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IMAGES AND THEMES  
IN  
'LE LYS DANS LA VALLEE'

Thesis presented for the degree of Ph.D. in the  
University of London  
by  
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ABSTRACT

The thesis is a style-study of le Lys dans la vallée. Previous assessments of the novel's style have often been unfavourable. This derives at least in part from critics' tendency to concentrate on selected parts of the novel - whether to illustrate the Honoré de Balzac-Félix de Vandenesse identification, or Balzac's supposedly flawed prose. The partiality of such approaches may be remedied by acknowledging the creative autonomy which Balzac has delegated to his 'créature', Félix de Vandenesse, and by seeing the novel as Félix's valiant bid for creativity, as Félix's coherent vision of his past and of the world. Balzac does, moreover, give Félix ample motivation for writing such a narrative. Although, then, an examination of the historical context in which le Lys was written confirms that many of its themes are clichés of the period, their combination, organisation, and justification are unique.

Félix's vision is epitomised in the way he establishes verbal links between experiences separated in time but related in intensity of feeling. The objects he describes are infused with his own subjective values, and become, therefore, what are called material images. These centre in groups on the four natural elements of earth, air (light and sound), fire and water, and on the various references to movement in the narrative. All these images and themes are then seen to converge on the plant, especially in the descriptions of the bouquets, which are thus at the centre of a network of correspondances whose source and brilliant internal justification are to be found in the description of Félix the poet-child-mystic. However brilliantly coherent, this vision is also the escapist fantasy of a child who never progresses from his adolescent fixations. Hence the importance of

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Natalie de Manerville's rejoinder. Hence, too, the originality of Balzac in composing a supremely coherent but at the same time supremely vitiated 'paradis imaginaire'.

The interest of this subject was first suggested to me by Dr. W.M. Landers of King's College, London. I owe him a considerable debt of gratitude. I would also like to express my deep indebtedness to Professor J. Gaudon, formerly of Royal Holloway College, London, and to Professor B. Juden, at present of Royal Holloway College, London, whose patient advice, help and encouragement have been invaluable.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations have been used in the footnotes and bibliography:

- A.B. : Année balzacienne.
- C.A.I.E.F. : Cahiers de l'association internationale des études françaises.
- F.S. : French Studies.
- I.L. : Information littéraire.
- L.H.I. : See p.i, n.2.
- M.L. : Modern Languages.
- M.L.N. : Modern Language Notes.
- O.D. : Oeuvres diverses. See p.12 n.3. and bibliography.
- P.M.L.A. : Publication of the Modern Language Association of America.
- R.H.L.F. : Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France.
- R.S.H. : Revue des sciences humaines.
- S.F. : Studi francesi.
- Y. : See p.i, n.1.

NOTE ON INTERREFERENCES

Interreferences in the thesis are punctuated as in the following examples:

- Cf. p.5(n.6) : i.e. see context and quotation preceding note 6.
- Cf. p.5 n.6 : i.e. see note only.
- Cf. p.5 and n.6 : i.e. see context, quotation and note.

INTRODUCTION.

## Introduction

A résumé of critical reactions to le Lys dans la vallée.

" 'Je demande une grâce que je crains qu'on ne m'accorde pas: c'est de ne pas juger, par la lecture d'un moment, d'un travail de vingt années; d'approuver ou de condamner le livre entier, et non pas quelques phrases. Si l'on veut chercher le dessein de l'auteur, on ne peut le bien découvrir que dans le dessein de l'ouvrage.' " 1

These words of Montesquieu provide a singularly appropriate introduction to critics' reaction to le Lys dans la vallée. For le Lys has, ever since its first appearance, frequently suffered from hasty and ill-considered condemnations. In the summer of 1836 Balzac wrote to Mme Hanska: 'Oui, tous les journaux ont été hostiles au Lys; tous l'ont honni, ont craché là-dessus.'<sup>2</sup> Even if, as Le Yaouanc points out, Balzac exaggerated public hostility towards the novel,<sup>3</sup> Jacques Borel draws attention to the partial and polemical nature of many of the contemporary judgements<sup>4</sup> and le Lys continued to remain in general disfavour for many years after the polemical battles surrounding its publication had subsided.

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- 1: Quoted from the introduction to l'Esprit des Lois by Per Nykrog: La Pensée de Balzac dans la 'Comédie humaine', Copenhagen, Munksgaard, 1965, p.10. Balzac himself makes an analogy between l'Esprit des Lois and le Lys in the Historique du procès auquel a donné lieu 'le Lys dans la vallée', Garnier edition, Introduction, notes, bibliographie et choix de variantes par Moïse Le Yaouanc, 1966, p.342. This is the edition used in this study; it will henceforward be indicated: Y. For other novels in the Comédie humaine the edition used will, unless otherwise indicated, be the eleven volumes of the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade.
  - 2: Honoré de Balzac: Lettres à Madame Hanska, Textes réunis, classés et annotés par Roger Pierrot, Les Editions du Delta, 1967, Tome 1 (1832-1840), p. 439. (Letter of 22 August 1836) This volume will henceforward be indicated: L.H.L.
  - 3: Y. intro. p.XCVI.
  - 4: J.Borel: 'Le Lys dans la vallée' et les sources de la création balzacienne, Corti, 1961, p.7. For further details of contemporary reaction to le Lys, see: M.Serval: 'Autour d'un roman de Balzac. Le Lys dans la vallée', R.H.L.F., 1926 (octobre-décembre), pp.586-594; M. Blanchard: Témoignages et jugements sur Balzac, Champion, 1931; Mary L. Givens: Balzac and the 'roman personnel'. A study of 'le Lys dans la vallée'. American Doctoral Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1938 (unpublished), pp.48-78.



In 1938 Mary L. Givens observes that nearly all the critics of le Lys dans la vallée think that 'the style of the novel is bad'.<sup>1</sup> R. Michaud, also in 1938, refers to le Lys as 'ce livre longtemps méconnu, et que le public et les lettrés boudent encore.'<sup>2</sup> Borel, after recalling the verdicts of Brunetière, Faguet and Lanson, comments: 'pour accabler le Lys l'accord est complet.'<sup>3</sup> In 1966, Monica Crawley writes: 'La critique du Lys est dans l'ensemble soit défavorable soit exclusivement biographique.'<sup>4</sup>

Although the work of a number of critics - for example, Baschet, Paul Flat, Bellessort, Taine, Allem and Alain, and, more recently, Marie-Jeanne Durry, Borel and Le Yaouanc - represents more detailed and more sympathetic study of the novel, the bulk of adverse criticism remains formidable. As the above quotations suggest, le Lys criticism has tended to centre on style and biographical and literary sources. These will now be examined in more detail.

The primary literary source of le Lys dans la vallée is generally held to be Volupté by Sainte-Beuve. As Borel notes: 'La comparaison des deux livres, devenue un lieu commun de la critique, se fait de tradition au détriment de Balzac, dans un jugement général qui ne précise souvent pas grand chose.'<sup>5</sup> Volupté appeared on the 19th July, 1834,<sup>6</sup> was bought by Balzac on the 6th August,<sup>7</sup> and subsequently analysed and assessed by him in his letters.<sup>8</sup> Since Balzac's evaluation

1: Mary L. Givens: op.cit. p.68.

2: R. Michaud: 'Baudelaire, Balzac et les correspondances.', Romanic Review, 1938 (Oct.), p.255.

3: J. Borel: op.cit. p.11.

4: M. Crawley: 'Le Lys dans la vallée': H. de Balzac. Etude stylistique, M.A. Thesis, University of Exeter, 1966 (unpublished), p.2.

5: J. Borel: 'Le Lys(...)' et les sources(...), p.61.

6: Cf. Honoré de Balzac: Correspondance. Textes réunis, classés et annotés par Roger Pierrot, Tome II (juin 1832-1835), Garnier, 1962, p.537 n.l.

7: Cf. ibid.

8: Cf. L.H.I pp.246-247 (Letter of 25(?) August, 1834).

L.H.I p.259 (Letter of 18 October, 1834).

of Volupté coincides with his first allusions to what later becomes le Lys dans la vallée, and since he himself establishes parallels between the two novels,<sup>1</sup> critics have upheld Sainte-Beuve's claim that Balzac consciously re-wrote Volupté in le Lys dans la vallée.<sup>2</sup> They are further supported by certain similarities of plot and character in the two works.

Werdet himself, according to Givens, 'testifies that Volupté served the novelist as a model and a guide,<sup>3</sup> and later critics such as Brunetière, Ruxton, Faguet, Haas and Bouteron are unanimous in attributing the initial inspiration of le Lys to Volupté. Givens concludes that 'All literary authorities are agreed that le Lys dans la vallée had Volupté as its origin'<sup>4</sup> and a few years later Billy claims: 'Ce roman tire son origine de l'ambition qu'eut Balzac de faire oublier Volupté',<sup>5</sup> although, as Borel has pointed out, the frequent comparisons have stimulated the reading of the two novels.<sup>6</sup> More recent critics, including Pierrot, A. Mourois, and Le Yaouanc, have continued to consider Volupté an important factor in the genesis of the novel. After a searching analysis, Le Yaouanc concludes: 'A l'origine du Lys il y a chez lui, sans conteste, l'intention de rivaliser avec Sainte-Beuve, de traiter un sujet découvert en lisant Volupté.'<sup>7</sup>

Detailed comparisons of the two novels have been made by a much

1: Cf: L.H.I p.361 (Letter of the end of October, 1835).

2: Cf. for example, C.A. Sainte-Beuve: Portraits contemporains, Calmann-Lévy, 1876, t.2., pp.356-357. Sainte-Beuve tells the anecdote at intervals throughout his works. Here, as elsewhere, Sainte-Beuve claims that Balzac wrote le Lys in pique at his (Sainte-Beuve's) 1834 article on La Recherche de l'Asolu. (cf. below p. viii-ix).

3: Mary L. Givens: Balzac and the 'roman personnel' (...), pp.135-136.

4: Ibid. p.135.

5: A. Billy: Vie de Balzac, Flammarion, 1944, (2 Volumes), Vol.1, p.248.

6: Cf. J. Borel: op.cit. p.18.

7: Y. intro. p.XXXV.

smaller group of critics,<sup>1</sup> and their conclusions have shown that, despite apparent similarities of plot and character, radical differences of emphasis and treatment distinguish them. J. Haas remarks: 'Aus einer Betrachtung von Volupté wird sich ergeben, dass der Lys ein absolut anderes Werk ist als Volupté.'<sup>2</sup> He thus supports Girault's earlier contention that 'Ces deux livres, quoique traitant le même sujet, sont tout à fait distincts l'un de l'autre.'<sup>3</sup> Two of the main differences noted are the relative infrequency of metaphor in Volupté and the comparatively minor role attributed to Nature: 'Il y a donc une différence essentielle entre les deux conceptions, et c'est la localisation balzacienne qui la constitue.'<sup>4</sup>

Thus, although the parallels between the two novels have emphasised important if obvious aspects of le Lys dans la vallée, most critics have been content with 'un jugement qui ne précise souvent pas grand chose.'<sup>5</sup> In addition, some comparisons between Volupté and le Lys have been overshadowed by consideration of Balzac's relations with Sainte-Beuve or have been clouded by attempts to vindicate one of the authors. Thus, although illuminating comments can be, and have been, drawn from more detailed comparisons, le Lys should also and perhaps initially be studied as a separate and individual work of art. In this way, the risk of parallels or contrasts, often detrimental to

1: Cf. Mary L. Givens: *op.cit.* Part IV, Chapt.11, pp.109-156.

2: J. Haas: Honoré de Balzac's 'Lilie im Tal', Tübingen, Selbstverlag des Verfassers, 1924, p.5. ('It will be apparent from a consideration of Volupté that le Lys is a completely different work from Volupté'.)

3: F. Girault: Article in Spoelberch de Lovenjoul's Une page perdue de Honoré de Balzac, Société d'Editions littéraires et artistiques, 1903, p.257. Cf. pp.9-10 of M.-J. Darry's introduction to her edition of le Lys dans la vallée (Hachette, 1953).

4: M. Serval: 'Autour d'un roman de Balzac. Le Lys (...).' R.H.L.F., 1926 (octobre-décembre), p.571.

5: Cf. above p. ii.

one of the authors, each with an essentially different aim and technique, can be reduced.<sup>1</sup>

Another aspect of the genesis of le Lys dans la vallée has attracted even more attention: the possible biographical sources for the characters in the novel. Gould's comment: 'In recent years, the tendency has been to concentrate on the autobiographical elements in Balzac's writings'<sup>2</sup> and Arlette Michel's remark in her review of the 1967 Année Balzacienne: 'toute étude esthétique ou idéologique des textes balzaciens se veut fondée sur un examen scrupuleux et historique des oeuvres mêmes et de la carrière de leur auteur,'<sup>3</sup> have indeed been reflected in le Lys criticism. The attempt to find living models for the main characters began even before Balzac's death, as is evidenced by the following extract from a letter to Mme Hanska, written in October, 1836:

'Ne dit-on pas que j'ai peint Mme Visconti? Voilà à quels jugements nous sommes exposés. Vous savez que j'avais les épreuves à Vienne, et ce portrait a été écrit à Saché, corrigé à la Bouleaunière, avant que j'eusse vu Mme de V[isconti]. J'en suis à 5 plaintes formelles de personnes autour de moi qui disent que j'ai dévoilé leur vie privée. J'ai les lettres les plus curieuses, à ce sujet. Il paraît qu'il y a autant de M. de Mortsauif qu'il y a d'anges de Clochegourde, [...].'<sup>4</sup>

It is, perhaps, to try to anticipate such claims that Balzac writes

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- 1: Such is, however, the importance of Volupté in le Lys criticism that it is both natural and necessary to consider its style and themes in more detail when illustrating the historical context of Balzac's novel. Cf. below pp. 58-59.
  - 2: C. Gould: 'The present state of Balzac studies.', F.S., 1958 (October), p.312. This article has been reprinted in The Present State of French Studies, edited by Charles B. Osburn, Metuchen, N.J., The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1971.
  - 3: R.S.H. 1968 (avril-juin), p.329.
  - 4: L.H.I. p.447 (Letter of 1 October, 1836).

in the Preface to le Lys, dated July, 1835:

'Le Lys dans la vallée étant l'ouvrage le plus considérable de ceux où l'auteur a pris le moi pour se diriger à travers les sinuosités d'une histoire plus ou moins vraie, il croit nécessaire de déclarer ici qu'il ne s'est nulle part mis en scène. Il a sur la promiscuité des sentiments personnels et des sentiments fictifs une opinion sévère et des principes arrêtés.' 1

- an opinion which Le Yaouanc, like many previous critics, thinks 'très discutable'.<sup>2</sup>

The interpretation of Marcel Bouteron - even if his critical methods have come under fire of late - has been one of those most generally accepted: 'Les noms qu'il [Balzac] a donnés à ses personnages je les efface et je trouve au lieu de Madame de Mortsauf, de Natalie de Manerville et de Félix de Vandenesse, Madame de Berny, la comtesse Hanska, Honoré de Balzac.'<sup>3</sup> As a result of such comments, Gould has remarked: 'A number of separate episodes in Balzac's life have been investigated by M. Bouteron. His contributions on these subjects [...] show how much he has contributed to the present day 'autobiographical' interpretation of the novelist's works.'<sup>4</sup> The fact that, as will be seen,<sup>5</sup> this kind of biographical criticism has become increasingly well-informed and more subtle in its approach does not, moreover, mean that its conclusions are necessarily changed. Thus, in her Postface to a recent edition of le Lys, the eminent balzacienne Anne-Marie Meininger speaks of the novel as 'cette

1: Y. pp. 337-338. This preface was first published in La Revue de Paris, 1835 (22 November).

2: Y. p.338 n.l.

3: M. Bouteron: Une année dans la vie de Balzac. 1835. Monaco, Imprimerie de Monaco, 1925, pp. 40-41.

4: C. Gould: 'The present state of Balzac studies.', p.301.

5: The biographical approach and its implications are discussed more fully in Chapter 1.



prodigieuse psychanalyse de Balzac par lui-même' and comments: 'les amours de Félix sont exclusivement faits des souvenirs de l'amour encore chaste de Villeparisis.'<sup>1</sup>

Although it would be a serious error to underestimate the value and the need for further biographical research as an aid or a complement to thorough analyses of the texts themselves, such close textual analysis has been much less in evidence in the case of le Lys dans la vallée. Indeed, of Balzac in general Gould remarks: 'There is no field [...] in which investigations are more urgently required than in regard to his language and style.'<sup>2</sup> H. Mitterand makes a similar comment: 'sur le style de Balzac, ou, disons, sur le langage de Balzac, les balzaciens se taisent.'<sup>3</sup> Thus, although increasing importance has been given to stylistic studies in, for example, recent editions of Année Balzacienne, relatively few seem to have been produced by its established or regular contributors.<sup>4</sup>

Critics have, however, by no means always been silent on the style of le Lys dans la vallée, and if the novel has incurred such frequent disparagement, its style is usually held responsible. Balzac, however, was far from dissatisfied with its style: 'A l'avis de tous les critiques et au mien, ce sera l'oeuvre la plus parfaite comme style, en regardant Séraphita et Louis Lambert comme des

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- 1: Honoré de Balzac: Le Lys dans la vallée. Préface de Paul Morand. Postface, dossier et notes d'Anne-Marie Meininger. Collection Folio, Gallimard, 1972, pp. 347, 346. It was, of course, at Villeparisis that Balzac met Mme de Berny.
- 2: C. Gould: op.cit. p.315.
- 3: H. Mitterand: 'A propos du style de Balzac.' Europe, 1965 (janvier-février), p.146. Cf. however: J.M. Burton: Honoré de Balzac and his figures of speech. N. Jersey, Princeton University Press; Paris, Champion, 1921. (Elliot Monographs No.8).
- 4: Cf. B. Vannier's review of L'Année Balzacienne 1970: M.L.N. Vol. 86, 1971 (May), pp. 592-597. An important exception to the above remarks is Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, three of whose articles on imagery have appeared in A.B. (see bibliog.).

exceptions.<sup>1</sup> His letters repeatedly reflect, during the long and laborious composition of the novel, his preoccupation with its style: 'Il est inouï de vous dire ce que coûte le Lys.'<sup>2</sup> During the continual revisions and corrections, he makes frequent reference to 'les horribles travaux du Lys' but later triumphantly announces Mme de Berny's verdict: 'elle, qui m'était si amoureusement sévère, avouait que le Lys était un des plus beaux livres de la langue française'.<sup>3</sup> Although allowance must be made for Balzac's habit of claiming that the latest production surpasses its predecessors, and for his relief that the novel was at last published, his satisfaction accounts for his later disappointment at its unenthusiastic critical reception.

Even before the publication of the first complete edition of the novel,<sup>4</sup> its style was the subject of criticism and derision. In the celebrated lawsuit between Balzac and the Revue de Paris, M. Chaix d'Est-Ange, representing the Revue, selected extracts from the novel for ridicule, and was so scathing towards some of its expressions, that Balzac's lawyer, M. Boinvilliers, retorted: '"La prose de M de Balzac à fourni à mon adversaire sa réplique presque tout entière."<sup>5</sup>

Before le Lys appeared, Sainte-Beuve had taken up his pen against Balzac's style: 'M. de Balzac [...] a un vocabulaire incohérent, exubérant, où les mots bouillonnent et sortent comme

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1: L.H.I p.392 (Letter of 8 March, 1836).

2: Ibid. p.371 (Letter of 18 December, 1835).

3: L.H.I p.435 (Letter of 22 August, 1836).

4: 1836 (10 June): Y. p.XXXIII.

5: Revue de Paris, XXIX, 1836 (mai 28), p.354.

au hasard [...]'.<sup>1</sup> and, although moderating his tone in his necrological article, written in September, 1850, had a lasting influence on later critics of Balzac's style. Thus Mario Roques comments that, after Sainte-Beuve: 'le branle était donné; la condamnation de la langue et du style de Balzac devint une des propositions fondamentales de la critique de son temps, elle le poursuivit après sa mort, et, de manuel en manuel, elle est, malgré les réserves de quelques bons juges, devenue un dogme de notre histoire littéraire.'<sup>2</sup>

In order to illustrate the methods and criteria of critics of Balzac's style, with particular reference to le Lys dans la vallée, it is important to single out those particular aspects which have most angered the critics.

Balzac has, from Sainte-Beuve onwards, been accused of solecism, strained neologism, and tortured sentence structure. Recurrent phrases are 'fautes de style',<sup>3</sup> 'le plus mauvais roman que je connaisse',<sup>4</sup> 'l'un des plus méchants écrivains',<sup>5</sup> 'Balzac écrivait mal'.<sup>6</sup> Arrigon speaks of '[ce] style presque toujours défectueux qui gâte tout.'<sup>7</sup> and S. Ullmann, in 1957, sums up a still prevailing attitude to Balzac's style: 'it cannot be denied that some outstanding

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- 1: C.A. de Sainte-Beuve: 'Poètes et romanciers de la France XVI: M de Balzac: La Recherche de l'Absolu' in Revue des deux mondes, Troisième série, Tomes 3, 4, 1834 (juillet-décembre), p.451. Also quoted by H. Guillemin in his introduction to his edition of le Lys (Collection Classiques du Milieu du Monde, undated, p.15). Like so many critics, Guillemin concentrates on the autobiographical interest and stylistic weaknesses of the novel, in which Félix, Count or no, expresses himself on occasion 'comme un valet de comédie'. (*Ibid*) Cf. also A. Allemand: Unité et structure de l'univers balzacien, Plon, 1965, p.24.
  - 2: M. Roques: 'La Langue de Balzac', in Le Livre du Centenaire, Flammarion, 1952, p.246.
  - 3: M. Barrière: L'Oeuvre de Balzac, Calmann-Lévy, 1890, p.105.
  - 4: E. Faguet: Balzac, Hachette, (Les Grands Ecrivains Français), 1913, p.135.
  - 5: C. Bruneau in F. Brunot: Histoire. Vol.XII: L'Epoque romantique, 1815-1822, 1948, p.366.
  - 6: A. Hallays: 'Pèlerinages balzaciens' in En flânant: A travers la France. Touraine, Anjou et Maine, Perrin et Cie, 1912, p.43.
  - 7: L. Arrigon: Balzac et la "Contessa", Paris, 1932, p.59.



novelists are indifferent stylists. Balzac's style had many flaws;'.<sup>1</sup>  
 Even a more sympathetic critic H.U. Forest, writes: 'Il faut reconnaître, toutefois, qu'il y a des négligences, des manques de goût, des impropriétés de termes, même dans ses meilleurs romans.'<sup>2</sup>  
 Thus, despite eminent writers such as Taine, who contends:  
 'Evidemment cet homme [...] savait sa langue; [...] seulement il l'employait à sa façon.'<sup>3</sup> the opinion of many critics has been:  
 'Balzac commet des fautes contre l'usage académique, donc c'est un mauvais écrivain.'<sup>4</sup>

The frequent use of the words 'fautes' or 'flaws' illuminates the critics' method: the extraction of isolated words, phrases, and, more rarely, sentences or passages, from various texts, to illustrate the critic's assessment - whether favourable or unfavourable - of the author's whole work. This technique applies to both admirers and detractors of Balzac, and has, particularly among the earlier commentators, tended to lead to what now seems exaggerated disapproval, or praise, of Balzac's style.

The same technique has led to another reproach often levelled at Balzac's style: its incoherence. Le Lys dans la vallée in particular has been singled out to illustrate this fault: 'ce langage que personne ne comprend';<sup>5</sup> 'un vocabulaire incohérent';<sup>6</sup> 'Unklarheiten'.<sup>7</sup> One obstacle to coherence was thought to be Balzac's complicated sentence

1: S. Ullman: Style in the French Novel, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1964 (First published 1957), p.260.

2: H.U. Forest: L'Esthétique du roman balzacien, P.U.F., 1950, p.243.

3: H. Taine: Nouveaux Essais de critique et d'histoire, Hachette, 1865, p.116.

4: H. Mitterand: 'A propos du style de Balzac', p.147. Mitterand's irony is, alas, only too well justified.

5: Revue de Paris, XXIX, 1836 (mai), p.348.

6: Cf. above p.viii.

7: J. Haas: Honoré de Balzac's 'Lilie im Tal', p.50.

structure. The main obstacle suggested for le Lys, however, has been the abundance of confused and inappropriate metaphor: 'Çà et là, sans doute, on discerne une image, belle et saisissante, mais souvent elle a été conçue à part, de sorte que, dans le contexte, elle prend parfois l'apparence d'ornement plaqué.'<sup>1</sup> Lanson, referring to 'une phraséologie pompeuse, ornée de métaphores boursouflées ou banales',<sup>2</sup> also treats the images as external decoration, with no relation to others elsewhere in the novel, with no role in the presentation of the character of the speaker.

Once again, the method of stylistic criticism has often been the selection and condemnation of offending passages. Marie Roques has already regretted the extraction of 'des exemples morcelés, isolés d'un contexte'.<sup>3</sup> Indeed nowhere, perhaps might the plea which opened this introduction - to judge a work as a whole and not on 'quelques phrases' - have been more worthily heeded than in respect of the imagery of le Lys dans la vallée.

As a result, a critic may arbitrarily approve or condemn different extracts from the same work. Another may quote similar passages but react to them differently. As Allemand points out: 'Il y a ceux qui aiment de son style ce que Sainte-Beuve nommait, faute de terme meilleur, son efflorescence. Il y a ceux que le

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1: L. Arrigon: Balzac et la "Contessa", p.61.

2: G. Lanson: Histoire illustrée de la littérature française, Hachette, 1923, (2 Vols), Vol. 2, p.303.

3: M. Roques: 'La Langue de Balzac', p.247.

condamnent en vertu des mêmes principes [...]'.<sup>1</sup> Thus Faguet roundly condemns the bouquet descriptions: 'Ce n'est pas un bouquet, c'est une forêt [...]. On entend un cliquetis de noms étranges et inusités [...].'<sup>2</sup> Taine, however, concludes of the same passages: 'La poésie orientale n'a rien de plus éblouissant ni de plus magnifique;'.<sup>3</sup> Since both critics imply that the quotations alone should convince the reader of the correctness of their opinion, an impasse seems to have been reached. It is at least partly to try to show a possible way out of this impasse - still evident in le Lys criticisms<sup>4</sup> - that this thesis has been written.

A third, connected fault found in the style of le Lys dans la vallée has been its 'romanticism' and its exaggeration. The terms are often associated: 'The [...] exaggerated sentimentality of the

1: A. Allemand: Unité et structure [...], p.12

In his article on Balzac's style, ('Balzac styliste', C.A.I.E.F., No.15, 1963, pp.309-329) Francis Bar opens with reference to the le Lys trial and remarks (pp.310-311):

'Il est d'ailleurs piquant de se rappeler que Balzac reprochait de son côté à Sainte-Beuve l'emploi d'un style novateur et ampoulé...Il faut avouer qu'en général, et malgré l'avis de Taine, il est admis que Balzac écrit mal. Un ouvrage de haute érudition, auquel, par une exception à la méthode, nous nous contenterons de faire allusion, offre un catalogue complaisant de passages, à la vérité discutables du point de vue de la grammaire ou de celui du style, et pris à l'oeuvre de notre auteur; cependant un condamnation sans nuances est tout à fait irrégulière en pareil cas: il y manque la contre-partie élogieuse, aussi fondée, et autrement satisfaisante pour l'esprit.'

Unfortunately the rest of Bar's article is itself a catalogue of extracts, even if for him they constitute 'des "bonheurs" dans l'ordre de l'expression'. (Ibid. p.312).

2: E. Faguet: Balzac, pp. 161, 162.

3: H. Taine: Nouveaux Essais [...], p.116.

4: Thus Gérard Roubichou, in his presentation of extracts from the novel (Bordas, 1967) comments (p.229): 'Nombreux ont été et sont encore les détracteurs de ce roman, sensibles au pathos et à la verbosité.' After noting some of the novel's 'réussites', Roubichou attributes its 'défaillances' to the fact that it is Balzac's own confession (p.230): 'Il remuait trop de souvenirs, ou d'images qui lui étaient chères, pour ne pas se laisser emporter. De là viennent ces lourdeurs, ces gaucheries que n'ont pas manqué de relever les détracteurs du Lys et qui d'ailleurs se placent dans les moments de forte intensité dramatique et de pathétique, images incohérentes ou saugrenues [...].'  
Here is, alas, M. Roques' 'dogme de notre histoire littéraire' in action.

work'; 'much romantic exaggeration'; 'We find the language of le Lys sometimes awkward, exaggerated, monotonous, rhetorical.'<sup>1</sup> Haas speaks disparagingly of Balzac's 'Übertriebungen',<sup>2</sup> and Faguet is even more explicit: 'Il y avait [...] dans Balzac un romantique par imitation, un romantique populaire, [...] qui gâte déplorablement le réaliste';<sup>3</sup> Brunetière, too, feels that Balzac is by nature a 'realist' who lapses into 'romanticism' in such novels as Le Lys dans la vallée.<sup>4</sup>

The Touraine descriptions in le Lys are, however, usually excepted from the frequently condemned 'romanticism' of the novel, and associated with other environmental descriptions in Balzac's often more favourably treated 'realist' novels. Thus, Haas regrets the 'stylistische n Schwächen' of le Lys, but admires the descriptions of Touraine.<sup>5</sup> Hallays, too, talks of passages which are 'd'admirables tableaux peints d'après nature', but deplores 'l'embrouillamini des images'.<sup>6</sup> Such an attitude has no doubt been favoured by the pleasure of combining a love of literature with a love of nature: 'pour bien savouër le charme du Lys, il faut connaître la vallée'; 'le Lys doit être lu en Touraine'.<sup>7</sup> Mary Givens, however, - who, being in America, might have found these stipulations rather irritating - seems to glimpse the arbitrary nature of this romantic/realist division: 'Materialism and idealism are blended to such an extent in the novel that it is difficult to decide where one begins and the other leaves off.'<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, a large proportion

1: Mary L. Givens: Balzac and the 'roman personnel', pp.77, 300, 322.

2: J. Haas: Honoré de Balzac's 'Lilie im Tal', p.50. ('Exaggerations').

3: E. Faguet: Balzac, p.136.

4: F. Brunetière: Honoré de Balzac, 1799-1850, Calmann-Lévy, 1906, pp. 130-131, 168-169.

5: J. Haas: op.cit. p.43 ('Stylistic weaknesses'); pp.73ff.

6: A. Hallays: En flânant [...], pp.41,45.

7: M. Serval: 'Autour d'un roman de Balzac. Le Lys dans la vallée' R.H.L.F., 1926 (juillet-septembre), p.371. The verbal and the visual are, of course, explicitly linked in Paul Métadier's Balzac en Touraine, collection "Les Albums littéraires de la France", Hachette, 1968.

8: Mary L. Givens: op.cit., p.339.

of her thesis is devoted to the separate enumeration of 'romantic' and 'realist' elements, with the former severely penalised.<sup>1</sup>

J. Borel, in his chapter on Un paysage idéalisé, does not acknowledge this romantic/realist dichotomy. He claims that Balzac's principle 'est de traiter le paysage strictement en fonction de l'oeuvre' and that Balzac does, therefore, refrain from 'le développement gratuit, la description pour le plaisir';<sup>2</sup> He implies, therefore, that the Touraine descriptions should be analysed less in the context of the Indre valley - though, of course, discrepancies discovered between fact and fiction can be extremely revealing -<sup>3</sup> than in the context of the novel itself and in relation to the character of the protagonists. He also implies that le Lys should be studied as a separate and coherent unit in which, for example, structure, style and content can be examined together.

One way of doing full justice to the style of le Lys dans la vallée is, then, to refuse to see form and content, 'fond' and 'forme', as separate entities. From this angle, figures of speech such as metaphor are no longer mere ornaments, but the privileged purveyors of meaning. The notion of the semantic function of the image is, moreover, gaining increasing currency with critics. Thus, in his illuminating survey of changing attitudes to metaphor, T. Hawkes remarks of a number of

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1: Mary L. Givens: Balzac and the 'roman personnel', Part 3: 'The Realist and Romantic Qualities of the Novel', pp.229-379.

2: J. Borel: 'Le Lys dans la vallée' et les sources profondes [...]' pp.86,88.

If, for Le Yaouanc, 'M. de Mortsau est essentiellement un type nosographique.' (Y. p.LI; cf. idem: Nosographie de l'humanité balzacienne: Balzac et la médecine de son temps, Matoine, 1959, pp.410-417), Jacques Borel (Médecine et psychiatrie balzaciennes, Corti, 1971, pp.30-33,51) points to the medical vagueness - and hence literary usefulness - of, for example, the illness which causes Mortsau's prolonged confinement. In her article entitled 'Texte métaphorique et réalité romanesque' (A.B. 1972, pp.309-321) Lucienne Frappier-Mazur makes exactly the same point about Henriette's fatal illness (cf. pp.313-315). Elements of the novel hitherto cited as examples of Balzac's 'realism' are, therefore, being seen to be open to other interpretations.

3: Cf. below pp. 98-99.



of prominent contemporaries: 'there is no such thing as an isolated free-floating 'metaphor'. The 'meaning', value, and simple existence of any metaphor is discernible only as it actually occurs. And then it is properly perceived only in terms of its relationship with its entire context'.<sup>1</sup> Critics such as Hawkes do, therefore, echo the increasingly held view that 'style is an aspect of meaning'<sup>2</sup> - a view which will, moreover, be one of the basic premises and principles of the following study.<sup>3</sup>

The principle of the ultimate unity of form and content is, moreover, eminently appropriate, even necessary, if le Lys is to be rescued from its detractors. For although le Lys is almost exclusively a first-person narration from the pen of Félix de Vandenesse, its stylistic attributes have, as has been seen, been thought to characterise Balzac before rather than after Felix himself. But as Mario Roques argues of le Lys:

'Y aurait-il là pathos, charabia ou galimatias, nous ne devrions pas le mettre au compte de l'auteur mais bien de ses personnages, qu'il a dotés d'âmes déchirées, passionnées, incertaines, lyriques, dramatiques, romantiques, balzaciennes si l'on veut, - et que d'ailleurs indirectement il raille, - mais non pas de sa propre âme et pas davantage de son propre langage. [...] Prenons à partie Balzac là où il parle pour son compte; ailleurs, nous pouvons seulement nous demander si ce qu'il fait dire à ses personnages leur est ou non convenable; question d'art dramatique, non de langue.' 4

A second basic premise in succeeding chapters is, then, that in

(c.c.)

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- 1: T. Hawkes: Metaphor, London, Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1972, p.77. (No. 25 in the series 'The Critical idiom', edited by J.D. Jump).
  - 2: Cf. G. Hough: Style and stylistics, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969, p.8.
  - 3: The ideas in this paragraph will be examined at length in Chapter 1 - especially pp.35-54.
  - 4: M. Roques: 'La Langue de Balzac', p.247. The words 'pathos' etc. have been used by a number of critics to describe le Lys. The 'indirect raillery' to which Roques refers is undoubtedly Natalie's rejoinder. Cf. below p.424 and n.8.

le Lys Balzac gives what is at least the illusion of having delegated some of his creative powers to one of his 'créatures', who then re-creates his own vision of the past and the world.<sup>1</sup> Although an analysis of this vision will, of course, help to characterise Balzac as an artist and indeed as a philosopher, the prime aim of the thesis will be to delineate the vision of Félix himself.

The above remarks do, therefore, contain two crucially important points: the uniqueness of le Lys as a work of art lies in the fact that it embodies the unique vision of Félix de Vandenesse; the content of that vision is inseparable from the form or style through which it is expressed. The importance of these two points cannot be over-emphasised since their combination leads to a third and final premise, vital to an understanding of the thesis: to characterise le Lys as a work of art it is imperative to analyse its form and style. It is imperative to analyse precisely those images which have been the subject of so much adverse criticism.

Since this third premise is the main guiding principle which informs, even inspires, the whole thesis, it is necessary to present a detailed review of previous critics' attitudes to the form and style of the novel. This introduction has given a brief outline; it is now necessary to expand on these attitudes and put them in a more general perspective. This will be done in Chapter One.

Once this has been completed, it will be possible to define the word 'image' more closely. This will also be covered in Chapter One.<sup>2</sup> Then it will be possible to examine the wealth of imagery in le Lys dans la vallée. The images will be arranged in groups according to a shared motif or theme. Each main theme will be covered by a separate Chapter.<sup>3</sup>

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1: The theme of the delegation of power is, of course, frequent in Balzac. Cf. p.422.

2: Cf. below, pp.35ff.

3: Chapters 2 - 6 inclusive. The word 'theme' will also be examined in the section on imagery.

It will be seen from the titles of four of these Chapters that the predominant theme treated is that of one of the four elements: earth,<sup>1</sup> air,<sup>2</sup> fire,<sup>3</sup> and water.<sup>4</sup> Such themes need hardly surprise a reader familiar with the importance of the natural environment in le Lys dans la vallée.<sup>5</sup> Although the first Chapter on the imagery of the novel, Chapter 2, does not have one of the four elements as its central theme, the images of movement examined are analysed under the headings of the various elements. Thus, after an examination of the present state of study in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 presents the general problem of elemental imagery and basic movements necessary to gain a clear perception of earth, water, light and sound, and fire studied in the subsequent Chapters.

After five Chapters on these various themes, a seventh and final Chapter will bring together the images and themes previously presented: the different elements will be seen to combine in a network of 'correspondances' which pervade the novel, giving it both its unique coherence and character. When the various pieces of the mosaic are assembled, the picture will be complete:<sup>6</sup> Félix's vision will be characterised and the aim of the thesis achieved.

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1: Chapter 3.

2: What might be seen as the Chapter on Air imagery - Chapter 5 - does in fact cover the themes of Light and Sound. This is explained in the Introduction to the Chapter.

3: Chapter 6.

4: Chapter 4.

5: The interest of the four elements in image study has of course been shown by Gaston Bachelard. See bibliography.

6: Or, as Félix Davin/Balzac would say (Introduction to the Etudes philosophiques, XI, p.204), it will be time to leave 'l'envers de /1/a tapisserie' to examine 'le dessin dans son entier'. Cf. below p.372(n.7).



## CHAPTER ONE

### PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

- (1) The Balzac-Félix analogy and its implications.
- (2) Balzac's presentation of experienced reality.
- (3) Félix's presentation of experienced reality.
- (4) Félix's motives for recounting his past.
- (5) Images and themes.
- (6) Le Lys dans la vallée and the historical context.

(1)

The Balzac-Félix analogy and its implications

It has been seen from the above Introduction that a large proportion of those critics who have studied le Lys dans la vallée have tried to elucidate the literary or historical sources of the characters. It is now necessary to examine in greater detail the ideas put forward by the advocates of this technique, its effects on an interpretation of the novel, and the direction in which this type of analysis is developing in recent criticism.

In 1909, Geneviève Ruxton, referring to Balzac's relationship with the newly identified Mme de Berny, declares: 'Il y a dans leurs souvenirs communs, dans l'écho des émotions réveillées en eux par des longues conversations, toute la genèse du Lys dans la vallée. [...] Né de leur commun souvenir et de leur mutuel amour, le Lys dans la vallée reste le dernier fruit de la longue collaboration de leurs deux coeurs et de leurs deux intelligences.'<sup>1</sup> Hanotaux and Vicaire announce with equal authority: 'Le prototype du Lys dans la vallée est connu désormais.'<sup>2</sup>

If Henriette de Mortsauf is Mme de Berny then Félix de Vandenesse is Honoré de Balzac. As Allen remarks in 1931: 'dans aucun autre [roman] il n'a mis, en l'un de ses personnages, davantage de lui-même.'<sup>3</sup> Serval, Curtius, Bardèche, and Bouteron are among those critics who reiterate this identification with varying degrees of emphasis and documentary evidence. Mary Givens, whose study of le Lys is the most thorough and the most well-documented of its time, continues to support the Félix-Balzac identification,<sup>4</sup> and, in the Abstract of

1: Geneviève Ruxton: La Dilecta de Balzac, Paris, 1909, pp.220, 223.

2: G. Hanotaux et G. Vicaire: La Jeunesse de Balzac, Ferraud, 1903, Avertissement, p.II.

3: Honoré de Balzac: Le Lys dans la vallée. Introduction et notes par Maurice Allen, Garnier, 1931, p.V.

4: Mary L. Givens: Balzac and the 'roman personnel', Part II, Chapter IV, pp.173-183.

her thesis, describes the novel as 'extremely personal and autobiographical.'<sup>1</sup>

The critics of this period do, therefore, merge with the biographers of Balzac. Billy remarks: 'La chaste et mélancolique Henriette de Mortsauf est sans conteste une transposition éthérée de la voluptueuse Dilecta, comme Nathalie de Manerville, maîtresse de Félix de Vandenesse, [...] en est une de Mme Hanska.'<sup>2</sup> Billy does, therefore, identify Félix with Balzac.<sup>3</sup> The critic interested in Balzac's life for other reasons borrows quotations from le Lys in order to evoke Balzac's experiences at a particular juncture. Bertault,<sup>4</sup> Guyon,<sup>5</sup> Picon,<sup>6</sup> and Hunt<sup>7</sup> each resort to le Lys for a portrayal of Balzac's unhappy childhood and neglected adolescence. Picon, in particular, shows Félix to be among those characters in the Comédie humaine in whom Balzac portrayed aspects of his childhood frustration and youthful ambitions.

This illustrates one of the aspects of this technique: certain aspects or periods of Félix's life have been examined in greater detail than others because they coincide more obviously with Balzac's own experiences. As Serval points out: 'Félix de Vandenesse est, on

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- 1: Mary L. Givens: Balzac and the 'roman personnel', (The abstract, at the end of the thesis, is unpaginated.)
  - 2: A. Billy: Vie de Balzac, Vol.1, pp.248-249.
  - 3: Ibid. p.249. Billy is, however, by no means in favour of finding 'keys' to character: cf. ibid. pp. 229-238, 249.
  - 4: Cf. Balzac et la religion, Boivin, 1942, pp.20,36,51ff.
  - 5: Cf. La Pensée politique et sociale de Balzac, Colin, 1967 (2nd Edition), pp.1,2-3,18,19,20 etc.
  - 6: Cf. Balzac par lui-même, Bourges, Editions du Seuil, 1962. Extended passages from le Lys are, for example, quoted pp.31,50-51.
  - 7: Cf. H.J. Hunt: Balzac's 'Comédie humaine', University of London, Athlone Press, 1964, pp.9,110. In one of the judgements which A.R. Pugh ('Ten Years of Balzac studies', M.L., 1965 (September), p.92) describes as 'extremely sane and well-balanced', Hunt talks of Félix and Henriette as 'insupportable creatures' and of the style of le Lys as illustrative of Balzac's 'propensity for baroque rhapsody, forced metaphor and turgid platitude.' (H.J. Hunt: op.cit. p.115)

le sait, Balzac lui-même, tout au moins dans la première partie du roman'.<sup>1</sup> It is precisely this part of the novel which has been examined most thoroughly by the critic of le Lys and quoted most extensively by the biographers of Balzac. This is, of course, particularly in the latter case, perfectly valid. However, it also tends to create the impression, however unintentional, that the first part of le Lys can provide a useful fund of quotation to illuminate aspects of Balzac's life, but that the rest of the novel, and other aspects of the first section, are of relatively minor interest. It has also tended to inhibit study of the narrative form of le Lys: since Balzac's use of the first-person narrative is thought to be prompted by Balzac's unconfessed or unconscious desire to confess his own past, his use of this form for any other possible reason has never been investigated in any detail.<sup>2</sup>

More recent criticism of le Lys dans la vallée has, however, modified the concept of the literary source implicit in earlier critics' attitudes. For the majority of the above critics, the attribution of a source would seem to imply the identification of a literary character with a 'real' person, to whom that character owes his genesis and his personality.<sup>3</sup> Le Yaouanc, however,

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1: M. Serval: 'Autour d'un roman de Balzac. Le Lys [...]', R.H.L.F., 1926 (juillet-septembre), p.380.

2: The title of Mary L. Givens' thesis is, unfortunately, misleading: only one chapter (Part II. Chapt.1: 'The popularity of the "roman personnel" pp.85-108) deals with the narrative form of le Lys but is a general survey of the history of both the first-person and the letter-novel from La Princesse de Clèves to Proust.

