of the novel, but does not close it. He stages absence, lack, loss, hiatus. It is no wonder that in the earlier version of the prologue to the first act of *Requiem for a Nun*, the narrator was Gavin Stevens: the three descriptive prologues to this strange novel are just like him. They derive from a belief in the capacity of places to express the truth about people. The history of the city, of the state capitol, of the jail, look as though they could help the reader to understand what happens to the characters when they find themselves in such places. Conversely they insist that people live on and refuse to be determined by what they once where.

In *The Country Doctor*, Docteur Benassis is a forerunner of idealist Gavin Stevens, whom Faulkner recurrently describes in a Balzacian antonomasia as "the country lawyer, the amateur Cincinnatus." Benassis claims the status of an engineer to the community's happiness. Interestingly, the starting point of the thin plot in *The Country Doctor* is the discovery of a valley full of idiots, and the way Benassis deals with their families' crippling compassion for them: bringing order is making sure the idiots stay in the margins. In *The Town* and *The Mansion*, Balzac's opening descriptions of settings are replaced by the points of irony of Flem's monuments — which brings to mind Balzac's metaphor of literature as architecture. At least one of these monuments belies what everyone knows with the unanimous consent of the community: the monument to Eula Varner with its ironic inscription — "A Virtuous Wife is A Crown to Her Husband" (*T* 355; *M* 149). The difference between Balzac and Faulkner is that Benassis is more of a mouthpiece of the author than Gavin Stevens and V.K. Ratliff, who vie to decipher Flem's monument, although aware that their deciphering will always be too late to catch up with Flem Snopes. Yet neither Chick Mallison nor Gavin Stevens or V.K. Ratliff can help being Balzacian. The monuments which dot Flem Snopes's Jefferson in *The Town* and

²⁹The phrase, foreshadowing the Stein interview, occurs in Faulkner's unpublished account of the composition of *Flags in the Dust*: ". . . nothing served but that I try by main strength to recreate between the covers of a book the world as I was already preparing to lose and regret So I got some people, some I invented, others I created out of tales I learned of nigger cooks and stable boys of all ages thus I improved on God who, dramatic though He be, has no sense, no feeling for, theatre." (Manuscript quoted by Blotner, *Biography* 531-2)

³⁰"faire concurrence à l'Etat-Civil" ("Avant-Propos à *La Comédie Humaine*," Pléiade 1:10).

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The Mansion are like so many Balzacian Claës Houses the city has to decipher — and be wrong about.

In *The Town*, Gavin Stevens's evening vision of Jefferson from Seminary Hill stages the mastery of the God-like narrator, a metaphor of the writer contemplating his achievement: "you stand suzerain and solitary above the whole sum of your life . . . yourself detached as God himself for this moment above the cradle of your nativity . . . you to preside unanguished and immune above this miniature of man's passions and hopes and disasters . . ." (315-6) The sheer rhythm of Faulkner's splendid prose might lull the reader into the same comfortable agreement with the comprehensive vision as with Balzac's breathtaking descriptions; but gradually the unity collapses and the solitary figure of the individual narrator insists: "you, the old man, standing there while there rises to you, about you, the spring dark peopled and myriad, seeking never at all solitude but simply privacy" (317) and eventually, in italics: "*Why me? Why bother me? Why cant you let me alone?*" (318)

To conclude: like Balzac, Faulkner believes in a fiction which would reflect and enlarge political awareness. Balzac's descriptions are made to fascinate the reader into believing in the system of society he paints, and his technique is used as much to convince us of the utopian society of *The Country Doctor* as of the collapsing social order of *The Peasantry*. Conversely, Faulkner's interrupted tableaux point out that only the individual is valuable; communities are oppressive forms of society in which everybody watches his neighbors and is intent on deciphering the meanings of what he watches. Balzac coldly noted that in Saumur, the setting of *Eugénie Grandet*, "[n]o passer-by escapes being looked over by sharp eyes".³¹— but Faulkner is closer to Balzac's American contemporary Nathaniel Hawthorne in exposing the morally wrong and scientifically hopeless violation of the mystery of the human heart.

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³¹ *Eugénie Grandet* 36. "Il ne passe personne dans la rue qui ne soit étudié." (Pléiade 3:1030).

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