In another Wisconsin thesis, The Fictional confession of adolescent love, (1967, again unpublished), Gerald H. Storzer devotes his third chapter (pp.51-74) to le Lys dans la vallée, but concentrates on character development in the Romantic fictional confession.

3: Some earlier critics are more tentative in their identifications. Cf. M. Serval: op.cit. p.389 and M. Allem's introduction to his edition of le Lys, p.XVIII. Anne-Marie Meininger would, however, still hold this view: cf. above pp.vi-vii and her article entitled 'Les Employés: réflexions sur la création balzacienne', R.H.L.F., 1967, pp.754-758.

remarks: 'Mieux on connaît Balzac, plus on se convainc que la création, chez lui, résulte d'opérations complexes et qu'il a animé ses personnages en groupant sur eux des détails épars dans la réalité.'<sup>1</sup> Le Yaouanc illustrates this attitude in his Introduction to le Lys by enlarging and diversifying the fund of sources which may have contributed to the genesis of any one character. He has examined the debt Henriette de Mortsauif owes to Zulma Carraud, thereby modifying the contribution of Mme de Berny.<sup>2</sup> While discussing the Félix-Balzac analogy in detail, he considers other sources as varied as Bethel, le jeune Irlandais, and La Gervaisais.<sup>3</sup> M. Regard compliments Le Yaouanc on this enrichment of the possible sources for the characters of le Lys, and refers, among others, to the possible influence of Marguerite de Navarre.<sup>4</sup> In his turn, Le Yaouanc appreciates Borel's discovery of 'des échos multiples dans le Lys': 'Grâce toujours à ses lectures, il a mis en lumière maintes influences littéraires qui ont agi sur l'imagination de Balzac.'<sup>5</sup>

The principle merit of such an attitude is that the source and the literary character are no longer rigidly identified. The source is becoming an influence.<sup>6</sup> Discrepancies - such as the consummation of the love of Balzac and Mme de Berny, not realized by Félix and Henriette - are acknowledged and a wider range of possible sources

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- 1: M. Le Yaouanc: 'Le Lys dans la vallée et la famille Carraud', R.H.L.F., 1953, pp.514-515.
  - 2: Y. pp. XXXVII ff.
  - 3: Y. pp. LXIV, LXVI. Cf. also M. Le Yaouanc: 'De La Gervaisais au Lys dans la vallée: Deux princesses de Bourbon-Condé inspiratrices de Balzac', Annales de Bretagne, 1962 (juin), pp.203-232.
  - 4: Cf. M. Regard's review of Y: A.B. 1967, p.397. The possible influence of the Heptaméron (cf. Y. pp.XXXV, XLIII, XLVII) was also mentioned by Marie-Jeanne Durry in her introduction to le Lys (p.8).
  - 5: Cf. Le Yaouanc's review of Borel's 'Le Lys /.../' et les sources profondes /.../, in A.B. 1962, p.378.
  - 6: Cf. R. Guise: 'Balzac et l'étranger', A.B. 1970, pp.12-13.



is suggested to incorporate such discrepancies. The identification of Balzac with Félix, seen to be relevant primarily in the first part of the novel, is complemented by other analogies which illuminate the later development of his character. The more that is discovered of Balzac's life the less easy it has been to be categorical about the allocation of sources. It is, moreover, the very search for a more complete and a more accurate gathering of sources which is revealing the limitations of this particular method: 'Vandenesse, c'est Balzac tel qu'il s'est rêvé. C'est aussi Balzac tel qu'il fut.'<sup>1</sup> Le Yaouanc, whose investigations in this field have been concentrated on an examination of sources, sees Vandenesse firstly as a product of Balzac's desire to idealize himself, and only then as a representation of the 'real' Balzac. Félix is the product of imagination as much as of experience.

Borel, like Le Yaouanc, enlarges the field of possible sources - to such an extent that Madeleine Fargeaud remarks: 'on finit par se demander ce que Balzac lui-même a fait!'<sup>2</sup> - to which the answer would seem to be all or nothing. For the extension of the range of possible sources has reduced the relative importance of each, and has, as a result, extended the role of Balzac's imagination in the creation of his characters. Arlette Michel, in her review of A. Lorent's work on les Parents pauvres, refers to the multiplicity and variety of sources for the characters discussed, including the fertilising effect of

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- 1: Y. p. LXVIII. B. Vannier would, however, be very scathing towards such compromises, typical of 'les fervents du nouvel évangile balzacien' - (L'Inscription du corps. Pour une sémiotique du portrait balzacien. Klincksieck, 1972, p.9.)
- 2: Cf. her review of Borel's Personnages et destins balzaciens, Corti, 1959 in A.B. 1960, p.220.

characters present in Balzac's mind for novels still to be written,<sup>1</sup> and comments: 'Tous ces éléments se fondent pour donner au personnage romanesque son "autonomie", et c'est la multiplicité même de ses "sources" qui peut la lui garantir.'<sup>2</sup> In the case of Lorant, as in that of Borel and Le Yaouanc, it is the prudence and the scrupulousness of the critic which makes him advocate the idea of a composite portrait with its 'source' in numerous models.

Such critics do, therefore, join Balzac who frequently claims to create his characters from two or more models: 'Il faut souvent, hélas! deux hommes pour en faire un amant parfait, comme en littérature on ne compose pas un type qu'en employant les singularités de plusieurs caractères similaires.'<sup>3</sup> It can be seen from the juxtaposition of such a statement and the conclusions of the later critics of le Lys that Balzac can no longer be seen as an author who contents himself with reproducing reality as it is experienced. Contrary to the impression given by some biographers of Balzac and by some of the earlier critics of le Lys, the novel is not merely the real or actual experience of the author conveyed through a fictional character relating fictional experience. This division into reality on the one hand and fiction on the other, with le Lys as a fiction incorporating slices of life, is an increasingly apparent over-simplification of the process of literary creation. 'Félix, c'est

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1: On this 'cross fertilisation' theme, see C. Gould: 'The present state of Balzac studies', p.315, and Nicole Mozet: 'Les personnages anglais et la Touraine dans l'oeuvre de Balzac', A.B. 1970, p.141 (referred to below p. 27n.1).

2: Cf. Arlette Michel's review of A. Lorant: 'Les Parents pauvres' Etude historique et critique, 2 Vols, Genève, Droz, 1967, in R.S.M. 1969 (janvier-mars), p.163. Cf. also P. Citron's review of Lorant's work: R.H.L.F. 1969 (septembre-octobre), p.862-863 and Lorant op.cit. (Vol.1) p.373. Other critics have made a similar point: cf. B. Guyon: La Création littéraire chez Balzac. La genèse du 'Médecin de campagne' A. Colin, 1951, p.71; Marie-Jeanne Durry's introduction to le Lys, p.8, and M. Brion's Preface to le Lys in L'Oeuvre de Balzac, Le Club français du livre, 1964, Vol.1, p.247.

3: Modeste Mignon, I, p.441. Cf. L.H.I., p.30 (Letter of the end of January, 1833).

Balzac tel qu'il s'est rêvé [...] - Félix is no longer a simple transfer from real life. He is, as Arlette Michel and André Lorant would say, recovering his autonomy.

P. Laubriet is of the opinion that the technique of the composite portrait is frequently and consciously employed by Balzac: 'Un caractère [...] n'est pas toujours donné entièrement par la nature; il incombe à l'écrivain de rechercher les traits dont il doit le composer chez les hommes et les femmes où la nature les a éparpillés.'<sup>1</sup> According to Laubriet, Balzac assembles various elements - Frenhofer's 'effects'<sup>2</sup> - to form a coherent whole: 'La littérature se sert du même procédé qu'emploie la peinture, qui, pour faire une belle figure, prend les mains de tel modèle, le pied de tel autre, la poitrine de celui-ci, les épaules de celui-là.'<sup>3</sup> Thus the conclusions of Borel and Le Yaouanc are, in Laubriet, posited as examples of evidence of a balzacian aesthetic, of 'l'intelligence de l'art chez Balzac'. The conclusions of such critics as Borel and Le Yaouanc, particularly the latter since he is the more scrupulous and well-documented of the two, are further evidence that Balzac's technique is not to reproduce the isolated, diffuse elements of experienced reality, but to assemble these elements into a coherent synthesis which becomes Balzac's vision of reality: 'Ainsi le vrai littéraire - et, semble-t-il, le vrai de

1: P. Laubriet: L'Intelligence de l'art chez Balzac, Didier, 1961, p.40.

2: Cf. Le Chef d'oeuvre inconnu, IX, p.394: 'La mission de l'art n'est pas de copier la nature mais de l'exprimer! Tu n'est 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.' Cf. also Laubriet: L'Intelligence [...], p.48 and Un Catéchisme esthétique: 'Le Chef d'oeuvre inconnu' de Balzac, Didier, 1961, pp.89-93.

3: From the Preface to le Cabinet des Antiques, XI, p.367. Quoted by Laubriet: L'Intelligence [...], p.41, and by P-G. Castex in his illuminating article: 'Aux sources d'Eugénie Grandet', R.H.L.F., 1964 (mars-avril), p.93. Cf. also the Preface to la Fille aux yeux d'or, XI, p.199.



l'art en général - est une synthèse des éléments que la nature offre à l'artiste, et que l'artiste combine selon un plan nouveau, qui lui a été donné par son imagination.'<sup>1</sup> Thus Balzac continues in the Preface to le Cabinet des Antiques: 'L'affaire du peintre est de donner la vie à ces membres choisis et de les rendre probables. S'il vous copiait une vraie femme, vous détourneriez la tête.'<sup>2</sup> Experience itself, diffuse and incomprehensible, is metamorphosed into an organised vision of experience: 'le vrai littéraire est toujours une reconstruction de la nature par une intelligence, un tempérament, qui en offre une synthèse forcément déformée.'<sup>3</sup>

A. Allemand, in Unité et structure de l'univers balzacien, makes a similar point:

'La création balzacienne est [...] essentiellement "une prise de possession". Et c'est de celle du monde qu'il est question. Car l'oeuvre ne peut être réalisée que si l'auteur ramène aux limites de la compréhension humaine les dimensions exorbitantes de l'univers et les mystères insondables de l'existence. [...] Ainsi, l'oeuvre n'est pas composée d'éléments différents de ceux qui constituent notre univers sensible. Ce sont les mêmes, mais vus autrement. [...] Ces éléments sont autres, parce qu'ils sont avant tout significatifs, donc jamais neutres, que leur coordination a un sens et que ce sens trahit une intention [...].'<sup>4</sup>

Both Allemand and Laubriet extend and support the comments of H.U. Forest who had a similar attitude: 'Il faut distinguer entre la vie et l'illusion de la vie. [...] Toute construction de l'esprit, comme tout edifice, doit avoir une charpente. [...] Sans cette charpente, il n'y a que des matériaux épars. Quelle que soit leur valeur, ils n'auraient guère de signification.'<sup>5</sup>

1: P. Laubriet: L'Intelligence [...], pp.41-42. Cf. the Preface to Une fille d'Eve, XI, p.377.

2: XI, p.367.

3: P. Laubriet: op.cit. p.65.

4: Plon, 1965, pp. 144, 146. Here, as elsewhere, the italics are to be found in the original text, unless otherwise stated.

5: H.U. Forest: L'Esthétique [...], p.249.

The work of Laubriet, and to a much lesser extent that of Forest, can, therefore, be seen as a bridge between more recent developments in an analysis of the sources of Balzac's characters, as in the work of Borel and Le Yaouanc, and those critics who view the Comédie humaine as a coherent vision of reality, such as, for example, Curtius,<sup>1</sup> Béguin,<sup>2</sup> Eigeldinger,<sup>3</sup> and, more recently, Nykrog<sup>4</sup> and Allemand. It is also a bridge between these analyses of the sources and other recent critics who, as will be seen, see the work of art as one coherent whole, as 'une synthèse de parties liées entre elles.'<sup>5</sup> It is now possible to examine which aspects of the Comédie humaine and le Lys dans la vallée might be seen to contribute to the above-mentioned characteristics of autonomy and coherence.

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- 1: E.R. Curtius: Balzac, Bernard Grasset, 1933 (Traduit de l'allemand par H. Jourdan; first published 1923). See especially Chapter XII Oeuvre (pp.309-349).
  - 2: Cf. for example pp. 36, 45 of the study entitled Balzac visionnaire (originally published 1946) in A. Béguin: Balzac lu et relu, Seuil, 1965.
  - 3: Cf. M. Eigeldinger: La Philosophie de l'Art chez Balzac, Genève, Pierre Cailler, 1957, p.35: 'L'art n'est pas une imitation de la nature, mais une imitation de l'acte de la création du monde.'
  - 4: Further reference to P. Nykrog's important work: La Pensée de Balzac dans la 'Comédie humaine'. Esquisse de quelques concepts-clé will be made in subsequent sections.
  - 5: S. Doubrovsky: Pourquoi la nouvelle critique. Critique et objectivité, Mercure de France, 1966, p.65.

(2)

Balzac's presentation of experienced reality

Pierre Laubriet, in his introductory Chapter on Balzac's attitude towards and treatment of history, shows that Balzac, when considering himself a social historian, does not seek merely to reproduce the events of history as they might have appeared to people of the period described, but to present history as a continuous sequence of interrelated events: 'L'histoire n'est donc plus une collection de faits, mais elle devient une explication du passé par les causes profondes, psychologiques, des événements;'.<sup>1</sup> For events are related to one another in one or both of two ways. They are shown to be not only consecutive but causal: 'cet humus de son ancienne vie d'où germaient de nouvelles souffrances lui tomba sur le coeur, et paracheva sa destruction.'<sup>2</sup> They are not only simultaneous but interdependent: 'Toujours en harmonie avec mes pensées, la vallée où se mouraient les rayons jaunes d'un soleil tiède, me présentait une vivante image de mon âme.'<sup>3</sup> A review of the past shows events to have been related in both these ways: 'Vous verrez toujours mon malheur s'agrandissant en raison de la circonférence des sphères sociales où j'entrerai.'<sup>4</sup> As a result, past, present and future events form a vast, harmonious whole:

1: P. Laubriet: L'Intelligence [...], p.19. Although P. Barbéris has, of course, a different concept of the relationship between the Comédie humaine and history, for him, too, the Comédie humaine is by no means merely a document (Balzac. Une mythologie réaliste, Larousse, 1971, p.267. Cf. p.88) if only because 'Le mal du siècle tend à être dépassé, jugé-en même temps qu'il est exprimé et transcrit [...]': 'Balzac et le mal du siècle', I.L., 1971 (mai-juin), p.112. Unfortunately, like Guyon before him, Barbéris does not cover the period in which le Lys was written in his thesis 'Balzac et le mal du siècle. Contribution à une physiologie du monde moderne', 2 Vols, Gallimard, 1970. Cf. below pp. 53-54.

2: Y. p.63.

3: Y. p.154.

4: Y. p.11. The importance of such premonitions is noted below.

'Tous les moments de l'histoire sont liés, étant tour à tour effets et causes, et orientés: Balzac instaure dans l'histoire une unité;'.<sup>1</sup>  
 Thus in le Lys: 'La comtesse devina le passé par le présent et lut dans l'avenir.'<sup>2</sup> If the law of cause-effect had not operated, such a reconstruction of total experience would not have been possible.<sup>3</sup>

It is the operation of such laws in the Comédie humaine which has led such critics as Allemand to speak of 'la répudiation du hasard' in the Comédie humaine,<sup>4</sup> and Poulet of 'une durée pleine' and 'cet espace plein': 'Dans la durée comme dans l'espace, c'est la même coordination, la même "chaîne de rapports nécessaires"'.<sup>5</sup>

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- 1: P. Laubriet: op.cit. p.20. It should be noted that Balzac was by no means alone in doing this. Such a remark could indeed be a transposition of, for example, Ballanche. Cf. below pp.63-66.
- 2: Y. p.63. This remark, which is pure Ballanche, is also quoted by G. Jacques: 'Le Lys dans la vallée. Roman éducatif et ésotérique', Les Lettres romanes, 1971 (novembre), p.368). Jacques sees 'la structure "passé-présent-avenir"' as 'la micro-structure de base' in the novel (ibid. pp.372, 367). Félix's narrative thus represents a pause or plateau between his past and the future he seeks to forge with Natalie, just as the France of the novel is poised between Empire and Restoration. Hence the links Jacques brings out between le Lys and Séraphita in which Wilfrid exclaims: 'l'Europe se trouve à une époque où elle attend ce Messie nouveau qui doit ravager le monde pour en refaire les sociétés. L'Europe ne croira plus qu'à celui qui la broiera sous ses pieds.' Such remarks link not only with the theme of the palingénésie (cf. below p. 62 ) but also with that of the Apocalypse, evident in evocations of the Last Judgement both in Séraphita and le Lys (cf. X, pp.512-513 and Y. p.237, both quoted by Jacques in the second part of his above-mentioned article: Les Lettres romanes, 1972 (février), p.23). For other Apocalyptic motifs in le Lys, see below p.13n.2 ; cf. also the violent, sacrificial death of Paquita in la Fille aux yeux d'or - a novel which Geneviève Delattre also closely relates to Séraphita in 'De Séraphita à La Fille aux yeux d'or', A.B. 1970, pp.183-226. Another theme Séraphita and le Lys have in common is, of course that of initiation (cf. Jacques' articles and below p.64 ). There is obviously considerable material for interesting further study here. Cf. below p.372 and n.6.
- 3: In his article 'Espace et temps dans la Peau de chagrin', A.B. 1969, p.66, F. Bilodeau notes: 'puisque le présent ne définit qu'une répétition du passé, je puis voir dans le passé l'image du présent en même temps que la prophétie de l'avenir; la contemplation du passé devient la vision de l'avenir;'. The theme of what Bilodeau calls 'la circularité du temps' is discussed below pp. 237-243.
- 4: Cf. A. Allemand: Unité et structure [...], Chapter IV, pp.161-200.
- 5: Cf. pp.177, 178 of G. Poulet's study Balzac in his Etudes sur le temps humain. II. La Distance intérieure, Plon, 1952.

Since each event, or, more generally, each circumstance or phenomenon, is related to those which both precede and follow it, and to those simultaneous with it, Louis Lambert can claim that 'nulle part le Mouvement n'est stérile'.<sup>1</sup> Nykrog sees this remark as the theory behind Balzac's presentation of:

'une Nature pour ainsi dire pleine où pas un mouvement, pas une action ne se perd, mais où au contraire tout mouvement, toute action contribue à former l'état - ou le "Nombre" - suivant, qui sera à son tour le point de départ de mouvements et d'actions nouvelles qui en sont la conséquence immédiate ou qui du moins reçoivent une partie plus ou moins grande de leur caractère par la situation créée à la suite du "mouvement" précédent'.<sup>2</sup>

This apparent relationship between different actions gives them a significance which, when viewed separately, each would not possess, and a view of the totality of these actions gives an impression of total significance, or coherence. Since such laws seem to operate without the direct intervention of the author, the Comédie humaine seems as if it evolves independently according to its own internal laws. Thus, it is also possible to speak of a work's autonomy, of 'la souveraineté de l'oeuvre'.<sup>3</sup>

However, such a technique, if applied rigorously, could have the opposite effect from that intended: from being too mechanically and predictably applied, the cycle of movement and pauses eventually giving birth to new movement could seem to lose its dynamism and its mobility.<sup>4</sup> The rigidity of these laws is, therefore, often masked by

1: Louis Lambert, X, p.453. Quoted by P. Nykrog: La Pensée de Balzac, p.143.

2: P. Nykrog: op.cit. p.144. Cf. G. Poulet: Les Métamorphoses du cercle, Plon, 1961, Chapt.VIII Balzac, p.206.

3: Cf. Part 2 of A. Allemant's Unité et structure [...]. Cf. also Balzac's remarks in the Catéchisme social: 'il /le pouvoir de Dieu/ peut anéantir les mondes et rentrer dans le repos, mais, tant qu'il les laissera subsister, ils marchent par des lois dont l'ensemble donne l'ordre.' (Honoré de Balzac: Oeuvres complètes, Conard édition (various dates) in 40 volumes: Oeuvres diverses III, Vol.40, 1940, p.691; the abbreviations O.D.I+, O.D.I++, O.D.II and O.D.III will be used in subsequent references.) The theme of the creation creating, of vital importance in le Lys, is examined in the final section of Chapter 7.

4: It is this dynamism which P. Barbéris admires in Balzac's universe. Cf. Mythes balzaciens, Armand Colin, 1972, p.246.



the presence in the Comédie humaine of characters who, while subject to such laws, appear to transcend them. The Vautrins, Rastignacs and de Marsays acquire such power, prestige, and apparent autonomy, because they see the inner workings of their universe and exploit them freely to their own advantage.<sup>1</sup>

Le Lys dans la vallée presents an outstanding example of the apparent autonomy of the Balzacian character. For Félix de Vandenesse is autonomous not merely because he perceives the laws of conformity and consistency which govern the universe in general, but because he himself creates and establishes similar laws in his own particular universe. The network of 'correspondances' which, as will be seen, pervade le Lys, are the result of Félix's own sense of isolation and wishful-thinking: 'mes rêves de collègue [...] ont été comme une Apocalypse où ma vie me fut figurativement prédite; chaque événement heureux ou malheureux s'y rattache par des images bizarres, liens visibles aux yeux de l'âme seulement.'<sup>2</sup> In le Lys dans la

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- 1: Cf. L.-F. Hoffmann's comment in 'Les Métaphores animales dans le père Goriot', A.B. 1963, p.101: 'plusieurs personnages du roman se détachent par la conscience qu'ils ont d'une animalité qu'ils assument et, ce faisant, qu'ils dépassent.' In 'La Métaphore théâtrale dans la Comédie humaine', (R.H.L.F., 1970 (janvier-février), pp.64-89), Lucienne Frappier-Mazur discerns a similar superiority in those characters of the Comédie humaine who, deploying their own theatrical talents, create miniature comédies of their own: 'la comédie sociale ou amoureuse, conduite avec art remplit cette fonction. La princesse de Cadignan, ou, à un moindre degré, Modeste Mignon, s'assurent une marge de liberté au sein des forces qui les gouvernent.' (p.89).
- 2: Y. pp.36-37. While bearing in mind that Félix speaks of 'une Apocalypse' not 'l'Apocalypse', there are, as suggested above, a number of striking similarities between le Lys as it is shown to be in this thesis and the Revelation of Saint John the Divine - primarily, of course, as Félix himself infers, the highly figurative character of both works. It is also significant that many of the predictions in the Apocalypse are of death and disaster - not least, consumption by fire (Cf. Apocalypse: Chapters 16, 20; cf. also C. Dupuis: Origine de tous les cultes, Agasse, 1795). In a way which is consistent with Félix's background and character, Balzac does, therefore, prepare the reader for Henriette's eventual martyrdom. For other examples of 'l'art des préparations' in le Lys, cf. the references to martyrdom Y. pp. 6, 84, 95, 96, 115, 228, 248, 258; for more general premonitions of disaster, see Y. pp. 41, 50-51, 274. Such references do, of course form part of a vast network of religious imagery in le Lys, the presence of which will be examined in the concluding section to Chapter 7, below pp.415-418. + (cf. Y. pp.12-13)



vallée Balzac does, therefore, go as far as to allow one of his 'créatures',<sup>1</sup> to attribute to himself the responsibility of creating his own 'paradis imaginaire'.<sup>2</sup>

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- 1: Cf. P. Abraham: Créatures chez Balzac, Gallimard, 1931. In 'A propos du style de Balzac' (p.159) H. Mitterand regrets that Abraham, who uses elements of Balzac's physiognomical description to show that his portraits are far from 'realistic', had so few continuators. Cf. however, below p.404 n.l.
  - 2: Cf. G. David: 'L'Idée de bonheur dans la Comédie humaine', A.B. 1966, p.354. Cf. also le Chef d'oeuvre inconnu, IX, p.413: 'Le vieillard absorbé ne les écoutait pas, et souriait à cette femme imaginaire.'

(3)

Félix's presentation of experienced reality

Le Lys dans la vallée is one of a number of novels in the Comédie humaine either wholly or partly in the form of a first-person narrative, such as Facino Cane, Z. Marcas, or la Maison Nucingen. In some cases, such as Sarrasine, it seems as if the author himself is telling the story.<sup>1</sup> In others, such as Un drame au bord de la mer, parts of Catherine de Médicis (Les deux rêves), of Albert Savarus, Autre étude de femme, and Une ténébreuse affaire, a character from the Comédie humaine such as Bianchon or de Marsay takes up the story. This technique of a narrative within a narrative is, indeed, so common in Balzac that Alain wonders 's'il fait jamais autre chose que conter ce qui lui fut conté.'<sup>2</sup> What is, however, rather less common is that a character should recount his own life in this way. Although, for example, Benassis in le Médecin de campagne and Octave de Bauvan in Honorine give some account of their own pasts, only in le Lys does a character relate such a large portion of his life.

Balzac also inserted letters in a number of his narratives such as Modeste Mignon or Louis Lambert. Since Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées is, however, the only pure letter-novel in the Comédie humaine, le Lys dans la vallée is the only other work in which Balzac never speaks directly to the reader. As Alain says of Mémoires [...] : 'On ne sait rien de plus des deux amies que leurs lettres; tel est le sens d'un roman par lettres. (Et je rappelle que Le Lys est un roman par lettres.)'<sup>3</sup> As La Brière remarks in Modeste Mignon: '"Le vrai poète [...] doit [...] rester caché comme Dieu dans le centre de ses mondes, n'être visible que par ses créations."<sup>4</sup>

1: Cf. P. Citron's 'Interprétation de Sarrasine', A.B. 1972, pp.81-95.

2: Alain: Avec Balzac, Gallimard, 1937, p.98.

3: Ibid. p.121.

4: I, pp. 408-409.

What is, however, even more exceptional about le Lys is that it should combine both letter-novel and first-person narrative. It is this combination which ensures both that Félix commands the stage in a way impossible in the duet of a true correspondence, and that it is a character other than the author who responds to his narrative. It is this combination which makes le Lys seem so perfectly self-contained, - not least because a narrative is thereby framed within, and punctuated by, symmetrically positioned letters.<sup>1</sup>

If the subject-matter of le Lys is accordingly almost wholly restricted to the range of experiences related by one individual from about the first thirty years of his life, it is also restricted, though perhaps less obviously, to those experiences which can still be recollected and articulated after a number of years.<sup>2</sup> Not only will Félix be unable to recall or express certain of his experiences, but he may have to limit those reported from among those remembered. It is not possible, of course, to reconstruct Félix's life from other documents, as has been done to illuminate Balzac's letters to another 'coeur jaloux et délicat',<sup>3</sup> in order to show that Félix may have had certain principles of selection and emphasis. It is, however, possible to illustrate another method of investigating these principles.

According to Lotte, Félix was born in 1794 and is twenty years

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- 1: Apart from Félix's envoi, Natalie's reply, and Félix's brief letter to Henriette (Y. pp.143-145), the only other letter in le Lys, Henriette's to Félix (Y. pp.155-170) may be seen to divide the narrative into two almost equal parts. Cf. also Le Yaouanc's comment Y. p.435: 'jusqu'à la publication chez Werdet, l'écrivain a fait jouer au genre épistolaire un rôle de plus en plus important.'
- 2: Probably two or three after Henriette's death - if the date of 8 August 1827, originally given to Félix's envoi, is to be taken into consideration (cf. Y. p.452 and J. Borel: 'Le Lys /.../' et les sources profondes /.../, pp.38-39.) Although Félix could have become Count (cf. Y. p.330) only after his father's death which, according to Lotte, was also in 1827, any agreement between these dates is almost certainly coincidental.
- 3: Y. p.328.

old at the ball of 1814.<sup>1</sup> At the end of his narrative, he would appear to be just under thirty.<sup>2</sup> What is important here is, however, less Félix's precise age than the relative amount of attention given by him to the period before his meeting with Henriette and then to his later relationship with her. The first twenty years of his life occupy some twenty pages of the novel; the following eight or nine years some three hundred pages. Once Félix meets Henriette, the passage of time seems to be slowed down - except when Félix is away from Henriette in Paris or Gand.<sup>3</sup> It is evident that in view of the relatively brief and dense account Félix gives of his childhood, he selects those events or experiences which are of particular significance for his later development. One of these experiences will now be examined.

Georges Poulet has shown that for the Balzacian character 'le désir devint une force supérieure et le mobile de tout l'être'.<sup>4</sup> This passionate longing for existence rather than existence itself is characterised by the projection of the individual energy in a certain direction in order to realise a desired goal. It is also characterised by a fear of moral isolation: 'l'homme a horreur de

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- 1: Félix gives his age as twenty Y. pp.18, 21, and as 'vingt ans passés', pp. 19, 51. The Ball would have been a natural point from which to try to calculate Félix's precise age had not its own date been uncertain (cf. Y. p.22 n.2 and p.23 n.2). Thus, although Félix's first walk in the Indre valley seems to take place in Spring (cf. below p.229n.1) after a second day at Clochegourde and a short gap (Y. pp.65-77) Félix reaches a memorable day at the end of August (Y. p.80 cf. pp.76-77).
- 2: Y. p.326. Another obstacle to accuracy here is that, as in le père Goriot, (cf. J. Gaudon: 'Sur la chronologie du Père Goriot', A.B. 1967, pp. 147-156), time contracts and expands in le Lys according to the requirements of the narrative. Thus Félix makes his first stay at Clochegourde seem much longer than the 2½ months he is allowed (Y. p.70) - between, presumably, mid-August and the beginning of November. But three months pass before the end of September! (Y. p.113; cf. p.124). Cf. Le Yaouanc's notes on chronology Y. pp. 222, 275, 290, 326 and G. Jacques: 'Le Lys dans la vallée. roman éducatif et ésotérique', Les Lettres romanes, 1971 (novembre), pp.374-382. Cf. also below p.364 n.1.
- 3: Thus, for example, the Thursday of Félix's first visit to Clochegourde occupies nearly 40 pages (Y. pp.27-65) whereas some 8 months in Paris only 3 pages (Y. pp.170-173). Félix seems to have spent much more than a bare day at Clochegourde before Henriette dies (Y. pp.287-311). All these indications are for the Garnier edition.
- 4: Quoted from Albert Savarus (I, p.779) by G. Poulet: La Distance intérieure, p.122.

la solitude. Et de toutes les solitudes, la solitude morale est celle qui l'épouvante le plus. [...] La première pensée de l'homme [...] est d'avoir un complice de sa destinée.<sup>1</sup> Félix's childhood, as he recounts it, is also characterised by an intense longing for 'un complice de sa destinée.' He makes little or no sympathetic contact with his parents - 'les êtres placés autour d'eux [ces pauvres coeurs opprimés] pour favoriser les développements de leur sensibilité'<sup>2</sup> - nor with his brother, sisters and school-fellows. He is consequently the victim of intense moral isolation, indicated by his retreat to the garden while at home, and by his excessive reading and similar retreats while at school, 'perdu dans de plaintives rêveries'.<sup>3</sup>

Félix does, as a result, find an object which does not resist his attempts to establish a link between himself and the world: the star: 'je regardais une étoile avec cette passion curieuse qui saisit les enfants, et à laquelle une précoce mélancolie ajoutait une sorte d'intelligence sentimentale.'<sup>4</sup> He immediately absorbs the star and it becomes his possession: 'J'eus donc souvent le fouet pour mon étoile.'<sup>5</sup> Later on, at college, the star is closely associated with Félix's religious fervour: 'A cinq ans je m'envolais dans une étoile, à douze ans j'allais frapper aux portes du Sanctuaire':<sup>6</sup> this shows that in absorbing the star, Félix satisfies not only his desire for companionship, but also for the infinite. As Poulet remarks: 'Le

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1: Illusions perdues, IV, p.1032. Cf. G. Poulet: op.cit. p.123.

2: Y. p.5.

3: Y. p.11.

4: Y. p.7. The phrases 'passion curieuse' and 'intelligence sentimentale' may well prefigure Félix's later association of the star with Henriette as well as his - or rather their - increasingly mystical leanings. Since the account of Félix's childhood was one of Balzac's major additions to the text (cf. Y. p.442), such an anticipation is even more likely. (Cf. also: note b. to p.5 (Y. p.452) and note a. to p.23 (Y. pp.454-455).)

5: Y. p.8. For the use of the possessive pronoun, see below p.39 n.2.

6: Y. p.12.



premier moment véritable de l'activité balzacienne, c'est donc le moment sans durée, sans épaisseur, à partir duquel il se projette dans les temps et dans les espaces;<sup>1</sup>. Félix is trying to project himself and his desire across space to the Heavens; by associating his passion for the star with religious faith, he tries to give a meaning to the future both immediate and in eternity.

When Félix first meets Henriette de Mortsauf, he expresses the impact of her presence through the image of a star: 'Tombée des steppes bleus où je l'admirais, ma chère étoile s'était donc faite femme en conservant sa clarté, ses scintillements et sa fraîcheur.'<sup>2</sup> The transfer of the star-experience, as an image, to describe Henriette, is of crucial importance in illustrating Félix's development: it shows that his desire, hitherto projected on to an inanimate object, is transferred to a person, a woman. The transfer both acknowledges the importance of the past experience and anticipates the importance of Henriette in his later life; it establishes a continuity in Félix's experience by concentrating past, present and future in a single ecstatic moment in the present. The connection between Henriette and the previous star-experience is reinforced by Félix's later action: 'J'allai m'accroupir dans un coin du jardin pour y rêver au baiser que j'avais volé.'<sup>3</sup> He dreams of Henriette in the garden just as it was there he contemplated the star.

It is such a transfer of an experience into an image that shows Félix is not reproducing his past as it might have been lived. There

1: G. Poulet: op.cit. p.124.

2: Y. p.26. References to 'steppes bleus' are, of course, a commonplace of the period - as is the association between the star and the object of ideal affection: cf. George Sand, Nerval, Lamartine, and a host of minor poets, - even a review of the period: cf. B. Juden: Traditions orhiques et tendances mystiques dans le romantisme français (1800-1855), Klincksieck, 1971, pp.424-425. Cf. also the 'Image and theme' section below pp.38-40.

3: Y. p.26.

is no obvious connection between Félix's attachment to a star at the age of five and his attraction to a woman at the age of twenty. These apparently unrelated events are, however, brought into an immediate and inseparable relationship by the use of the star-image. Félix, from the perspective of maturity, mentally eliminates any intervening events and experiences, only a small proportion of which he has recounted, and juxtaposes two events widely separated in time but related in mood and intensity of feeling. Thus, as Doubrovsky has pointed out: 'le travail de l'artiste ne confère pas son sens à l'oeuvre, [..], il le reçoit d'elle.'<sup>1</sup>

Another such event occurs on Félix's nocturnal return to Clochegourde: 'Pendant cette nuit baignée de lumière où cette fleur sidérale m'éclaira la vie, je lui fiançai mon âme avec la foi [..] par laquelle nous commençons l'amour.'<sup>2</sup> Poulet quotes an extract from this scene to illustrate the concentration and projection of an individual's desire: 'Toute passion n'est donc pas seulement concentration sur un être, mais projection violente vers et contre un être, pour l'atteindre, pour le pénétrer, pour le posséder.'<sup>3</sup> In the case of Félix, however, it is less a question of possession than of infinite expansion - 'l'expansion infinie' of Baudelaire. Hence the image of the star is associated with an expanding universe - 'l'univers s'était agrandi pour moi'<sup>4</sup> and with an adoration which has the dimensions of both grandiose religious aspiration and illustrious

1: S. Doubrovsky: Pourquoi la nouvelle critique, p.54. Cf. pp. 20, 21 of G. Poulet's article 'Une critique d'identification' in Les Chemins actuels de la critique, 10/18, 1968 and J.- P. Richard: L'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé, Seuil, 1961, p.32.

2: Y. p.65. The expression 'fleur sidérale', uniting Heaven and Earth, operates a magnificent cosmic synthesis. The 'reprise' aspect of this image is noted by Enid H. Rhodes: 'Concerning a Metaphor in Le Lys dans la vallée, S.F. 37, 1969 (January - April), p.84. Cf. below pp. 38-40.

3: G. Poulet: La Distance intérieure, p.147.

4: This sense of expansion may be seen to culminate with Félix's re-discovery of 'le ciel de S/es anciens songes' (Y. p.96; cf. below p. 40 and pp.89-92.)

poetic ancestry - with 'la foi du pauvre chevalier castillan de qui nous nous moquons dans Cervantès'.<sup>1</sup> If Félix does, then, long before he is impelled actually to write his letter-narrative to Natalie de Manerville, see himself as a literary hero, it is appropriate that his experiences should have the consistency and coherence commonly associated with a literary character. Félix's different experiences begin to be so linked that they reveal a progression or pattern in his development.

A further stage occurs after the joint childhood confessions of Félix and Henriette: 'O mon Henriette! [...] à toi l'amour le plus pur qui jamais aura brillé sur cette terre [...]. Une brillante carrière s'ouvrirait enfin au dévouement dont est gros tout jeune coeur, et qui chez moi fut si longtemps une force inerte! Semblable au prêtre qui, par un seul pas, s'est avancé dans une vie nouvelle, j'étais consacré, voué.'<sup>2</sup> Once again the past is linked to the present and to the future in an ecstatic, aggrandizing moment in the present and is expressed in the terms of light images which recall the star motif and continue to anticipate its importance throughout the narrative.

Towards the end of le Lys, after a series of 'reprises' which will be examined in a later chapter,<sup>3</sup> the star theme is recalled to

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1: In thus associating himself with Cervantes, Félix is wholly in the tradition of 'la littérature spirituelle et chevaleresque' of the Romantic period. Hence the 'blazon du beau corps' theme apparent in Félix's initial description of Henriette - the reference to her 'globes azurés' might come straight from The Rape of Lucrece - and the conscious adoption of the bouquets as a 'blazon' (Cf. Y. pp.115-116). (Cf. also A.- M. Schmidt: La Poésie scientifique en France au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, Albin Michel, 1938) Hence, too, Félix's equally self-conscious use of rhetoric, symbolism, and allegory throughout le Lys. As will be shown in more detail in Chapter 7 (pp.419-420). Cf. also below p.425. Félix is a self-appointed artist and poet, and, as such, uses language on a wide variety of levels, often simultaneously. Even in a study of this length, many of these cannot be examined in detail.

2: Y. p.95.

3: Cf. Chapter 5.

crystallize the impact and the significance of Henriette's death for Félix: 'Oui, ce brillant esprit, étoile angélique, sortira splendide de ses nuages pour aller dans le royaume de lumière.'<sup>1</sup> As before, the importance of the present moment is aggrandized by the prestige of past associations now recalled by the image alone, and by the promise of the future in which religious faith, with the prospect of eternity, is playing an increasingly important role. Thus as the image develops, its associations stretch further into both past and future and the intensity of feeling in the present moment is progressively increased.

It is noticeable that, despite this progression, references to actual stars become rare and more generalised after the description of the initial childhood star-experience: 'Avant de me retrouver à l'étroit dans une chambre, je voulus voluptueusement rester sous l'azur ensemencé d'étoiles [..].'<sup>2</sup> Alternatively, Félix refers to less powerful and less distant sources of light: 'Quand je fus dans le chemin de Frapesle, je vis encore sa robe blanche éclairée par la lune; puis, quelques instants après, une lumière illumina sa chambre.'<sup>3</sup> Such remarks depend for at least some of their impact on the memory of the previous early star-experience and on Félix's identification of Henriette with a star.<sup>4</sup> The later absence of references to actual stars shows that once the transfer of the star-experience, as an image,

1: Y. p.294. Cf. Lélia, Garnier, 1960, pp. 54-55, 228.

2: Y. p.95.

3: Ibid.

4: One is tempted to refer to the myth of 'la lumière féminine' referred to by Creuzer in the 1829 edition of Religions de l'Antiquité considérées principalement dans leurs formes symboliques et mythologiques (cf. B. Juden: Traditions orphiques /.../, pp.683 and 223 n.43). The theme is, of course, evident in Nerval, Sand and later, Hugo ('la dame blanche'). If, just as female light antedates male light, Félix sees light as principally feminine, the use of a highly sexualised, masculine 'ensemencé' with 'azur' and 'étoiles' above successfully evokes the ambiguity of Henriette's own attitude towards sexuality. Cf. the ambiguity implicit in the juxtaposition of 'flamme vive' and 'rêves bleus' Y. p.43. (Cf. below p.106).

to Henriette has taken place, it is the images themselves which begin to shape and organise Félix's later experiences - in other words, to give them coherence.

This gives new significance to the proliferation of the star-light metaphor in a variety of contexts throughout the work: 'N'avons-nous pas, comme les Mages, suivi la même étoile?'<sup>1</sup>; 'un magnifique double pavot rouge [..] déployant les flammèches de son incendie au-dessus des jasmins étoilés'<sup>2</sup>; 'Ces noms possèdent les vertus talismaniques des paroles constellées'<sup>3</sup>; 'Les étoiles rayonnent d'en haut sur les hommes; pourquoi l'âme, cette étoile humaine, n'envelopperait-elle pas de ses feux un ami [..]'.<sup>4</sup> Although it is not possible to examine the individual qualities of each of these metaphors here, they demonstrate, when juxtaposed, the variety and richness of the star motif as it develops throughout the novel. Such metaphors, when combined with the star-light imagery associated with Henriette, can be seen to build into a theme or 'un ensemble original de formes signifiantes'<sup>5</sup> in le Lys dans la vallée.

In imposing such a pattern on past events Félix does, moreover, give internal justification for the narrative he is writing. Small wonder, then, that the narrative should seem so self-contained. For if Félix's search for Henriette is seen as a development of a previous search, this search may well continue after her death. Thus, at the

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1: Y. p.91. A cliché - but, as will be seen in Chapter 5, of significance in le Lys.

2: Y. p.121.

3: Y. p.130.

4: Y. p.200.

5: H. Mitterand: 'A propos du style de Balzac', p.160. It is, of course, the 'ensemble' which is original rather than the individual images. The question of originality is discussed in the last section of this chapter and in the conclusion of the thesis.



time of writing, Félix is still haunted by the idea of Henriette, by his longing for the ideal with which she became identified:<sup>1</sup> 'ma vie est dominée par un fantôme, il se dessine vaguement au moindre mot qui le provoque, il s'agite souvent de lui-même au-dessus de moi.'<sup>2</sup> It is one of these ideas which, as Balzac remarks in le Cousin Pons, 'vivent spectralement',<sup>3</sup> which seem to exist independently of their creator, and, therefore, of the person on whom they are projected.

Thus, if, as Poulet has remarked, 'l'espace final est fait de séparation', it is also true that 'le temps final est fait d'attente.'<sup>4</sup> This waiting is negative in that the desire has so far been frustrated, but positive, in that the Balzacian character still hopes, still projects his desire into the future: 'Etre, c'est donc désirer, c'est-à-dire, vouloir être.'<sup>5</sup> As a result, Félix still searches for 'un complice' in the person of Natalie de Manerville: 'Les hommes ne sont-ils pas coupables [...] de venir à nous [...] en gardant au fond de leurs coeurs d'angéliques images, en nous comparant à des rivales inconnues, à des perfections souvent prises à plus d'un souvenir, et nous trouvant toujours inférieures?'<sup>6</sup> Thus, Félix's final sentence begins - as might have done that of Balthazar Claës - 'Demain, je saurai [...].'<sup>7</sup> It now remains to be seen why Félix should have used an extended written narrative of his past to try to achieve his aim.

1: Hence, of course, the erotic mysticism which pervades the novel and, for example, Félix's consternation at a suddenly accessible, sensual Henriette: '-Non, [...], ce n'est plus elle. J'étais hébété de douleur.' (Y. p.302). Cf. also the mixture of exhilaration and despair with which Félix reacts to her dying: 'Ce soir l'Ave Maria nous parut une salutation du ciel. [...] nous étions [...] plongés dans cette terrible contemplation [...].' (Y. p.306).

2: Y. p.3.

3: Le Cousin Pons, VI, p.626.

4: G. Poulet: La Distance intérieure, p.193.

5: G. Poulet: ibid. p.122.

6: Honorine: II. p.317.

7: Y. p.329

(4)

Félix's motives for recounting his past

One of the occasions on which Félix and Henriette achieve a period of deepest communion is in their exchange of their childhood experiences: 'elle éclaira les ténèbres par un regard, elle anima les mondes terrestres et divins par un seul mot. - Nous avons eu la même enfance!'<sup>1</sup> In this realisation 'nos âmes se marièrent dans cette même pensée consolante: Je n'étais donc pas seul à souffrir!'<sup>2</sup>

Since it was, as has been seen, their isolation which caused their suffering, their present knowledge not only removes present isolation and, therefore, present suffering, but, by removing past isolation, also removes past suffering. Thus not only the present but also the past vacuum is filled with new meaning. Félix's 'orgue expressif doué de mouvement' which once played 'dans le vide'<sup>3</sup> is now transformed into an instrument with an echo, with a response. This connection between past and present enables Félix to look to the future with a new hope: 'Les souffrances dont vous parlez étaient le grain répandu à flots par la main du Semeur pour faire éclore la moisson déjà dorée par le plus beau des soleils.'<sup>4</sup> For it is only after an exchange of pasts that the relationship can progress; it is only the memory of shared pasts that justifies a shared present.

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1: Y. pp.83-84.

2: Y. p.84.

3: Y. p.72.

4: Y. p.91. Henriette's ability to totalise experience has already been noted above p. 11. Cf. Louise de Chaulieu's remark in Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées, 1, p.203: ' "On vit aux trois temps du verbe." ' (Quoted by G. Poulet: La Distance intérieure, p.160). M. Milner ('La Poésie du mal chez Balzac', A.B. 1963, p.334) quotes a similar comment in le père Goriot and adds: 'Cette intuition instantanée d'éléments à la fois complexes, intenses et cachées dans la vie quotidienne, est sans doute, pour Balzac, la forme la plus haute de la poésie.' The totalising power of the poem is discussed in Chapter 7.

Thus, the inability of Mortsauif to share Henriette's memories prevents her from accumulating later memories and later intimacy:

'En se mariant, elle possédait ses épargnes, ce peu d'or qui représente les heures joyeuses, les mille désirs du jeune âge; en un jour de détresse, elle l'avait généreusement donné sans dire que c'était des souvenirs et non des pièces d'or; jamais son mari ne lui en avait tenu compte, il ne se savait pas son débiteur! En échange de ce trésor englouti dans les eaux dormantes de l'oubli, elle n'avait pas obtenu ce regard mouillé qui solde tout, qui pour les âmes généreuses est comme un éternel joyau dont les feux brillent aux jours difficiles.' 1

It is, therefore, because 'l'amour vrai règne surtout par la mémoire',<sup>2</sup> that Félix writes to Natalie: 'As-tu dans le coeur des secrets qui, pour se faire absoudre, aient besoin des miens?'<sup>3</sup> He hopes that his own confession will stimulate hers, and that their knowledge of each other's pasts will enable them to give new meaning and hope to a shared future.

Félix does, however, receive short change from Natalie: 'Savez-vous pour qui je suis prise de pitié? pour la quatrième femme que vous aimerez. Celle-là sera nécessairement forcée de lutter contre trois personnes; aussi dois-je vous prévenir contre le danger de votre mémoire.'<sup>4</sup> If Natalie upbraids Félix for his memory it is not because her love would be the 'amour sans mémoire' of lady Dudley.<sup>5</sup>

1: Y. pp.85-86.

2: La Fille aux yeux d'or, V, p.307.

3: Y. p.3.

4: This remark is of crucial importance for an understanding of le Lys (Y.p.33c) in that it shows Félix fails in what he seeks to achieve - to build on, and thereby progress from, the past. Hence, of course, the very repetitiveness of such themes as that of the star: as Natalie's irony brings out, Félix has never really emerged from his childhood fixations. Hence, too, the ultimate circularity of the form of the novel: cf. below pp. 280-289 and the Conclusion to the thesis.

5: Y. p.232. Cf. Y. p.282: 'mais le rideau tombé sur cette scène de féerie en bannissait jusqu'au souvenir'. Cf. also the no doubt Ballanche derived comment in Séraphita: 'la matière ne peut se ressouvenir d'aucune des choses spirituelles.' (X, p.573)

As she tartly reminds Félix: 'Je suis Française, cher conte;'.<sup>1</sup>  
 It is rather because she can appreciate only too well that 'en amour, comme en toute chose peut-être, il est certains faits minimes en eux-mêmes mais le résultat de mille petites circonstances antérieures, et dont la portée devient immense en résumant le passé, en se rattachant à l'avenir.'<sup>2</sup> She does not wish to fall into the trap signalled by Camille Maupin in Honorine,<sup>3</sup> knowing, with Claudine du Bruel in Un Prince de la Bohème that: 'l'espoir est une mémoire qui désire'.<sup>4</sup>

Although the above remarks give some account of Félix's possible motives for communicating his past to Natalie,<sup>5</sup> no explanation has been given for his choosing an extended written narrative. One reason is, no doubt, his general reluctance to establish direct contact with people, particularly when in difficulty. He tries to use his brother as mediator with his mother,<sup>6</sup> and, initially, M de Chessel with the Mortsaufts. Although he seems more reluctant to use Henriette's letters of introduction<sup>7</sup> he still does so.<sup>8</sup> He even uses Mortsauf to secure a

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- 1: She should know. But is her own memory so bad that she forgets her maiden name was Natalie Evangélista? It may not be altogether surprising if Natalie also appears to have some of the characteristics of an Englishwoman for, as Le Yaouanc points out (Y. pp. LXX-LXXI), Natalie is, in la Fleur des pois at least, in many ways more similar to the English lady Dudley than to the French Henriette. Even Henriette has been seen to have some English characteristics (cf. Nicole Mozet: 'Les personnages anglais et la Touraine dans l'oeuvre de Balzac', pp.138-143). Such links between a variety of characters support Mozet's belief in the importance of cross-fertilisation in their creation (cf. above p.6 and n.1) They also throw an interesting light on, for example, Henriette's own claim that lady Dudley shall be her 'soeur heureuse' (cf. Chapter 7, p.410).
- 2: Albert Savarus, I, p.800. Quoted by G. Poulet: La Distance intérieure, pp. 160-161.
- 3: Cf. above p. 24 (n.6).
- 4: VI, p.835. Cf. G. David: 'L'idée de bonheur dans la Comédie humaine', p.353.
- 5: She did, of course, ask him to. The idea that only the written word can do justice to love does, of course, belong to the whole 'galanterie' tradition; it is as true for Félix as for Petrarch. Again, then, the lover should also be a poet.
- 6: Y. p.15.
- 7: Cf. Y. p.100.
- 8: Y. pp.171, 185.

few words with Madeleine.<sup>1</sup> He is, as Bersani has pointed out,<sup>2</sup> past master at involving others while remaining as passive and as uninvolved as possible himself. There are, however, other possible reasons for his choosing the written form and these may now be examined.

As Nykrog has pointed out, and as the presence of such characters in the Comédie humaine as Frenhofer, Gambara, and Louis Lambert shows, Balzac was frequently preoccupied by the problems of perception and communication. Nykrog shows that *Séraphita*, like Melmoth and Castanier, 'ne se sentait pas la moindre velléité de communiquer sa science aux autres hommes'<sup>3</sup> and needs the presence of 'quatre "catalyseurs"', Minna, Wilfrid, the pastor and David, to prompt her to reveal her experiences.<sup>4</sup> It is Louis Lambert's school-friend, not Louis Lambert, who ensures that a small proportion of his friend's work is made public, even then in a disjointed, hermetic form. Although Félix has already been seen to have a motive for at least communicating his past, this could still have been the subject of a private conversation between him and Natalie and his love for Henriette de Mortsauf would have been another 'chef d'oeuvre inconnu'. Thus, in order to illuminate Félix's motives for choosing a written narrative, it may be useful to compare him with those artists of the Comédie humaine who try to communicate the infinite of their experience and fail: 'Mon malheur vient d'avoir écouté les concerts des anges et d'avoir cru que les hommes pouvaient les comprendre.'<sup>5</sup>

1: Y. p.324.

2: Cf. for example pp.77-81 in Chapter 1 'The Taming of Tigers' (Balzac and Le Lys dans la vallée) of L. Bersani: Balzac to Beckett. Centre and Circumference in French Fiction, New York, Oxford University Press, 1970. How appropriate that this most self-contained of novels should also be the novel of self-containment.

3: Melmoth réconcilié, IX, p.298. Quoted by P. Nykrog: La Pensée de Balzac, p.43.

4: P. Nykrog: ibid.

5: Gambara, IX, p.472. Even if Félix manages to write his narrative, he still fails to use his past creatively. Cf. the Conclusion to the thesis.



One of the reasons why Gambara and Frenhofer fail to communicate their experience is that they cannot isolate themselves from that experience. As Capraja remarks in Massimilla Doni: 'Quand un artiste a le malheur d'être plein de la passion qu'il veut exprimer, il ne saurait la peindre, car il est la chose même au lieu d'en être l'image. L'art procède du cerveau et non du coeur. Quand votre sujet vous domine, vous en êtes l'esclave et non le maître.'<sup>1</sup> If an experience is to be communicated, it must be both relived and assessed: the creator must be both immanent and transcendent. As Poulet says of Balzac himself: 'Mais ce créateur si occupé de sa création, n'est pas seulement un dieu immanent, c'est encore un dieu transcendant.'<sup>2</sup> The artist must, in Nykrog's terms - and those of Balzac - be both 'fou' and 'savant': 'Le savant de la parabole balzacienne communique "à l'univers" ses résultats maigres mais solides, alors que le fou est condamné à "rester dans sa loge": son expérience l'isole et le rend étranger à un univers avec lequel il ne peut pas communiquer.'<sup>3</sup> If the artist is to be successful 'il y a symbiose intime entre les deux "asymptotes"'.<sup>4</sup>

Félix manages to achieve a balance between distance and involvement, between 'juger' and 'aimer'.<sup>5</sup> One of the reasons for this is indicated

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- 1: IX, p.381. Cf. Balzac's remark in Des Artistes: 'Ils ont trop bien senti pour traduire.' (O.D.I++, Vol.38ii, Conard, 1956, p.138). Cf. also Lucienne Frappier-Mazur: 'La Métaphore théâtrale dans la Comédie humaine', p.88 and J.-L. Backès: 'La Métaphore géométrique dans l'oeuvre de Jean Rousset', Critique, 272, 1970 (janvier), pp.32-42.
- 2: G. Poulet: La Distance intérieure, pp.188-189. This belief in the need for aesthetic distance - often taking the form of the 'souvenir' - was by no means unique to Balzac, or Baudelaire. Cf. B. Juden's remarks on Magnin: Traditions orphiques [...], pp.505-506.
- 3: P. Nykrog: La Pensée de Balzac, p.27. For a full discussion of the parable, taken from Théorie de la Démarche, see ibid. pp.24-29. P. Barbéris discusses it from a different point of view in Balzac. Une mythologie réaliste, pp.161-170.
- 4: P. Nykrog: op.cit. p.63.
- 5: Cf. Physiologie du mariage, X, p.682: 'Plus on juge, moins on aime.' Félix confirms this Y. p.21: 'la sublime erreur de notre amour se continua jusqu'au jour où, plus avancés dans la vie, elle fut souverainement jugée.' (Of his mother).

by Borel: 'L'histoire est assez ancienne pour que le héros puisse l'évoquer impartialement; [...] Elle est assez récente pour qu'il en soit encore imprégné.'<sup>1</sup> However, separation in time is not the only factor which enables him to distance himself from his past experience. From his earliest childhood, he was, as we have seen, forced to recognize that his parents, brethren, and school-fellows did not respect and cherish him as an individual as he expected them to: 'Déjà déshérité de toute affection, je ne pouvais rien aimer, et la nature m'avait fait aimant!'<sup>2</sup> Nykrog, in his chapter entitled Ciels et Enfers shows how the individual begins by treating himself as 'un être-valeur', but, after passing through one or more 'crises des illusions perdues' treats himself and the world more and more as 'objet-chose'<sup>3</sup>: 'Le même passage mortel de l'état de valeur à l'état d'objet, se retrouve dans d'innombrables versions à travers la Comédie humaine.'<sup>4</sup> In other words, there is a tendency for the 'fou' of the previously mentioned parable to distance himself from his own experience and become the 'savant'.

These two attitudes are neatly juxtaposed in Félix's conversation with his mother about the star:

- Que faisiez-vous donc là? me dit-elle. [Mademoiselle Caroline]
- Je regardais une étoile.
- Vous ne regardiez pas une étoile, dit ma mère qui nous écoutait du haut de son balcon, connaît-on l'astronomie à votre âge? 5

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1: J. Borel: 'Le Lys [...] et les sources profondes [...]', p.39.  
Cf. above p. 16 and n.2.

2: Y. p.6.

3: P. Nykrog: La Pensée de Balzac, pp.328-394.

4: Ibid. p.348.

5: Y. p.7.

The contrast between the detached, scientific term 'astronomie' and Félix's passionate attachment to the star shows that he is continually jolted in his involvement in his own experience. Even in the 'société de corps fossiles' of the Listomère society, he feels the indifference of 'les regards hostiles ou froids'<sup>1</sup> which he frequently describes in his mother: 'La froideur de ses façons [...] le froid merci [...] les femmes froides.'<sup>2</sup> This indifference heightens his sense of moral isolation - 'vous qui partout avez trouvé les visages froids [...]'<sup>3</sup> - and forces him to examine his own personality and his place in the world: 'Quelle vanité pouvais - je blesser, moi nouveau-né? quelle disgrâce physique ou morale me valait la froideur de ma mère?'<sup>4</sup>

This process of disillusion continues throughout Félix's life and, as he finds out in their joint confessions, is also experienced by Henriette in whose mother he recognizes 'la race froide d'où procédait /s/a mère.'<sup>5</sup> As Marie-Jeanne Durry has pointed out, le Lys dans la vallée is a novel of disillusion:

'Il fallait que, parmi toute la sincérité du sentiment, tout le monde s'y trompât et y fût trompé: M. de Mortsauf, - quoique matériellement la comtesse lui soit fidèle, - les enfants, - qui après avoir, petits, aimé Félix, l'abhorreront dès qu'ils seront en âge de mieux comprendre; - Félix sur Lady Dudley - qui le toise comme un inconnu au moment où il revenait instinctivement vers elle, - ainsi que sur Natalie de Manerville; Mme de Mortsauf sur elle-même.' 6

1: Y. p.18. The theme of 'froideur' will be discussed in Chapter 3.

2: Y. pp. 20, 21.

3: Y. p.96.

4: Y. p.5. Lady Dudley's irony will not have helped, nor his failure with Madeleine. Even Henriette counsels a greater degree of detachment (e.g. Y. p.160).

5: Y. p.104.

6: Cf. p.13 of Marie-Jeanne Durry's introduction to her edition of le Lys dans la vallée. Such disillusion was, of course, common to more than one 'enfant du siècle'. Cf. for example R. Bolster: Stendhal, Balzac et le féminisme romantique, Minard, 1970, pp. 9-16.

Since, as Nykrog has so expertly demonstrated, disillusion is 'la découverte de la dualité être-chose',<sup>1</sup> Félix is, both through his own disillusion and through that of Henriette, forced to detach himself from his own experience and his own past. The final note of the novel, for M.-J. Durry, is one of defeat and frustration,<sup>2</sup> just as for Borel 'Henriette est irrémédiablement pessimiste. [...] elle ne croit plus au bonheur.'<sup>3</sup> At the end of his narrative, Félix may look towards the future, but doubt has entered his mind: 'Demain, je saurai si je me suis trompé en vous aimant.'<sup>4</sup>

Félix's ability to judge his past actions and experiences as he recounts them receives abundant support from the narrative itself. He analyses even his passion for the star.<sup>5</sup> He comments on his own past style, both to his sisters: 'je leur écrivais des lettres pleines de sentiments, peut-être emphatiquement exprimées [...]'<sup>6</sup> and, even, to Henriette: 'Mon Dieu! ne m'entendez-vous pas? repris-je en me servant du langage mystique auquel notre éducation religieuse nous avait habitués.'<sup>7</sup> He is explicit about the relative detachment of his present narrative: 'Je lui [à Henriette] contai mon enfance et ma jeunesse, non comme je vous l'ai dite, en la jugeant à distance; mais avec les paroles ardentes du jeune homme de qui les

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1: P. Nykrog: La Pensée de Balzac, p.355.

2: Marie-Jeanne Durry: op.cit. p.15.

3: J. Borel: 'Le Lys /.../' et les sources profondes [...], p.159.

On page 22 of her Preface to the Garnier-Flammarion edition of le Lys (1972), Nicole Mozet, however, speaks of 'la gaieté profonde' of Henriette's character.

4: Y. p.329.

5: Cf. above p. 18 and n.4.

6: Y. p.11.

7: Y. p.91. Cf. Chapter 7, p.417 and n.3.

blessures saignaient encore.'<sup>1</sup> This objectivity is balanced by his continued involvement in his past memories - 'les souvenirs où j'aime à revivre'<sup>2</sup> - Both combine in 'le travail que nécessitent les idées pour être exprimées'<sup>3</sup> to produce the work of art.

However, there is another aspect to this problem: it is the act of narration itself which enables Félix to write his confession.

'Les peintres ne doivent méditer que la brosse à la main.'<sup>4</sup> It is precisely 'le travail que nécessitent les idées pour être exprimées' which enables Félix to dominate his emotions and to present them in a coherent, organised form. His pen recreates his past and enables his past to be recreated. For Félix might have written to Natalie as he wrote to Henriette: 'Je ne puis [...] parler de vous que loin de vous.'<sup>5</sup> It is noticeable that both Félix and Henriette write some of their most intense moments to one another, Félix after Mortsauf's attack on Henriette, and Henriette at her death. It is the written account which crystallises experience: 'Quel bonheur, mon ami, d'avoir à rassembler les éléments épars de mon expérience pour vous la transmettre [...].'<sup>6</sup>

From this point of view Félix, too, is an artist, and like the other artists of the Comédie humaine can only create in a moment of detachment and through a certain form: 'Il existe [...] une relation étroite entre la forme et ce qu'elle conditionne, telle forme ne

1: Y. p.83.

2: Y. p.57.

3: Y. p.4. Cf. Chapter 7, p.406(n.4).

4: Le Chef d'oeuvre inconnu, IX, p.403. Cf. the Introduction to J. Rousset's Forme et Signification, Corti, 1969 (first published 1962), esp. p.X.

5: Y. p.144.

6: Y. p.155. Cf. above and G. Durand: Les Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire, Bordas, 1969 (3<sup>e</sup> édition), pp.466ff.



pouvant se réaliser que dans telle matière: l'effet et la cause sont invinciblement l'un dans l'autre!'<sup>1</sup>. It is the form itself which presents that résistance which when combined with the energy of Félix's past emotions, becomes life in art: 'Le Mouvement, en raison de la résistance, produit une combinaison qui est la vie; dès que l'un ou l'autre est plus fort, la vie cesse.'<sup>2</sup> For, as Eigeldinger has observed: 'La pensée créatrice a pour fonction d'empreindre l'idée dans le fait, d'accorder les deux pôles de l'idéalité dans la réalité. Le Savant et l'alchimiste, l'artiste et le romancier, ne parviennent à une fin concrète qu'en intégrant leur pensée dans une forme.'<sup>3</sup> This shows again why neither Félix nor Balzac can simply reproduce experience in a narrative: reproduced experience is relived experience and relived experience is incommunicable.

In this way, Balzac achieves a remarkable balance between the form of le Lys dans la vallée and its content. Just as 'le dehors raconte le dedans'<sup>4</sup>, so 'le dedans n'est que l'intériorisation d'un dehors.'<sup>5</sup> The first-person narrative technique both expresses Balzac's vision of the 'real' Félix and is dictated by it, since it seems that the confession is both dictated by Félix's desire to recreate his past and, at the same time, directs the way in which his past is recreated. It is, therefore, particularly appropriate that Balzac should have said in a preface to le Lys: 'A chaque oeuvre sa forme. L'art du romancier consiste à bien matérialiser ses idées.'<sup>6</sup>, since he speaks not only for himself but for Félix de Vandenesse.

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- 1: P. Laubriet: Un catéchisme esthétique, p.90. Cf. Le Chef d'oeuvre inconnu, IX, p.394.  
 2: Louis Lambert, X, p.453. The theme of movement and resistance can also be detected in the novel itself. Cf. Chapter 2, pp.114-120.  
 3: M. Eigeldinger: La Philosophie de l'art /.../, p.30.  
 4: J.-P. Richard: L'Univers imaginaire /.../, p.20.  
 5: S. Doubrovsky; Pourquoi la nouvelle critique, p.55.  
 6: Y. p.337. From the preface dated July, 1835.

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Images and themes

It has been seen that one of the features which characterises Félix's vision of his past is his ability to link past and present experiences by means of related images.<sup>1</sup> Although few style-critics would agree as to what exactly is meant by image, and, indeed, as to what are the objects and methods of style-study,<sup>2</sup> it is now necessary to indicate what, for the purposes of this thesis, will be understood by images, and how they will be examined in succeeding chapters.

As was pointed out in the Introduction, the imagery of le Lys dans la vallée has been the subject of frequent criticism. This may be because such critics have tended to see the image - whether metaphor or simile - in terms of a definition similar to that of I.A. Richards, where the 'tenor' and 'vehicle' of a two-part comparison - as in the teeth ('tenor') of a comb ('vehicle') - have an element in common which is perceptible, even out of context, to the reader.<sup>3</sup> If the juxtaposition of tenor and vehicle is found too predictable, the image is often dismissed as a cliché; if the juxtaposition is thought wholly unpredictable, the image may be thought exaggerated or strained. Since le Lys has, and is still, thought to have both these faults, the acceptance or rejection of this approach to the image is

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1: Cf. above pp.18-24.

2: The bibliography in these fields is, of course, vast. An unfortunate example of the confusion reigning in analyses of the image is P. Caminade: Image et métaphore, Bordas, 1970. Other, more helpful works will be quoted as necessary. Useful collections of definitions of style can be found in S. Ullmann: Style in the French Novel, pp.1-5 and in A. Henry: 'La stylistique littéraire', Le Français moderne, 1972 (janvier), pp.1-15. For a recent attempt to describe the different approaches of a large and varied number of style-critics, see the first three Chapters of B. Dupriez: L'Étude des styles, édition augmentée d'une étude sur le style de Paul Claudel, Ottawa, Didier, 1971.

3: Cf. S. Ullmann: op.cit. p.214. B. Dupriez (op.cit. pp.50-51) gives a somewhat similar initial definition. One of many discussions of I.A. Richards' approach to stylistic criticism can be found in G. Hough: Style and stylistics, pp.80-90.

likely to have important consequences for an appreciation of its style.

The above approach seems to be at the base of, for example, J.M. Burton's enumeration and classification of the images of le Lys, in which his total of 804 comparisons in the novel are divided into groups according to the type of elements compared - whether both are, for example, both concrete as with man and plants, or abstract and concrete as with spiritual phenomena and plants.<sup>1</sup> Although such an analysis enables Burton to show that le Lys has, for example, about four times as many such two-term comparisons as Eugénie Grandet, and that there are 33 man-plant comparisons as opposed to 6 in Eugénie Grandet, he makes no attempt to explain why this should be the case, and what particular significance the predominance of a particular group of images may have in the novels discussed.<sup>2</sup>

As an example of the man-plant analogies Burton would, of course, take the title of the novel which, as Félix makes clear, denotes Henriette de Mortsauf. It could be argued, therefore, that Henriette and the lily are essentially different objects with a number of points in common, whether physical - delicacy, fragility, associational - purity, or Physical-associational - whiteness. Although such images can indeed be seen to reveal previously unsuspected or unspecified facets of Henriette's nature - what Dupriez calls 'un aspect inédit de l'object'<sup>3</sup> - such indications by no means exhaust the implications

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- 1: J.M. Burton: Honoré de Balzac and his figures of speech, Princeton University Press, N.J.-Paris, Champion, 1921.
- 2: In a discussion of V.E. Graham's The Imagery of Proust, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1966, A. Abbou makes a similar point: 'Combien de monographies sur l'image s'accrochent désespérément à un dénombrement et à un répertoire des comparés et des comparants sans parvenir à saisir au travers des thèmes et des sources aucun trait spécifique de l'univers recensé.' (Problèmes et méthode d'une stylistique des images, Le Français Moderne, 1969 (juillet), p.215). Burton's analysis was, however, too early for interpretative conclusions to be drawn.
- 3: B. Dupriez: L'Etude des styles, p.52. They are also both characterised by their perfume and their beauty.

of the Henriette-lily analogy. For, - and this is where the inadequacy of the Burton approach becomes apparent - the relation between Henriette and the lily is not merely one of comparison but of identification. Félix could not be more explicit: 'Elle était, comme vous le savez déjà, le lys de cette vallée où elle croissait pour le ciel, le lys de cette vallée'.<sup>1</sup> It is evident that the different images in le Lys can, when juxtaposed, illuminate both each other and Félix's use of language in a way that a more conventional listing of images would not. It is also evident that Félix's use of language is less metaphorical - in the above sense - than metonymic or even symbolic.<sup>2</sup>

This use of language is, of course, perfectly consistent with the background and character of Félix. As Balzac makes abundantly clear from the first paragraph of le Lys onwards, Félix is, or thinks he is, a poet able to discern 'l'esprit intime des choses',<sup>3</sup> influenced by semi-mystical childhood visions and a Martiniste-influenced Henriette de Mortsau. As F. Germain points out with reference to such authors as Chateaubriand, Mme de Staël, Swedenborg and Ballanche: 'Une imagination spiritualiste est, à peu près forcément, une imagination symbolique.'<sup>4</sup> If, as will be seen Félix talks in terms of

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- 1: Y. p.29. Some critics would, of course, see such an identification as a normal extension of the function of metaphor. Cf. Danielle Bouverot: 'Comparaison et métaphore', Le Français moderne, 1969 (juillet), p.228; this is the second of three articles in successive issues. Although the lily will be examined in more detail in Chapter 7, it may be appropriate to indicate here the many biblical texts where the lily is mentioned: 1 Kings: 7:19, 7:22, 7:26; 2 Chronicles: 4:5; Song of Solomon (cf. Y. p.72): 2:1, 2:2, 2:16, 4:5, 5:13, 6:3, 7:2; Hosea: 14:5; Matthew: 6:28; Luke: 12:27. The latter two references are, of course, the most celebrated and closest to the passage in le Lys.
- 2: Definitions of metonymy and symbol are almost as diverse as of metaphor. Cf. however B. Dupriez: op.cit. pp.51-52, and 54-56. The word symbol will usually be avoided in this thesis as symbols tend to represent rather than materialise - exactly the opposite of the material images of le Lys. Cf. however above p.21 n.1.
- 3: Y. p.12. A direct quote from Ballanche - who bases his use of the term on Francis Bacon!
- 4: F. Germain: L'Imagination d'Alfred de Vigny, Corti, 1961, p.34. For further reference to Félix's mystical language, see below p.417 and n.3.

divine texts, hieroglyphs, and correspondances, an examination of the imagery of le Lys merely in terms of two-part comparisons is indeed likely to do the novel less than justice. For, as the Henriette-lily analogy shows, Félix's images do not merely reveal 'un aspect inédit de l'objet' but 'sa vision de l'objet'. As Abbou writes of sustained metaphor:

'Elle marque enfin l'envahissement progressif d'une conscience par une vision qui s'incorpore peu à peu à la réalité contemplée et l'investit. Il peut s'agir enfin d'une volonté d'écrivain d'imposer lentement sa vision de l'objet, de la scène, ou son interprétation d'un événement. Ecrivain, narrateur et lecteur coïncident alors avec la chose contemplée: trois consciences battent au rythme d'une même réalité ressentie et retransmise.' 1

If the Henriette-lily analogy does not merely compare objects it is because it does not compare mere objects. The object is no longer an object because it is, as an image, impregnated with the subjective intentions and values of the writer.<sup>2</sup>

The importance of subjective intention and values in determining the nature and role of imagery in le Lys can, perhaps, be most usefully illustrated by returning to the link established between Henriette and the star: 'Tombée des steppes bleus où je l'admirais, ma chère étoile s'était donc faite femme en conservant sa clarté, ses scintillements

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- 1: A. Abbou: 'Problèmes et méthode d'une stylistique des images', pp.222-223. Cf. B. Dupriez: L'Etude des styles, p.55: 'Il ne faut pas perdre de vue que l'abstraction n'est pas une qualité mais une action de l'esprit. Il est difficile de dire si, en soi, un mot est abstrait ou concret.'
- 2: This use of values is not, of course, to be confused with that of a number of structuralist critics where 'la valeur ne fait qu'un avec la situation du mot dans le système de la langue.' (B. Dupriez: op.cit. p.134). Nor does it relate to a common definition of stylistics as '(la) linguistique affective'. (Cf. B. Dupriez: ibid. p.140). A number of critics, however, such as Doubrovsky, Poulet, and Richard have argued against the neutrality and 'objectivity' of literary language and shown that the whole work of art is, like Félix's images, an object-subject rather than an object - either because it materialises the intention of its author/narrator or because the act of reading prompts a fusion of the 'I' of the reader and the 'I' of the work into a new, intermittently or semi-self-conscious identity.



et sa fraîcheur.<sup>1</sup> Once again, objects are identified rather than compared. Once again, any physical or even associational links between the objects would seem to be an explanation or a rationalisation of the initial spontaneous association. For what is important here is that the star invoked is not any star, a star visualised by the reader, nor even an actual star seen by the young Félix. It is rather the affective value which the star represents for Félix and for Félix alone.<sup>2</sup> This explains why any more logical links may be less than satisfactory and why a possible dismissal of the analogy as a cliché misses its interest and its significance.<sup>3</sup> For it is, as Doubrovsky would say, 'l'affectivité qui donne au langage sa cohérence.'<sup>4</sup> Or as F. Germain puts it: 'Sauf dans les allégories fabriquées, un objet n'est pas directement l'image d'un autre, mais seulement et toujours de la valeur qui leur est commune.'<sup>5</sup> In thus interiorising and subjectivising the star as a value which is associated with Henriette, Félix the poet-mystic joins a 'new' critic such as Doubrovsky who argues that 'le dedans n'est que l'intériorisation d'un dehors.'<sup>6</sup> As G. Poulet so pertinently remarks: 'Il est singulier de constater que ce qui ressemble le plus à un traité de dévotion du XV<sup>e</sup> ou du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, c'est un essai critique au XX<sup>e</sup>.'<sup>7</sup>

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- 1: Y. p.26. The reference to intention here must not be confused with what has, as Northrop Frye points out, been called the "intentional fallacy" - 'the notion that the poet has a primary intention of conveying meaning to a reader, and that the first duty of a critic is to recapture that intention.' (Anatomy of criticism, Princeton N.J., Princeton University Press, 1971 (first published 1957), p.86).
- 2: Félix delights in the possession and absorption of material objects - not unlike lady Dudley. Cf. Y. p.65: 'avec cette vélocité de pieds qui défie celle du cheval échappé, je retrouvai mon bateau, mes saules et mon Clochegourde.' In her thesis 'Le Lys dans la vallée': Honoré de Balzac. Etude stylistique, Monica Crawley has a Chapter entitled: 'Le pronom et l'adjectif possessif'. (pp.31-43). Cf. also above p.18(n.5).
- 3: There is a logic here, though - poetic logic.
- 4: S. Doubrovsky: Pourquoi la nouvelle critique, p.55. Cf. ibid. p.190.
- 5: F. Germain: L'Imagination d'Alfred de Vigny, p.15.
- 6: S. Doubrovsky: op.cit. p.55. See above p.34.
- 7: G. Poulet: La Conscience critique, Corti, 1971, p.104. Cf. ibid. pp.170, 186-187.

It can be seen from the above that if the significance of, for example, star and lily in Félix's narrative is to be appreciated, it is by taking them in a representational or figurative rather than literal or objective sense - by taking them, in other words, as a kind of private symbol or image. For the purposes of this study the image is, then, a kind of object-subject or subject-object which thereby materialises Félix de Vandenesse's attitude to or relationship with the 'objet', the outside world - here the star and Henriette de Mortsau.

The above remarks do, moreover, confirm the notion that such images cannot be meaningfully examined in isolation: the identification of Henriette and the star is not merely a transfer of values, the value of the star being transferred to Henriette, but an accumulation of values: the star as a value is maintained in the new reference to Henriette as a value. The identification does, then, by enabling Félix to interiorise his experiences, also enable him, at least momentarily, to totalise his experiences. Such a totalisation through interiorisation - again indicative of the poet-mystic - can be seen to go a stage further when Félix refers to Henriette as 'cette fleur sidérale'.<sup>1</sup> This is, of course, a more conventional metaphor. It does, however, show the impossibility of examining such figures in isolation from the so-called object-subjects or subject-objects in le Lys. It also shows how a perhaps apparently banal image may be breathtaking in its ability to condense and subsume the values and the experiences of the writer.

As a result, it can be said that the image not only materialises but also totalises Félix's attitude to and relationship with the

1: Y. p.65. The gradation 'étoile', 'lys', 'étoile-femme', 'fleur sidérale' is, of course, significant in that it reflects the expansion of sentiments: cf. above p.20 and n.4, and below pp.98-99,111.

outside world. As Doubrovsky argues: 'écrire, [...] c'est exprimer, par des moyens plus ou moins complexes et selon des techniques variables, ce que le monde signifie.'<sup>1</sup> It is for this reason that Poulet sees Bachelard's exploration of material images as 'une merveilleuse application de la phénoménologie à la littérature' and writes, after Bachelard: 'Rêver le monde, c'est donc se rêver.'<sup>2</sup> Or as Bachelard himself observes: 'Dans les heures de grandes trouvailles, une image poétique peut être le germe d'un monde, le germe d'un univers imaginé devant la rêverie d'un poète.'<sup>3</sup> If, therefore, passages in le Lys, hitherto treated as examples of realistic or purely objective environmental description, are also treated as images, it is because they too can be seen as object-subjects or subject-objects, materialising Félix's attitude to and relationship with the outside world. Illustrating once again the inseparability of 'fond' and 'forme', they too embody Félix's 'Weltanschauung'. In the words of F. Germain: 'L'imagination, en effet, ne répartit pas la vie mentale selon la raison et la déraison, mais selon le désir et la répugnance, et les objets, sur chacun de ces pôles, se réunissent en vertu de leurs similitudes affectives.'<sup>4</sup>

It might appear from the above remarks that a definition of the image as a subject-object in the greater subject-object which is the whole work of art makes the actual distinguishing and grouping of such images difficult to determine. One way, however, in which this can be done is, as Germain indicates, by the nature of quality of the relationship - or lack of relationship - which different subject-objects

1: S. Doubrovsky: Pourquoi la nouvelle critique, p.100.

2: G. Poulet: La Conscience critique, pp.208, 209.

3: G. Bachelard: La Poétique de la rêverie, P.U.F., 1965 (3<sup>e</sup> édition), p.1.

4: F. Germain: L'Imagination d'Alfred de Vigny, p.15.

can be found to embody. Thus, various objects will be seen to embody for Félix varying degrees of hostility or affection. The quality of these relationships can, moreover, be highlighted by changes of perspective which accompany a change of speaker. Although, for example, lady Dudley is said to be attached to material objects and material pleasures, she does, with her irony, satirise and debase a number of material images by which Félix elsewhere sets great value.<sup>1</sup> At no point, however, does Félix himself appear to call these values into question and see his vision of the world with the relative objectivity and distance of a lady Dudley. Félix's inability to see his images as the clichés they sometimes are is, of course, for the reader, extremely revealing: Félix's vision is thereby specified. As Riffaterre points out, one of the functions of the cliché is to reinforce 'la caractérisation psychologique des personnages.'<sup>2</sup> Another way in which the cliché functions is 'comme une citation, comme une référence à un certain niveau social, à certaines manifestations de culture.'<sup>3</sup> However, as Riffaterre again points

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- 1: Cf. for example below pp. 131, 224 n.8, 256 n.4, and p.424 n.7. Balzac is, of course, past master at adapting language to character.
- 2: M. Riffaterre: Essais de stylistique structurale, présentation et traduction par D. Delas, Flammarion, 1971, p.176. This and subsequent quotations are taken from Chapter VI of Riffaterre's work, entitled 'Fonction du cliché dans la prose littéraire', a text previously printed in article form (cf. ibid. p.161.) A number of other critics have examined the possible role of the cliché or faded image: cf. for example R. Wellek and A. Warren: Theory of Literature, Penguin Books, 1970, pp.195-197 (First published in the U.S.A. 1949); S. Ullmann: Style in the French novel, pp. 15-16; B. Dupriez: L'Etude des styles, pp. 57-58. In order to give as faithful description as possible of Félix's vision it will, therefore, be necessary to draw attention to those images which may be considered clichés. This will, of course, underline, not detract from, their significance in le Lys dans la vallée.
- 3: M. Riffaterre: op.cit. p.170. The historical and cultural background of le Lys is discussed in the last section of this Chapter.

out, this use of cliché does have its dangers:

'L'écrivain qui emploie le cliché mimétique craint que le lecteur ne fasse une confusion: il ne faut surtout pas que celui-ci l'accuse d'avoir inconsciemment employé ces clichés que justement il prête à ses personnages. L'auteur est alors amené à baliser son texte, à tracer une démarcation entre son style à lui et les clichés mimétiques.' 1

Hence, of course, the singular importance of Natalie's rejoinder to Félix's confession and, once again, of seeing the image not merely as an isolated two-part comparison but as an integral part of a work which is 'tout entier figure: figure de la longue rêverie d'un homme jeune sur le monde extérieur, [...]'.<sup>2</sup>

It is, of course, appropriate that it is the detachment of a lady Dudley which helps throw into relief imagery which is, as has been seen, the materialisation of accumulated values, expressing its creator's experiences in a singularly dense and intense form. As noted above, what Félix sees as an 'être-valeur' others such as his mother - or lady Dudley - may see as an 'objet-chose'.<sup>3</sup> The degree of 'subjectivity' or 'objectivity' may, therefore, fluctuate from one character to another just as it can fluctuate in the attitude of one character - with, for example, the perhaps paradigmatic development of the star as object-subject to pure subject, after which, as has been noted, stars as objects virtually disappear from the narrative.

1: M. Riffaterre: op.cit. pp.176-177. Cf. M. Roques' remark, quoted in the Introduction, p. xv(n.4).

2: J. Gaudon: 'Le Rouge et le blanc: notes sur le Lys dans la vallée', in Balzac and the Nineteenth century, Studies in French literature presented to Herbert J. Hunt, Leicester University Press, 1972, p.78. Further comments on the importance to Natalie's reply will be found below p. 423, p.424.

3: Cf. above p. 30.



Thus the same may be said of the imagery of le Lys as Starobinsky claims for the work of art:

'Si la réflexion critique s'inscrit dans un trajet, l'oeuvre littéraire, elle aussi, se manifeste comme un trajet, c'est-à-dire comme un système de relations variables établies, par l'entremise du langage, entre une conscience singulière et le monde.' 1

Although, then, it is not usual within this concept of imagery to distinguish between different planes of meaning - such as degrees of figurativeness, literalness, spirituality, materiality -<sup>2</sup> but to treat, for example, references to the characters' 'actual' environment alongside their more conventionally figurative environment, it will occasionally be useful to distinguish between these in order to highlight certain aspects of Félix's vision of the world.<sup>3</sup>

This does not, of course, mean that different planes of meaning will not generally be distinguished in le Lys. However, these different meanings, called by Doubrovsky 'des "niveaux" de

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1: J. Starobinsky: La Relation critique, Gallimard, 1970, p.15.

The section from which this quotation is taken was previously published under the same title in Studi francesci, Supplement to No.34 entitled 'Quatre conférences sur la "nouvelle critique"', 1968 (January-April), pp.33-45. Cf. also J.-P. Richard: L'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé, Seuil, 1961, p.25.

2: Cf. the extremely useful distinction made by Northrop Frye between words used as motifs or as signs: 'Whenever we read anything, we find our attention moving in two directions at once. One direction is outward or centrifugal, in which we keep going outside our reading, from the individual words to the things they mean, or, in practice, to our memory of the conventional association between them. The other direction is inward or centripetal, in which we try to develop from the words a sense of the larger verbal pattern they make.' (Anatomy of criticism, p.73). Frye goes on to note that 'verbal structures may be classified according to whether the final direction of meaning is outward or inward. In descriptive or assertive writing the final direction is outward. Here the verbal structure is intended to represent things external to it, and is valued in terms of the accuracy with which it does represent them. In literary structures, however, the final direction of meaning is inward. In literature the standards of outward meaning are secondary, for literary works do not pretend to describe or assert, and hence are not true, not false, and yet not tautological either [...]. In literature, questions of fact or truth are subordinated to the primary aim of producing a structure of words for its own sake, and the sign-values of symbols are subordinated to their importance as a structure of interconnected motifs.' (Ibid. p.74).

3: Cf. for example, the Conclusion to Chapter 4.

signification'<sup>1</sup> are not, as he points out, different levels of meaning in the sense that one is at a deeper or more significant level than another, but in the sense that 'la profondeur est une vertu possible de l'ambiguïté.'<sup>2</sup> An image, seen from a different angle or perspective, can be interpreted on a different axis of meaning. Various axes of meaning cross each image, but not every image is crossed by the same combination of axes. It is where such axes cross that a particular image emerges and can be characterised. For the critic as for the creator 'une grande lumière prend naissance à l'intersection des trajectoires.'<sup>3</sup> The image is a knot of interrelated meanings in the 'tissu verbal' of the text.<sup>4</sup> Thus J. Rousset speaks of 'ces noeuds et [...] ces carrefours où la texture se concentre ou se déploie.'<sup>5</sup>

It is evident that, given the above conception of imagery, there can be no question of considering Félix's images in isolation either from the text in which they occur or in isolation from each other. It is also evident from the above that if full justice is to be done to the unity and complexity of this 'tissu verbal', each image must be reconsidered with each axis which crosses it. For it is the persistent relevance of a certain number of images to a variety of perspectives which shows Félix's attitude to be crystallised round certain themes and, finally, gives his vision not only its relief

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1: S. Doubrovsky: Pourquoi la nouvelle critique, p.45.

2: Ibid. p.44.

3: J. Starobinsky: La Relation critique, p.15.

4: J.-P. Richard: L'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé, p.19.

5: J. Rousset: Forme et signification, Intro. p.XII. Quoted by S. Doubrovsky: Pourquoi la nouvelle critique, p.66 n.3.

but its identity. Without such repetitions, then, what has been variously called a structuralist<sup>1</sup> or, perhaps now more accurately, thematic<sup>2</sup> study of a work, is no longer possible.

A frequently-used approach for discovering such themes is based on the idea of the 'écart', or work's divergence from certain linguistic or literary norms, preferably of the period, cultural group, or genre to which the work is thought to belong.<sup>3</sup> Or an attempt may be made to assess the divergence between the work and all of these or, simply, between one work and the rest of an author's productions.<sup>4</sup> Here repetition almost invariably provides

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- 1: Jean Pouillon gives a useful definition: 'Par opposition à l'atomisme, qui isole les termes dont l'ensemble est simplement leur juxtaposition, le structuralisme consiste à chercher les relations qui donnent aux termes qu'elles unissent une valeur "de position" dans un ensemble organisé, à appréhender des ensembles que leur articulation rend signifiant. Le structuralisme implique donc deux idées: celle de totalité, celle d'interdépendance.' (Quoted from Temps modernes, 1966 (novembre) by R. Girard: 'La Notion de structure en critique littéraire', Studi francesci, Supplement to No.34 entitled 'Quatre conférences sur la "nouvelle critique"', 1968 (January - April) p.62.) As structuralism develops it is, however, emphasising those elements in the above definition which distinguish it from the approach followed in this thesis, becoming increasingly concerned with the purely syntactical relations in a work rather than with the semantics of form. Such critics do, therefore, see works as pure objects rather than subject-objects. Cf. B. Dupriez: L'Etude des styles, p.124 and G. Poulet on R. Barthes in La Conscience critique, pp.267-272.
- 2: The use of the word theme needs to be distinguished from its use by J.-P. Weber, with whom it is often associated. As B. Dupriez points out, for Weber 'le thème déborde [...] l'acte de création littéraire pour envahir la vie, à la manière même des complexes.' (L'Etude des styles, p.86). Equally different is of course Mauron's notion of 'le mythe personnel'. Being phenomenological rather than psychoanalytical or psychocritical, the approach in this thesis is, therefore, closer to that of a Spitzer or an Antoine - for whom style is 'comme une manière d'être, et par conséquent d'agir ... et d'écrire.' (B. Dupriez: op.cit. p.159.)
- 3: The problem is, of course, that 'écart' and norm are mutually dependent but both unknowns. Thus A. Henry writes: 'Au lieu de ne songer qu'à des écarts par rapport à une norme inaccessible et extérieure à l'oeuvre, il faut fonder et respecter le postulat que l'oeuvre est un système fermé, à l'intérieur duquel, au mieux des choses, les faits stylistiques marquants sont en dynamisme convergent.' ('La stylistique littéraire', p.5.) For a more detailed study of the 'écart' see J. Starobinsky's introductory article to L. Spitzer's Etudes de style, Gallimard, 1970. For a valiant attempt to apply the principle of the 'écart' to rigorous style-study, see B. Dupriez: L'Etude des styles ou la Commutation en littérature.
- 4: Hence the frequency counts of images in Balzac by such critics as J.M. Burton and Lucienne Frappier-Mazur (see bibliog.) Cf. also below p.220.

the key. Thus Baudelaire remarks: 'Je lis dans une critique: "pour deviner l'âme d'un poète, ou du moins sa principale préoccupation, cherchons dans ses oeuvres quel est le mot ou quels sont les mots qui s'y représentent avec le plus de fréquence. Le mot traduira l'obsession."<sup>1</sup> Richard may have had this in mind when he writes: 'La répétition, ici comme ailleurs, signale l'obsession.'<sup>2</sup>

Richard does, however, indicate the weaknesses of a purely statistical approach to the theme. First of all, it assumes the unequivocality of language: 'c'est supposer que d'un exemple à l'autre la signification des mots demeure fixe.'<sup>3</sup> It also assumes that the complexity of a theme can be contained in a single word whereas in fact 'le thème déborde souvent en extension le mot.'<sup>4</sup> Thus it is not just the recurrence of the same words which reveals the theme but the recurrence of semantically related words - such as in le Lys 'étoile', 'briller' and 'lumière' - which are at least momentarily endowed with the same affective value by the creator. Furthermore, words do not have to be so related to convey a similar value: 'c'est prendre le langage pour la langue'.<sup>5</sup> For semantically distant words can convey a similar tension in the subject-object relationship of the speaker - in his attitude to and relationship with the object. As Doubrovsky remarks: 'C'est donc

1: Quoted from L'Art romantique (Pléiade ed. p.IIII) by S. Ullmann: 'Style et expressivité', C.A.I.E.F., No.16, 1964 (mars), p.103.

2: J.-P. Richard: L'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé, p.25. The terminology here is evocative of Maaron.

3: Ibid.

4: J.-P. Richard: L'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé, p.25.

5: S. Doubrovsky: Pourquoi la nouvelle critique, p.96. Doubrovsky is presumably following Bally's distinction.

sur le fondement de leur rapport à l'objet qu'ils signifient que les mots entretiennent des rapports entre eux.<sup>1</sup> It is for this reason that although certain themes examined in later chapters will tend to centre on groups of key words and images, a number of others will cut across these groupings, and, incorporating images from several different groups, show that composite clusters of images can convey a different, though complementary, perspective on this relationship.<sup>2</sup>

Since so many different axes of meaning cross so many different images, it is unlikely that one critic will be able to exhaust the almost infinite complexity of themes. As Poulet observes: 'Sans doute [...] il est vain d'espérer de toutes ces oeuvres la révélation totale de l'oeuvre totale.'<sup>3</sup> If, as has been suggested, each image represents a stage in 'un mouvement de totalisation permanent' which, Doubrovsky adds, is never completed,<sup>4</sup> then it is questionable whether the critic can allow himself to try to improve on that totalisation - especially in a description of the manifestly restricted 'Weltanschauung' of a single character.<sup>5</sup> What he can do, of course, is try to alternate moments of identification with this

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1: S. Doubrovsky: op.cit. p.97, n.l. Hence such expressions as 'fleur sidérale'.

2: Cf. the examination of the Journey theme in the following Chapter.

3: G. Poulet: La Conscience critique, p.54. Cf. J.-P. Richard: 'le critique n'a point d'autre tâche à accomplir qu'à tisser patiemment une toile infinie.' (L'Univers [...], p.37) and J. Starobinsky: 'nul n'est moins assuré de son repos que celui devant qui s'ouvre et s'élargit, de cercle en cercle, le champ d'une totalité finalement non totalisable.' (p.38 of his introductory article to L. Spitzer: Etudes de style). Such remarks recall, perhaps, Capraja's 'horizons fuyants' and corroborate Poulet's analogy between some modern critics and mysticism.

4: Cf. S. Doubrovsky: op.cit. p.211.

5: The danger of pure description is that it tends to lack the interest of a more cavalier approach. If Northrop Frye is to be believed, however, it may be worth trying: 'Value-judgements are founded on the study of literature; the study of literature can never be founded on value-judgements.' (Anatomy of criticism, p.20.)



'Weltanschauung' and moments of relative distance from it - the method of the 'trajet' outlined by Starobinsky.<sup>1</sup> In this way the critic can hope to avoid both 'une union sans intellectualisation' and 'une intellectualisation sans union'.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from the difficulty of finding a delicate balance between these two extremes, the present-day critic has to acknowledge another problem: the critic, like the author, is 'engagé'; his examination of certain themes rather than others involves more or less conscious choice. As Doubrovsky writes: 'Dans le domaine qui nous occupe, la même oeuvre peut donc se découper selon des structures différentes, suivant le rapport de l'observateur à l'objet de son observation, ou plutôt ici du participant à l'objet de sa participation.'<sup>3</sup> Given this subjectivity of the critic and 'l'ambiguïté inhérente à toute expression littéraire',<sup>4</sup> it is hardly surprising that 'dès que l'on passe de la théorie à la pratique, l'école de l'unité se désunit.'<sup>5</sup>

However, this partial - in both senses of the word - nature of criticism does, despite R. Chollet's reference to the 'exclusions commodes' of the structuralists,<sup>6</sup> apply to every approach; every method implies a choice and every choice an absence of totality.

Thus Doubrovsky argues:

'Puisque, de l'aveu général, la forme de critique vers laquelle tendent les recherches contemporaines est celle que intégrera la plus grande quantité de sens possible, il en découle qu'aucun modèle d'intelligibilité à l'oeuvre dans les sciences humaines ne saurait être retenu pour la critique littéraire; car ces modèles s'obtiennent soit par exclusion d'autres significations tout aussi légitimes, et l'on perd la plus grande quantité de sens possible; soit par sommation des divers sens possibles, mais ils ne sont pas intégrés.'<sup>7</sup>

1: Cf. La Relation critique, p.13.

2: G. Poulet: La Conscience critique, p.290. The characteristics, no doubt, of the 'fou' and the 'savant'.

3: S. Doubrovsky: Pourquoi la nouvelle critique, p.71.

4: Ibid. p.35.

5: Ibid. p.76.

6: Cf. his review of A.B. 1967 in R.H.L.F. 1969 (janvier-mars), p.145.

7: S. Doubrovsky: op.cit. pp.174-175.

Thus neither the Marxist, nor the psychocritical nor the so-called objective, scientific approach can, either, present a final and total study of a work.

Thus, however careful the analysis, however convincing the approach, no method can be advocated or dismissed merely on the strength of its manifesto - especially as, as Starobinsky points out, the method emerges from the analysis itself:

'La méthode se cache dans le style de la démarche critique, et ne devient parfaitement évident qu'une fois le parcours achevé. Le paradoxe apparent, c'est que la méthode ne puisse se former conceptuellement qu'au moment où elle a accompli son office et où elle est presque inutile. Le critique accède à la pleine conscience de la méthode en se retournant vers la trace de son cheminement. Et j'entends par méthode aussi bien la réflexion sur les fins que la codification des moyens de la critique.' 1

Since the merits or demerits of a method rest, finally, on the insights and conclusions it produces, what is proposed in the following chapters is much less 'une nouvelle critique' than, it is hoped, at least the beginnings of 'une nouvelle lecture'. Whatever other aims the literary critic may have, for this there will surely always be room.

Before leaving this section on images and themes it is, however, <sup>= fille 7</sup> <sup>what</sup> <sup>Leiris?</sup> necessary to confess the absence of one important perspective in all the above analyses: the role of Balzac in his own creation.

In this as in previous sections of this Chapter the presence of Balzac in le Lys dans la vallée has been either minimised or ignored. This attitude has been adopted partly to counterbalance the weight of previous criticism which has tended to stress the interest of le Lys as a semi-autobiography at the expense of other aspects; it has been

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1: La Relation critique, p.12.

adopted also because an authoritative movement in recent criticism has tended to put such considerations on one side - 'mettre provisoirement entre parenthèses l'extérieur',<sup>1</sup> - in order to concentrate on the inner structures of the work; it has also been adopted to try to show that although Balzac wrote le Lys, he wrote it in such a way that both the motivation and construction of the narrative-confession can seem to have their origins in the character of Félix de Vandenesse. Thus, however much or however little of Balzac's own experiences is related in le Lys, and the number and nature of such confidences remain, as Le Yaouanc observes in a tantalising article on this subject, far from accurately determined,<sup>2</sup> a purely internal examination of the themes and structures of the novel may still offer a valid interpretation of the text: 'Ainsi, les rapports de signification se constitueraient-ils à l'intérieur du langage, comme "valides" dans la mesure où ils sont cohérents, mais non comme "vrais", en tant qu'ils se renverraient à une réalité extérieure à la parole.'<sup>3</sup> However, since a number of critics have refused to limit themselves to a purely internal analysis while recognizing the value of such studies, it is important to indicate the nature of their reservations.

Critics such as Richard, Poulet and Starobinsky have argued that there is an essential link between the structure of a work and its author: 'La structure structurée de l'oeuvre nous renvoie à un sujet

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- 1: J.-P. Richard: L'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé, p.30. But cf. ibid. p.30 n.l: 'A partir d'une série de monographies, internes et cohérentes, il deviendra possible d'esquisser une étude des sensibilités ou des imaginations collectives. Nul doute en effet que les directions intérieures de chaque rêverie ne soient en rapport avec les tendances historiques et sociales de tout un temps.'
- 2: M. Le Yaouanc: 'Balzac dans son oeuvre', C.A.I.E.F., No.15, 1963 (mars), p.357.
- 3: S. Doubrovsky: Pourquoi la nouvelle critique, p.97 n.l.

structurant, de même qu'elle nous renvoie à un monde culturel auquel elle s'ajoute en y apportant le plus souvent le trouble et le défi.<sup>1</sup>; 'Bref, il n'y a pas de toile d'araignée sans un centre qui est l'araignée'.<sup>2</sup> Structures and themes have, like the words themselves, a history.<sup>3</sup> As Starobinsky's remark suggests, there are two aspects to this historical approach: the genesis and development of a theme in the author's work or works may be examined: Girard, for example, recommends the study of 'des textes chronologiquement éloignés l'un de l'autre et qui, plutôt que les étapes successives, les gradins bien ordonnés d'une même élaboration esthétique, révéleront de véritables ruptures, des réorganisations structurelles qui obligent à distinguer deux moments incompatibles, deux versants opposés de la même création, laquelle ne peut plus passer pour une qu'à un regard assez superficiel, même si elle ne cesse jamais de remanier les mêmes éléments.'<sup>4</sup> Thus R. Chollet observes: 'Les études de genèse [...] permettent [...] d'aborder l'oeuvre simultanément de l'extérieur (matériaux) et de l'intérieur (construction).'<sup>5</sup> This type of study might be particularly rewarding in the case of le Lys dans la vallée. It could also lead to a thematic study of all the novels prior to le Lys if its structures and themes were to be placed in perspective with those of earlier works.

The second historical approach to thematic studies incorporates an attempt to place the themes and structures of an author's work or

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- 1: J. Starobinsky: La Relation critique, p.23. Cf. S. Doubrovsky: op.cit. p.53.  
 2: G. Poulet: La Conscience critique, p.295.  
 3: Cf. S. Doubrovsky, quoting Sartre, in Pourquoi la nouvelle critique, p.37 n.l.  
 4: R. Girard: 'La notion de structure en critique littéraire', pp.68-69. Girard illustrates this method with particular reference to L'Education sentimentale.  
 5: In his review of A.B. 1967: R.H.L.F., 1969 (janvier-mars), p.145. In 'Problemes et methode d'une stylistique des images', p.219, A. Abbou criticizes V.E. Graham for not having examined the various manuscripts in his study of the imagery of Proust.

works in their historical context. As Sartre remarks: "Une oeuvre d'art est à la fois une production individuelle et un fait social".<sup>1</sup> Thus Doubrovsky concludes: 'l'examen des "structures littéraires" présente un rapport significatif avec les structures sociologiques de l'époque'.<sup>2</sup> In this connection C. Pichois speaks of 'les progrès que l'histoire littéraire pourrait accomplir grâce à la sociologie interne de la littérature [...]'.<sup>3</sup> A number of other critics have also pointed to the structuralist's tendency to study a work in a historical vacuum: 'tout principe d'explication exclusivement formel aboutirait à isoler l'objet de la recherche, à l'abstraire abusivement de son contexte historique';<sup>4</sup> 'une dimension d'histoire s'introduit dans la culture, dont un structuralisme généralisé peut malaisément rendre compte'.<sup>5</sup>

In an extended commentary on P. Nykrog's La Pensée de Balzac,<sup>6</sup> Pierre Barbéris strongly advocates the historical approach to themes and structures in Balzac:

'Les structures littéraires ne sont pas de pures entités, manipulables selon de pures recettes de virtuosité, selon les "règles" d'une pure subjectivité, de pures intuitions, dans un vide historique rassurant. Les structures, en littérature, comme les comportements ailleurs, sont des formes, et des formes logiques, ayant leurs origines, leurz genèse, leur développement, leurs lois, aussi, d'accélération propre.' 7

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- 1: Quoted from Situations IV by S. Doubrovsky: Pourquoi la nouvelle critique, p.41.  
 2: S. Doubrovsky: op.cit. p.41.  
 3: C. Pichois: 'L'Histoire littéraire traditionnelle', C.A.I.E.F., No.16, 1964 (mars), p.119.  
 4: A. Pizzorusso: 'Critique formaliste et critique formelle: problèmes et méthodes', C.A.I.E.F., No.16, 1964 (mars), p.151.  
 5: J. Starobinsky: La Relation critique, pp.20-21.  
 6: P. Barbéris: 'La Pensée de Balzac: histoire et structures', R.H.L.F. 1967, pp.18-54. Barbéris is of course a Marxist and his historical approach implies a social dialectic of linguistics.  
 7: Ibid. p.46. As R. Guise, however, points out in his review of Barbéris' Balzac et le mal du siècle, 2 volumes, Gallimard, 1970: 'Il y a un écart inquiétant entre la théorie critique de P. Barbéris et son application.' (A.B. 1972, p.417). Given Barbéris' present tendency to interpret history through Balzac rather than Balzac in and through history, his concept of the theme is very different from that outlined above and from Nykrog's 'concepts-clé'. The principles enunciated in Barbéris' earlier article nevertheless remain valid.



Barb eris' approach, as outlined here, would incorporate a study of the genesis of the structures: 'On voit mal comment une v eritable  tude des structures peut se s eparer d'une  tude de g en etique.'<sup>1</sup>; 'Il y a un mouvement interne des th emes, et un mouvement plus strictement chronologique dans l'histoire de l'oeuvre et dans la vie.'<sup>2</sup> He would also seek to place these structures in their historical context:

'Le h eros balzacien ne dialogue pas avec soi-m eme des probl emes du repos et du mouvement, mais bien avec le si ecle, en ce qu'il a d'in evitable et de contraignant. Ce dialogue, ce dilemme, ces choix, ces fourvoiements d' nergie, ces retours sur soi, non en vertu de l'intuition d'une indignit e ou d'une incapacit e fondamentale, mais en vertu d'une exp erience historique pr ecise, on en trouverait des annonces, des  quivalents ou des prolongements chez bien d'autres  crivains,   commencer par Stendhal,   continuer par Flaubert.'<sup>3</sup>

This approach may enable the critic to escape from a situation in which 'la critique [ ] oscille entre des auteurs sans oeuvres et des oeuvres sans auteurs, et manque perpetuellement la litt erature.'<sup>4</sup>

A more immediate, though preparatory, task, at least for le Lys dans la vall ee, lies in the editing of complete and reliable texts of its numerous proofs and editions, and in a preliminary investigation of some of its themes. This latter will be the subject of succeeding chapters.

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1: P. Barb eris: 'La Pens ee de Balzac: histoire et structures', p.23.

2: Ibid. p.39.

3: Ibid. pp.44-45. There is also an element of fashion here.

4: S. Doubrovsky: Pourquoi la nouvelle critique, p.61.

(6)

'Le Lys dans la vallée' and the historical context

It might seem from the previous sections not altogether impossible to examine le Lys dans la vallée as a purely self-contained work of art in a cultural and historical vacuum. However desirable it may be, though, to cut umbilical cords in order to characterise an individual work of art, no image study could be attempted or appreciated if the imagery were thought meaningful only in and to one work. As Northrop Frye points out with customary cogency: 'For the psychologist all dream symbols are private ones, interpreted by the personal life of the dreamer. For the critic there is no such thing as private symbolism, or, if there is, it is his job to make sure that it does not remain so.'<sup>1</sup> The assumption behind the works of a Bachelard or a Gilbert Durand is that the creation and appreciation of images and themes is a phenomenon which transcends any individual work, with poets and other writers reiterating or re-exploiting the archetypes belonging to the collective unconscious. For the poet as for the critic 'expanding images into conventional archetypes is a process that takes place unconsciously in all our reading.'<sup>2</sup>

Although it is not possible, within the limits of this study, to examine Balzac's reading in this perspective, nor to examine the images and themes of le Lys dans la vallée as possible archetypes, some of these themes may, at least, be placed in the perspective of the preoccupations, even the obsessions, of the period concerned.

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1: Anatomy of criticism, p.111.

2: Ibid. p.100. The influence of Jung is, of course, important here. For the works of Bachelard and Durand which will be quoted in this thesis, see Bibliog.

In this way, at least some of the disadvantages of the synchronic approach may be remedied.

There are, moreover, particular reasons why the jettisoning of all background material would be detrimental to an appreciation of le Lys. The novel does, as has been noted, contain a number of clichés and one of the functions of cliché is, as has also been noted, 'comme une citation, comme une référence à un certain niveau social, à certaines manifestations de culture.'<sup>1</sup> The cliché, like the novel-mirror, reflects rather than reproduces certain attitudes and conventions. Even an image - in the sense of 'imago' - introduces a certain distance, a new perspective. Some indication of the background to le Lys is, therefore, necessary for the originality of and in the novel to be examined and assessed.<sup>2</sup>

One of the first authors who needs to be considered is the Tourangeau theosopher, Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, the 'Philosophe Inconnu', (1743-1803). Although Robert Amadou, in his excellent article on Balzac and Saint-Martin,<sup>3</sup> concludes that Balzac is neither perfectly faithful to, nor perfectly well-informed about, Saint-Martin's doctrine,<sup>4</sup> he does acknowledge - thereby following P. Bertault - that 'le vocabulaire de Saint-Martin a imprégné profondément l'esprit et le style de Balzac'.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, even if Félix de Vandenesse is wrong in claiming that the phrase 'la lumière de l'amour céleste et l'huile de la joie intérieure'

1: Cf. above p. 42(n.3).

2: This will be done in the Conclusion to the thesis.

3: 'Balzac et Saint-Martin', A.B. 1965, pp.35-60.

4: Ibid. p.52.

5: Ibid. p.38. Quotes P. Bertault: intro. to Traité de la prière, Boivin, 1942, p.49. Bertault is referring particularly to Louis Lambert and Séraphita.

is a direct borrowing from Saint-martin,<sup>1</sup> Amadou shows that this and the other three direct references to Saint-Martin's vocabulary and ideas in le Lys are at least faithful in tone and spirit to his works.<sup>2</sup> As the reference to 'cette lumière que Saint-Martin, le Philosophe Inconnu, disait être intelligente, mélodieuse et parfumée' in le Lys suggests,<sup>3</sup> Balzac's stylistic and perhaps also philosophical debt to Saint-Martin is particularly notable in the description of the network of 'correspondances' in the novel. Thus of Saint-Martin's philosophy P. Laubriet observes: 'Balzac retrouvait là une théorie des correspondances, semblable à celle de Swedenborg dans son esprit général, plus intéressant peut-être par un aspect particulier.'<sup>4</sup> In order to illustrate this debt, a limited number of references will be made to l'Homme de désir, (1790), Saint-Martin's most widely known work and perhaps that most directly alluded to in le Lys.<sup>5</sup> These references will be given in later Chapters.

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- 1: Y. p.62. Le Yaouanc (ibid. n.3) and Amadou (op.cit. p.58) find similar expressions though not the whole quotation in Saint-Martin.
  - 2: The other three passages are: Y. p.114, p.149, p.214. See the relevant notes on each of these pages and Amadou: op.cit. pp.58-59.
  - 3: Y. p.214.
  - 4: P. Laubriet: L'Intelligence /.../, p.302. This 'aspect particulier' is the synesthesia noted above. See Chapter 7 for a full analysis. As Amadou's article refers to all the important works on the subject of Balzac and Saint-Martin (except that of Laubriet himself) they will not be recited here. Mention should be made, however, of J. Borel's 'Le Lys' et les sources /.../ (esp. pp.99ff.) and his 'Séraphita' et le mysticisme balzacien, Corti, 1967. These will be quoted where relevant in later chapters. In L'Oeuvre fantastique de Balzac: sources et philosophie, Didier, 1972, Marie-Claude Amblard has surprisingly little to say about Saint-Martin.
  - 5: In 1835 U. Guttinguer produced an extract edition from l'Homme de désir. Since Guttinguer knew Balzac, he may possibly be the bridge between them. It is interesting that Poulet, who has been seen to note the links between modern criticism and mysticism, and Saint-Martin should both highlight the theme of desire. Whereas for Poulet this means that the Balzacian character is merely 'un creux vivant', for Saint-Martin it means that man has one constant and specific longing: God; desire is the ascent of man's aspiration towards a God whose inspiration descends (in)to man. Hence, no doubt, the frequent references in le Lys to ascent and progression (e.g. Y. p.61 and p.259; these themes will be discussed more fully in Chapter 2). Cf. also below p.350, esp. n.5.

As Amadou has pointed out, it should hardly be necessary to indicate by what means Balzac first became acquainted with 'le Philosophe Inconnu':

'On l'a oublié aujourd'hui, de même qu'on a oublié le Philosophe Inconnu lui-même. Mais, durant la première moitié du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, toute la Touraine, tout le monde des lettres, toute la haute société, connaissaient le nom de Saint-Martin [...]. La situation se répète, à un moindre degré sans doute, en Allemagne et en Russie.' 1

Léon Cellier also indicates to what extent Saint-Martin was known to Balzac's predecessors and contemporaries:

'Autour d'un Saint-Martin rayonnant il faudrait rassembler après Bernardin de Saint-Pierre et Sénancour, après Joseph de Maistre, les romantiques de la Muse française et du Globe et Guiraud et Ballanche et Leroux et Cousin et Damiron et Jouffroy et Hugo et Lamartine et Balzac, sans compter tous les sectaires des obédiences rivales: swedenborgiens et fouriéristes. La chose aujourd'hui est admise.' 2

This influence is also apparent in the writings of Sainte-Beuve and, significantly enough, in Volupté, where there are far more references to Saint-Martin than in le Lys dans la vallée. Amaury, like Félix, comments on the 'philosophie unitaire' of the 'Philosophe Inconnu': 'Dès mes précédentes excursions philosophiques, j'avais appris à reconnaître, dans le théosophe Saint-Martin, au milieu d'un encens perpétuel d'amour, de mystérieux rapports, des communications d'esprit à esprit, une vue facile à travers les interstices du monde visible.'<sup>3</sup> However, despite his allusion to 'un enchaînement particulier',<sup>4</sup> Amaury does not develop the synesthetic imagery already

1: R. Amadou: 'Balzac et Saint-Martin', p.39.

2: 'Sainte-Beuve et Saint-Martin: le martinisme dans Volupté', R.S.H., 1969 (juillet-septembre), p.403.

3: Sainte-Beuve: Volupté, Lausanne, Editions Rencontre, 1964, in two volumes. Vol.2, p.122. Quoted by L. Cellier: op.cit. p.396. Cf. also P. Laubriet: L'Intelligence [...], p.302.

4: Sainte-Beuve: op.cit. p.146. Quoted by L. Cellier: op.cit. p.397.



seen to exist in Saint-Martin and in le Lys dans la vallée. Nor does the nature imagery in Volupté - consisting in particular of references to stars, water, flowers and perfumes<sup>1</sup> - combine to form a complex of 'correspondances' as in le Lys. Unlike Félix, Amaury is a Catholic priest not a poet,<sup>2</sup> interested in Saint-Martin rather as a 'moraliste' than a mystic.<sup>3</sup> Amaury's intuition of cosmic unity culminates not in bouquets but God: 'Toutes ces parcelles d'au-delà me revenaient, et m'avertissaient que ce n'était qu'attente et vestibule en cette demeure; je m'élevais à la signification chrétienne des choses.'<sup>4</sup> Hence Cellier shows that the allusions to Saint-Martin are signposts on Amaury's 'itinéraire spirituel'.<sup>5</sup> Such a spiritual progress is difficult to trace in the development of Félix de Vandenesse.<sup>6</sup>

What is, however, important in the above is less perhaps the differences - which are natural enough - between the approaches of Sainte-Beuve and Balzac to Saint-Martin than the fact that Volupté and le Lys dans la vallée both corroborate and illustrate the assertions of Amadou and Cellier as to the extent to which the thought and style of Saint-Martin had become the common currency of

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- 1: This list should not give the wrong impression. Such references are much more scattered in Volupté and coincidences of vocabulary should not be mistaken for coincidences of attitude or sentiment. Notes by Le Yaouanc such as Y. p.152 n.2 are misleading and based on a superficial reading of the texts concerned. (Cf. Sainte-Beuve: op.cit. pp.66-67.)
  - 2: Cf. Y. intro. p.XLIII.
  - 3: Cf. L. Cellier: 'Sainte-Beuve et Saint-Martin /.../' p.405 and J. Borel: 'Le Lys /.../' et les sources /.../, pp.219-220. In some ways Félix is closer to the young, virginal and disconsolate poet, Joseph Delorme, than to the self-analytical, desiccated Amaury.
  - 4: Sainte-Beuve: Volupté, Vol.2, p.122. (Continuation of quotation above).
  - 5: L. Cellier: op.cit. p.392. Cellier examines all the references to Saint-Martin in Volupté.
  - 6: Such a journey may, however, be made by Henriette - in which case a direct Saint-Martin-Balzac influence is much more likely (cf. the note on l'Homme de désir above).

the period. Henriette's 'martinisme' and Félix's 'langage mystique'<sup>1</sup> would doubtless be immediately and widely recognizable at the time of the publication of le Lys dans la vallée.

It would be difficult to refer to Saint-Martin's 'philosophie unitaire' and theory of the 'correspondances' without mentioning the even more influential Swedish philosopher and mystic, Emmanuel Swedenborg. His works belong to the same long mystic tradition<sup>2</sup> while at the same time place the necessary emphasis on renewal and regeneration to appeal to an age weary of materialism<sup>3</sup> and provide the necessary "'alliance de la science et de la foi"' to appeal to a Balzac unable to identify himself exclusively with either.<sup>4</sup>

Swedenborg, like Saint-Martin, propounded 'une philosophie unitaire'.<sup>5</sup> Swedenborg also elaborated a theory of the 'correspondances'.<sup>6</sup> However, the place assigned to the 'correspondances' in the philosophy of Swedenborg is very different from their role in le Lys dans la vallée where 'L'art du romancier consiste à bien matérialiser ses idées.'<sup>7</sup> 'Alors que Swedenborg ne vit dans les correspondances que des moyens de connaissance, surtout de pénétration du sens caché des Ecritures, ou parfois d'interprétation des songes, Balzac les utilise à des fins artistiques.'<sup>8</sup> Le Lys does not present a treatise on 'correspondances' organised in a cosmic hierarchy<sup>9</sup> but shows them to

1: Cf. Y. p.91 and Chapter 7, p. 417 and n.3.

2: Cf. K.E. Sjöden: 'Balzac et Swedenborg', C.A.I.E.F., 1963 (mai), p.302; Suzanne, J. Bérard: 'Une énigme balzacienne: La "Spécialité"', A.B. 1965, p.66, p.72. Cf. also the Avant-Propos to the Comédie humaine (I.pp.3-4), quoted by B. Guyon: La Pensée politique et sociale de Balzac, A. Colin, 1967 (2nd Ed.), p.412.

3: Cf. Madeleine Fargeaud: 'Madame Balzac, son mysticisme et ses enfants.', A.B. 1965, p.23.

4: Quoted from H. Durville: La Science Secrète, Paris, Henri Durville, 1923, p.34 by K.-E.Sjöden: op.cit. p.306. Cf. P. Laubriet: L'Intelligence/... pp.287-288.

5: Cf. P. Laubriet: ibid. p.291.

6: Cf. Ibid. pp.291-298.

7: Y. p.337.

8: P. Laubriet: op.cit. p.294.

9: Cf. Ibid. p.296. To a certain extent, however, it can be said to use this technique: cf. Y. p.117.

be the product of an individual imagination, the expression of an individual style, whose development is exposed in the novel.<sup>1</sup>

A similar difference may be noted in the case of other parallels which may be drawn between le Lys and Swedenborg. The 'vision intérieure' with which Félix endows Henriette and occasionally himself<sup>2</sup> relates not only to the faculty of 'spécialité' attributed to Victor Morillon in the Avertissement du 'Gars' and to Louis Lambert, but also to the whole mystic and visionary tradition to which Swedenborg - and Saint-Martin - belong.<sup>3</sup> In le Lys, however, references to visions - Balzac's more technical term 'spécialité' is not used - are limited and strictly subordinated to dictates of plot and character. It is perhaps for similar reasons that allusions to animal magnetism, with which Balzac was familiar as early as 1820,<sup>4</sup> are also more discreet than in some other novels.<sup>5</sup> It is also notable that neither Swedenborg nor any of the many other philosophers and ideologists with whom Balzac came in direct or indirect contact figure in Félix's narrative.<sup>6</sup> Saint-Martin could, however, be freely referred to since he has his own internal justification: the place of residence as well as the background and temperament of the characters: 'A Séraphita, fille du Nord, la foi du théosophe suédois; à Mme de Mortsauf, Tourangelle d'adoption, la foi du théosophe tourangeau.'<sup>7</sup>

1: Cf. the section on the 'correspondances' in Chapter 7.

2: See Chapter 2, pp.101-103.

3: Cf. Suzanne J. Bérard: op.cit. p.66. Madame Bérard's examination of Swedenborg as a 'voyant' and her remark (ibid. p.68) 'Swedenborg a grandement fait état du songe.' may illuminate some of Henriette's dream-visions (cf. Y. p.176). K.-E.Sjöden does, however, claim that Balzac and others were wrong to attribute such practices to Swedenborg ('Remarques sur le "Swedenborgisme" balzacien', A.B. 1966, p.34, p.41.)

4: Cf. Madeleine Fargeaud: op.cit./Cf, also Suzanne J.Bérard: op.cit. p.69-70.

5: Y. p.142 and p.187 (quoted by J.Borel: 'Le Lys /.../' et les sources/.../, p.137). Cf. L'Interdiction, III, p.35, and l'Envers de l'histoire contemporaine, VII, pp.351-353.

6: The question whether Balzac actually read Swedenborg or just Daillant de la Touche's Abrégé of his works has, of course, given rise to considerable controversy.

7: Y. intro. p.XLI. Cf. R. Amadou: 'Balzac et Saint-Martin', p.54, p.58.

Hence a consideration of the historical context in which le Lys dans la vallée was written can help show not only to what extent some of its elements were the common currency of the period but also that Balzac melted them down and coined them after his own fashion.

One of the ways in which Henriette's visionary qualities may be seen to manifest themselves is in her ability to construct past and future from the present: 'La comtesse devina le passé par le présent et lut dans l'avenir.'<sup>1</sup> Louis Lambert is endowed with a similar gift:

'tantôt ils lui voyaient reconstruire le passé, soit par la puissance d'une vue rétrospective, soit par le mystère d'une palingénésie assez semblable au pouvoir que posséderait un homme de reconnaître aux linéaments, téguments et rudiments d'une graine, ses floraisons antérieures [...]; et que tantôt enfin, ils lui voyaient deviner imparfaitement l'avenir, soit par l'aperçu des causes premières, soit par un phénomène de pressentiment physique.'<sup>2</sup>

Although Balzac's use of the word 'palingénésie' here is somewhat unusual, the word itself inevitably evokes Ballanche's Essais de Palingénésie sociale which appeared between 1827 and 1829.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Balzac's apparent misuse of the word may well reveal what was important to him in Ballanche's approach. As Arlette Michel observes after quoting the above passage: 'Ballanche n'est pas nommé. En revanche le mot de "palingénésie" est prononcé et il s'applique, de façon originale, à l'activité par laquelle l'esprit créateur devine le futur par l'analyse du passé: c'est la démarche même qui, reconnue

1: Y. p.63. Cf. Y. p.177. Cf. also above, p.11.

2: Louis Lambert, X, p.392. (Quoted by Arlette Michel: 'Balzac, Ballanche et l'idée du progrès.', R.S.H., 1969 (avril-juin), p.245.) The text is an 1835 addition.

3: Cf. P. Laubriet: L'Intelligence [...], pp.303-304 n.83.

chez Ballanche, suscite depuis 1830 l'admiration de Balzac.<sup>1</sup>

P. Laubriet notes a similar parallel between the two writers:

'Cette conception du poète véritable historien parce que découvreur des causes cachées se rapproche étrangement de celle qu'avait Balzac du romancier historien et de son mépris de l'histoire science des faits au lieu d'être révélation.'<sup>2</sup> A reading of Ballanche may, moreover, have shown Balzac that if history can be poetic then poetry can be historical: 'on peut exprimer symboliquement, poétiquement, une vérité philosophique et historique'<sup>3</sup> - without being explicitly ideological or theoretical as in many of the 'romans de jeunesse'.<sup>4</sup> It is precisely this absence of the explicitly and gratuitously theoretical that has hitherto been noted in le Lys dans la vallée.

This concept of the poet-historian, common to Balzac and Ballanche, also relates to that of the poet-'mage': 'Balzac, comme Ballanche, voit dans l'artiste un inspiré, un visionnaire, que ce don de lire dans l'avenir distingue des autres hommes et lui impose la mission de les conduire.'<sup>5</sup> It is, therefore, no surprise that Félix should see himself as both poet and prophet and that l'abbé de Dominis sees him as a follower of a star.<sup>6</sup> However, in le Lys dans la vallée such identifications naturally have none of the social connotations found in Ballanche. Similarly,

1: A. Michel: op.cit. p.245. Balzac's use of the word 'palingénésie' probably owes as much to Bonnet as to Ballanche. The alchemistic meanings in the term - the reconstitution of ashes to restore to life - are particularly relevant to le Lys. (cf. B. Juden: Traditions orphiques [...], pp.272-273 and Chapter 6 below p.312<sup>etc</sup>) and link with the Apocalyptic themes noted above p. 13 and n.2.

2: P. Laubriet: op.cit. p.309.

3: A. Michel: op.cit. p.240.

4: Cf. Ibid. p.239.

5: P. Laubriet: L'Intelligence [...], p.306.

6: For Félix follower of a star, see below Chapter 5, pp.239-241. and for Félix poet and prophet, Chapters 6, pp. 325-329. and 7, pp. 418ff.



Félix's initiation into the mysteries and intimacy of Clochegourde,<sup>1</sup> with its attendant illumination as to the truth of Henriette's marriage and, perhaps, as to the true nature of society,<sup>2</sup> can be seen to be a personalisation and localisation of what is an ancient and commonplace mystical or philosophical theme. As Laubriet observes of Ballanche's *Orphée*: 'l'initiation n'est que l'acquisition des moyens spirituels nécessaires pour connaître l'illumination.'<sup>3</sup> In Ballanche, too, can be seen 'un amour passionné du Verbe'<sup>4</sup> which will be seen to be shared by Félix who exclaims: 'Ces noms possèdent les vertus talismaniques des paroles constellées en usage dans les évocations, [...]'<sup>5</sup> However, as Laubriet again shows, this fascination exerted by the word seems to stem in Ballanche from the belief that the material world is a symbol of the spiritual world,<sup>6</sup> whereas of Balzac he remarks: 'Loin de chercher l'image ou les images qui peuvent suggérer telle idée, il s'agit de forcer la réalité à découvrir l'idée qu'elle contient;'<sup>7</sup> Balzac, unlike Chateaubriand and Lamartine, but like Hugo, tries to penetrate inner meaning hidden beneath the physical envelope.<sup>8</sup> For Balzac, material and physical worlds cannot be separated. Once again, 'fond' cannot be separated from 'forme'.

1: E.g. *Y.* p.82. Cf. above p.11 and Chapter 5, pp. 285ff.

2: E.g. *Y.* pp.148-149. Félix's use of the word 'hiéroglyphe' *Y.* p.149 may also recall Ballanche: see P. Laubriet: *L'Intelligence/.../*, p.305. For other references to the hieroglyph, see below p. 67(a.4). and Chapter 7, pp. 372-373.

3: P. Laubriet: *op.cit.* p.305.

4: *Ibid.* p.307 n.101. Cf. '*Oeuvres*' de M. Ballanche de l'Académie de Lyon, Paris et Genève, 1830, in 4 vols. Vol.3: *Essais de Palingénésie sociale*, p.113, p.114. More correct might be 'de la Parole'.

5: *Y.* p.130. Cf. Chapter 7, p. 373 for other references to the talisman theme. Light and sound are also examined in Chapter 7, pp. 394ff.

6: Cf. P. Laubriet: *L'Intelligence/.../*, p.305.

7: P. Laubriet: *op.cit.* p.296. For Ballanche there is, however, more to this than Laubriet suggests. For Ballanche the hieroglyph which is the natural world represents a harmony towards which man may evolve and progress. Cf. in particular *La Vision d'Hébal*.

8: Cf. P. Laubriet: *ibid.* Hugo is, of course, another enthusiastic exponent of the poet-'mage' theme.

The continuity which Ballanche notes in history - 'cette chaîne non interrompue de causes et d'effets'<sup>1</sup> - is not, of course, static: 'Ce dogme [that of the 'palingénésie'] sert d'enveloppe à une idée philosophique très ancienne [...]; c'est celle de la vie considérée comme une épreuve.'<sup>2</sup> For Ballanche life is a series of 'épreuves' followed by a series of 'initiations' and from which man eventually emerges as from a chrysalis to reach perfection.<sup>3</sup> It is of course possible to see certain parallels between this idea of a palingenesis and Henriette's gradual emergence through and from suffering to immortality. This parallel is all the more striking as Ballanche describes such a palingenesis in terms of a parabolic curve or a cycle just as Henriette seems to follow the circular trajectory of a star - followed by Félix the poet-'mage': 'Une courbe, comme on le sait, peut s'étudier dans une de ses parties: notre existence actuelle, le monde où nous sommes placés, sont une fort petite partie d'une immense parabole, d'un cycle palingénésique infini [...].'<sup>4</sup>

As a result, it is important to note that in the October 1832 Lettre à Nodier, Balzac takes up the defense of Ballanche. Although Balzac would seem to have certain reservations about the infinite nature of man's development, he has fewer doubts about man's perfectibility: 'Je pense actuellement, en mettant à part les illusions dont j'aime à me nourrir, que l'homme doit être une créature finie, mais douée de facultés perfectibles.'<sup>5</sup> It must, however, be

1: Ballanche: Oeuvres, Vol.3, p.31. Cf. ibid. p.63, p.314, p.354.

2: Ibid. p.16. Hence the themes of progress and perfectibility.

3: For the 'épreuve-initiation' theme, see, for example, Ballanche: op.cit. p.105, p.111. For reference to the chrysalis, ibid. pp.125-126.

4: Ballanche: op.cit. p.112. Cf. Bonnet. The 'infini' is the problem here: it comes later into Jean Reynaud.

5: Lettre à Charles Nodier sur son article intitulé: 'De la Palingénésie humaine et de la résurrection', (O.D.II, Vol. 39, Conard, 1938, p.565). Cf. the celebrated remark in the Avant-Propos: 'Je ne partage point la croyance à un progrès indéfini, quant aux Sociétés; je crois aux progrès de l'homme sur lui-même.' (I, p.12). For comments on Balzac, Ballanche, and the Lettre à Nodier see B. Juden: Traditions orphiques [...], pp.391-392.

remembered that it is Félix de Vandenesse not Balzac who witnesses and recounts Henriette's journey through suffering to Heaven and immortality. Thus if this journey recalls aspects of Ballanche's Essais it is because the ideology - if such it can be called - of one of Balzac's characters reflects his particular temperament and vision of the world rather than the no doubt infinitely more mobile and more complex vision of Balzac himself.<sup>1</sup>

A system about which Balzac probably had considerably more reservations but with which he was even more certainly familiar is that of Charles Fourier.<sup>2</sup> Fourier, too, devised 'un immense réseau de correspondances, comparable, pour la précision, la couleur, la poésie, la cocasserie aussi, à celui qu'avait tissé le grand Svedenborg.'<sup>3</sup> What is more interesting in relation to le Lys is that, as Balzac himself writes in les Comédiens sans le savoir (1846): 'ce n'est pas un des moindres titres de Fourier à la vénération que d'avoir restitué la pensée aux plantes, il a tout relié dans la création par la signification des choses entre elles et aussi par leur langage spécial.'<sup>4</sup>

This passage probably refers to Fourier's description of 'le langage des fleurs' in the context of cosmic analogies to be found in the Traité de l'Association domestique-agricole of 1822, and republished under the title of Théorie de l'Unité universelle in

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- 1: An idea of this complexity can be gained from Arlette Michel's very different approach to the Lettre à Nodier (cf. 'Balzac, Ballanche et l'idée de progrès'. p.244).
- 2: Cf. P. Laubriet: L'Intelligence [...], p.297 n.50.
- 3: Helene Tuzet: Le Cosmos et l'imagination, Corti, 1965, p.362. Cf. ibid. p.129. I would like to express my gratitude to Madame Tuzet for suggesting the parallels which may be drawn between Fourier and le Lys dans la vallée.
- 4: VII, p.46. The character speaking is, however, one of the 'comédiens sans le savoir'. Cf. P. Laubriet: op.cit. p.436 n.545. H. Tuzet refers in passing to Fourier's 'langage des plantes' (op.cit. p.362).

1841.<sup>1</sup> Among a variety of flowers Fourier analyses the significance of the various parts of the lily, for example: 'La tige en est droite et ferme comme la marche d'un homme véridique'; 'La nature nous écrit cette leçon dans le pollen dont elle enduit les étamines du lis. Il semble qu'elle ait voulu dire à l'homme attiré par cette fleur: Défie-toi de la vérité; ne t'y frotte pas.'<sup>2</sup> Despite the obvious parallels which may be drawn between such descriptions and those of the lily and Henriette in Félix's narrative, Fourier differs from Félix in emphasising the explicitly moral symbolism of the lily: 'Enfin on l'emploie à orner les statues et portraits des saints aux jours de fêtes; et c'est fort bien fait de placer le symbole de la vérité entre les mains des habitants du ciel;'<sup>3</sup> If Fourier does, moreover, as Félix may well have done, see in the flower 'les effets de nos passions hiéroglyphiquement peints'<sup>4</sup> he is almost certainly using the word 'passion' in his own particular sense.<sup>5</sup>

Thus what is important in this brief examination of Fourier is less the precise parallels which may be drawn between him and le Lys than the fact that the theme of the language of flowers can be seen to belong as much to the cosmogonists of the period as to the writers of manuals<sup>6</sup> and of literary works such as Saint-Pierre, Sainte-Beuve and Sénancour.<sup>7</sup> Once again Balzac can be seen to have been using a theme which was a commonplace of the period. This can be said without detriment to Balzac since, as will be seen, the language of flowers

1: It is from this latter edition, published in the Oeuvres complètes de Charles Fourier, (Réimpression anastaltique), Editions Anthropos, 1966, in 12 vols, that subsequent quotations are taken. The section on flowers, entitled Mosaïque des tableaux en règne végétal, is the same in both 1822 and 1841 editions.

2: Fourier: op.cit. Vol.4. p.227, p.228.

3: Ibid. p.229.

4: Ibid. p.233. The hieroglyph was mentioned above p.64 n.2.

5: Cf. H. Tuzet: Le Cosmos/..., p.361.

6: Cf. the relevant notes Y. pp.115-116.

7: Cf. Y. intro. p.LXXXVII and the section on the bouquets in Chapter 7.

forms an integral part of Félix's vision of the world and his past. As Borel so aptly remarks of Balzac: 'N'ignorant rien de ses devanciers, il ne copie néanmoins personne.'<sup>1</sup>

It would, of course, be false to assume from the above that the only or even the main exponents of a 'philosophie unitaire' in the first half of the nineteenth century or before were mystics or cosmogonists. If the 'paysages état d'âme' in le Lys reflect a certain 'mysticisme de la nature'<sup>2</sup> they may also be seen to demonstrate, for example, Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire's theories on the influence of milieu on character. If certain analogies noted between physical and moral laws can be treated as an illustration of Félix's mystical leanings, they may also be compared to the ideas of a Cabanis or a Bonald.<sup>3</sup> The ultimate unity in duality of Henriette's character - 'Blanche et Henriette, ces deux sublimes faces de la même femme'<sup>4</sup> - may be reminiscent of mystic oneness or of Buffon.<sup>5</sup> For, as Laubriet observes: 'Balzac, semblable en cela à un certain nombre de penseurs du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle et du début du XIX<sup>e</sup>, se refuse à dissocier science et philosophie, science et mystique.'<sup>6</sup> It is, therefore, perhaps less surprising that at Clochegourde, where 'toute la vie [...] se déroule dans cette ambiance de mystique émotion.'<sup>7</sup> both its adult inhabitants should suffer from illnesses whose symptoms are described in painfully precise medical detail.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, this very duality of materialism on the one hand and spiritualism on the other may be

1: J. Borel: 'Le Lys [...] et les sources [...]', p.60.

2: J. Borel: ibid. p.100.

3: Cf. the parallels Y. pp.71, 79, 210. Cf. also P. Laubriet: L'Intelligence [...], p.278.

4: Y. p.305. Cf. Lélie.

5: Cf. Suzanne J. Bérard: 'Une énigme balzacienne: La "Spécialité"', p.75.

6: P. Laubriet: op.cit. p.287. Cf. H. Tuzet: Le Cosmos [...], pp.379-380 and B. Guyon: La Pensée politique [...], p.412.

7: J. Borel: op.cit. p.99.

8: Cf. the Introduction, above p. xiv n.2.



further expressed in terms of the conflict between body and soul in Henriette herself.<sup>1</sup>

It is apparent from the above remarks on the historical context in which le Lys dans la vallée was written that many important aspects of Félix's narrative were by no means peculiar to Balzac. Even the narrative structure itself had its illustrious precedents and Borel has shown that le Lys belongs to a whole line of literary productions combining two or more of the following elements: first-person narrative; letter novel; young man introduced into household of 'mal mariée'; successful or unsuccessful seduction.<sup>2</sup> Nor is the portrayal of Félix - the sensitive child-poet who makes a cult of his chosen idol - exactly unprecedented.<sup>3</sup> Nor of course is the 'christianisme sentimental'<sup>4</sup> or the 'paysages /état d'âme'<sup>5</sup> which are the conventional accompaniment of such a passion.<sup>6</sup> It does, therefore, follow that the character of the protagonists and the situation in

1: Cf. Intro. p. xiii and Chapter 7, pp. 375 and n.2, 407-409.

2: Cf. J. Borel: 'Le Lys /.../' et les sources profondes /.../. esp. chapters II and IV and Y. intro. esp. pp. XXXVII-L. The 'mal mariée' theme does of course occur in for example Sand's Valentine (1832). For a detailed study of this problem in its social context see: Marie-Henriette Faillie: La Femme et le code civil dans la 'Comédie humaine' d'Honoré de Balzac, Didier, 1968. Cf. also R. Bolster: Stendhal, Balzac et le féminisme romantique, Minard, 1970.

3: Cf. George Sand: Lélie, Garnier, 1960, p.55: 'Nous refusons à Dieu le sentiment de l'adoration, /.../. Nous le reportons sur un être incomplet et faible, qui devient le dieu de notre culte idolâtre.' The text is of 1833. To a certain extent the character of Sténio prefigures that of Musset in La Confession d'un enfant du siècle (partly published in La Revue des deux mondes in September 1835 and fully in book form in February 1836.)

4: J. Borel: op.cit. p.230. No reference to this can be made without mention of Chateaubriand's Génie du Christianisme (1802). The invocations and rhetorical questions in le Lys (cf. Y. p.5, p.96) may have been influenced by Chateaubriand. (cf. J. Borel: op.cit. pp.64,74).

5: Cf. J. Borel: op.cit. p.92. Balzac's preoccupation with 'la grande question du paysage en littérature' (Historique /.../, Y. p.347) has been noted by Borel (op.cit. p.85) and Le Yaouanc (Y. intro. p.LXXVIII).

6: Another popular theme in le Lys is, of course, the Orient - immediately suggestive of Hugo's Orientales (1828) and De Quincey's Opium Eater, published in book form in 1822 and freely translated by Musset in 1828. Gautier's Fortunio appeared in 1837. (Cf. P. Citron: 'Le Rêve asiatique de Balzac', A.B. 1968, p.310 n.2 and pp.327-328).

which they are placed adhere to a certain convention. To a large extent the style, if not the exact wording at least the tone, of the work is inspired by the particular convention adopted.<sup>1</sup>

However, once this is recognised it is necessary to ask whether Balzac, who is a writer of some standing, resorted to such a convention through indifference or lack of initiative or rather because such a convention enabled him to achieve an effect, to convey a vision, which could not have been achieved or conveyed in any other way. This is, in fact, what Balzac is claiming<sup>5</sup> in the July, 1835 Preface to the novel.<sup>2</sup> The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate the validity of this claim.<sup>3</sup>

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- 1: That this convention has survived from le Lys dans la vallée to the present day is shown by such works as Dominique, Le Bal du comte d'Orgel and La Maison des Bories.
- 2: This Preface has been mentioned above pp. 34, 60.
- 3: The originality of le Lys will be discussed in the Conclusion to the thesis.

## CHAPTER TWO

### JOURNEYS

Introduction: internal and external journeys

- (1) Land journeys.
- (2) Air journeys.
- (3) Sound and light journeys.
- (4) Fire journeys.
- (5) Water journeys.
- (6) Plant journeys.

Conclusion

Introduction

Internal and external journeys

Georges Poulet has shown that one of the prime impulses of the Balzacian character, for whom 'être, c'est [...] désirer, c'est-à-dire vouloir être',<sup>1</sup> is the accumulation and concentration of energy which is projected on to the desired goal: 'Concentration et projection ne sont que les deux aspects complémentaires d'une pensée qui se condense dans l'instant pour aussitôt se jeter au-delà de l'instant.'<sup>2</sup> Bixiou describes this phenomenon in Rastignac: 'Rastignac se concentre, se ramasse, étudie le point où il faut charger, et il charge à fond de train.'<sup>3</sup> It is doubtless for this reason that G. David cannot decide whether self-fulfilment for the Balzacian character lies in 'une expansion démesurée de tout l'être ou, [...], inversement, dans un fécond resserrement du moi'.<sup>4</sup> It does, in fact, lie in both a sense of concentration - or of the intensity of experience - and in a sense of expansion - or of the infinity of experience.

This may account for the ambivalence of Félix's references to his childhood. For although he suffers from being constantly thrown on his own resources, 'dans un coin du jardin' or 'dans un coin au bout d'une banquette abandonnée',<sup>5</sup> such a constriction intensifies his yearning and his faculty for communion with the infinite:

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- 1: G. Poulet: La Distance intérieure, p.122. A. Béguin makes a similar observation in Balzac lu et relu, p.37. P. Barbéris, however, objects to Poulet seeing this desire in a historical and social vacuum (Balzac. Une mythologie réaliste, pp.270-271). Cf. the Conclusion to this chapter, p.122.
- 2: G. Poulet: op.cit. p.125.
- 3: La Maison Nucingen, V, p.597. Cf. p.49 of J.-P. Richard's study 'Corps et décors balzaciens' in Études sur le romantisme, Seuil, 1970.
- 4: 'L'Idée de bonheur dans la Comédie humaine', p.312.
- 5: Y. pp.26,24. For an examination of the characteristics of 'le coin', see Chapter VI of G. Bachelard's La Poétique de l'espace, P.U.F., 1967.

'Un soir, tranquillement blotti sous un figuier, je regardais une étoile [...]'.<sup>1</sup> As in the fairy-story - or in Hoffmann - it is the lonely, unwanted or ill-treated child whose sufferings are more than compensated for by a little magic. For Félix, a little more prosaically, this period of frustration is also one where his energies and aspirations are conserved and accumulated, galvanising him for future action: 'ces continuelles tourmentes m'habituaient à déployer une force qui s'accrut par son exercice et prédisposa mon âme aux résistances morales.'<sup>2</sup> This concentration of energy is, as a result, followed by an increase in the violence with which it is projected towards the object of its desire: 'Si dans quelques âmes les sentiments méconnus tournent en haine, dans la mienne ils se concentrèrent et s'y creusèrent un lit d'où, plus tard, ils jaillirent sur ma vie.'<sup>3</sup> It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Félix's first meeting with Henriette should be marked by one sudden, uncontrolled movement: 'je me plongeai dans ce dos comme un enfant qui se jette dans le sein de sa mère.'<sup>4</sup>

Félix's description of his childhood is, therefore, both a prefiguration of, and an explanation for, a whole range of images of concentration and projection which permeate his narrative:<sup>5</sup>

1: Y. p.7.

2: Y. p.6. Cf. Y. p.19: 'Mon âme pleine de vouloirs se débattait contre un corps débile en apparence; mais qui, selon le mot d'un vieux médecin de Tours, subissait la dernière fusion d'un tempérament de fer.' (Quoted below p.116 and p.138(n.5).)

3: Y. p.6. G. Poulet discusses further the phenomenon of concentration in Balzac in Les Métamorphoses du cercle, pp.211 ff. Cf. also G. Bachelard: La Poétique de l'espace, p.110: 'Les plus dynamiques évasions se font à partir de l'être comprimé [...].'

4: Y. p.25.

5: In addition to carefully preparing Natalie for his above-mentioned assault on Henriette (Y. p.25: 'Si vous avez bien compris ma vie antérieure, vous devinerez les sentiments qui sourdirent en mon coeur.') Félix frequently alludes to the poetic or figurative interpretation of the elegy which is his childhood. (Y. pp.5, 12-13, 19, 36-37). Once again the thoroughness of 'l'art des préparations' in Balzac consolidates the narrative's internal coherence.



'je voulus [...] rassembler dans l'air les effluves de cette âme qui toutes devaient venir à moi.'<sup>1</sup>; 'Puis j'étais [...] assez jeune pour concentrer ma nature dans le baiser qu'elle me permettait si rarement de mettre sur sa main [...].'<sup>2</sup>; 'Quand l'être intérieur se ramasse et se rapetisse pour n'occuper que la place que l'on offre aux embrassements, peut-être est-ce le pire des crimes!'<sup>3</sup>

In the first of these examples, Félix wishes to project himself outside himself to reach Henriette who is making a similar effort to reach him. Félix's desire for union with Henriette makes him increasingly aware of the distances which separate him from Henriette and accordingly fill him with an ever increasing desire to reduce them. As a result, Félix's desire for Henriette-still - in Poulet's understanding of the term - is accompanied by a sense of increased exteriority, of ever-increasing external expansion,

However, just as it is possible for Henriette and Félix to project their energies outside themselves to approach each other, it is, as the remaining two examples in the preceding paragraph show, possible for them to concentrate themselves within themselves to absorb each other. This attempt of Félix and Henriette to absorb one another is accompanied by a sense of increased interiority, of increasing internal expansion. As Bachelard remarks: 'Nous découvrons ici que l'immensité du côté de l'intime est une intensité, une intensité d'être, l'intensité d'un être qui se développe dans une vaste perspective d'immensité intime.'<sup>4</sup> However, despite this possibility of distinguishing between expressions of external and internal expansion, both combine to form 'la correspondance de l'immensité de l'espace du monde et de la profondeur de "l'espace du dedans".'<sup>5</sup>

1: Y. p.95.

2: Y. p.110.

3: Y. p.261.

4: G. Bachelard: La Poétique de l'espace, p.176. Cf. Lucienne Frappier-Mazur: 'Espace et regard dans la Comédie humaine', A.B. 1967, pp. 326-327.

5: G. Bachelard: op.cit. p.186.

The ultimate unity of expressions of external and internal expansion is demonstrated in Poulet's examination of the Rochambeau incident in Louis Lambert: 'Si le paysage n'est pas venu vers moi, ce qui serait absurde à penser, j'y suis donc venu.'<sup>1</sup> There are two possible explanations for Louis Lambert's experience: either he projected his 'être intérieur' towards Rochambeau or he absorbed Rochambeau into his 'être intérieur'. Union of Lambert and Rochambeau is achieved either by external projection or by internal absorption. In either case, the result is a merging of the individual and the world: 'Il n'y a plus de dedans ni de dehors. Il n'y a plus ici un sujet qui désire, là un objet externe de ce désir, mais une identification du moi et du monde.'<sup>2</sup> In the same way, Félix may merge with Henriette either by projecting himself across the distances which separate them or by absorbing the world, its distances and Henriette into himself.

These remarks may help to understand Félix's frequent use of the word 'âme' in the narrative. For 'âme' is often used to indicate man's 'être intérieur' which can achieve union with the object desired either by a movement of projection or absorption: 'Les douleurs [...] sont autant de liens par lesquels l'âme s'attache à l'âme confidente.'<sup>3</sup>; 'L'amour n'est-il pas dans les espaces infinis de l'âme [...].'<sup>4</sup> The soul both projects and absorbs in the following reference to 'nos âmes qui pour ainsi dire entraînent l'une chez l'autre sans obstacle [...]'.<sup>5</sup>

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- 1: Louis Lambert, X, p.385. Quoted by G. Poulet: La Distance intérieure, p.128. Cf. the 1831 Preface to la Peau de chagrin (XI, p.175): 'Les hommes ont-ils le pouvoir de faire venir l'univers dans leur cerveau, ou leur cerveau est-il un talisman avec lequel ils abolissent les lois du temps et l'espace?'. Cf. Chapter 1, p.64(n.5) and Chapter 7, p.373
- 2: G. Poulet: op.cit. pp.127-128.
- 3: Y. p.96.
- 4: Y. p.211.
- 5: Y. p.113.

At the time of le Lys, 'âme' was, of course, frequently used to indicate both the centre of man's sensibility and the presence of a similar sensibility in the world about him, often with the possibility of semi-Christian, semi-mystical, semi-animistic interrelationships - or 'correspondances' - between the two 'âmes' and within 'L'âme du monde'.<sup>1</sup> It is appropriate, therefore, that 'les espaces infinis de l'âme' are, elsewhere in le Lys, associated with the elements - the four elements which animistic doctrines have traditionally linked and which, as will be seen in Chapter 7, are linked to form 'correspondances' in le Lys itself. Thus the soul, identified with water, may project itself outwards: 'Depuis quelques jours une explication flottait entre nous, et semblait devoir éclater au premier mot qui ferait jaillir la source trop pleine de nos âmes.'<sup>2</sup> Or it can absorb a stone into its depths: thus Félix speaks of 'les âmes dont la limpide substance est ébranlée tout entière au moindre choc, de même qu'une pierre jetée dans un lac en agite également la surface et la profondeur.'<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the soul can both project and absorb light: '[...] mon âme illuminée par le coup d'oeil qu'elle me jeta [...]';<sup>4</sup> 'l'âme triomphante envoyait ses lueurs par des vagues confondues avec celles de la respiration.'<sup>5</sup> It also emits or absorbs sounds: 'le souffle de son âme se déployait dans les replis des syllabes';<sup>6</sup> 'son adieu monsieur! avait fait retentir en mon âme les harmonies que contient l'O filii, ô filiae! de la résurrection pascale.'<sup>7</sup>

1: Cf. for example, B. Juden: Traditions orphiques [...], pp.112-113.

2: Y. p.80. This and the following images will be re-quoted where appropriate below.

3: Y. p.85.

4: Y. p.277.

5: Y. p.305. Water and light are linked here.

6: Y. p.39. Cf. also below p.270 n.1.

7: Y. p.76.

It can be seen that expressions in le Lys dans la vallée which might strike the reader as incongruous or banal can, when viewed in the context of a theme or themes, take on a new significance and relevance. Such images may, therefore, indeed form 'un ensemble original de formes signifiantes' in the novel, and, moreover, 'un ensemble de sous-ensembles' since the common theme of internal and external movements unites sub-themes of, for example, water, light, and sound journeys.<sup>1</sup> If justice is to be done to the style of le Lys dans la vallée, such themes must be elucidated and examined.

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1: H. Mitterand: 'A propos du style de Balzac', pp.160, 157.  
Cf. above p.9 etc.

(1)

Land journeys(a) External land journeys

The idea of Félix's desire for Henriette as a journey across land is conveyed both by the events and the imagery of the novel. Just as Félix has been seen to adapt his childhood star-experience as an image to crystallize the impact of his meeting with Henriette, so does he, towards the end of his narrative, adapt his adolescent journey from Tours to Clochegourde as an image to crystallize the frustration of his attempt to be united with Henriette: 'Voilà comment finissent les plus beaux sentiments et les plus grands drames de la jeunesse. Nous partons presque tous au matin, comme moi de Tours pour Clochegourde, nous emparant du monde, le cœur affamé d'amour.'<sup>1</sup> Félix shows that he sees his desire for Henriette as a journey whose end is continually postponed, despite certain earlier indications that he was moving in her direction: 'Voici, Natalie, [...] la sublime figure qui se dressa pour me montrer du doigt le vrai chemin dans le carrefour où j'étais arrivé'<sup>2</sup> and that their routes have been converging: 'voyez par quelles voies nous avons marché l'un vers l'autre'.<sup>3</sup>

This indicates the appropriateness and significance of the interruption of Félix's relationship with Henriette by a series of journeys. These show Félix's awareness of the distance between them, suggested by and reflected in actual physical distance, and his

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1: Y. p.315. While most attention will be given to those journeys Félix describes in greater detail - his journeys to Clochegourde - it must be remembered that these are only one part of a series of rhythmical movements, a kind of ebb and flow, to and from the Indre valley. Cf. below p.120 and n.3 and the Conclusion to the thesis.

2: Y. p.155.

3: Y. p.91.



desire to abolish it. His return journeys to Clochegourde indicate his heightened sense of distance between himself and Henriette and his urge to reduce it. After their first evening at Clochegourde, Félix cannot contain his impatience: 'avec cette vélocité de pieds qui défie celle du cheval échappé, je retrouvai mon bateau, mes saules, et mon Clochegourde.'<sup>1</sup> When he is most aware of this distance, he accomplishes the journey even more rapidly: during his liaison with lady Dudley: 'Aussitôt, je m'élançai vers elle avec la rapidité de l'éclair, et fus en quelques minutes au bas du mur, après avoir franchi la distance en droite ligne, comme s'il s'agissait d'une course au clocher.'<sup>2</sup> when Henriette is dying: 'Mon rapide voyage fut comme un rêve'.<sup>3</sup>

A number of Félix's other journey's are equally revealing. His first journey in Touraine is, despite his ignorance of the identity and origin of the woman at the ball, accompanied by a sense of purpose and increasing proximity. He knows in advance he has found her. He leans on the chestnut tree: 'Sous cet arbre confident de mes pensées, je m'interroge sur les changements que j'ai subis pendant le temps qui s'est écoulé depuis le dernier jour où j'en suis parti.' He then adds: 'Elle demeurait là, mon coeur ne me trompait point.'<sup>4</sup> Thus at this point in the journey Félix reads into the future as well as the past. His first journey is accompanied by a sense of dominating both time and space.<sup>5</sup>

1: Y. p.65. Cf. above p.39 n.2.

In Balzac. Une mythologie réaliste, P. Barbéris attributes Félix's loyalty to Clochegourde to '/la/ fraternité des victimes et des pariahs contre les triomphateurs apparents de la vie parisienne' (p.96) and, elsewhere, (pp.178-179), to the attraction of 'une aristocratie-repère' in Balzac's works.

2: Y. p.236.

3: Y. p.287. Cf. the relative slowness and interruptions of Félix's journey home with his mother (Y. p.20).

4: Y. p.29.

5: Cf. G. Poulet: La Distance intérieure, pp.160 ff. Félix and Henriette have already been seen to be able to transcend time, above pp. 10-11.

In the same way Henriette can triumph over distance: she can follow Félix to Paris: 'avec quelles anxiétés je vous suivrai dans votre route, quelle joie si vous allez droit, quels pleurs si vous vous heurtez à des angles!';<sup>1</sup> 'ses pensées traversaient les distances'.<sup>2</sup> Hence Félix's exhilaration in a moment of unusual intimacy is expressed in terms of a shared journey: 'Se promener avec la femme qu'on aime, lui donner le bras, lui choisir son chemin! ces joies illimitées suffisent à une vie.'<sup>3</sup>

The references to horses in two of the above quotations shows that the speed at which a horse enables its rider to reach his destination reflects the rider's desire to reach that destination. No wonder lady Dudley is a superb horsewoman! For as Félix remarks: 'Quelque fougueux qu'il soit, aucun cheval ne résiste à son poignet nerveux, [..]. Elle a le pied de la biche, un petit pied sec et musculéux [..].'<sup>4</sup> Lady Dudley allows no obstacle to hinder the fulfilment of her desire and is, therefore, able to speed across the distance which separates her from her lover. How she must have relished exhibiting her skill before her rival, Henriette de Mortsauf<sup>5</sup> who, too late, exclaims: 'Je veux monter à cheval aussi, moi!'<sup>6</sup> The speed of the horse is also linked to the speed of the bird when Félix describes his Arabian horse as 'l'hirondelle du désert'<sup>7</sup> - acquired, appropriately enough, through lady Dudley. If Félix does, then, choose women whose skill at riding is so much at variance with his own needs and desires at a particular time, it is significant that

1: Y. p.151.

2: Y. p.186.

3: Y. p.123. Cf. La Femme de trente ans, II, p.720: 'La malade et son médecin marchaient du même pas sans être étonnés d'un accord qui paraissait avoir existé dès le premier jour où ils marchèrent ensemble;'.  
 4: Y. p.230.

5: Cf. Y. pp.264-265.

6: Y. p.301.

7: Y. p.236. Cf. the implied reference to Pegasus Y. p.232 quoted below p.91 and, for another 'hirondelle du désert', the panther in Une passion dans le désert. Cf. also below p.153.

his description of Arabelle's prowess discourages the less confident horsewoman, Natalie de Manerville. For as Natalie is the first to admit, she does not have lady Dudley's 'désirs furieux'.<sup>1</sup> Here, as elsewhere, Félix does not seem to be able to gauge the appropriate intensity or the appropriate moment for his attacks. He is, as ever, out of phase with the woman he desires.<sup>2</sup>

The above references to the speed of the horse - and of the bird - contrast with the occasions on which Félix compares himself to a small, timid animal: 'Semblable aux animaux qui sentent venir le mal, j'allai m'accroupir dans un coin du jardin pour y rêver au baiser que j'avais volé.'<sup>3</sup> Hence, perhaps, too, Félix's reference to 'les scrupules d'hermine effarouchée qui poignaient /s/a blanche Henriette.'<sup>4</sup> Although these are but two of a large number of animal images, in le Lys, they acquire particular significance when considered from the point of view of the journey theme.

The above comparison between Félix and a retreating animal relates both to the above-mentioned references to Félix retreating into a corner of the garden, and to his identification of himself with a prisoner: 'Chez moi, l'étude était devenue une passion qui pouvait m'être fatale en m'emprisonnant à l'époque où les jeunes gens doivent se livrer aux activités enchanteresses de leur <sup>u/</sup>printanière.'<sup>5</sup> It is, as was intimated above, from this 'coin'/'prison'

1: Y. p.331.

2: The paradigm for this would be his assault on Henriette at the Ball.

3: Y. p.26. Cf. Y. p.36: 'Mon coeur palpitait à l'approche des événements secrets qui devaient le modifier à jamais, comme les animaux s'égaient en prévoyant un beau temps' and, for various canine analogies, Y. pp.27, 32, 177. When Félix returns to Clochegourde it is 'traqué comme une bête fauve' (Y. p.173) - a cliché but, as L.-F.Hoffmann has shown ('Les Métaphores animales dans le père Goriot' A.B. 1963, pp.91-105) such images can be of interest when considered in the context of a theme.

4: Y. p.209. The themes of whiteness (cf. the lily) and winter are at least as important in this remark.

5: Y. p.19. Cf. Y. p.16: 'ma liberté fut savamment enchaînée'. Cf. also the discussion of metals, Chapter 3, pp.136-144.

that Félix projects himself, first towards the star and then towards a sidereal Henriette: 'Avec quelle violence mes désirs montaient jusqu'à elle!' <sup>1</sup> A period of 'resserrement' is, as noted above, followed by a period of 'dilatation'. It is appropriate, therefore, that his search for Henriette should indeed allow him to do justice to his 'nature printanière' and, for the first time in his life, walk freely in Touraine in the Spring. The establishment of a relationship with Henriette enables Félix to continue to associate Henriette, the stars, and freedom of movement: 'Avant de me retrouver à l'étroit dans une chambre, je voulus voluptueusement rester sous l'azur ensemencé d'étoiles.' <sup>2</sup>

Further, more specific, references to his or Henriette's moral imprisonment recur at intervals throughout the narrative. Félix deplores the 'coeurs fermés' which the unwanted child cannot penetrate; <sup>3</sup> he speaks of his passion as 'ce sentiment déchaîné comme un torrent et qui faisait onde de tout ce qu'il emportait.'; <sup>4</sup> he refers to his affair with lady Dudley as 'l'anneau du forçat,' <sup>5</sup> and to Henriette's suffering as a heavy chain. <sup>6</sup> Although the prisoner theme belongs essentially to the period of intense frustration before Félix's meeting with Henriette, frustration of desire is, then, throughout the narrative, seen in terms of frustration of movement.

A related group of images places the emphasis on the hazards and the obstacles of the terrain which has to be crossed if Félix and

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1: Y. p.65.

2: Y. p.95. If a liberated Félix communes with the star, Henriette and the Heavens, it is appropriate that Nykrog should identify the prison and Hell (La Pensée de Balzac, p.329).

3: Y. p.96.

4: Y. p.110.

5: Y. p.234.

6: Y. p.191.

Henriette are to fulfil their desire.<sup>1</sup> Félix anticipates the need for adapting to a devious route: 'je connaissais métaphysiquement la vie dans ses hauteurs au moment où j'allais apercevoir les difficultés tortueuses de ses défilés et les chemins sablonneux de ses plaines.'<sup>2</sup> Progress is arduous and slow: 'je me tue [...] à lui sabler, à lui fleurir les chemins qu'il a semés de pierres.'<sup>3</sup> However, their continued use of the journey metaphor shows their continued faith in their progress: 'Le plus difficile du chemin est fait [...]'<sup>4</sup> The persistence of the journey theme illustrates their persistence, their sense of purpose, and their optimism. To surrender these would be to surrender their desire, that is, as Poulet has shown, their life.

This no doubt explains why the attitude of Félix and Henriette towards the distances they have to cross varies throughout the novel. Félix's desire to approach Henriette makes him increasingly aware of the distances which separate them, but the resulting expansion of his perspectives and the prospect of expanding them further exhilarates him and fills him with an urge to explore and possess the world: 'j'éprouve près de vous un bonheur tellement infini, que le sentiment actuel efface les sentiments de la vie antérieure. Chaque fois, je nais à une vie plus étendue et suis comme le voyageur qui,

1: Although desire is still used in Poulet's sense, journey metaphors obviously have sexual connotations.

2: *Y.* p.19. As P. Nykrog (*op.cit.* pp.136-137, 291) and H. Evans ('*Louis Lambert' et la philosophie de Balzac*, Corti, 1951, p.75) have pointed out, the contrast between straight and tortuous journeys is not uncommon in Balzac. Thus *Séraphita* remarks (X, p.550): 'la Courbe est la loi des mondes matériels [...] la Droite est celle des mondes spirituels: l'une est la théorie des créations finies, l'autre est la théorie de l'infini.' The lily does, of course, grow straight up towards Heaven. Cf. also *Les Chouans*, VII, p.822; *La Fille d'Eve*, II, p.92.

3: *Y.* p.87, *Henriette de Mortsauif*. Cf. *Y.* p.198: 'Toujours marcher dans les broussailles [...]' and *Y.* p.316: 'Au moment où je tombe harassée par les fatigues du voyage, [...]'

4: *Y.* p.250.



en montant quelque grand rocher découvre à chaque pas un nouvel horizon.<sup>1</sup> It is probably for this reason that Félix regrets that there is no distance between him and lady Dudley.<sup>2</sup> Excessive proximity removes Félix's sense of limitless potentiality. As before, it prevents desire.

Henriette, however, before she meets Félix, is dismayed by the prospect of such distances: 'Elle avait vu cet immense malheur déroulant ses savanes épineuses à chaque difficulté vaincue. A la montée de chaque rocher, elle avait aperçu de nouveaux déserts à franchir [...]'.<sup>3</sup> Such distances cannot immediately be annexed and possessed. Similarly Félix, leaving Henriette and Clochegourde for Paris, remarks: 'je me trouvais soudain comme dans un pays étranger dont j'ignorais la langue;'.<sup>4</sup> Here again distance is hostile. Thus, as with the attitude of Félix and Henriette to the speed with which they can cover distance, the perspective on distance changes according to the sense of fulfilment or of frustration within Félix and Henriette.<sup>5</sup>

The end of the novel is similarly ambiguous. Félix seems no longer able to set out to conquer the world,<sup>6</sup> but does instead resolve to enter 'les sentiers tortueux de l'ambition'.<sup>7</sup> However, in the opening letter to Natalie, he has recovered: 'Pour ne pas

1: Y. p.144.

2: Cf. Y. p.279: 'Les distances à franchir, le respect extérieur à conserver, [...] toute cette stratégie de l'amour heureux occupe la vie, renouvelle le désir [...].' and below p.91.

3: Y. p.86. Desert imagery is discussed in Chapter 3, pp. 149-153.

4: Y. p.154. Félix felt a similar isolation 'dans les cours avec les Outre-mer' (Y. p.11).

5: An analysis of the development of the journey theme through the novel would be a most interesting complementary study.

6: Cf. Y. p.315.

7: Y. p.315. A cliché of course.

voir un pli se former sur vos fronts [...] nous franchissons miraculeusement les distances, [...] nous dépensons l'avenir.<sup>1</sup> Thus although 'L'espace final est fait de séparation',<sup>2</sup> Félix, still 'être de désir', is on the threshold of a new journey.<sup>3</sup>

(b) Internal land journeys

There is, in le Lys, a second group of land journey imagery where the distances traversed are not outside Félix and Henriette but within them, within their very souls. Thus Félix speaks of 'ces épouvantables rages qui sillonnent l'âme'<sup>4</sup> and Henriette writes to Félix: 'Vous souvenez-vous encore aujourd'hui de vos baisers? ils ont dominé ma vie, ils ont sillonné mon âme;'<sup>5</sup> In such instances, contact is immediate and often irreparable: 'Nos âmes étaient en proie à ces bouleversements qui les sillonnent de manière à y laisser d'éternelles empreintes.'<sup>6</sup> For the soft and fertile earth of the soul safeguards the memory of incidents which once penetrated it: 'J'ai d'imposants souvenirs ensevelis au fond de mon âme [...].'<sup>7</sup> Thus the memory of Henriette is encased in Félix's heart just as she is encased in the earth: 'Il est des personnes que nous ensevelissons dans la terre,

1: Y. p.3.

2: G. Poulet: La Distance intérieure, p.193.

3: Félix has, after all, come under the influence of the 'martiniste' Henriette de Mortsau. Cf. however, the note on desire for Poulet and Saint-Martin, above p.57 n.5.

4: Y. p.75. In a passage which recalls the 'coin'theme, Félix later speaks of 'ces idées que nous laissons dans un coin de notre âme, pour les reprendre et les creuser plus tard, à loisir.' (Y. p.304).

5: Y. p.317. After quoting this passage, J.-P. Richard (Etudes sur le romantisme, p.85) remarks: 'Le mot sillonné suggère bien le geste d'un enfoncement, puis d'un parcours, vainqueur et possessif, dans la profondeur de l'espace pénétré.'

6: Y. pp.101-102.

7: Y. p.3. Mortsau's 'amours' are also 'ensevelis dans le plus profond de son âme' (Y. p.59).

mais il en est de plus particulièrement chéries qui ont eu notre coeur pour linceul'.<sup>1</sup>

Related images of gentle internal penetration convey Félix's sense of increased security at Clochegourde - his 'naturalisation':<sup>2</sup> 'Ma petite brouille avec le comte avait eu pour résultat de m'y implanter encore plus avant que par le passé.'<sup>3</sup> - a security also enjoyed by Mortsauf: 'Le caractère variable [ ] du comte rencontra donc chez sa femme une terre douce et facile où il s'étendait en y sentant ses secrètes douleurs amollies par la fraîcheur des baumes.'<sup>4</sup> Mortsauf himself, however, is more closely allied to the hard and barren 'lande'<sup>5</sup>: - as impenetrable as Félix's 'sol domestique'.<sup>6</sup>

The internal geography of the soul is occasionally described in greater detail. It can be a river-bed<sup>7</sup> or even a prison illuminated with light.<sup>8</sup> Félix is no longer a prisoner seeking to project himself into open country; he is a prison into which he can absorb Henriette. Elsewhere, the individual is identified with a number of different types of building: Henriette protects Mortsauf: 'elle avait paré ses ruines d'un épais manteau de lierre.'<sup>9</sup> 'le joli château de mes espérances'<sup>10</sup>; 'tout était détruit dans le

1: Y. p.322.

2: Y. p.111.

3: Y. p.109. Félix continues: 'Les antécédents de ma vie me portèrent à m'étendre comme une plante grimpante dans la belle âme où s'ouvrait pour moi le monde enchanteur des sentiments partagés.'

4: Y. p.64. Later, however, Mortsauf finds no more 'terre molle où planter ses flèches' (Y. pp.239-240).

5: Cf. Y. p.77. Félix, however, wishes to penetrate the 'lande'; 'j'y trouverais peut-être des trésors en la sondant;'. (Ibid.)

6: Y. p.5.

7: Cf. Y. p.6.

8: Cf. Y. p.37.

9: Y. p.64.

10: Y. p.235.

bel édifice de mon bonheur.<sup>1</sup> Such images reinforce the idea of the ability of Félix and Henriette to penetrate each other and themselves: 'Félix, mon ami, [...] pardonnez la peur à qui n'a qu'un fil pour se diriger dans un labyrinthe souterrain, et qui tremble de le voir se briser.'<sup>2</sup> When they are distant from each other such internal penetration may, like external penetration, become more difficult: 'elle avait, disait-elle, vécu d'une vie toute intérieure; elle avait habité comme un palais sombre en craignant d'entrer en de somptueux appartements où brillèrent des lumières, où se donnaient des fêtes à elle interdites',<sup>3</sup> Internal distance may, like external distance, be hostile: 'je soupçonnai donc un malheur comme lorsqu'en marchant sur les voûtes d'une cave les pieds ont en quelque sorte la conscience de la profondeur.'<sup>4</sup> At this point, Félix feels less able to establish contact with an unknown and unknowable Henriette, with the microcosm within, and which is, man. He is confronted with the mystery and imminent disaster which his whole narrative will attempt to exorcise and dispel.<sup>5</sup>

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1: Y. p.325. Cf. G. Bachelard: La Poétique de l'espace, esp. Chapters 1 and 2.

2: Y. p.188.

3: Y. p.176. Speaking of Nodier's character, 'Trésor des fèves' Bachelard comments: 'Une fois à l'intérieur de la miniature, il en verra les vastes appartements.' (La Poétique de l'espace, p.141). Of le comte Octave in Honorine Maurice remarks: 'il ne m'ouvrirait pas ces immenses souterrains que j'avais reconnus dans sa vie secrète'. (II, p.265. Cf. Ibid. pp.261, 271). Cf. also Modeste Mignon (I, p.393): 'un coeur vierge, creusé par les souterrains de la Fantaisie.' Such images are common in both Nodier and Hugo. Cf. also below, p.102 and n.1.

4: Y. pp.50-51. The fact that it is Félix's feet which register the premonition of doom (cf. above p.13 n.2) recalls Le Yaouanc's references to the psychopathological theme in le Lys (cf. Y. intro. p.LXXIV and Y. p.12 n.1) which may be seen to culminate in Henriette's fatal illness. Cf. also the links between physical and spiritual worlds, noted above pp. 68-69.

and Chapter 7, pp. 375 and n.2, 409 and n.1.

5: Cf. Chapter 5, pp. 273-276.

(2)

Air journeys(a) External air journeys

'Je volai comme une hirondelle en Touraine.'<sup>1</sup> This evocation of the speed with which Félix rejoins Henriette epitomises the mobility which characterises the couple in their moments of elation: 'Elle fit quelques pas légers, comme pour aérer sa blanche toilette, pour livrer au zéphyr ses ruches de tulle neigeuses, ses manches flottantes, ses rubans frais, [...]'; et je la vis pour la première fois, jeune fille, gaie de sa gaieté naturelle'.<sup>2</sup> The whole of their Touraine environment, from Clochegourde - 'qui semble ne pas peser sur le sol'<sup>3</sup> - to 'la pluie incessante du pollen, beau nuage qui papillote dans l'air'<sup>4</sup>; to 'les insectes qui [...] volaient à leurs frênes, à leurs roseaux';<sup>5</sup> can share this movement: 'au printemps, l'amour y bat des ailes à plein ciel'.<sup>6</sup>

It is hardly surprising, then, that Henriette, '[cette] lueur élevée',<sup>7</sup> is also a bird whose mobility enables her to fly nearer to either Heaven or earth, according to the fluctuations in her relationship with Félix. If accessible, she approaches him 'par un mouvement d'oiseau qui s'abat sur son nid'.<sup>8</sup> If she needs to withdraw: 'Mon coeur ira plus haut que ne va l'aigle';<sup>9</sup> For however

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1: Y. p.187. Cf. G. Poulet: La Distance intérieure, p.126.

2: Y. p.191. Quoted by J.-P.Richard: Etudes sur le romantisme, p.75.

3: Y. p.36. Cf. Y. p.87: "'- Je vais mourir! La vie me pèse!'" and Y. p.213: 'le comte ne pesait plus sur sa femme'. Cf. below pp.143,226.

4: Y. p.121.

5: Y. p.65.

6: Y. p.30.

7: Y. p.263.

8: Y. p.25. The presence of such images in le Lys is noted by Lucienne Frappier-Mazur in her article 'Balzac et les images "reparaissantes" lumière et flamme dans la comédie humaine', R.S.H., 1966, p.48 n.12.

9: Y. p.259. This and many of the other images quoted are, of course, clichés of the period, but of significance in the context of the Journey theme. Cf. also the note on Saint-Martin, above p.57 n.5.



confined Henriette may seem to be to this earth,<sup>1</sup> however joyfully she may seem to approach Félix and he her,<sup>2</sup> the distance between them is invariably re-established: 'Elle montait à des hauteurs où les ailes diaprées de l'amour qui me fit dévorer ses épaules ne pouvaient me porter; pour arriver près d'elle, un homme devait avoir conquis les ailes blanches du séraphin.'<sup>3</sup>

As was noted in the previous section on Land journeys, the characters can find the distance established between them alternately discouraging and stimulating. As a result, Félix's very admiration for Henriette's superiority can momentarily overwhelm and defeat him: 'cet orage de choses célestes me tomba sur le coeur et m'écrasa. Je me sentis petit, [...].'<sup>4</sup> Without this distance Félix could, however, no longer be 'être de désir'; Henriette would descend to the ignominious level of a lady Dudley; thus Félix later reasserts Henriette's inaccessibility: 'tu planes glorieusement au-dessus d'elle'.<sup>5</sup> Thus, too, after a considerable struggle involving many delays and setbacks,<sup>6</sup> already noted in the context of land journeys, Henriette finally emerges triumphant and returns to the Heavens

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- 1: Like Dante and Godefroid, Henriette is 'proscrite': 'madame de Mortsauf était le bengali transporté dans la froide Europe, tristement posé sur son bâton, [...].' (Y. p.214). The vulnerability of the bird is also shown in: 'jamais cet homme n'avait manqué de lui décocher une flèche au coeur. Oiseau sublime atteint dans son vol par ce grossier grain de plomb, elle tomba dans un stupide abattement.' (Y. p.176; an amusing transition from 'flèche' to 'grain de plomb').
- 2: Thus, during Mortsauf's illness: 'elle me servait, avec quel pétilllement de joie dans les mouvements, avec quelle fauve finesse d'hirondelle'. (Y. p.214).
- 3: Y. p.151.
- 4: Y. p.192. There is perhaps an element of masochism here, already noted by L. Bersani: 'Félix's childhood has prepared him for precisely the kind of self-torture and torture of others which I think he brings to his love for Henriette.' (Balzac to Beckett, p.80).
- 5: Y. p.248. Lady Dudley herself offers a kind of parody of such remarks: 'Dieu t'a mis au-dessus de tout. N'est-ce pas se rapprocher de lui que de t'aimer?' (Y. p.271). In this way, as later with Natalie's letter, Balzac is able to indicate the limitations of Félix's vision.
- 6: Cf. Y. p.248: 'elle eut un moment de doute horrible; mais elle se releva grande et sainte, portant haut la tête.' Y. p.294: 'Elle tombe, il est vrai; mais, à chaque faux pas, elle se relève plus haut vers le ciel.'

whence she came.<sup>1</sup> She remains for ever, as Félix predicted and as, perhaps, he wanted,<sup>2</sup> for ever above him and inaccessible.

(b) Internal air journeys

A small group of images connected with 'air' and 'ciel' conveys Félix's sense of internal expansion which follows his recognition of the object of his desire and the stages in his apparent approach towards it. For example, Félix describes his first meeting with Henriette: 'Une âme nouvelle, une âme aux ailes diaprées avait brisé sa larve.'<sup>3</sup> Félix's feeling of internal buoyancy will enable him to ascend to Henriette and the infinite. He experiences an internal

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- 1: Cf. Y. p.29. If Nykrog noted in Balzac 'la soif de s'élever, l'aspiration vers les hauteurs intellectuelles et morales' (La Pensée de Balzac, p.126), Lucienne Frappier-Mazur points out: 'L'idée d'ascension [...] jette un [...] pont entre les deux mondes.' (op.cit. p.48; the two worlds are, of course, Heaven and Earth).
- 2: After quoting (in English) the passage (Y. p.110): 'Puis vous le dirai-je, à vous si bien femme, cette situation comportait des langueurs enchanteresses, des moments de suavité divine et les contentements qui suivent de tacites immolations.' Bersani comments (op.cit. p.79): 'Félix alone appears to enjoy deliberately aborted stimulations, a kind of emotional coitus interruptus, and it is perhaps this artfully controlled playing with their love which gives him the coolness and the poise which Henriette pathetically interprets as moral superiority.' Contrasting le Lys with Volupté, where 'the only "therapy" Sainte-Beuve can imagine for his hero's troubled sexuality is the total renunciation of sex in the priesthood', Bersani sees the 'system of rich metaphorical inventiveness' in the novel as Félix's and Henriette's attempt to re-create their love, (cf. ibid. p.78 n.69 and p.74), and as, therefore, one of 'les ruses de désir pour trouver des compensations'. (Y. p.LXXIII). Another link between 'fond' and 'forme' is, therefore, forged. Cf. the analysis of another of Félix's 'ruses' - the equally erotic and equally richly metaphorical bouquets, below pp.398-406. Cf. also below p.154.
- 3: Y. p.26. Although it is necessary to recall the remarks made on l'Homme de désir (above p.57n.5) and on Ballanche (above pp.62-66) it would probably be erroneous to see any allusion to any specific religious or philosophical system here - despite Félix's more explicit reference to metempsychosis Y. p.322. Unlike, for example, Sigier who makes a more conscious attempt to elaborate such a system (cf. Les Proscrits, X, p.337: 'Les successives transformations de chrysalide que Dieu imposait [...] à nos âmes') Félix is simply but effectively exploiting 'le langage mystique auquel notre éducation religieuse nous avait habitués' (Y. p.91) to try to convince Natalie of the intensity of his experiences. Once again, then, it is important to emphasise the figurative quality of Félix's language. As he himself says of Henriette: 'Ses qualités visibles ne peuvent d'ailleurs s'exprimer que par des comparaisons.' (Y. p.42). Cf. Chapter 7, 416ff and Conclusion p.425.

explosion which prepares an external explosion: 'Je ne saurais expliquer dans quel état je fus en m'en allant. Mon âme avait absorbé mon corps, je ne pesais pas, je ne marchais point, je volais.'<sup>1</sup>

After their joint childhood confessions, the potentiality of the gift of wings seems to be fully realised: 'Peut-être voulait-elle tirer de moi sa force et sa consolation, [...] Cette pensée m'éleva soudain à des hauteurs éthérées. Je me retrouvai dans le ciel de mes anciens songes, et je m'expliquai les peines de mon enfance par le bonheur immense où je nageais.'<sup>2</sup> The Heaven realised by Félix is both external and internal: as he ascends towards Heaven he bears within him the memory of a previous Heaven. It may even be possible to distinguish four Heavens: the Heaven towards which Félix tried to project himself as a child; the memory of this projection; his present sense of possessing Heaven within him; the Heaven towards which he now projects himself. This shows how present perspectives intensify and expand past perspectives. It also shows the close interrelationship between Félix's increasing sense of external penetration and increasing sense of internal expansion.

At the same time, however, the above remarks show to what extent present perspectives replace and thereby invalidate past perspectives. For although Félix seems to have succeeded in both absorbing Heaven within him and in penetrating Heaven beyond him, this Heaven, once

1: Y. p.76. Cf. Modeste Mignon: 'Elle ne sentit pas son corps, elle plana dans la nature!' (I, p.403).

2: Y. p.96. Cf. Y. p.248: 'Répétez une parole qui me rend aux cieux où je voulais tendre d'un vol égal avec vous!' Cf. also P. Nykrog: La Pensée de Balzac, pp.329-330: 'Le Ciel est pour Balzac un certain état mental fait de confiance, de solidarité, et d'harmonie entre l'individu et l'univers ambiant tel que l'individu le comprend;'. As above, then, it is unlikely that Félix's use of the word 'ciel' has any specific Christian or religious connotations. It cannot, for example, be defined here in relation to an antithetical 'enfer'. Indeed the impact of Félix's vocabulary depends rather on the very ambiguity, hence multiplicity, of its resonances. Cf. above, pp.21 n.1, 37 n.2, and below p.425 n.4.

possessed, seems to lose its infinity: 'je l'aimais d'un double amour qui décochait tour à tour les mille flèches du désir, et les perdait au ciel où elles se mouraient dans un éther infranchissable.'<sup>1</sup> Just as the gift of wings proves inadequate to approach Henriette,<sup>2</sup> and has to lead on to another, higher, stage, so does the word 'ciel' lose its ability to convey Henriette's later inaccessibility and has to be expanded into 'un éther infranchissable'. Félix's desire may ascend to the Heavens but he has then to progress across yet another immeasurable distance to reach her. One of the characteristics of the 'être de désir' is, then, that he remains a victim of the very elements he seeks to transcend - space or distance and, perhaps more importantly here, time. For whether or not the future is filled with promise, it remains the future and is, therefore, unobtainable.<sup>3</sup>

Hence, when Félix writes his confession, (Lady Dudley no longer seems to fill him with a sense of continually expanding horizons. However, at the time of the experience, he recalls 'cet amour [...] qui vous introduit souvent dans les cieux par les portes d'ivoire de son demi-sommeil, ou qui vous y enlève en croupe sur ses reins ailés.'<sup>4</sup> These are pleasant dreams no doubt but they are followed by a 'dessillement' which is not the 'dessillement suprême' of Henriette<sup>5</sup> but the cold reality of morning, of another day, and the inevitability of future. Hence the importance in le Lys of the association night-

1: Y. p.109.

2: Cf. Y. p.151 quoted above p. 88(n.3).

3: If, then, there are various levels denoted by 'ciel' in relation to 'l'espace intérieur', they are of a temporal as much as of a spatial nature. For Félix victim of time, see Chapter 5, pp.254-261.

4: Y. p.232. Cf. the reference to Pegasus, above p.79.

Cf. also Virgil, Nerval's Aurélia and Gautier's Mademoiselle de Maupin.

5: Y. p.308.

time-'ciel'-illusion: 'Souvent lorsque, perdue dans l'infini de la lassitude, mon âme dégagée du corps voltigeait loin de la terre, je pensais que ces plaisirs étaient un moyen d'annuler la matière et de rendre l'esprit à son vol sublime.'<sup>1</sup>

And yet ... and yet such is the ambivalence of Félix's attitude towards distance and time that, still 'être de désir', he needs the stimulus of a Henriette who retains the limitless potentiality of, significantly enough, a Heavenly star, a star so remote that every obstacle which is overcome in an attempt to approach her reveals 'un nouvel horizon' and each new horizon, yet another.<sup>2</sup> Félix's narrative does, perhaps, represent his last attempt to capture and possess the infinity which was and still is Henriette, to give at last a form to this spectre which haunts him, ever present yet ever absent.<sup>3</sup>

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1: Y. p.235. Hence of course the reference to 'le ciel de mes anciens songes' above. The interplay of light and dark is examined in Chapter 5, pp. 247-253.

2: Cf. Y. p.144 quoted above p. 83 and Y. p.145: 'Si je n'ai pas expiré en traversant les espaces que j'ai franchis pour aller demander à Dieu de te laisser encore à moi, l'on ne meurt ni de joie ni de douleur.' In Massimilla Doni (IX, p.351) Capraja, spurred on by the Goddess of Curiosity who emerges 'radiouse des abîmes du cerveau', discovers the vertiginous infinity of 'ces horizons fuyants'. Cf. above p.24 and below p.287 n.5.

3: Cf. G. Genette's description of the figure (of speech): Figures, Seuil, 1966, p.210.



(3)

Sound and light journeys(a) External sound journeys

The almost infinite modulations of Henriette's voice enable her to abolish the distance which separates her from Félix and establish immediate and irrevocable contact with him: 'Quoique madame de Mortsauf n'eût prononcé qu'un mot au bal, je reconnus sa voix qui pénétra mon âme et la remplit comme un rayon de soleil remplit et dore le cachot d'un prisonnier.'<sup>1</sup> She projects herself across intervening distances and Félix feels drawn towards her and the infinite: 'Le souffle de son âme se déployait dans les replis des syllabes [...] Elle étendait ainsi, sans le savoir, le sens des mots, et vous entraînait l'âme dans un monde surhumain.'<sup>2</sup>

Such contact is so immediate that Henriette's voice inevitably betrays her later awareness of an increasing distance between them: 'La comtesse eut, en me parlant de toutes choses, même indifférentes, un son de voix nouveau, comme si l'instrument eût perdu plusieurs cordes, et que les autres se fussent détendues.'<sup>3</sup> and Félix's voice betrays the weakening of his urge to cross such distances during his liaison with lady Dudley: 'Nous connaissions trop l'un et l'autre les modes de notre voix, quelques infinis qu'ils fussent, pour nous déguiser la moindre de nos émotions.'<sup>4</sup> Thus, in contrast to periods of intimacy where even the silence seemed to speak - 'Quand les mots manquaient, le silence servaient fidèlement nos âmes'<sup>5</sup> - periods of

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1: Y. p.37.

2: Y. pp.39-40. cf. below p.119.

3: Y. p.222. cf. below p.115 n.8 and p.272(n.3).

4: Y. p.258.

5: Y. p.113. Cf. Y. p.281: 'La femme française [...] trouve un accent qui ne résonne que dans une oreille, elle parle par son silence même, [...].'

estrangement are marked by an inability to communicate: 'Après cinq ans de délicieuse intimité, nous ne savions pas de quoi parler;'.<sup>1</sup> Nykrog has shown that silence and distance are associated elsewhere in the Comédie humaine: '[...] il existe un si grand espace entre la classe qui se courrouçait et celle qui était menacée, que les paroles y meurent;'.<sup>2</sup>

Verbal contact not only abolishes distance: it also creates it. The duchesse de Lenoncourt's reference to a possible 'amourette' between Félix and Henriette 'ouvrit entre ces deux femmes des abîmes que rien ne pouvait combler désormais.'<sup>3</sup> Distance is also associated with an inability to comprehend: 'je me trouvais soudain comme dans un pays étranger dont j'ignorais la langue;'.<sup>4</sup> The distance an Englishman establishes between himself and others is also described in terms of language: 'ils [les Anglais] ne connaissent de leur espèce que les gens admis par eux; les autres, ils n'en entendent pas le langage;'.<sup>5</sup> Speech, the absence of speech, and the misuse of speech, are, therefore, among those 'communications électriques'<sup>6</sup> which expose the ability or the inability of the individual to recognise, abolish, or increase the distance which separates him from the fulfilment of his desire. It is, as a result, hardly surprising that Félix should use an extended written narrative to try to explain and compensate for his moments of estrangement from Natalie de Manerville.

1: Y. p.275. A common enough expression-and experience!

2: Quoted from Les Paysans (VIII, p.290) by P. Nykrog: La Pensée de Balzac, pp.179-180.

3: Y. p.108. Other references to 'abîme' are examined below pp.156,356.

4: Y. p.154. After quoting madame de Beauséant's remark (le père Goriot, II, p.907): 'Ce pauvre enfant est si nouvellement jeté dans le monde, qu'il ne comprend rien, ma chère Antoinette, à ce que nous disons.', R. Kempf observes: 'Le premier moment est de désarroi, le désarroi de celui qui ne comprend pas la langue.' (p.72 of 'Coutumes et hiéroglyphes balzaciens' in Sur le corps romanesque, Seuil, 1968). Hence the importance of the preceptor in Balzac and of Henriette's long letter to Félix (Cf. ibid. pp.72-73). Henriette is helping Félix to chart his new territory. Cf. p.13 of Michel Butor's fascinating article entitled 'Le Voyage et l'écriture', Romantisme, 1972, No.4, pp.4-19: 'Le voyage de découverte manifeste de la façon la plus saisissante les phénomènes de marquage et d'écriture. On dresse une croix, un monument, une tombe, on inscrit. [...] L'explorateur, avant le conquérant, recouvre de sa langue la terre qu'il parcourt.'

5: Y. p.227.

6: Y. p.36.

(b) Internal sound journeys

The echo-chamber of the soul, like the soft earth of the soul, safeguards the memory of the sounds and voices which once penetrated it:

'Il se fit dans nos deux âmes une grande clameur et comme un retentissement du lugubre Consummatum est! qui se crie dans les églises le vendredi-saint à l'heure où le Sauveur expira'. 1

'son adieu, monsieur! avait fait retentir en mon âme les harmonies que contient l'O filii, ô filiae! de la résurrection pascale.' 2

Voices do indeed announce a Revelation and a Resurrection:

'Ces noms possèdent les vertus talismaniques des paroles constellées en usage dans les évocations, ils m'expliquent la magie, ils réveillent des figures endormies qui se dressent aussitôt et me parlent'. 3

- the resurrection of Henriette: 'ma vie est dominée par un fantôme, il se dessine vaguement au moindre mot qui le provoque'. 4

Hence the importance of the confession in a narrative which is, perhaps, as has been seen, Félix's attempt to give form to the ghosts of the past, to make the word flesh,<sup>5</sup> and out of this to create - in the fullest sense - a new future. For Félix's narrative is a voice searching for an echo; he had found one in the past, why not again?

'j'eus, selon la jurisprudence mondaine, un manque de tact; mais, chez certaines âmes, n'est-ce pas souvent précipitation généreuse au-devant d'un danger [...], et plus souvent encore n'est-ce pas l'interrogation brusque faite à un cœur, un coup donné pour savoir s'il résonne à l'unisson?' 6

1: Y. p.274. Cf. above p.13 n.2, below p.100 n.6.

2: Y. p.76.

3: Y. p.130. The names are two of Henriette's farms: La Cassine and La Rhétorière. Félix's childhood visions had a similar magic (Y. p.12). Cf. above p.64.

4: Y. p.3.

5: Cf. Louis Lambert, X, pp.403, 449, 452, and Chapter 7, pp.407-408 etc.

6: Y. pp.81-82. Henriette's letter is also inseparable from her voice: 'je baissai le papier [...] où je devais reprendre les mystérieuses effluves échappées de sa main, d'où les accentuations de sa voix s'élançeraient dans mon entendement recueilli.' (Y. p.155).

This echo Félix had constantly found in Henriette:

'N'appartenons-nous pas au petit nombre de créatures  
[...]  
de qui les qualités sensibles vibrent toutes à  
l'unisson en produisant de grands retentissements  
intérieurs [...].'<sup>1</sup>

- and, indeed, to an extent of which he was for long only dimly aware: 'Votre faute n'est pas si funeste par vous que par le retentissement que je lui ai donné au-dedans de moi-même.'<sup>2</sup> writes Henriette of Félix's kisses: 'Oui, c'était bien le son arrivé dans l'écho'.<sup>3</sup> It is, therefore, hardly surprising that Félix, in whom the voices of the past commune in past, present and future,<sup>4</sup> should see the mutual confession as the ultimate in intimacy:

'Elle savait donc que la source des rayons épanchés de nos yeux était dans nos âmes, auxquelles ils servaient de route pour pénétrer l'une chez l'autre ou pour se confondre en une seule, se séparer, jouer comme deux femmes sans défiance qui se disent tout.'<sup>5</sup>

How marvellously, then, do form and content harmonise in le Lys!

(c) External light journeys

Henriette is frequently compared to a source of light whose brightness can cross the distance between her and Félix: 'Comme elle aimait à jeter sa tendresse en rayons dans l'air! Ah! Natalie, oui,

1: Y. p.72.

2: Y. p.316.

3: Y. p.317.

4: Cf. Y. p.95: 'Tous les sentiments nobles réveillés faisaient entendre en moi-même leurs voix confuses.'

Y. p.286: 'je reçus un coup qui retentit encore dans ma vie, car à chaque heure il trouve un écho.'

Y. p.289: 'Ma conscience menaçante prononça un de ces réquisitoires qui retentissent dans toute la vie et quelquefois au-delà.'

Henriette, too, hears voices: Y. p.179.

5: Y. pp.274-275.

certaines femmes possèdent ici-bas les privilèges des Esprits-  
Angéliques, et répandent comme eux cette lumière que Saint-Martin,  
[...], disait être intelligente, mélodieuse, et parfumée.<sup>1</sup> This  
emanation of light is most particularly associated with the light  
of Henriette's eyes. As Lucienne Frappier-Mazur remarks: 'Chez  
les êtres qui dominent leur destin, le regard annexe l'espace';<sup>2</sup>  
Thus Félix comments: 'Elle leva les yeux vers le ciel [...] et les  
reporta sur moi. Electrisé par ce regard qui jetait une âme dans  
la mienne [...].'<sup>3</sup> This illustrates Henriette's ability to project  
her gaze both across the distance separating her both from Heaven  
and Félix.

The ability of the eye to project light and energy across  
distance recurs in comparisons between the light of the eye and  
lightning: ' - Quel espoir avez-vous? lui dis-je en jetant des  
éclairs par les yeux.'<sup>4</sup> Such images also convey the speed at which  
hostility may be communicated: Félix says of Mortsauf: 'ses yeux  
lançaient une foudre aussitôt amollie'.<sup>5</sup> This last image also shows  
the fitful and unpredictable way in which Mortsauf crosses the  
distance between himself and others.<sup>6</sup>

Elsewhere in her study entitled 'Espace et regard dans la  
Comédie humaine' Lucienne Frappier-Mazur also refers to the extinction

1: Y. p.214. For the reference to Saint-Martin, see above p. 57.

An important aspect of the light journey theme is, of course, the  
movement of the star. This will be considered at length in Chapter 5.

2: 'Espace et regard dans la Comédie humaine', A.B. 1967, p.333.

Cf. Illusions perdues, IV, p.645: 'Le coup d'oeil est avide de l'espace'.

3: Y. p.81.

4: Y. p.101. Such images are, of course, common in Balzac. Cf. for example,  
La Femme de trente ans, II, p.796 and Z. Marcas, VII, p.742.

5: Y. p.71. Cf. also Y. p.70.

6: The above remark, with the amusing combination of 'foudre' and 'amollie',  
is doubtless one of a number of discreet but important allusions to  
Mortsauf's sexual problems. Cf. Y. pp.59, 140-142, 200, 250.



of light in Henriette's eyes: 'le feu sec de ses yeux luisants dont on ne peut donner une idée à ceux qui n'ont pas connu des êtres chers atteints de cette horrible maladie, qu'en comparant ses yeux à des globes d'argent bruni.'<sup>1</sup> Although Madame Frappier-Mazur does not list this image in the group where 'l'espace supprimé est réintroduit dans l'image',<sup>2</sup> it is possible, by linking it to those just mentioned, and perhaps, to the prisoner theme, to use this image to reinforce the association of the light of the eye and the individual's ability to abolish distance.

This association occurs in another group of expressions which indicate the large, open perspectives enjoyed by Félix and Henriette in the Indre valley: 'Là se découvre une vallée [...] au milieu des longues prairies où l'oeil se perd sous un ciel chaud et vapoureux [...] un des mille points de vue de ce beau pays.'<sup>3</sup> J. Borel has pointed out that the existence of such vistas does not correspond to the actual Indre valley: 'Mais serait bien déçu celui qui chercherait les autres 'mille points de vue' que Balzac distribue avec largesse dans cet espace limité.'<sup>4</sup> Le Yaouanc notes a similar change: 'il [Balzac] a doué le territoire de Saché de merveilleux belvédères: de plusieurs points élevés, sur la rive gauche, à en croire le roman, l'on apercevrait la Loire, ses voiles, ses vagues, et de Clochegourde, sur la rive droite, l'on découvrirait Azay-le-Rideau

1: Y. p.277 quoted by Lucienne Frappier-Mazur: op.cit. p.328. Cf. also J.-P.Richard: Etudes sur le romantisme, pp.31-32. It is appropriate that Henriette's eyes should become mirror-like at a time when her sense of frustration and self-containment is at its most acute.

2: Op.cit. p.329.

3: Y. pp.29, 31. Cf. J.-P.Richard: op.cit. p.115.

4: J. Borel: 'le Lys [...] ' et les sources profondes [...]', p.113.

aussi bien que Montbazou.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the expansion of such vistas features among Balzac's textual alterations.<sup>2</sup> As a result, Félix's new sense of freedom and purpose on his journey to Clochegourde is conveyed not only by physical but by visual liberation.<sup>3</sup>

(d) Internal light journeys

A number of images illustrate both the projection and the absorption of light: 'je reconnus sa voix qui pénétra mon âme et la remplit comme un rayon de soleil remplit et dore le cachot d'un prisonnier.'<sup>4</sup> Not only does Henriette exude light, but her light penetrates Félix and fills him with a sense of interior illumination. The soul itself is light - 'l'âme, cette étoile humaine'<sup>5</sup> - and can grow in brightness: 'La femme qui se donne entière, m'écris-je en sentant mon âme illuminée par le coup d'oeil qu'elle me jeta, donne moins de vie et d'âme que je viens d'en recevoir.'<sup>6</sup> Such passages show the intimate connection between the projection and the absorption of light and between internal and external light journeys: 'Electrisé

1: Y. p.LXXXV. Cf. Y. pp.32, 44-45, 67.

2: Cf. Y. p.442.

3: This visual liberation is, moreover, not merely an apparent expansion of actual visual perspectives, since the eye sees in this changed landscape that which the mind knows to be present. As so often in Balzac, the eye devines as much as it sees, and devines correctly. This is, of course, Balzac's celebrated second sight, the faculty which enables him to intuit and thereby invent truth. (Cf. the much-quoted opening sequence of Facino Cane, the 1831 Preface to La Peau de chagrin, and Suzanne Bérard's article: 'Une énigme balzacienne: La "Spécialité"', first referred to in the section on Swedenborg, above p. 60 n.2. Cf. also 'l'expansion infinie' of Baudelaire, mentioned above p.20, p.40. and the references to magnetism above p. 61 and below.)

4: Y. p.37.

5: Y. p.200.

6: Y. p.277.

par ce regard qui jetait une âme dans la mienne [...] Plusieurs pensées s'élevèrent en moi comme des lueurs [...].<sup>1</sup> Light is transmitted, absorbed, then retransmitted in a continuous exchange of 'le mouvement et la lumière.'<sup>2</sup>

The absorption of light endows Félix with a new movement: 'Mon âme avait absorbé mon corps, je ne pesais pas, je ne marchais point, je volais. Je sentais en moi-même ce regard, il m'avait inondé de lumière [...].'<sup>3</sup> Hence Félix's sense of internal expansion in moments of elation is paralleled by a sense of internal illumination - and also by a sense of internal resonance: 'son adieu monsieur! avait fait retentir en mon âme [...].'<sup>4</sup> Thus Félix expresses moments of intense self-fulfilment in which he and Henriette accelerate towards each other in a series of different but complementary types of journey images.

A number of other images show that the individual's sense of internal illumination often coincides with a visible external emanation of light. When he first contemplates Henriette, Félix perceives: 'le reflet des feux intérieurs',<sup>5</sup> and he later observes 'un visage où reluisait l'auréole des martyrs.'<sup>6</sup> Periods of prolonged intimacy with Henriette fill Félix with such abundant light that he glows with happiness: he has 'une physionomie jeune qui recevait un lustre inexplicable de la placidité d'une âme magnétiquement unie à l'âme pure qui de Clochegourde rayonnait sur moi.'<sup>7</sup> Thus, too,

1: Y. pp.81,82.

2: Y. p.96.

3: Y. p.76.

4: Ibid.

5: Y. p.41.

6: Y. p.84. Both this and the preceding quotation betray Félix's sense of impending disaster. Cf. above p.95 n.1 etc.

7: Y. p.187. For other references to magnetism, a cosmic electric force which was thought to reveal the secret of life and death, see above and Chapter 7, p.374.

Félix writes to Henriette after Mortsau's attack: 'Moi seul ai su de quelles lueurs peut briller une femme quand elle arrive des portes de la mort aux portes de la vie, et que l'aurore d'une renaissance vient nuancer son front.'<sup>1</sup> In all these examples, it is impossible to isolate internal and external illumination. Henriette and Félix have an inner glow; their projection of light is an overflowing of inner light which is too powerful and too penetrating to be confined within them. This explains the two verbs 'remplir' and 'dorer' in the first quotation in this section: Henriette's light penetrates within Félix and radiates from him. At her death too, Henriette is penetrated by a divine light which exudes from her.<sup>2</sup>

Gaston Bachelard's comment that 'tout ce qui brille voit'<sup>3</sup> receives remarkable support in le Lys dans la vallée. Félix and Henriette, continually associated with sources of light, also possess extraordinary powers of vision: 'mes yeux se fermaient aux choses de la terre et voyaient dans une autre région: quand j'y apercevais Jacques et Madeleine lumineux, ils étaient [...] en bonne santé; si je les y trouvais enveloppés d'un brouillard, ils tombaient bientôt malades. Pour vous, [...] je vous vois toujours brillant [...].'<sup>4</sup> Thus to the 'lumière intérieure' corresponds a 'vision intérieure': 'elle avait, disait-elle, vécu d'une vie tout intérieure; elle avait habité comme un palais sombre en craignant d'entrer en de somptueux

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1: Y. p.144.

2: As the examples in this paragraph show, and as will be seen in Chapter 5, light is associated both with life and death.

3: G. Bachelard: La Poétique de l'espace, p.48.

4: Y. p.179. Sources and examples of the 'vision intérieure' in Balzac are examined by Suzanne Bérard's article on the theme of "Spécialité": cf. above p.99 n.3 and below p.416 n.4.

appartements où brillèrent des lumières [...]'.<sup>1</sup>

Félix, too, refers to his childhood visions which enable him to penetrate 'l'esprit intime des choses':<sup>2</sup> 'mes rêves de collègue [...] ont été comme une Apocalypse où ma vie me fut figurativement prédite: chaque événement [...] s'y rattache par des images bizarres, liens visibles aux yeux de l'âme seulement.'<sup>3</sup> This reference to the eyes of the soul, establishing an obvious contrast with the physical eye, contrasts such visions with the vistas of the previous section. The vision of Félix and Henriette penetrates both inwards and outwards in two complementary developments.

Internal and external vision are, however, frequently confused. For example, Félix sees in Henriette's face: 'cette vapeur lumineuse que nie la science, que la parole ne traduit pas, mais que voit un amant.'<sup>4</sup> Here Félix endows himself with a vision which abolishes any possible distance between them, but it is impossible to say whether his external or internal eye plays a more dominant role. Similarly he claims in his letter to Henriette: 'Hier j'ai entrevu je ne sais quel être dégagé des entraves corporelles qui nous empêchent de secouer les feux de l'âme. [...] hier ton âme a été visible et palpable.'<sup>5</sup>

1: Y. p.176. Quoted above p.86. It is interesting that Henriette does not explain what barrier prevents her from entering the illuminated rooms - perhaps because no such barrier exists except for her own internal will not to develop. Hence the importance of 'craignant': the whole image is perhaps, inspired by fear, fear of loss of inhibition being expressed in terms of a kind of agoraphobia. Balzac does, therefore, continue to achieve a remarkable harmony of 'fond' and 'forme', of psychological observation and figurative expression. For the theme of forbidden light, see Chapter 5, pp. 254-261.

2: Y. p.12.

3: Y. pp.36-37. As has been seen, Félix and Henriette are able to deduce past and future from the present. For this and the theme of the Apocalypse, see above p.13 n.2.

4: Y. p.41. Many Balzacian characters are, of course, surrounded by such a halo of light. Cf. G. Poulet: Les Métamorphoses du cercle, pp.219-221, and J.-P. Richard: Études sur le romantisme, p.73. As Balzac himself writes in Théorie de la démarche: 'Voyez le visage d'un homme inspiré par une conviction forte: il doit rayonner. Si jusqu'ici les effluves d'une tête embrasée n'ont pas été visibles à l'œil nu, n'est-ce pas adams en poésie, en peinture? Et s'il n'est pas encore prouvé physiologiquement, certes il est probable.' (O.D. II, Vol.39, Conard, 1938, pp.637-638). Félix of course, here (Y. p.41) as elsewhere, is an artist: cf. below p.416 n.4.

5: Y. pp.144,145. Although no edition consulted offers an alternative, the use of 'secouer' here is sufficiently odd to postulate a misreading of the manuscript.



It would seem here that Félix sees a visible soul with 'les yeux de l'âme'. The effect of 'entrevoir' is to intensify rather than reduce his powers of penetration in that it suggests the effort and concentration required to achieve such a moment of vision, and the rarity of such an experience. The intensity of Félix's desire, while abolishing the distance which separates them, reaffirms the possibility of limitless discovery which their relationship promises. His moment of elation combines possession with the promise of infinity.

(4)

Fire journeys

As Lucienne Trappier-Mazur remarks: 'Le feu, souvent présent, ne constitue pas à lui seul, une catégorie de l'espace.'<sup>1</sup> Although it is possible to distinguish between fire images related to internal and external journeys in le Lys dans la vallée, the presence of fire alone does not seem sufficient for impetus to be evoked or movement described. It is only once that impetus or that movement has been established that fire can offer its own, no doubt distinctive, contribution. Since, as a result, Félix very rarely identifies man with fire in a journey image uncontaminated by the presence of other elements, such images tend, even when juxtaposed, to remain disassociated. They can hardly be said to merge to form an intricate, closely-woven network of journey images permeating the whole novel.

It must, however, be pointed out that these images may have a different kind of homogeneity. The presence of fire, with its traditional association with sexuality, brings out the sexual connotations of the whole journey theme; it also betrays the presence of a frequently suppressed sexuality in the novel. Such connotations are, however, not restricted to journey images; nor can all fire journey images be said to have such connotations. For these reasons the themes of sexuality and fire journeys will be seen to overlap but cannot be said to coincide.<sup>2</sup>

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1: 'Espace et regard dans la Comédie humaine', p.330.

2: The fire-sexuality analogy will be examined more fully in Chapter 6. In order to appreciate the development of sexuality in le Lys it would be necessary to adopt a different approach from that followed in this thesis - namely a diachronic study of the various images and themes as they occur in the narrative. Cf. J. Gaudon: 'Le Rouge et le blanc: notes sur le Lys dans la vallée, esp. p.78.

(a) External fire journeys

Fire and heat are present in a number of images which compare the attempts of Félix and Henriette to approach each other with the sun's rays: 'un regard de sollicitude [...] rayonna dans mon âme comme le soleil.'<sup>1</sup> 'les trois enfants [...] sur lesquels je dois [...] faire rayonner mon âme sans en laisser adultérer la moindre parcelle.'<sup>2</sup> However, such images are closely associated with the group of 'regard-lumière' images mentioned in the previous section, and, despite the presence of 'adultérer', cannot be said to have as their dominant motif the disclosure of a frustrated sensuality. It would be difficult, therefore, to see such images as examples of a distinct or distinctive group of external journey imagery centering on fire.

Occasional images identifying lady Dudley's urge to approach Félix are, perhaps, equally unsatisfactory from the point of view of the fire journey theme: 'sa tendresse se dressait comme des feux subitement allumés'.<sup>3</sup> 'Allumer' suggests the presence of 'lumière' as well as of fire. Similarly, in images such as 'mon coeur éprouve une plus ardente soif',<sup>4</sup> in which it is Henriette who longs to approach Félix, the presence of fire intensifies what is primarily an urge to absorb water. 'Soif' is the absence of water at least as much as the presence of fire. However important, moreover, the sexual connotations in these two quotations, it is doubtful whether they depend on the movement rather than the mere presence of fire.

One possible exception to this is the description of Félix's bouquets, where Félix admires 'tout ce que ces naïves créatures ont

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1: Y. p.221.

2: Y. p.92.

3: Y. p.283. This is, of course, an erotic commonplace.

4: Y. p.301.

de plus échevelé, [..] des flammes et de triples dards [..].'

The description culminates in the poppy 'déployant les flammèches de son incendie'.<sup>1</sup> It could, however, be argued that the reference to flame movement merely adds vigour and intensity to the sense of movement conveyed by the flower.<sup>2</sup> As a separate entity, then, fire would seem to be too elusive or too amorphous to be focussed in that nucleus of energy whose concentration and expansion has been seen to characterise movement in le Lys dans la vallée.<sup>3</sup>

(b) Internal fire journeys

A number of images suggest the presence of an internal flame within Henriette or lady Dudley. Félix speaks of Henriette's 'première nature de flamme vive',<sup>4</sup> and observes that 'son oeil lançait [..] une lueur subtile qui semblait s'enflammer aux sources de la vie et devait les tarir.'<sup>5</sup> However, in this second example, Henriette is identified with light and water rather than with fire. 'S'enflammer' indicates the energy with which Henriette emits light; 'tarir', associated with 's'enflammer', is essentially an epithet to describe the drying up of water. If the first image is reviewed in context, it will be seen to be in combination with light: 'elle [..] laissait apercevoir sa première nature de flamme vive, ses premiers rêves bleus, comme on voit le ciel par des éclaircies de nuages.'<sup>6</sup> It is indeed in this tension between ideal light and sexualised fire that the significance of the image lies -

1: Y. p.121.

2: Cf. the section on Plant journeys.

3: It is, however, possible to study fire-movement in a different way. This will be done in Chapter 6.

4: Y. p.43.

5: Y. p.41.

6: Cf. above p.22 n.4.

in that it betrays Henriette's frustrated sexuality and prefigures her eventual martyrdom.<sup>1</sup> It is, however, this very tension which demonstrates the difficulty of pinpointing a fire journey theme.

A close examination of fire images related to internal contraction or expansion reveals that they are mostly of such a hybrid nature: 'pourquoi l'âme, cette étoile humaine, n'envelopperait-elle pas de ses feux un ami [...]';<sup>2</sup> 'le reflet des feux intérieurs [...] cette vapeur lumineuse [...]'.<sup>3</sup> Once again, then, the interest of such images lies in the fire-light, whence sensuality-purity dichotomy, rather than in the movement of light and fire and, still less, in the movement of fire alone.

In another group of images the evocation of fire is associated with that of liquid: 'le désir serpenta dans mes veines comme le signal d'un feu de joie.'<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Henriette writes to Félix: 'Votre nom prononcé par mes enfants m'emplissait le coeur d'un sang plus chaud qui colorait aussitôt mon visage [...] j'aimais les bouillonnements de cette sensation.'<sup>5</sup> As before, it can be argued that fire intensifies desire and can thus accelerate movement, but it is liquid which is central to the journey image.

The ability of the individual to absorb energy within himself is also conveyed by this type of hybrid fire image: 'Il faut avoir été le centre de tout [...], avoir été le principe de la vie, le foyer d'où chacun tirait sa lumière [...]'.<sup>6</sup> Again, the fire image is not

1: Cf. above, p.13 n.2 and Chapter 6, pp.342-344.

2: Y. p.200.

3: Y. p.41.

4: Y. p.113. The birth of this desire is in sharp contrast with the placidity of the 'promenade en bateau': cf. below p.113. Cf. also Félix's reference to the volcano (Y. pp.127-128) inevitably reminiscent of René.

5: Y. p.318.

6: Y. p.252. This is, of course, an example of sun imagery which will be examined in the Chapter on Fire. Such 'hybrid' images are common in Saint-Martin's l'Homme de désir.



self-sufficient: the essence of life as it is absorbed by the individual is, sexualised or no, described as light not fire.

Although lady Dudley absorbs fire, she is also the absence of water:

'Son corps ignore la sueur, il aspire le feu dans l'atmosphère [...]'.<sup>1</sup>

Fire imagery, most closely associated with that of light, is used to intensify a number of Félix's 'visions intérieures': 'N'existe-t-il pas chez un coeur rempli d'amour des souhaits incessants qui donnent plus de prix aux formes désirées en les faisant entrevoir colorées par le feu des rêves?'<sup>2</sup> The ability of desire to heighten Félix's sense of internal illumination and thereby his sense of internal penetration is the same as that discussed in the previous section. The particular colouring - Félix's own word - the vision receives in this instance is the primary contribution of the reference to fire.<sup>3</sup> As before, therefore, journey imagery expressed in terms of fire is essentially derived.

However unsatisfactory this conclusion may seem from the point of view of the journey theme, it usefully clears the ground for a different approach to fire and fire-movement in le Lys dans la vallée. It is also extremely significant that an element traditionally associated with the passions should, in le Lys, seem to be of a primarily parasitic nature in at least some of its manifestations. The above remarks do, therefore, constitute a revealing preliminary sounding whose implications can be discussed more fully in the Chapter on Fire imagery.

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1: Y. p.230.

2: Y. p.175. Once again 'entrevoir' conveys Félix's heightened perceptions. His visions are similarly inflamed Y. pp.40, 76.

3: Fire also, of course, emphasises their erotic nature.

(5)

Water journeys(a) External water journeys

A number of images in le Lys associate the characters' sense of frustration with a hazardous journey on water. Mortsauf is a victim of 'le grand naufrage qui termina le dix-huitième siècle.'<sup>1</sup> Henriette, too, is in danger of being swept along: 'Si je n'avais pas d'enfants, je me laisserais aller au courant de cette vie;'.<sup>2</sup> Félix communicates his experiences with lady Dudley 'pour allumer un phare sur cet écueil',<sup>3</sup> and sees Paris as 'une mer aussi dangereuse aux chastes amours qu'à la pureté des consciences.'<sup>4</sup> In her letter to Félix, Henriette points to the inadvisability of an affair with a young woman of society: 'elle [...] sera comme une pierre à votre cou. Vous vous noierez un jour, et la femme surnagera.'<sup>5</sup> When Félix thinks of a possible marriage with Madeleine after Henriette's death, he remarks: 'Dans ce grand naufrage, j'apercevais une île où je pouvais aborder.'<sup>6</sup> Such images are reminiscent of the slow and obstacle-ridden journeys across land already discussed: in each case, the journey deviates, is extended, or threatens to end, before desire is fulfilled.

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- 1: Y. p.49. Like l'abbé Birotteau's remark: 'Elle arrive au port' (Y. p.306) this is an obvious cliché. Such images do, however, like those that follow, contribute to the journey theme.
- 2: Y. p.147. Another platitude.
- 3: Y. p.230.
- 4: I. p.183. The sea and sea metaphor figure prominently in Volupté - as, of course, in a number of Balzac's other works such as Beatrix, L'Enfant maudit and Un drame au bord de la mer.
- 5: Y. p.168.
- 6: Y. p.323.

A different but related group of images highlights the importance of Félix's meeting with Henriette - 'je me plongeai dans ce dos comme un enfant qui se jette dans le sein de sa mère'<sup>1</sup> - and shows his progress towards her as an uninhibited journey on water: 'Le jour où j'eus ainsi la clef des champs, j'avais si drument nagé dans l'océan de l'amour que je l'avais traversé.'<sup>2</sup> The Indre itself reflects the freedom and lightness of Félix's movement: 'L'Indre se roule par des mouvements de serpent [...] ces végétations aquatiques, si vivaces, [...] qui tapissent la rivière, surgissent au-dessus, ondulent avec elle, se laissent aller à ses caprices et se plient aux tempêtes de la rivière fouettée par la roue des moulins!'<sup>3</sup> Félix minimises the hazards of his journey towards her: 'Le contentement qui m'enflait toutes mes voiles m'empêcha de voir les inextricables difficultés mises entre elle et moi'.<sup>4</sup> The realisation that they have been travelling towards each other - 'quel aimant nous a dirigés sur l'océan des eaux amères, vers la source d'eau douce'<sup>5</sup> - fills Félix with ineffable joy: 'je m'expliquai les peines de mon enfance par le bonheur immense où je nageais.'<sup>6</sup>

After this point such images become more scattered. However, a number of images, which are closely related to those in the air journey group, express Henriette's mobility in moments of intimacy and elation: Félix recalls 'la souveraine dont la robe blanche ondoyait dans les taillis, flottait sur les pelouses',<sup>7</sup> and admires

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1: Y. p.25.

2: Y. p.27.

3: Y. pp.29, 30.

4: Y. p.53.

5: Y. p.91.

6: Y. p.96. Developed from an obvious cliché.

7: Y. p.119.

'ses manches flottantes, ses rubans frais, sa pèlerine et les boucles fluides de sa coiffure à la Sévigné;'.<sup>1</sup>

Such images can be seen to reach a climax in the description of the journey on the Indre: the gentle rhythm of the water stimulates their desire to unite with one another: 'L'agitation d'un amour plein de désirs contenus s'harmonie à celle de l'eau'.<sup>2</sup> As they float, they begin to ascend towards the heavens: 'La rivière fut comme un sentier sur lequel nous volions.'<sup>3</sup> They project themselves across distance and possess infinity: 'Enfin, n'étant pas diverti par le mouvement qu'exige la marche à pied, notre esprit s'empara de la création.' In this unique moment of release and freedom - 'une petite fille en liberté [..] deux âmes libres'<sup>4</sup> - distance is abolished and space possessed.

(b) Internal water journeys

In this group of images the soul is both a vast reservoir which can be penetrated with ease - 'dont la limpide substance est ébranlée tout entière au moindre choc, de même qu'une pierre jetée dans un lac

1: Y. p.191. Cf. the young, impetuous Julie d'Aiglemont: 'A voir le mouvement qu'elle imprimait à son bras droit, vous eussiez dit qu'elle s'en aidait pour courir. Sa petite main, bien gantée, froissait impatientement un mouchoir, et ressemblait à la rame d'une barque qui fend les ondes.' (II, p.675).

2: Y. p.203.

3: Ibid. This sentence combines land, air and water journeys. Cf. the description of Dante and Godefroid: 'Tous deux [..] voyagèrent fraternellement comme deux colombes qui parcoururent les cieux d'une même aile, jusqu'au moment où la barque, en touchant le sable du Terrain, les tira de leur profonde rêverie.' (X, pp.343-344). The shipwreck in Jésus Christ en Flandre is another obviously symbolic water journey in the Comédie humaine.

4: Y. p.203. Once again the 'expansion infinie' theme. Cf. above p.99 n.3.

en agite également la surface et la profondeur.'<sup>1</sup> - and a fountain overflowing towards the object of its desire: 'Si dans quelques âmes les sentiments méconnus tournent en haine, dans la mienne ils se concentrèrent et se creusèrent un lit d'où, plus tard, ils jaillirent sur ma vie.'<sup>2</sup> References to the submerged depths of the soul are, therefore, related to those in which these waters gather force and overflow. As with images of light, internal and external journeys are inseparably linked.

Just as, moreover, the intimacy between Félix and Henriette was evoked by an exchange of light, so it is by a continuous exchange of emanation and absorption. Thus Félix drinks the waters of Henriette's soul, the tears prompted by memory of past sufferings: 'Oui, je viens de participer à vos douleurs, de m'unir à votre âme, comme nous nous unissons au Christ en buvant sa divine substance.'<sup>3</sup> Félix's own tears are also seen as the overflowing of memory and of the waters of the soul: 'Ce moment m'a laissé des souvenirs ensevelis dans mon âme et qui ne reparaitront jamais à sa surface sans que mes yeux se mouillent de pleurs;'<sup>4</sup> Once again, then, the soul safeguards memory. If the soul is an echo-chamber whose voices inspire Félix's narrative, it is also a reservoir whose overflowing waters impel the writing of that narrative; 'J'ai d'imposants souvenirs ensevelis au fond de mon âme comme ces productions marines qui s'aperçoivent par les temps calmes, et que les flots de la tempête jettent par fragments sur

1: Y. p.85. Cf. La Bourse, I, p.346: 'ils ressentirent une de ces commotions vives dont les effets dans l'âme peuvent se comparer à ceux que produit une pierre jetée au fond d'un lac.'

2: Y. p.6. Cf. G. Bachelard: L'Eau et les rêves, Corti, 1942, p.3: 'La matière se laisse d'ailleurs valoriser en deux sens: dans le sens de l'approfondissement et dans le sens de l'essor.'

3: Y. p.93.

4: Y. p.145.



la grève.<sup>1</sup> Once again the themes which pervade Félix's account of his past combine to motivate the actual narration of his past and le Lys dans la vallée astounds the reader with its self-containment and its coherence.

The journey theme - and Félix's narrative - is, however, not so immaculately self-contained as to eliminate all possibility of progression, all projection towards the future. One of the most intimate and serene exchanges between Félix and Henriette is evoked in the following passage:

'Quand les mots manquaient, le silence servait fidèlement nos âmes qui pour ainsi dire entraient l'une chez l'autre sans obstacle, [...]: savourant toutes deux les charmes d'une torpeur pensive, elles s'engageaient dans les ondulations d'une même rêverie, se plongeaient ensemble dans la rivière, en sortaient rafraîchies comme deux nymphes aussi parfaitement unies que la jalousie peut le désirer, mais sans aucun lien terrestre. Nous allions dans un gouffre sans fond, nous revenions à la surface, les mains vides, [...]. Malgré l'énerveante poésie du soir [...], le désir serpenta dans mes veines comme le signal d'un feu de joie.' 2

Whereas the journey of Félix and Henriette on the Indre enabled them to project themselves out to infinity beyond them, here they plunge into the river and into the infinity within them. They merge with each other as water with itself, and, united, plunge into their own unfathomable depths. And yet ... They emerge 'les main/vides'. 4/  
Infinity, once penetrated, loses its quality of infinity, and these ecstatic moments are followed by a return to the surface, by a return to the beginning of a journey, by a resurgence of desire.

1: Y. pp.3-4.

2: Y. p.113. Cf. above p.107, and Chapter 6, pp.308,315,323.  
J.-P.Richard quotes from this passage in Etudes sur le romantisme, pp.61-62. Cf. also l'Enfant maudit, IX, p.736: 'Etienne et Gabrielle se plongèrent ensemble dans les délices de cette heure enfantine:'.

(6)

Plant journeys

A small number of plants and flowers in le Lys dans la vallée convey Félix's desire to shoot unimpeded towards his goal: 'Du sein de ce proluxe torrent d'amour qui déborde, s'élançe un magnifique double pavot rouge [∟.∟].'<sup>1</sup> The lily, too, has a similar élan.<sup>2</sup> More often, however, plant movements are sinuous and insinuating. Thus Félix refers to 'les spirales des liserons à cloches blanches', to 'les brins tortueux des chèvrefeuilles'.<sup>3</sup> If the poppy has such explosive power, it is precisely because, as they intertwine, the flowers of the bouquets enfold desire upon desire, forming a tight knot within the soul - 'des tiges tourmentées comme les désirs entortillés au fond de l'âme'<sup>4</sup> - which is then powerful enough to project itself out towards Henriette. As Poulet has pointed out: 'L'âme n'a de force centrifuge que dans la mesure où elle se condense préalablement par la force centripète.'<sup>5</sup> In the flowers, therefore, are combined internal and external movements: 'toutes s'avancent prosternées'.<sup>6</sup> The microcosm which is the flower subsumes the different but complementary forces within Félix's universe.

It is therefore, singularly appropriate that Félix and Henriette should possess or aspire towards the same flexibility and tautness as they see in the plants. Their hearts, too, are seen as delicate

1: Y. p.121.

2: Cf. Y. pp.29, 192. It is interesting that the lily and the poppy, two opposites, should here share characteristics. For a discussion of the ultimate unity of the spiritualism/materialism dichotomy, see below p.375 and n.2, pp.407ff.

3: Y. pp.120, 121.

4: Y. p.121.

5: G.Poulet: 'Les Métamorphoses du cercle', p.215. Cf. J.-P.Richard: 'Etudes sur le romantisme', p.43, and the Introduction to this Chapter.

6: Y. p.120.

fibrous coils which penetrate, or are penetrated by, each other. Thus Félix speaks of 'ces liens si forts qui nous brisent par mille points quand ils se rompent, parce qu'ils touchent à toutes nos fibres, parce qu'ils sont attachés dans les replis de notre coeur, en même temps qu'ils ont caressé l'âme qui sanctionnait chacune de ces attaches.'<sup>1</sup> Just as Félix speaks of 'les caresses des plantes',<sup>2</sup> so do he and Henriette intertwine like the tendrils of the plants. Similarly, Henriette refers to 'le coeur où je devais attacher les premières racines de tendresse',<sup>3</sup> and Félix observes: 'elle entra dans les derniers replis de mon coeur'.<sup>4</sup>

It is, moreover, the same 'puissance de repliement' which has been noted in plants and, more particularly, in Félix's bouquets,<sup>5</sup> which enables Félix and Henriette to counter Mortsauf's attacks: 'elle resta dans la solitide et se plia sans murmure à ses défiances';<sup>6</sup> 'Quand j'eus pour ainsi dire palpé ses défauts, je m'y pliai avec autant de souplesse qu'en mettait la comtesse à les caresser'.<sup>7</sup> However, as Henriette finds it more and more difficult to find periods of withdrawal - 'Faute de repos et de bains de mer où je retremperais mes fibres, je périrai'<sup>8</sup> - her flexibility diminishes: 'Si je connaissais bien le

1: Y. p.314. Cf. Y. p.92: 'Je n'aime monsieur de Mortsauf ni par devoir social, ni par calcul [...]; mais par un irrésistible sentiment qui l'attache à toutes les fibres de mon coeur.'

2: Y. p.305.

3: Y. p.260.

4: Y. p.151.

5: Cf. G. Poulet: Les Métamorphoses du cercle, p.215.

6: Y. p.63.

7: Y. p.69.

8: Y. p.88. Cf. Y. p.87: 'La pitié détend toutes mes fibres et mollifie mes nerfs.' and Y. p.226: 'La souffrance a tout détendu dans leur âme, même les liens qui nous attachent.' If waves of sound follow the same serpentine movements as fibres, they, too, can lose their tautness: 'La comtesse eut, en me parlant de toutes choses, [...], un son de voix nouveau, comme si l'instrument eût perdu plusieurs cordes, et que les autres se fussent détendues.' (Y. p.222 - quoted above p.93 and below p.272(n.3).)

terrain sur lequel doivent porter mes efforts, si ma résistance était déterminée, l'âme s'y plierait; mais non, chaque jour l'attaque change de caractère, [...].<sup>1</sup> Henriette is losing her resistance to Mortsauf.

It is, of course, precisely this resistance accumulated in periods of withdrawal which has been seen to characterise Félix's childhood, when despite - or rather because of - the frustration of his longing for release, he undergoes 'la dernière fusion d'un tempérament de fer'.<sup>2</sup> Félix, poet and 'spécialiste', also has some of the characteristics of their opposite, the 'instinctif': 'L'instinctif pur est un automate mécanique'.<sup>3</sup> Hence, perhaps, his attachment to the 'organisation de fer' which is lady Dudley,<sup>4</sup> to 'l'animalité', to 'les souvenirs de nos instincts antérieurs'.<sup>5</sup> In his childhood which so remarkably prefigures the themes of his later narrative, Félix acquires that very 'puissance de repliement' associated with the bouquets: 'Cette fête était un débacle d'enthousiasme où chacun s'efforçait de se surpasser [...], véritable égoïsme de parti qui me laissa froid, me rapetissa, me replia sur moi-même'.<sup>6</sup> The coil is later released: 'je voulais me suspendre aux arbres, ramper dans les vignes, me tapir dans l'Indre;'.<sup>7</sup>

This fondness for flexibility and tautness is no doubt also reflected in Félix's fondness for the discipline of regular, rhythmical

1: Y. p.198. For an examination of the 'elasticity' of the Balzacian character, see J.-P. Richard: Études sur le romantisme, pp.43-55.

2: Y. p.19. Quoted above p.72 n.2 and below p.138(n.5).

3: P. Nykrog: La Pensée de Balzac, p.92.

4: Y. p.230. Metals in le Lys are examined in Chapter 3.

5: Y. p.232.

6: Y. pp.23-24. Having retreated within himself, Félix retreats into a small space 'dans un coin au bout d'une banquette abandonnée'.

7: Y. p.45. The intertwining plant can also suffocate movement (Y. p.112).

and mechanical movements<sup>1</sup> and even for the discipline of Catholic observances, of 'la répétition des actes qui conservent l'espérance et la crainte'.<sup>2</sup> It is, moreover, the absence of such discipline which eventually undermines Félix's relationship with lady Dudley: 'Ceux qui aiment tant à briller, à se mouvoir, n'ont pas reçu le don de la constance. Selon mes idées, l'amour veut plus de tranquillité'.<sup>3</sup> Lady Dudley, associated with the debilitatingly limitless horizons of the desert,<sup>4</sup> offers 'une vie sans opposition',<sup>5</sup> and does, therefore, fail to hold Félix: 'Entre deux êtres susceptibles d'amour, la durée de la passion est en raison de la résistance primitive de la femme, [...]'.<sup>6</sup> Thus, however impressive movement may be on its own, movement alone is not enough: 'La vie résulte du jeu de deux principes opposés': 'Le Mouvement, en raison de la résistance, produit une combinaison qui est la vie.'<sup>7</sup> In le Lys, however, ideas which Balzac explains explicitly and in the abstract in other works, are given a concrete form. Once again, moreover,

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- 1: Cf. the passages Y. pp.126-127: 'Puis je me mis à cueillir des grappes [...] je compris les règles monastiques.' and Y. p.138: 'j'ai senti le besoin de régulariser la souffrance [...] en réglant ainsi ses émotions.' Cf. also M. Bardèche: 'Autour des Etudes philosophiques', A.B. 1960, p.124: 'la force vitale des nations se refait chaque jour par la vie calme de la province, par la vie naturelle et presque animale de ses campagnes, comme le fluide vital se refait par le sommeil et le repos.' G. David ('L'Idée de bonheur dans la Comédie humaine', p.349) also notes: 'Le bonheur a son rythme, comme les saisons.' For further discussion of floral, seasonal and symphonic rhythms, see Chapter 7, pp.378 n.1, 406, 413-415.
- 2: Y. p.223.
- 3: Y. p.266.
- 4: The desert is examined in Chapter 3. Cf. also above p.83(n.3).
- 5: Y. p.231.
- 6: Physiologie du mariage, X, p.671. Unlike lady Dudley, Henriette provides not only an outlet for Félix's energies, but a barrier which absorbs and reflects them, thus preventing their dissipation. An echo-chamber has walls. (Cf. Y. pp.72-73). Cf. also below pp.146,164-166.
- 7: Quoted from Une fille d'Eve, II, p.80 (appropriately enough from a description of the mature Félix) and Louis Lambert (X, p.453) by G. Poulet: Les Métamorphoses du cercle, p.205. Cf. also P. Nykrog: La Pensée de Balzac, pp.118-120, 140-144 and J.-P. Richard: Etudes sur le romantisme, p.79. For Félix's dislike of inertia, see Y. pp.46, 95. In such remarks Balzac is exploiting the traditional opposition between active and passive principles. Cf. Sénancour's Reveries.



the themes of the work also characterise the actual writing of the work since, as has been seen, it is the form itself which is the resistance which, when combined with the 'movement' of Félix's emotions, creates life in art.<sup>1</sup>

If this union of movement and resistance is epitomised most consistently and prestigiously in flowers, they are similarly united in other references to slow, tortuous movement in le Lys dans la vallée. Speaking of lady Dudley, Félix remarks: 'C'était [...] tantôt des créations semblables à celles de mes bouquets [...]; puis des jeux pareils à ceux des serpents entrelacés;'.<sup>2</sup> Thus the movements of the bouquets are connected to a variant of the animal journey theme. The same type of movement is shared by water: 'l'Indre se roule par des mouvements de serpent.'. <sup>3</sup>

The flexibility and sinuosity associated with gradually accumulated potential force is also apparent both in Félix's descriptions of Henriette - 'partout les lignes s'arrondissaient en flexuosités désépérantes pour le regard',<sup>4</sup> and in their environment - 'les sinuosités de la côte opposée'.<sup>5</sup> It is notable that after a period of separation and, for Henriette at least, of frustration and withdrawal, Félix remarks: 'elle s'était entendue avec ces horizons fumeux, avec leurs sinuosités vaporeuses'.<sup>6</sup>

It is now possible to examine a final example of the 'puissance de repliement' noted in Félix, Henriette and the bouquets - that is,

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1: Cf. above pp.33-34.

2: Y. p.272. Again the traditional erotic motif.

3: Y. p.29. Cf. above p.80.

4: Y. p.41.

5: Y. p.44.

6: Y. p.180.

in the Indre valley itself. For just as the 'replis' of Henriette's voice draw Félix into 'un monde surhumain',<sup>1</sup> so does the 'pli' which is the Indre valley open into the infinite:

'Je demeurai quelques jours dans une chambre dont les fenêtres donnent sur ce vallon tranquille et solitaire dont je vous ai parlé. C'est un vaste pli de terrain bordé par des chênes deux fois centenaires, [...]. Cet aspect convenait à la méditation sévère et solennelle à laquelle je voulais me livrer.' 2

The 'pli' does, therefore, rejoin the 'coin' discussed at the beginning of this Chapter: 'Là, vous eussiez dit d'un petit coin de la Suisse. La prairie, sillonnée par les ruisseaux qui se jettent dans l'Indre, se découvre dans sa longueur, et se perd en lointains vaporeux.'<sup>3</sup> From the miniature sinuosity which is the 'pli' of the valley, Félix's horizons expand into the increasingly ill-defined sinuosities of the infinite.

It can be seen from the above that internal and external journeys, seen throughout this Chapter to be inseparably linked in le Lys, are now virtually completely fused in the vibrant sinuosities of the bouquets, Henriette, water, the valley, and the horizons. The total fusing of the two kinds of movement does, however, seem to have abolished the very phenomenon on which the whole notion of journey depended: distance. If within and without are the same, then how can Félix progress from one to the other? Thus, as in the composition of the work in which it is contained, movement is gradually becoming form - a vibrant, dynamic form perhaps, but nevertheless form. What is more, this form is, as can be seen from the references to 'pli'

1: Y. p.40. Cf. above p.93.

The word 'repli' emphasises the serpentine quality of sound.

2: Y. pp.313-314. Cf. Y. p.109: 'Les antécédents de ma vie [...] le monde enchanteur des sentiments partagés.' (Quoted above p.85 n.3).

3: Y. p.67.

and 'coin' above, less movement itself than a generator of movement.<sup>1</sup> Paradoxically enough, movement is in the process of becoming resistance which will, as has been seen, eventually provoke and protect the gathering of new movement.

If, then, any sense of achievement and progress - any conquering of actual distance - is to be discerned in the journey theme, it cannot be in this vibrance alone, even though this vibrance may be the theme's most concentrated and sophisticated expression.<sup>2</sup> This vibrance has to be appreciated from the perspective of Félix's cloistered childhood, where impetus was first inhibited and discovered. In other words, it has to be appreciated by going back to the beginning of the novel - and of this Chapter - where the cycles of movement and resistance can be seen to be beginning again.<sup>3</sup>

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- 1: There are also elements of the portrait. Cf. Chapter 7, pp.418ff.
  - 2: This cannot be appreciated, however, without an examination of the more cliché-ridden expressions of the external journey theme.
  - 3: Félix travels both to and from Clochegourde. Cf. above p.77 n.1. and the Conclusion.

### Conclusion

The main contribution of the journey theme to le Lys dans la vallée is that it epitomises the ambivalence of Félix's predicament: his sense of achievement and of failure, or, more accurately, his sense of achievement in failure. This is, after all, the essence of the journey: one is nowhere yet but one will be. As Poulet has so brilliantly shown, the Balzacian character is permanently projected towards the future: 'l'être balzacien se découvre d'abord comme une sorte de creux vivant, d'appel à la vie.'<sup>1</sup>

In this predicament Félix is, of course, one of many similarly placed 'débutants dans la vie', who, like de Marsay, set off hopefully 'par une de ces belles matinées de printemps' to an experience which leads to regret and disillusion: '- Adieu, dit-elle, rien ne console d'avoir perdu ce qui nous a paru être l'infini.'<sup>2</sup>

For Félix knows he is not alone in setting out as he did - 'Nous partons presque tous au matin, comme moi de Tours à Clochegourde [...]'<sup>3</sup> - not alone in his sense of frustration and yearning: 'Cette fête était une débâcle d'enthousiasme où chacun s'efforçait de se surpasser dans le féroce empressement de courir au soleil levant des Bourbons, [...]'<sup>4</sup> Like many of his contemporaries, no doubt, Félix is suffering from being the younger son of largely dispossessed parents, themselves insecurely placed in a period of political uncertainty, with a certain position to keep up, an elder son to launch, and daughters to marry. In being

1: G. Poulet: La Distance intérieure, p.122.

2: La Fille aux yeux d'or, V, pp.269, 323. In the latter remark madame de San-Réal is speaking to de Marsay.

3: Y. p.315.

4: Y. pp.23-24. Just how closely these political allusions fit into the themes of the novel will be shown, for example, in Chapter 3, p.140 n.6. Cf. also above pp.50-54. The whole of Romantisme 4 (1972) is devoted to the theme of 'Le Voyage'.

'être de désir', Félix is also a child of his age: 'On trouve souvent, dans La Comédie humaine ce thème de la vie qui repart en 1814, et de Félix de Vandenesse, qui sort de sa sombre enfance pour s'élancer dans la carrière: la Restauration - chance est le thème d'ouverture de la jeunesse balzacienne.'<sup>1</sup>

Thus Félix, however much in retreat, remarks of the Ball: 'Emporté comme un fêtu dans ce tourbillon, j'eus un enfantin désir d'être duc d'Angoulême, de me mêler ainsi à ces princes devant un public ébahi.'<sup>2</sup> How interesting if surprising, then, the manner of Henriette's introduction: 'Puis tout à coup je rencontrai la femme qui devait aiguillonner sans cesse mes ambitieux désirs, et les combler en me jetant au coeur de la Royauté.'<sup>3</sup> In this sense, however temporarily, Félix does indeed arrive - and quickly, and indeed through Henriette: 'Madame de Mortsauf avait vu juste, je lui devais donc tout: pouvoir et richesse, le bonheur et la science; elle me guidait et m'encourageait, purifiait mon coeur et donnait à mes vœux cette unité sans laquelle les forces de la jeunesse se dépensent inutilement.'<sup>4</sup> This singlemindedness largely derives from the chastity of this 'mademoiselle de Vandenesse'<sup>5</sup> - a chastity which pleases the King because it guarantees his devotion - and his discretion. It is not surprising, then, that Félix's affair with lady Dudley jeopardises the social position which Henriette acquired for him in Paris<sup>6</sup> and that Félix no longer occupies his prestigious position after Henriette's death.<sup>7</sup>

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1: P. Barbéris: Mythes balzaciens, A. Colin, 1972, p.14.

Cf. the opening section of this Chapter.

2: Y. p.24.

3: Ibid.

4: Y. p.183.

5: Y. p.186. Given the importance of the confession in le Lys, it is appropriate that Félix should become the confident of the King. The relation between chastity and preserved energy, a common one in Balzac, is examined particularly in Chapter 4.

6: Cf. Y. p.279.

7: Cf. Y. p.328. Perhaps Félix, again symptomatically, is already disillusioned with the Restoration. Cf. Y. pp.286-287, and P. Barbéris; Mythes balzaciens, p.15.



For however much Félix loves nature, he constantly returns to a society which, like that of his schoolfellows, kindles and exacerbates frustrations and desires. However much he voyages to Touraine, Félix, 'Enfant de la Touraine à qui la Touraine était inconnue',<sup>1</sup> returns to the Paris where those frustrations and desires acquired an unprecedented intensity - in the Palais-Royal: 'là pouvaient s'apaiser nos curiosités allumées!'<sup>2</sup> For it was of the desire that thrived in the uncertain, feverish atmosphere of pre-Restoration Paris that Félix makes the remark which epitomises the whole journey theme: 'nous fûmes deux asymptotes, dirigées l'une vers l'autre sans pouvoir se rencontrer.'<sup>3</sup>

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1: Y. p.38.

2: Y. p.17.

3: Ibid. Such remarks emphasise the importance of Félix's childhood as a source of the themes of a narrative which Balzac saw in the Dédicace as 'l'une des pierres les plus travaillées' in the monument to life's journey which is la Comédie humaine. (Cf. P. Nykrog: La Pensée de Balzac, pp.269-270 and XI, pp.207-209, 223-227). Cf. also below p.230 n.4

## CHAPTER THREE

### LAND IMAGERY

#### Introduction

(1) Unyielding substances and forms

(a) Rock imagery

(b) Metal imagery

(2) Yielding substances and forms

(a) Valley and desert imagery

(b) Composite land imagery

Substances and sounds

Substances and light

Substances and fire

Substances and water

Substances and plants

#### Conclusion

### Introduction

The imagery in this Chapter, although concerned with 'terre' and associated expressions such as 'enterrer', is not restricted to earth or soil. It covers a wide variety of references to the substance and contours of material objects and geographical features. It is concerned with the quality of these substances and contours, that is, with the way in which variations in their hardness or softness, sharpness or roundness, may, for example, show variations in Félix's attitude to or relationship with the outside world.

Given the close relationship between movement and form, highlighted in the last section of the preceding Chapter, it is significant that a study of substances and forms should reveal a similar preoccupation with penetrability and impenetrability. Thus, if soft and yielding substances such as earth convey the accessibility of the material world, rocks and stones, which frequently impeded the protagonists' movements, convey its resistance and its hostility. As Bachelard remarks: 'Il semble que la matière ait deux êtres: son être de repos et son être de résistance.'<sup>1</sup>

Although this Chapter is accordingly divided into sections examining first unyielding then yielding substances and forms, examples will show that the degree of resistance or penetrability may vary at different stages in the narrative.<sup>2</sup> Alternatively, a substance or form may convey both qualities with equal force. As

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1: G. Bachelard: La Terre et les rêveries de la volonté, Corti, 1948, p.44. This division is confirmed by G. Durand in Les Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire, (Third edition), Bordas, 1969. Cf. for example, p.31.

2: This difference in degré recalls one of Louis Lambert's ideas: 'Pour lui, tout provient donc de la **SUBSTANCE** dont les transformations ne diffèrent que par le **NOMBRE**, par un certain dosage dont les proportions produisent les individus ou les choses de ce que l'on nomme les **REGNES**.' (X, p.449, quoted by P.Nykrog: La Pensée de Balzac, p.87) For Louis Lambert the word 'substance' has, of course, a much broader meaning than in this Chapter.

Bachelard also observes: 'Dans le règne de l'imagination, sans polyvalence il n'y a pas de valeur.'<sup>1</sup>; 'toute valeur côtoie son anti-valeur'.<sup>2</sup> Thus stones and metals will be seen both to attract and repel. For if substances and forms have such significance and prestige in le Lys dans la vallée, it is because they so frequently manage to transcend the contrasting but complementary characteristics of the above two categories, either because the protagonists' allegiance to one or other category varies, or because a substance or form subsumes the characteristics of both categories and, like the afore-mentioned sinuosities, maintains them in precarious but exhilarating equilibrium. Thus, as again Bachelard remarks: 'Pas d'images de la matière sans cette dialectique d'invitation et d'exclusion.'<sup>3</sup> Or as Blondet puts it to Lucien de Rubempré: 'Mon petit, en littérature, chaque idée a son envers et son endroit; personne ne peut prendre sur lui d'affirmer quel est l'envers. Tout est bilatéral dans le domaine de la pensée.'<sup>4</sup>

Because substances in le Lys are never wholly excluding or inviting, they can never be wholly static - even if the substances' kaleidoscopic metamorphoses are in the eye of the beholder rather than in the substance itself. Not only, moreover, can substances themselves provoke movement<sup>5</sup> but the substances themselves can explode with new dynamism.<sup>6</sup> If, then, movement becomes form, form can also become movement. Just so can the form which is the narrative create further movement in the form of an echo, a reciprocation.<sup>7</sup> Once again, then, the themes of the novel receive brilliant confirmation in the narrative form.

1: G. Bachelard: La Terre et les rêveries du repos, Corti, 1948, p.82.

2: G. Bachelard: La Terre /.../ volonté, p.126.

3: G. Bachelard: op.cit. p.18.

4: Illusions perdues, IV, pp.788-789. Cf. the Dédicace to les Parents pauvres, VI, pp.133-134. The theme of unity in duality is discussed in Chapter 7, pp.375 and n.2, 407ff.

5: Cf. above pp.119-120 and below p.132(n.6), p.253 and n.3, p.299 n.7.

6: Cf. the 'composite' imagery discussed below.

7: Cf. Y. p.3: 'As-tu dans le coeur des secrets qui, pour se faire absoudre, aient besoin des miens?' and also Y. pp.72-73.

(1)

Unyielding substances and forms(a) Rock imagery

At the opening of his narrative Félix de Vandenesse describes his attempt to find security and affection in a hostile childhood environment in terms of the movement of roots obstructed by rock:

'A quel talent nourri de larmes devons-nous un jour [...] la peinture des tourments subis en silence par les âmes dont les racines tendres encore ne rencontrent que de durs cailloux dans le sol domestique, [...]?'<sup>1</sup>

Despite the hostility of the rocks, Félix's choice of the serpentine movement of roots to describe his reaction to his environment implies that he is already beginning to adapt himself to it. If his roots are still delicate they promise to strengthen. For, as Bachelard has observed, 'ce qui est vraiment solide sur la terre a pour une imagination dynamique une forte racine.'<sup>2</sup>

Later references to roots do, therefore, indicate a struggle between the individual and hostile forces, a struggle which may be lost but not without considerable effort: 'Malgré ces barrières épineuses, les sentiments instinctifs tiennent par tant de racines [...].'<sup>3</sup>; 'Ainsi, des orages [...] déracinaient par leurs vagues après les espérances le plus profondément plantées dans son coeur.'<sup>4</sup>; 'Le coeur où je devais attacher les premières racines de la tendresse [...] s'est fermé pour moi, malgré ma persistance à y chercher un pli où je pusse me glisser.'<sup>5</sup> The strength of the roots

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1: Y. p.5.

2: G. Bachelard: La Terre [...]repos, p.294.

3: Y. p.21.

4: Y. p.225.

5: Y. p.260.



derives from their flexibility and their number: 'La racine domine l'obstacle en le tournant. Elle insinue ses vérités; elle stabilise l'être par sa multiplicité.'<sup>1</sup>

The above root images suggest, and other references to this 'tempérament de fer'<sup>2</sup> which is Félix will show, that Félix acquires some of the condensed and latent energy of his stony environment. It is this contagiousness, this transfer of values from the attacked to the attacker, which accounts for the ambivalence of many of the images in this group. An illustration of 'le caractère transitif des valeurs',<sup>3</sup> is Félix's description of the hardships of life as 'les difficultés tortueuses de ses défilés'.<sup>4</sup> The rocks themselves have become petrified tortuous movements: they seem to materialise Félix's suffering. But his suffering has also endowed him with the strength and durability of the rock. Félix, forced to follow the twists of the mountain passes, acquires the force of its movements and of its substance. The strength of the rock has its effect and he continues: 'J'étais entre ma puberté prolongée par mes travaux et ma virilité qui poussait tardivement ses rameaux verts.'<sup>5</sup> The slowness of his maturation implies that it will endure; his branches may be green but will be sturdy: his roots have had time to grow.

Félix himself refers to this preservation and accumulation of energy as a kind of petrification: 'J'étais le trésor de mes vœux

1: G. Bachelard: La Terre [...] repos, p.310. Given the explicit linking of plants and weaving (cf. below p.170).

it is tempting to posit a link between the need for strong roots and Henriette's anxiety at having to rely on a single, brittle thread: 'Félix [...] pardonnez la peur à qui n'a qu'un fil pour se diriger dans un labyrinthe souterrain, et qui tremble de le voir se briser.' (Y. p. 188; see above p.86.)

However, the dominant motif here is, of course, Ariadne's thread, derived from the myth of Theseus, but current in Balzac's period - cf. Saint-Martin, Nerval. As above (see p.102 n.1)

fear seems to prompt an image which can be seen as yet another premonition of disaster in the novel.

2: Y. p.19.

3: M. Mansuy: 'Gaston Bachelard et les lois de l'imagination littéraire', Travaux de linguistique et de littérature, 1966, Vol.IV, Part II, p.106.

4: Y.p..19. Many other examples of this transfer can be found in Malraux's la Voie royale.

5: Y. p.20.

brillants, l'or vierge de mes désirs, tout un coeur brûlant conservé sous les glaces de ces Alpes entassées par un continuel hiver.<sup>1</sup>  
 The freezing of the rocks intensifies their quality of 'resserrement',<sup>2</sup> of condensed force which now preserves and fortifies Félix. He is explicit about such a transfer: 'Quoique ma probité, nourrie de sueurs froides, se soit fortifiée en ces moments où la vie s'entrouvre et laisse voir l'aride gravier de son lit [...]'.<sup>3</sup> The rock both resists and restores, thus illustrating 'cette ambivalence profonde qui marque l'adhésion intime du rêveur à ses images matérielles'.<sup>4</sup>

The ambivalence of Félix's and Henriette's attitude to stone is reflected in a number of images in which stone alternately repels and attracts. The stone may be impenetrable in which case hostile; thus Félix deplores 'cette insensibilité de marbre contre laquelle s'étaient jusqu'alors émoussés [s/es] sentiments;'.<sup>5</sup> If the stone is penetrable then its strength is reassuring; thus Félix admires in Henriette 'ce sourire des femmes résignées qui fendrait le granit'.<sup>6</sup> Henriette senses both the hostility and the reassurance of stone: 'l'intérêt de la maison exige que je sois calme et sévère comme une statue de la Justice, et cependant, moi aussi, j'ai l'âme expansive et tendre!'.<sup>7</sup> This ambivalence is epitomised in Félix's descriptions of Madeleine: 'Elle ressemblait aux jolies statuette du Moyen-Age, si fines de contour, si minces de forme que l'oeil en les caressant craint de les voir se briser;'.<sup>8</sup> 'Elle me haïssait [...] je vis

1: Y. p.83.

2: Cf. G. Bachelard: La Terre [...] volonté, p.189.

3: Y. p.75.

4: G. Bachelard: op.cit. p.75. Hence, paradoxically, resistance creates movement. Cf. above p.125 and n.5.

5: Y. p.54.

6: Y. p.89. 'Sourire' is, however, more important than 'granit' here.

7: Y. p.87.

8: Y. p.243.

Madeleine comme une statue, immobile et debout, écoutant le bruit de mes pas.'<sup>1</sup>

Since stone has a strength which sustains as well as resists, the destruction or decay of stone often indicates death. Mortsauf, who compares himself to 'une vieille tour'<sup>2</sup> is a ruin: 'elle [Henriette] avait paré ses ruines d'un épais manteau de lierre.'<sup>3</sup> It is the sight of 'deux pilastres ruinés'<sup>4</sup> which makes Félix think of the count's death. Clochegourde, once 'ouvrage comme une fleur'<sup>5</sup> and, therefore, as light and delicate as the statuette, imitates Henriette as she declines: 'C'était des allées ratissées à moitié, des travaux commencés et abandonnés [...]'; 'Henriette tombée, tout était en ruine à Clochegourde.'<sup>6</sup> It follows that Félix should wish to safeguard 'le joli château de [s]es espérances'<sup>7</sup> and later comment: 'Ainsi tout était détruit dans le bel édifice de mon bonheur.'<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the novel, the establishment of happiness and security is, therefore, linked to a prosperous estate. This explains Henriette's concern for the extension of their property and for the rebuilding of the farms.<sup>9</sup> A temporary setback in the construction of la Cassine and la Rhétorière causes violent quarrels.<sup>10</sup> The building of a road linking Clochegourde to the road to Chinon indicates the prospect of new, more far-reaching journeys, and the

1: Y. p.304.

2: Y. p.238.

3: Y. p.64.

4: Y. p.102.

5: Y. p.36.

6: Y. pp.295, 304.

7: Y. p.235.

8: Y. p.325. Cf. Y. p.250: 'Elle me regarda [...], et prise de je ne sais quelle compassion pour nos débris [...]' and Internal land journeys, above, pp.85-86.

9: Cf. Y. pp.130-133, 178. This is undoubtedly an outlet for Henriette's frustrated sensuality and strong maternal feelings - hence the improved estates will consolidate her children's future.

10: Cf. Y. p.139. It is appropriate, therefore, that the Mortsauf's sexual relations are also a source of friction. Cf. above p.97 and n.6.

gradual mastery of a responsive but hitherto unexploited environment.<sup>1</sup>  
 Land gained and land cultivated are both values which show the individual's attempt to annex the outside world, to mould it to his requirements.

The theme of the 'domaine', the 'terrain' is, moreover, closely linked to that of *journeys* in the novel: the 'terrain' is the area over which the different trajectories of different wills pass and clash. The individual desire and struggle for self-fulfilment is given material form: 'il semble vraiment que les maladies morales soient des créatures qui ont leurs appétits, leurs instincts, et veulent augmenter l'espace de leur empire comme un propriétaire veut augmenter son domaine.'<sup>2</sup> Hence the struggle of wills between Henriette and Mortsauf is described in terms of a struggle for land: 'Elle s'était d'ailleurs abandonnée à la tyrannie du comte, qui, de guerre lasse, avait regagné le terrain perdu.'<sup>3</sup> Hence Henriette's recommendations to Félix: 'n'y cédez pas un pouce de terrain à ma mère'.<sup>4</sup> Hence, too, lady Dudley's control over Félix is accompanied by her control of his territory: 'Elle se tenait d'ailleurs sur un terrain où je ne pouvais pas la fuir'.<sup>5</sup> She is, therefore, in a position to exhibit 'les plus riches pays de son ardent royaume'.<sup>6</sup>

Unlike Véronique Graslin who sees that the cultivation of land is the material image of the cultivation of the personality - 'Je compris alors, dit-elle au curé, que nos âmes devaient être labourées

1: Cf. Y. pp.132,137,178,187-188.

2: Y. p.79. Another example of the materialism-spiritualism analogies, common in Balzac. Cf. above pp.68-69 and below p.375 and n.2 etc.

3: Y. p.225. Cf. the passage Y. p.198: 'Si je connaissais bien le terrain [...] l'âme s'y plierait;' quoted above p.116.

4: Y. p.163.

5: Y. p.229.

6: Y. p.230. The 'ardent' is revealing enough!

aussi bien que la terre'.<sup>1</sup> - Lady Dudley herself rationalises and distorts the identification: 'Elle [Henriette] sait cultiver les terres, dis-tu? Moi je laisse cette science aux fermiers, j'aime mieux cultiver ton coeur.'<sup>2</sup> Lady Dudley, with her 'amour raisonné, calculateur des Anglaises'<sup>3</sup> is, perhaps, unable to appreciate 'la convergence des valeurs'.<sup>4</sup> She does not appreciate the fact that Clochegourde, like Montégnaç, is 'un symbole d'un état d'âme'.<sup>5</sup>

A number of images, already mentioned in connection with the Journey theme, show stones to be one of the principle obstacles of life's journey: Henriette says of Mortsauf: '[...] je me tue [...] à lui fleurir les chemins qu'il a semés de pierres.'<sup>6</sup> A Parisian mistress will, warns Henriette, be a stone round Félix's neck which threatens to drown him.<sup>7</sup> There is also the threat of reefs.<sup>8</sup> For Henriette rocks are a surmountable but continual obstacle: 'A la montée de chaque rocher, elle avait aperçu de nouveaux déserts à franchir [...].'<sup>9</sup> For Félix, however, such rocks are a challenge

1: Quoted from Le Curé de village, VIII, p.659, by P. Nykrog: La Pensée de Balzac, p.383. This is one of a number of Biblical images to be found in this section.

2: Y. p.272. It is interesting that the young and virginal Félix emphasises his ignorance of methods of cultivation and uses this to further his 'naturalisation' at Clochegourde. Cf. Y. p.66 and G. Jacques: 'Le Lys dans la vallée. Roman éducatif et ésotérique', Les Lettres romanes, 1971 (novembre), p.369. Jacques sees Félix's first lessons in agriculture as one of a number of manifestations of the initiation theme in the novel. Cf. above p.11 n.2, p.64 and n.1 and below pp.285ff.

3: Y. p.282.

4: G. Bachelard: La Terre [...] volonté, p.174. Once again Lady Dudley's irony enables Balzac to place Félix's vision in a different perspective. (Cf. above p.42 and n.1).

5: See P. Nykrog: La Pensée de Balzac, p.382. Nykrog sees Le Curé de village as 'la mise en valeur des ressources de l'âme humaine, pétrifiée et rendue stérile après une chute morale.' (Ibid. p.383).

6: Y. p.87. For references to rocks and stones, cf. above pp.82-83.

7: Y. p.168. Another example of a Biblical expression, now almost a proverb.

8: Y. p.230.

9: Y. p.86.



and a stimulant: 'Chaque fois, je nais à une vie plus étendue et suis comme le voyageur qui, en montant quelque grand rocher, découvre à chaque pas un nouvel horizon.'<sup>1</sup> As before, then, the rock is both frustrating and rewarding. It is a standard, a value, by which Henriette and Félix measure their failures and achievements.

This ambivalence is epitomised in the description of the 'lande':

'Après le dîner, [...] nous allâmes dans une lande où rien ne pouvait venir, le sol en était pierrenx, desséché, sans terre végétale; néanmoins il s'y trouvait quelques chênes et des buissons pleins de sinelles; mais, au lieu d'herbes, s'étendait un tapis de mousses fauves, crépues [...] sur lequel les pieds glissaient.' 2

The almost rootless moss and the slipperiness of the ground suggest that the surface is difficult to penetrate, but not impossible given the survival of fruit-bearing bushes. It is, indeed, the very resistance of the ground which intensifies Félix's urge to penetrate it: 'je voudrais bien avoir à moi cette lande, j'y trouverais peut-être des trésors en la sondant;'.<sup>3</sup> As Bachelard has pointed out: 'la dureté rêvée est une dureté sans cesse attaquée et une dureté qui renouvelle sans cesse ses excitations.'<sup>4</sup> Thus Henriette remarks of her mother: 'elle écrase celui qui s'abandonne et admire la fierté de celui qui lui résiste;'.<sup>5</sup> Félix makes a similar remark about lady Dudley: 'Ma résistance aiguïsa sa passion.'<sup>6</sup>

This leads to a group of imagery in which the values of strength and durability materialised in rocky terrain are transferred to the plants which grow in it: 'Oui, [...] elles [les souffrances] étaient nécessaires comme le sont les miennes pour me faire apprécier

1: Y. p.144. For the varying attitude of Félix and Henriette towards distance, see Chapter 2, pp.82-83.

2: Y. p.77.

3: Ibid.

4: G. Bachelard: La Terre [...] volonté, p.21.

5: Y. p.163.

6: Y. p.228. Cf. above p.125 and n.5.

les saveurs du fruit mûri dans nos roches;'.<sup>1</sup> This links to other more predictable images: 'Ma patience que rien ne lasse, ce fruit de mon enfance [...].'<sup>2</sup> 'mais la santé, ce fruit éclos après tant d'efforts [...].'<sup>3</sup> As before, the slowly and painfully matured plant is the more rewarding: 'Les passions vraies semblent être de belles fleurs qui font d'autant plus de plaisir à voir que les terrains où elles se produisent sont plus ingrats.'<sup>4</sup>

Such images relate in turn to Félix's fascination for the solitary flower which grows in barren ground: he recalls

'une lande chaude, sans végétation, pierreuse, à pans raides, dont les horizons tiennent de ceux du désert, et où je rencontrais une fleur sublime et solitaire, une pulsatille au pavillon de soie violette étalé pour ses étamines d'or; image attendrissante de ma blanche idole, seule dans sa vallée!' 5

When Henriette is dying, the latent hostility of the terrain comes to the surface and spreads desolation round the flower:

"La voilà, pensai-je, cette lande desséchée comme un squelette, éclairée par un jour gris au milieu de laquelle s'élevait un seul buisson de fleurs, [...]  
qui était l'image de cette heure lugubre!" 6

The two images show that while the resistance of a particular object can both attract and repel, the degree of attraction or repulsion conveyed by that object may vary at different stages in the novel. The tension of the image, like the tension of the fibres of the soul, may become more taut or more relaxed.

Just as the rock's strength fortifies Félix and the decay of rock is death, so may the rock's hostility overpower him and petrification is death. Hence the skeletal nature of the 'lande'

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1: Y. p.91.  
2: Y. p.73.  
3: Y. p.243.  
4: Y. p.111.  
5: Y. p.117.  
6: Y. p.295.

above, and the association of stones and death at Henriette's funeral: 'Quand j'entendis rouler les cailloux et le gravier de la terre sur le cercueil, mon courage m'abandonna [...]'.<sup>1</sup> Hence, too, Félix's description of the Listomère circle as '[une] société de corps fossiles où je croyais être dans un cimetière.'<sup>2</sup> What Bachelard has called 'la volonté de méduser'<sup>3</sup> is manifested by Félix's mother: 'son oeil bleu foncé me pétrifia';<sup>4</sup> 'Je fus arrêté par son regard et demeurai comme l'oiseau devant le serpent.'<sup>5</sup> Henriette's resistance is similarly conveyed: 'Je fus pétrifié par un regard animé d'une sainte colère'.<sup>6</sup> As before, frustration of movement is associated with death.

In all of the previous examples, emphasis has been given to substances rather than forms. However, another group of images emphasizes the jagged contours of obstacles and frustrations. One of these has already been mentioned in connection with the Journey theme: 'Si vous saviez [...] avec quelles anxiétés je vous suivrai dans votre route, quelle joie si vous allez droit, quels pleurs si vous vous heurtez à des angles!'<sup>7</sup> An angular path presents the same problems as 'les chemins [...] semés de pierres.'<sup>8</sup> If Mortsaufr strews paths with stones, he is also noted for his 'angular' nature: 'Je connus alors tous les angles de ce caractère intolérable';<sup>9</sup> 'A l'époque de la vie où chez les autres hommes les aspérités se fondent et les angles s'émoussent, le caractère du vieux gentilhomme

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1: Y. p.313. Such a comment is predictable enough.

2: Y. p.18.

3: G. Bachelard: La Terre [...] volonté, p.225.

4: Y. p.15.

5: Y. pp.18-19.

6: Y. p.25. Henriette is 'pétrifiée par la douleur' (Y. p.226) and described as 'une Niobé chrétienne' Y. p.154.

7: Y. p.151.

8: Y. p.87.

9: Y. p.111. Cf. the theme of the caress, below pp.169-170.

était encore devenu plus agressif que par le passé.'<sup>1</sup> Appropriately enough, this deterioration is accompanied by a reduction in movement.<sup>2</sup>

These images are, in turn, related to a further group which centres on the thorn: 'Elle [Mme de Vandenesse] nous piquait sans cesse par les traits d'une ironie mordante, l'arme des gens sans coeur, [...]. Malgré ces barrières épineuses, les sentiments instinctifs tiennent par tant de racines, [...] que la sublime erreur de notre amour se continua [...].'<sup>3</sup> Like the previously mentioned 'gravier', the thorn prevents the growth of 'quelques rameaux d'affection'.<sup>4</sup> In this image, the incongruity of such a botanical conflict between roots and thorns is permissible since it expresses a conflict of values - those of hostility and security - with which thorns and roots are endowed. A later reference to 'savanes épineuses' may seem equally incongruous since the savanna is a treeless, and therefore thornless, desert.<sup>5</sup> Savanna and thorn are linked because they both convey the same affective values of hostility and asperity. They are, therefore, followed by mention of perhaps equally incongruous boulders.<sup>6</sup>

Since, as has been seen, 'toute valeur côtoie son anti-valeur',<sup>7</sup> the thorn may defend as well as wound: Félix wants to surround Henriette with 'une triple haie d'épines, afin de la défendre des orages, de tout contact, de toute blessure',<sup>8</sup> The aggression of the

1: Y. p.194. Cf. Y. p.50: 'sa vie intime devait offrir les aspérités que dénonçaient en lui ses traits anguleux'. Lady Dudley seems to be similarly angular: 'elle était comme une ambassadrice obligée d'arrondir ses phrases et ses coudes' (Y. p.282). Cf. J.-P.Richard: Etudes sur le romantisme, pp.34-38.

2: Cf. Y. p.194.

3: Y. p.21.

4: Ibid.

5: Y. p.86.

6: Ibid.

7: G. Bachelard: La Terre [...] volonté, p.126. Quoted above p.125.

8: Y. p.108.

thorn is both hostile and reassuring. In other images, however, its hostility is unalleviated and, intensified by its religious associations, announces suffering and death: 'Hé! bien, cher ange, [..] les épines se multiplient?';<sup>1</sup> 'Hélas! nous avons tous dans la vie un Golgotha où nous laissons nos trente-trois premières années en recevant un coup de lance au coeur, en sentant sur notre tête la couronne d'épines qui remplace la couronne de roses:'.<sup>2</sup> This image, with its 'coup de lance au coeur' introduces those images which evoke the hostility of metals; these will be examined in the following section.

#### Unyielding substances and forms

##### (b) Metal imagery

Metal is frequently hostile in le Lys dans la vallée as, for instance, in images describing Mme de Lenoncourt - 'En voyant ses yeux d'un bleu dur, [..] je reconnus la race froide d'où procédait ma mère, aussi promptement qu'un minéralogiste reconnaît le fer de Suède'<sup>3</sup> - and lady Dudley, 'une organisation de fer':<sup>4</sup> 'Elle [..] régna d'autant mieux sur la société parisienne, qu'elle eut les qualités nécessaires à ses succès, la main de fer sous le gant de velours [..]'.<sup>5</sup> These images give support to Bachelard's reaction to metal: 'En première impression, le métal, semble-t-il, matérialise

1: Y. p.191.

2: Y. p.312. These further examples of religious imagery no doubt reflect the protagonists' mystical leanings: cf. below p.417 n.3, pp.415-418.

3: Y. p.104. Quoted by J.-P. Richard: Etudes sur le romantisme, p.37.

4: Y. p.230.

5: Y. pp.226-227. This cliché is also to be found in le Père Goriot, II, p.946.



un refus. [...] Par exemple, le métal est la substance même de la froideur [...]. L'hostilité du métal est ainsi sa première valeur imaginaire. Dur, froid, lourd, anguleux, il a tout ce qu'il faut pour être blessant, psychologiquement blessant.<sup>1</sup>

Lady Dudley and Mme de Lenoncourt are also compared to machines. Of the Englishwoman, Félix remarks: 'elle ouvre et ferme son coeur avec la facilité d'une mécanique anglaise.'<sup>2</sup> Of Mme de Lenoncourt he remarks:

'Pour avoir une idée de cette lutte entre une femme sèche, froide, calculée, ambitieuse, et sa fille, pleine de cette onctueuse et fraîche bonté qui ne tarit jamais, il faudrait vous figurer le lys [...] broyé dans les rouages d'une machine en acier poli.'<sup>3</sup>

Hardness, aridity, and a smooth, slippery surface characterise Mme de Lenoncourt as they characterise the 'lande'. The machine, like 'la meule sous laquelle son âme fut sans cesse meurtrie'<sup>4</sup> crushes and destroys.

The machine's destruction of the lily is related to a number of references to contact which wounds. Félix says of his mother: 'il me passait alors des frissons horribles en songeant aux déchirements que me causerait un contact journalier avec elle.'<sup>5</sup> The games of backgammon with Mortsauf - 'ces taquines parties où mon âme était constamment déchirée'<sup>6</sup> - have a similar effect. A scene between Mortsauf and Henriette aggravates 'les déchirements de son âme.'<sup>7</sup> The destruction of the lily is recalled more obviously in Henriette's remark to Félix: 'Si, comme vous le dites, j'ai pu contribuer à

1: G. Bachelard: La Terre [...] volonté, p.238.

2: Y. p.281. It must, however, be admitted that lady Dudley also epitomises an England of which Félix writes: (Y. p.231): 'Elle possède au plus haut degré cette science de l'existence qui bonifie les moindres parcelles de la matérialité, [...], qui fait de la matière une pulpe nourrissante et cotonneuse, [...], qui [...] donne une vie sans opposition, dénuée de spontanéité et qui pour tout dire vous machinise.' As with movement and resistance above, 'les extrêmes se touchent' (La Vieille fille, IV, p.282).

3: Y. p.108. Metal and flowers are similarly incompatible, Y. pp.234-235.

4: Y. p.84.

5: Y. p.6.

6: Y. p.74.

7: I. p.255.

préserver votre coeur du contact qui l'eût défleuri, cette Anglaise ne saurait me haïr.'<sup>1</sup> The vulnerability of Félix and Henriette in a hostile environment is conveyed by a conflict between substances which tear - such as metals - and substances which are torn - such as the soft flesh of flowers and of 'des âmes souffrantes et malades'.<sup>2</sup> In this way, apparently unrelated and faded images may be linked and given new meaning.

Other metal images are, however, less unequivocally hostile: 'elle [Mme de Lenoncourt] ressemble au fer, qui, battu, peut se joindre au fer, mais qui brise par son contact tout ce qui n'a pas sa dureté.'<sup>3</sup> The contact of metal is not, then, totally hostile: it respects its own kind. As was said before of the duchesse: 'elle [...] admire la fierté de celui qui lui résiste;'.<sup>4</sup> As Bachelard pointed out, it is the first impression of metal - and, perhaps, some of the more conventional metal images in le Lys - which convey total hostility.

Just as Félix endows the metallic Mme de Lenoncourt with a respect for metals, so is he, himself 'ce tempérament de fer',<sup>5</sup> attracted by them. He says of lady Dudley:

'Les fortifications d'acier poli élevées autour d'une femme anglaise, encagée dans son ménage par des fils d'or, mais où sa mangeoire et son abreuvoir, où ses bâtons et sa pâture sont des merveilles, lui prêtent d'irrésistibles attraits.' 6

The resistance of metal, like the resistance of the 'lande', is irresistible. Thus Félix may speak of Henriette as 'la femme

1: Y. p.262. Just as the plant conveyed Félix's slow maturation (above p.126) so does it his long and healthy prime of life.

2: Y. p.329. Such remarks continue to emphasise the close links between physical and non-physical worlds. Cf. the notes on illnesses and psychopathology, above p.xiv n.2, p.86 n.4 and below p.409.

3: Y. p.163. Cf. J.-F. Richard: Etudes sur le romantisme, p.38.

4: Y. p.163.

5: Y. p.19.

6: Y. p.227.

enchaînées qui [l']avait séduit malgré ses rudesses.<sup>1</sup>

The presence of both gold and steel in the above description of lady Dudley leads to other images in which the hostility of iron - or rock - is tempered by the brilliance and comparative softness of gold: 'Aucune puissance ne peut briser cette lourde chaîne à laquelle la femme tient par un anneau d'or, emblème de la pureté des épouses.'<sup>2</sup> Henriette is a willing prisoner - like Félix: 'je reconnus sa voix qui pénétra mon âme et la remplit comme un rayon de soleil remplit et dore le cachot d'un prisonnier.'<sup>3</sup> The ambivalence of their position is conveyed by an alloy of substances. A similar ambivalence is present in the following description of the frustration and accumulation of Félix's energy: 'J'étais le trésor de mes vœux brillants, l'or vierge de mes désirs, tout un cœur brûlant conservé sous les glaces de ces Alpes entassées par un continuel hiver.'<sup>4</sup> It is no longer surprising that the ambiguity of the 'lande' is expressed in terms of hidden treasure.

The above images illuminate other references to submerged treasures in le Lys dans la vallée: 'les richesses enfouies';<sup>5</sup> 'les trésors cachés dans votre cœur';<sup>6</sup> 'les abondants trésors d'une foi cachée'.<sup>7</sup> The value of one substance may affect the value of another: 'vous la retrouverez [l...] pure comme un diamant encore

1: Y. p.214. The artificiality and unnaturalness of the Englishwoman is, however, consistently contrasted with the lily which is Henriette.

2: Y. p.85.

3: Y. p.37. Cf. Chapter 2, p.85 and below p.157.

The love-cage theme, has, of course, been popular from as early as Chrétien de Troyes. Cf. G. Durand: Le Décor mythique de 'la Chartreuse de Parme', Corti, 1961, pp.159ff. and V. Brombert: 'Esquisse de la prison heureuse', R.H.L.F., 1971 (mars-avril), pp.247-261. In la Femme de trente ans, Arthur remarks to Julie: 'C'est là [l...], là que prisonnier je vous vis pour la première fois ...' (II, p.721).

4: Y. p.83.

5: Y. p.45.

6: Y. p.193. Such images are, of course, clichés.

7: Y. p.223. The themes of mystery and secrecy in le Lys will be examined in Chapter 5.

enfoui dans les cendres.'<sup>1</sup> the prestige of the diamond purifies the ashes, and the diamond is buried in ashes as originally in the earth. Alternatively, the prestige of one substance offsets the impurity of another: 'puis, quand nos richesses ont passé par le creuset, [...] nous trouvons peu d'or parmi beaucoup de cendres.'<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the inertia of 'les eaux dormantes' emphasizes the energy of the treasure they contain.<sup>3</sup> The alloy, or interplay of affective values, can heighten the substances' separate values:

'Quand ces sortes de scènes arrivent, [...] avec quelle vigueur elles se détachent plus tard sur le fond ténébreux d'une vie agitée! pareilles à des diamants, elles brillent serties par des pensées pleines d'alliages, regrets fondus dans le souvenir des bonheurs évanouis!' 4

In this case, one of the substances of the alloy image is itself an alloy whose impurity offsets the unadulterated brilliance of the diamond.

One of Félix's early childhood images - 'où /s/a vie /lui/ fut figurativement prédite'<sup>5</sup> - prefigures the later significance of alloy images in the narrative: 'Le Palais-Royal était un Eldorado d'amour où le soir les lingots couraient tout monnayés.'<sup>6</sup>

1: Y. p.294.

2: Y. p.315. A common metaphor - with alchemistic resonances.

3: Y. p.86.

4: Y. p.219.

5: Y. p.37.

6: Y. p.17. Such remarks are, of course, inspired by the fact that the Palais-Royal was a centre of prostitution of the period - hence the build-up of money in the evening! This aspect of Félix's desire is itself given an extra dimension when placed alongside Balzac's elaboration of the 'or et plaisir' theme in la Fille aux yeux d'or. For if gold is mobile (cf. J.-P. Richard: Etudes sur le romantisme, pp.122-123) it is, as Félix's word-play suggests, because it is ceaselessly being consumed by an increasingly materialistic and acquisitive society: 'La tournoyante volute de l'or a gagné les sommités. Du fond des soupiraux où commencent ses rigoles, [...], du sein des comptoirs [...] où il se laisse mettre en barres, l'or [...] jaillit vers la gent aristocratique où il va reluire, s'étaler, ruisseler.' (La Fille aux yeux d'or, V, p.265). How interesting then, that Vandenesse, whose family motto is "Ne se vend!" (Y. p.135) should eventually become the brother-in-law of, of all people, the banker du Tillet! The simultaneous elaboration of Félix's vision of the world and what Barbéris would call Balzac's 'mythologie réaliste' demonstrates the different levels of language which can be found in the novel. Cf. for example, the Conclusions to Chapters 1 and 2.

The movement of malleable or molten gold and of the speed at which the gold is produced contrasts with the resistance of the solidified lingot. The image materialises not only desire, but frustrated desire, desire which meets with resistance. The image subsumes the contradictions of everyday experience and maintains them in equilibrium. It thus totalises experience.

References to copper are similarly ambivalent. Félix is both attracted and repelled:

'En un moment je fus suffoqué par la chaleur, ébloui par les lumières, par les tentures rouges, par les ornements dorés, [...] Les cuivres ardents et les éclats bourbonniens de la musique militaire furent étouffés [...]. Emporté comme un fœtu dans ce tourbillon, j'eus un enfantin désir d'être duc d'Angoulême [...].' 1

A moment of minimal resistance to hypnotic metals and sounds is followed by a moment of unprecedented energy: 'je me plongeai dans ce dos [...].'<sup>2</sup> It is perhaps not surprising that 'une de ces soirées chaudes où le ciel prend les teintes du cuivre'<sup>3</sup> should aggravate both their desire and Henriette's decline. Hence, too, the mixture of splendour and foreboding in the valley of Félix's

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1: Y. pp.23-24. Here again language is used in two different but related ways. Félix is referring to a particular kind of music played at a particular moment in time in a particular socio-political situation. This kind of music does, however, also create and reflect a particular emotional temper - that of Félix de Vandenesse at a crucial moment in his personal development and in the elaboration of his private vision. Cf. J. Gaudon: 'Le Rouge et le blanc: notes sur le Lys dans la vallée', esp. p.77.

2: Y. p.25.

3: Y. p.216.



departure: 'En ce moment les champs étaient dépouillés, [..], et celles qui restaient avaient la couleur de la rouille; les pampres étaient brûlés [..].'<sup>1</sup> Decaying metal, like decaying rock, is doubly awe-inspiring, combining both past and present magnificence.<sup>2</sup>

The presence of red, like the presence of gold and the presence of heat, modifies the metal's hostility: 'Les draperies rouges de la grande dame couvraient cette nature de bronze.'<sup>3</sup> Bronze, itself an alloy, is more malleable, more glowing, and more compromising than iron. It is no longer cold and exposed but enveloped in red folds. When the redness and the heat are transferred to the metal itself, its character is transformed: 'mon amour, séraphique en sa présence, devenait loin d'elle mordant et altéré comme un fer rouge.'<sup>4</sup> The metal's hostility is finally exorcised and its latent energy released: 'je l'aimais d'un double amour qui décochait tour à tour les mille flèches du désir, et les perdait au ciel où elles se mouraient dans un éther infranchissable.'<sup>5</sup> Metals can, therefore, materialise the two extremes of passive and active forces, of resistance and movement, of antagonism and desire.

Arrow images form a significant group in le Lys dans la vallée and offer a remarkable combination of movement and resistance. They are associated both with intense movement - 'enfin tout ce que ces naïves créatures ont de plus échevelé, de plus déchiré, des flammes et de triples dards, [..].'<sup>6</sup> - and with intense resistance - '[..] jamais cet homme n'avait manqué de lui décocher une flèche au coeur.

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1: Y. p.154.

2: Cf. the section on sunsets, Chapter 6, pp.313-318.

3: Y. p.285.

4: Y. p.109. Once again, distance exacerbates desire.

5: Ibid.

6: Y. p.121.

Oiseau sublime atteint dans son vol par ce grossier grain de plomb, elle tombe dans un stupide abattement.<sup>1</sup> It is far-reaching but clogging: 'vous souffrez dans les airs comme l'aigle qui plane en emportant au coeur une flèche décochée par quelque pâtre grossier.'<sup>2</sup> Its deadliness links to that of the bullet,<sup>3</sup> and its weight to that of lead.<sup>4</sup>

The arrow is frequently hostile, a mobile thorn, the natural weapon of an 'angular' Mortsauf: 'En ne rencontrant plus de terre molle où planter ses flèches, cet homme était devenu inquiet [...].'<sup>5</sup> It is associated with the speed<sup>6</sup> and viciousness<sup>7</sup> of lady Dudley. It is also associated with death: 'il [Origet] ne soupçonnait pas le dard envenimé de ses paroles, qui m'atteignirent comme une flèche au coeur.'<sup>8</sup> It is, like the thorn, associated with the crucifixion.<sup>9</sup>

However, the arrow is also identified with birth and growth: 'Nous voici devant la crèche d'où s'éveille un divin enfant qui lancera ses flèches au front des arbres nus [...].'<sup>10</sup> The sword, too, is identified with resurrection: 'Oui, les anges veillaient Henriette!

1: Y. p.176. The incongruity of an arrow becoming 'un grossier grain de plomb' betrays the ambivalence of Félix's attitude.

2: Y. p.259.

3: Cf. Y. p.86.

4: See above. References to 'peser' in le Lys are given above p.87.Cf.p.226.

5: Y. pp.239-240. It is appropriate that Mortsauf should also be noted for his lightning glances: cf. Chapter 2, p.97 and below pp.244-245.

6: Cf. Y. p.265.

7: Cf. Y. p.267: 'tes plaisanteries à triple dard'; Y. pp.283-284: 'sa langue à triple dard' and also Y. p.265: 'cet âpre coup d'oeil fut comme un coup de hache au coeur.' For the injurious effects of light and sound, common in Balzac, see Chapter 5.

8: Y. p.288.

9: Cf. Y. p.312. The shape and movement of the lance are sufficiently similar to those of the arrow for Félix's reference to 'un coup de lance au coeur' to be mentioned here.

10: Y. p.91.

Oui, leurs glaives brillèrent au-dessus de ce noble front où  
revenaient les augustes expressions de la vertu [...]'.<sup>1</sup> Thus  
do metals continue to epitomise the ambivalence, if not the  
polyvalence, of material images.

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1: Y. p.305. Although the sword image has been quoted immediately after the oblique reference to Hercules' childhood, the two images are dissimilar in a number of ways. The former is not, of course, of Christian origin, and evokes the beginning not the end of life. The richness of Félix's language derives both from its variety and its coherence. As Balzac writes in Massimilla Doni: 'C'est un et varié.' (IX, p.361). Cf. Chapter 7, p.377 and n.3, pp.407ff.

(2)

Yielding substances and forms(a) Valley and desert imagery

However richly ambivalent the attitude of Félix and Henriette to rocks and metals, the expressions which evoke them inevitably have some of the predictability and superficiality of the substances themselves. As with external land journeys, Félix and Henriette are forced to remain on the surface. Such images do, then, however banal, give a necessary relief or pluridimensional quality to Félix's experiences: just as surface-journeys highlight journeys in depth, so do brittle, unrewarding substances and forms offset those of almost immeasurable complexity.

Much more rewarding than mere rocks and metals is the soft, open, penetrable furrow of the Indre valley, one of whose characteristics has already been shown to be a spaciousness opening upon infinity: 'L'amour infini [..] je le trouvais exprimé par les bois de chênes qui s'avancent entre les vignobles sur des coteaux que la rivière arrondit toujours différemment, et par des horizons estompés qui fuient en se contrariant.'<sup>1</sup> Félix, like his illustrious fellow-artist Frenhofer, is trying to capture the infinite potentiality of nature - 'Oh! nature, nature! qui t'a jamais surprise dans tes fuites!' - by abolishing the line, the carefully defined shape: 'Rigoureusement parlant, le dessin n'existe pas!'<sup>2</sup>

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1: Y. pp.29-30. Cf. Chapter 2, p.119.

2: Le Chef d'oeuvre inconnu, IX, pp. 401, 400. The importance of the visual arts in le Lys, and of Félix's self-appointment as an artist, is examined in Chapter 7, p.416 and n.4 etc.

However, as was also indicated above, the valley also closes in around Félix; if the furrow is deep, it has walls: 'Du côté de Montbazou, l'oeil aperçoit une immense étendue verte, et sur tous les autres points se trouve arrêté par des collines, par des masses d'arbres, par des rochers.'<sup>1</sup> Here rocks do not merely stimulate or even fortify, but are a vital part of the equilibrium of forces prestigiously materialised in the Indre valley. In thus combining and thereby transcending the isolated qualities of movement and resistance, the 'corbeille' and the 'coupe d'émeraude'<sup>2</sup> of the Indre valley are, for the poet, for the 'spécialiste', for whom 'le cercle est dans le point, le point est dans le cercle',<sup>3</sup> the 'miroir concentrique'<sup>4</sup> of the universe. The valley of the Indre for Félix is, like the work of art for Balzac, 'dans un petit espace l'effrayante accumulation d'un monde entier de pensées'.<sup>5</sup>

Just as the valley is a woman, a fiancée,<sup>6</sup> who welcomes and embraces her lover - 'La nature s'était parée comme une femme allant à la rencontre du bienaimé'<sup>7</sup> - so is Henriette 'une terre douce et facile', '[une] terre molle',<sup>8</sup> which welcomes and embraces. If Félix

1: Y. p.67. Cf. Chapter 2, p.119 and J.-F. Richard: Etudes sur le romantisme, pp.132-134.

2: Cf. Y. pp.30, 29. The soft, green goblet contrasts with the gem-encrusted goblet given to Félix by lady Dudley (cf. Y. pp.234-235.)

3: G. Poulet: Les Métamorphoses du cercle, p.224.

4: Cf. G. Poulet: op.cit. pp.224-225, and Suzanne Bérard: 'Une énigme balzacienne: la "Spécialité"', esp. pp. 61-64.

5: Quoted from Des Artistes (O.D.I++, p.140) by G. Poulet: op.cit. p.203. Cf. below p.383(n.3) Cf. also the passage quoted above p.119:

'C'est un vaste pli de terrain bordé par des chênes deux fois centenaires [..]. Cet aspect convenait à la méditation sévère et solennelle à laquelle je voulais me livrer.' (Y. p.314.)

6: Y. p.30. Since Henriette is also a mother, this no doubt illustrates what Durand calls 'cet isomorphisme matriarcal et tellurique' (Les Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire, p.263). Cf. idem: Le Décor mythique de 'la Chartreuse de Parme', p.145: 'La femme est un domaine, la patrie et la nature sont aussi une femme.'

7: Y. p.36. The valley is not infrequently seen as a kind of substitute for the loving partner. Cf. the passage Y. p.72: 'Un soir je la trouvai [..] la vallée comme un lit.' This is perhaps one of 'les ruses du désir pour trouver des compensations.' (Y. intro. p.LXXIII). Cf. below p.320.

8: Y. pp. 64, 239.



descends into the furrows of the valley and the furrow which is the valley, he also penetrates furrows within Henriette: 'Vous souvenez-vous encore aujourd'hui de vos baisers? ils ont dominé ma vie, ils ont sillonné mon âme.'<sup>1</sup> If the valley, the furrow, is within Henriette, she, in her turn, is 'le Lys dans la vallée'. The soul is a valley and the valley has a soul: 'il y eut un gémissement unanime mêlé de pleurs qui semblait faire croire que cette vallée pleurerait son âme.'<sup>2</sup>

Roundness and accessibility are also the characteristics which Félix first savours in Henriette:

'Mes yeux furent tout à coup frappés par de blanches épaules rebondies sur lesquelles j'aurais voulu pouvoir me rouler, [...]. Je [...] fus complètement fasciné par une gorge chastement couverte d'une gaze, mais dont les globes azurés et d'une rondeur parfaite étaient douillettement couchés dans des flots de dentelle.'<sup>3</sup>

A similar emphasis occurs in a later description: 'Son embonpoint ne détruisait ni la grâce de sa taille, ni la rondeur voulue pour que ses formes demeuraient belles quoique développées.'<sup>4</sup> Henriette, like the valley, like the work of art, is a miniature world: 'Son front arrondi [...] paraissait plein d'idées inexprimées.'<sup>5</sup> Or as again Frenhofer would say: 'Toute figure est un monde'.<sup>6</sup>

1: Y. p.317. Cf. Y. pp.168-169.

2: Y. p.313. Cf. the comments on 'âme' in the Introduction to Chapter 1, and the end of Book IX of Orphée for Ballanche's reference to a similar palingenetic moment, both death and rebirth.

3: Y. p.25. In savouring Henriette, Félix is also savouring an apple (Y. pp.26,45). As a result, Henriette is not only another 'fille d'Eve' but one of the succulent round fruits of a valley where 'tout [...] conseille le plus épais et le plus matériel bonheur.' (Alain: Avec Balzac, p.29).

4: Y. p.41. Félix however also claims that Henriette has 'la taille plate' rather than 'la taille ronde' (Y. p.42).

5: Y. p.41.

6: Quoted from Le Chef d'oeuvre inconnu, IX, p.395, by P. Laubriet: Un Catéchisme esthétique /.../, p.93. Laubriet compares the description of Frenhofer - 'un front chauve, bombé, proéminent' - (IX, p.390) to that of Henriette, and, seeing them both as introspective, adds: 'n'oublions pas que Mme de Mortsauf est une disciple de Saint-Martin.' (P. Laubriet: op.cit. p.74). Cf. also Balthazar Claës: 'Son large front offrait d'ailleurs les protubérances dans lesquelles Gall a placé les mondes poétiques.' (IX, p.488).

As has already been shown, Henriette and the valley also share a certain sinuosity,<sup>1</sup> both thus contrasting with an 'angular' Mortsauf: 'Son front plat, trop large pour sa figure qui finissait en pointe, ridé transversalement par marches inégales, [...]. Ses pommettes, saillantes et brunes [...] indiquaient une charpente assez forte pour lui assurer une longue vie.'<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere in his work Balzac notes that 'la grâce veut des formes rondes',<sup>3</sup> and Bachelard, too, comments on the grace and femininity of the curve and the hostility and the masculinity of the angle.<sup>4</sup>

Henriette, like the valley but unlike the 'sol domestique' and the 'sein amer',<sup>5</sup> is not only open but enveloping: 'je me plongeai dans ce dos comme un enfant qui se jette dans le sein de sa mère'.<sup>6</sup> She becomes a cocoon from which Félix may be reborn: 'Une âme nouvelle, une âme aux ailes diaprées avait brisé sa larve.'<sup>7</sup> She remains a cocoon for Félix even after her death: 'Il est des personnes que nous ensevelissons dans la terre, mais il en est de plus particulièrement chéries qui ont eu notre coeur pour linceul, dont le souvenir se mêle chaque jour à nos palpitations;'.<sup>8</sup> The 'lande' bears its treasure; the shroud is a womb.<sup>9</sup>

1: Cf. above p.118. For an examination of roundness and flexuosity in Balzac, with particular reference to Henriette, see J.-P. Richard: Études sur le romantisme, pp.57-65.

2: Y. p.49. Cf. above pp.124-135.

3: In Théorie de la démarche, O.D.II, p.631. Cf. ibid.: 'La vertu des femmes est intimement liée à l'angle droit. Toutes les femmes qui ont fait ce que l'on nomme des fautes sont remarquables par la rondeur exquise de leurs mouvements.' (Also quoted by L.-F.Hoffmann: 'Eros en filigrane: "Le Curé de Tours".', A.B. 1967, p.98.)

4: Cf. G. Bachelard: La Poétique de l'espace, p.138.

5: Y. p.5.

6: Y. p.25.

7: Y. p.26. Cf. above p.89 and n.3 and G. Durand: Les Structures [...], p.362: 'La chrysalide non seulement est symbole d'intimité et de repos, mais en plus promesse de métamorphose, de résurrection: [...]' The theme of the cocoon is also examined by Bachelard, La Terre [...] repos, Chapter V: Le complexe de Jonas.

8: Y. p.322. Cf. above pp.84-85.

9: Or a chrysalis. These are not, however, its primary meaning.

However, if, as Bachelard puts it, 'le sarcophage est un ventre', then 'le ventre est un sarcophage.'<sup>1</sup> The very fertility of the earth may be fatal: 'cet humus de son ancienne vie d'où germaient de nouvelles souffrances lui tomba sur le coeur, et paracheva sa destruction.'<sup>2</sup> Thus Bachelard may also speak of 'ce manichéisme de la maternité qui permet à la terre d'être mère et mort à la fois.'<sup>3</sup> For the valley of the Indre also becomes, perhaps too explicitly, the valley of suffering - 'au lieu de souffrir dans la vallée [...]'<sup>4</sup>, of decay - 'la vallée jaunie dont le deuil répondait [...] aux sentiments qui m'agitaient',<sup>5</sup> and of death: 'cette épouvantable vallée où doivent tenir des millions de peuples devenus poussière [...]'.<sup>6</sup> The Indre valley is transformed into a desert: 'En ce moment les champs étaient dépouillés, les feuilles des peupliers tombaient [...]'.<sup>7</sup> However, it is a desert whose isolation is filled by memory of Henriette: 'Henriette s'éleva de toute sa hauteur dans ce désert où je ne vécus que par son souvenir.'<sup>8</sup>

The valley within and which is Henriette is similarly transformed: 'L'ouragan de l'infidélité, semblable à ces crues de la Loire qui ensablent à jamais une terre, avait passé sur son âme en faisant un désert là où verdoyaient d'opulentes prairies.'<sup>9</sup> However, as with the transformation of the Indre valley itself, the value of the valley

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1: G. Bachelard: La Terre [...] repos, p.179.

2: Y. p.63.

3: G. Bachelard: op.cit. pp.253-254.

4: Y. p.259.

5: Y. p.295.

6: Y. p.237. The whole of this passage has explicitly Biblical resonances. Cf. above p.11 n.2 and p.13 n.2.

7: Y. p.154.

8: Ibid.

9: Y. p.236.

as a desert is a development of the value of the valley as a valley. The desert seems to announce the decay of the valley as a value for Félix, a value which Henriette preserves:

'Non, je n'ai pas aimé, mais j'ai eu soif  
au milieu du désert.  
- Du désert! dit-elle avec amertume en  
montrant la vallée.' 1

However, the fact that the desert is a desolate valley shows that the valley as a value is submerged, not destroyed, in passages where deserts and valleys are contrasted.<sup>2</sup>

This may influence an interpretation of later, purely desert images in le Lys. Since they tend to evoke Félix's affair with lady Dudley, they may suggest that however alienated he becomes from Henriette, he never becomes completely disengaged from her. This would reinforce the idea that the values attached to lady Dudley tend to be debased or modified forms of values previously attached to Henriette.<sup>3</sup> It would also account for the fact that the first, most condensed, and most ambivalent valorisations tend to occur in the earlier stages of the narrative. Thus Bachelard remarks of le Lys: 'Ce roman de rêveries est si bien équilibré que je lis mal la fin du livre. [...] Lisant et relisant Le lys dans la vallée, je n'ai pas dominé mon chagrin de voir que Félix a quitté sa rivière, "leur rivière".'<sup>4</sup> However, if le Lys is a novel of values gained and lost, of 'illusions perdues',<sup>5</sup> and if

1: Y. p.249.

2: Cf. the remarks about the possibly parasitic nature of fire in the section on Fire journeys, above pp.104-108.

3: Cf. above p.42. There does, however, seem to be some confusion here, attributed by K.J. Fleurant to the fact that 'the interior also creates the exterior. It is for this reason that at times one cannot be entirely sure whether the Indre Valley is actually a valley rather than a desert.' (Water and desert in Le Lys dans la vallée', Romance Notes, 1970 (Autumn), p.84).

4: G. Bachelard: La Poétique de la rêverie, pp.64-65.

5: Cf. above pp.31-32.

Félix is to convey the impact of the lady Dudley affair as a period of lost values and lost illusions, this might well be conveyed by the imagery of the novel. In this context values which are lost or degraded may be as revealing as those which are maintained.<sup>1</sup> \*

Sand and desert imagery is, nevertheless, sufficiently frequent and varied not to be examined solely as a development of the valley theme. A number of images do, for example, evoke the softness and smoothness of sandy ground; Henriette confesses to Félix: 'je me tue [...] à lui sabler, à lui fleurir les chemins qu'il a semés de pierres.'<sup>2</sup> Félix wants to lead Henriette 'vers la source d'eau douce, coulant au pied des monts sur un sable pailleté, entre deux rives vertes et fleuries.'<sup>3</sup> He speaks of her 'ton doux et bas qui faisait ressembler ses phrases à des flots menus, murmurés par la mer sur un sable fin.'<sup>4</sup> Sand is not only soothing but eminently penetrable: 'si l'occasion lui interdit la parole et le regard, elle [la femme française] emploiera le sable sur lequel s'imprime son pied pour y écrire une pensée; [...] enfin elle plie le monde à son amour.'<sup>5</sup>

However, sand is not invariably lush and inviting but arid and hostile. It parches and inflames: 'elle [lady Dudley] était toujours insatiable comme une terre sablonneuse.'<sup>6</sup> Like other previously

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1: Cf. the remark of P. Larthomas, quoted by A. Abbou: 'Problèmes et méthode d'une stylistique des images', p.216: '"l'effet stylistique manqué est souvent plus révélateur que la trouvaille admirable qui laisse parfois difficilement percer le mystère de la réussite."'

2: Y. p.87.

3: Y. p.91. The 'rives vertes et fleuries' contrast with the 'rives desséchées' caused by the volcano's lava (Y. p.128) - another occasion on which a valley is transformed into a desert.

4: Y. p.133.

5: Y. p.281. For another example of impressionable sand, see below p.171(n.3).

6: Y. p.284. Cf. Bachelard's debatable comment (La Terre [...] volonté, p.129 n.1): 'Une âme un peu sèche souhaite le sable.'



mentioned substances, sand frustrates and wounds: 'Hé! bien, cher ange, [...] la chaîne s'est alourdie, les sables se sont enflammés, les épines se multiplient?'<sup>1</sup> This sentence presents a remarkable synthesis of at first sight incongruous but affectively related substances and forms.

When associated with the Journey theme, images of sands and deserts, like those of rocks, are equally ambivalent. The hostility and aridity of the 'lande' is akin to that of the desert: 'le sol en était pierreux, desséché, sans terre végétale;'.<sup>2</sup> If stones are arid then deserts are stony: 'A la montée de chaque rocher, elle avait aperçu de nouveaux déserts à franchir'.<sup>3</sup> The desert, unlike the valley, offers no resistance; it does not envelop or enfold. It is, therefore, associated with the dissipation of energy, fatigue and death. Once again, perhaps, the value of the desert is derivative, dependent on those of the 'lande' and the valley: 'je connaissais métaphysiquement la vie dans ses hauteurs au moment où j'allais apercevoir les difficultés tortueuses de ses défilés et les chemins sablonneux de ses plaines.'<sup>4</sup> The substances and contours of sands and deserts seem too shifting, too amorphous, and too empty, to materialise energy, whether mobilised in the arrow or condensed in stone.<sup>5</sup>

The hostility of the 'lande' was not, however, total: 'mais, au lieu d'herbes, s'étendait un tapis de mousses fauves [...].'<sup>6</sup> The

1: Y. p.191.

2: Y. p.77.

3: Y. p.86.

4: Y. p.19. Cf. other more banal references to desert Y. pp.26,96,326.

In none of these instances is the emphasis on the substance or the form of the desert.

5: It is notable that in Une passion dans le désert Balzac tends to describe the desert in terms of other substances (e.g. VII, pp.1073-1074) and comments (p. 1073): 'Le ciel avait un éclat oriental d'une pureté désespérante, car il ne laisse alors rien désirer à l'imagination.' Cf. J.-P. Richard: Etudes sur le romantisme, pp.118-120.

6: Y. p.77.

openness of 's'étendre' is later extended: 'Soit une lande chaude [..] dont les horizons tiennent de ceux du désert [..].'<sup>1</sup> The vast expanses of the desert express the challenges as well as the inaccessibility of the infinite:

'Aussi sa [Lady Dudley] passion est-elle tout africaine; son désir va comme le tourbillon du désert, le désert dont l'ardente immensité se peint dans ses yeux, le désert plein d'azur et d'amour, avec son ciel inaltérable, avec ses fraîches nuits étoilées.'<sup>2</sup>

The vast expanses of the desert need not discourage, for they can be crossed with the swiftness of Félix's Arabian horse, 'l'hirondelle du désert.'<sup>3</sup>

The desert is, then, alternately exhilarating and frustrating: 'Quand Agar a crié dans le désert, un ange a fait jaillir [..] une source pure; mais à moi, quand la source limpide [..] est venue couler autour de Clochegourde, elle n'a versé que des eaux amères.'<sup>4</sup>

The rewards of the desert are meagre but substantial, substantial but meagre, both 'miette' and 'manne': 'L'abstinence a des épuisements mortels que préviennent quelques miettes tombées une à une de ce ciel qui, de Dan à Sahara, donne la manne au voyageur.'<sup>5</sup> The final paradox is when Henriette's life becomes a desert through its very sunlessness: 'Que vais-je devenir? me dit-elle en apercevant pour la première fois son désert sans soleil.'<sup>6</sup>

1: Y. p.117.

2: Y. p.230.

3: Y. p.236. Cf. above p.79.

4: Y. p.261.

5: Y. p.122. In none of these images is the emphasis on the substance or the form of the desert.

6: Y. p.222. The latter part of this quotation may be an example of the 'style indirecte libre'. Cf. also below p.318 and p.336 n.6.

The time has, however, perhaps come when attempts to explicate such images are in danger of making Félix's narrative seem falsely one-dimensional. For unlike rocks and metals, valleys and deserts are often essentially elusive. To explain here is, to a certain extent, to destroy, for the paradox, like the afore-mentioned fibres, is essentially a tense, dynamic form, whose disparate elements must remain unresolved if they are to survive. Hence justice cannot be rendered to Félix's narrative without leaving intact some of its silences, its enigmas and its understatements. Thus Leo Bersani notes that while Félix and Henriette

'attempt to re-create their love by identifying it with a system of rich metaphorical inventiveness, Le Lys simultaneously demonstrates the approximative nature of language. Far from transforming feelings by their powerful suggestiveness, Henriette's words often drily and inadequately point to those feelings as inexpressible and unchangeable. The pessimism of the litote qualifies the exuberance of metaphor.'<sup>1</sup>

In this respect, too, the themes of the novel receive magnificent confirmation from the narrative form, itself a paradox of deviousness and explicitness: 'The epistolary form conveniently makes possible a limitless complicity with character as well as limitless duplicity about character.'<sup>2</sup>

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- 1: Balzac to Beckett, p.74. Among examples of litotes in le Lys Bersani quotes Henriette's reaction to news of Félix's imminent departure (Y. p.147): '- Je n'ai pas compté les jours, [...].'  
Superficially prosaic and flat, perhaps, .... it all depends on the context - and the intonation. Cf. above p.21 n.1 and below p.284.
- 2: L. Bersani: op.cit., p.75. Cf. below p.426.

Yielding substances and forms

(b) Composite land imagery

It has been seen from the sections on unyielding substances and forms that, when different rocks or metals are combined, one of the rocks or metals involved, or indeed the alloy itself, has a less hostile and, therefore, more dynamic identity than its partner.<sup>1</sup> A similar dynamism is apparent when rocks and metals are found with other elements: the combined substance glows or resounds, melts or explodes. As was noted in the Introduction to this Chapter, form is becoming movement once more. Since this dynamism, whether aggressive or co-operative, shows an active response, an activity which responds to man's activity, these images will be examined under the heading of yielding substances and forms.

Substances and sounds

A small group of images evokes the resonant quality of material substances. They are associated with moments of Félix's experience which makes a profound or lasting impression:

'Aller gauler les marronniers de Madeleine, entendre tomber les fruits que leur bogue faisait rebondir sur le velours mat et sec des terrains ingrats où vient le châtaignier; [...] je tressaille encore aujourd'hui en me rappelant le bruit que faisait chaque hottée de marrons, roulant sur la bourre jaunâtre mêlée de terre qui servait de plancher.'<sup>2</sup>

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- 1: It is, of course, this very contrast which guarantees its separate identity. A similar process of creation through antagonism will be noted between light and darkness, sound and silence, in Chapter 5.  
2: Y. p.128. Cf. Internal sound journeys, above pp.95-96.

If the resonance of infertile ground is associated with nostalgia - contrasting with the fertility of the fruit and the preceding wine harvest -, it is hardly surprising that 'des mousses ardentes et sonores',<sup>1</sup> recalling perhaps the mossy 'lande' with its submerged treasure, deepens Félix's appreciation of '[les] majestueux spectacles où va maintenant fouiller [s]a mémoire.'<sup>2</sup>

If the moments perpetuated by the echo have a certain splendour, this splendour is often sombre, even sinister. Echoing gloom is heightened by autumn's decay: 'Elle me dit le soir, en nous promenant dans les feuilles sèches de l'automne qui résonnaient sous nos pas: - La douleur est infinie, la joie a des limites.'<sup>3</sup> The earlier foreshadowing of the hollow vault seems to be realised,<sup>4</sup> and the resonance of the dead leaves reproduces and multiplies death and despair to infinity.

Nowhere, indeed, are the fateful effects of the echo more striking than when they are endowed with almost a special dimension - in the 'abîme':

'Aussitôt, comme un enfant qui, descendu dans un abîme en jouant, [...], voit avec angoisse qu'il lui sera impossible de remonter, n'aperçoit plus le sol humain qu'à une distance infranchissable, se sent tout seul, à la nuit, et entend les hurlements sauvages, je compris que nous étions séparés par tout un monde. Il se fit dans nos deux âmes une grande clameur et comme un retentissement du lugubre Consummatum est! [...].'<sup>5</sup>

This specialisation of the echo seems to be confirmed in Henriette's most agonising period of self-doubt: 'Nous restâmes pétrifiés tous

1: Y. p.118.

2: Ibid.

3: Y. p.146.

4: Cf. above p.86.

5: Y. p.274. Hostile sounds do, therefore, in the 'abîme', create both distance and space. Cf. above p.94(n.3) and below p.356.



deux, écoutant le son de cette parole comme celui d'une pierre jetée dans un gouffre.<sup>1</sup>

#### Substances and light

A number of images in le Lys dans la vallée evoke the incandescence of material substances. Objects such as precious stones, fabrics, and flowers are often endowed with an aura of energy which radiates into their environment. The vibrant energy of the bouquets is, for example, intensified by their luminescence: 'ce poème de fleurs lumineuses qui bourdonnait incessamment ses mélodies au coeur, en y caressant des voluptés cachées [...]'.<sup>2</sup> The impact of the 'lames luisantes et rayées' of the 'flouve odorante'<sup>3</sup> is heightened by their luminescence as is that of the angels' shining swords.<sup>4</sup> In each case radiance suggests the substance's own participation in the projection of its own energy. This is particularly evident in the case of the poppy, 'déployant les flammèches de son incendie [...] et dominant la pluie incessante du pollen, beau nuage qui papillote dans l'air en reflétant le jour dans ses mille parcelles luisantes!'<sup>5</sup> The poppy radiates not only its own but also reflected light: it multiplies its own energies, its own power.

As has been seen from the above references to gold,<sup>6</sup> buildings acquire a new prestige when illuminated: 'elle avait habité comme un palais sombre en craignant d'entrer en de somptueux appartements

1: Y. p.251. Cf. also p.298 n.1.

2: Y. p.122.

3: Y. pp.120, 119. The effect of these 'lames luisantes' is as swift and as potent as the arrow.

4: Cf. Y. p.305.

5: Y. p.121. The 'parcelles luisantes' suggest particles of gold or silver. Cf. the anemone's 'étamines d'or' (Y. p.117).

6: Cf. the passage Y. p.37 quoted above p.139.

où brillèrent des lumières [...]'.<sup>1</sup> Fabrics which do not embody or reflect light emphasise a hostile environment: 'Sa mort presque subite jeta des crêpes sur les joies de cette union, [...]'.<sup>2</sup> They stifle intimacy: 'Quoique lady Dudley soit une variété de l'espèce, j'enveloppai toutes les Anglaises dans les crêpes de mon arrêt.'<sup>3</sup>

Above all, however, it is the precious stone which condenses and radiates light. The ability of the precious stone to concentrate energy, noted by Bachelard,<sup>4</sup> is intensified in Félix's description of Clochegourde by the compression of many jewels into a confined space: 'Trapesle [...] est une massive argenterie, mais Clochegourde est un écrin de pierres précieuses!'<sup>5</sup> Unlike Azay, 'diamant taillé à facettes, serti par l'Indre',<sup>6</sup> Clochegourde is not merely a single jewel, but a jewel of jewels. It is notable that the 'écrin de pierres précieuses', like the 'lande' with its treasure, should be 'un paradis terrestre.'<sup>7</sup> As Lucienne Frappier-Mazur points out, precious stones are among those phenomena which demonstrate "l'isomorphisme du céleste et du lumineux".<sup>8</sup> Thus jewel and star are also linked: 'Les gemmes sont les étoiles de la terre. Les étoiles sont les diamants du ciel.'<sup>9</sup>

Another reference to the precious stone also emphasises its ability to concentrate and radiate energy: 'Henriette était l'oiseau chantant [...] au bord du Gange, et comme une pierrerie vivante, volant de branche en branche parmi les roses d'un immense volkaméria toujours fleuri.'<sup>10</sup> Like Clochegourde, 'ouvrage comme une fleur'<sup>11</sup> and 'écrin

1: Y. p.176. Cf. above pp.86, 102.

2: Y. p.62. A cliché.

3: Y. p.291. Silks and other luminous fabrics are discussed below pp.171-172.

4: Cf. *La Terre [...] volonté*, pp.299, 308.

5: Y. p.70.

6: Y. p.32.

7: Y. p.70.

8: Quoted from G. Durand: *Les Structures [...]*, p.163, by Lucienne Frappier-Mazur: 'Balzac et les images "reparaissantes" [...]', p.48.

9: G. Bachelard: *op.cit.* p.291.

10: Y. pp.214-215.

11: Y. p.36.

de pierres', Henriette is both flower and jewel. The jewel, like the flower, is a miniature world. Here the activation of the jewel is complete and it has the mobility of the bird. The jewel materialises not merely the responsiveness of the physical world: it has its own impetus, demands its own response. It is materialised mobility.

As Bachelard has pointed out, 'les pierreries sont des flammes multicolores, des flammes mouvantes, des flammes volantes.'<sup>1</sup> Nowhere, perhaps, is this more evident in le Lys than in Félix's description of his affair with lady Dudley:

'mais ce lien [...] laisse dans l'âme une ineffaçable empreinte, il y met un dégoût anticipé pour les amours frais, candides, riches de fleurs seulement, et qui ne savent pas servir d'alcool dans des coupes d'or curieusement ciselées, enrichies de pierres où brillent d'inépuisables feux.'<sup>2</sup>

The jewels are charged with the energy of 'ceux qui aiment tant à briller, à se mouvoir [...].'<sup>3</sup> It is, however, an energy which consumes and destroys, unimpeded by the resistance of the cage. An unexpected antagonism is apparent between the precious stone and the flower: the values of different substances do not converge on lady Dudley as they do on Henriette, on Clochegourde. Unlike Henriette she does not combine the flower and the jewel or the star and become 'cette fleur sidérale'.<sup>4</sup>

Light-giving treasures and jewels are numerous in le Lys dans la vallée. Henriette herself is a treasure,<sup>5</sup> possessing treasures,<sup>6</sup>

1: La Terre [...] volonté, p.312.

2: Y. pp.234-235.

3: Y. p.266.

4: Y. p.65. The reason being "d'inépuisables feux": i.e. sensuality or eroticism. Cf. 'l'amour savant' of Baudelaire.

5: Cf. Y. p.46.

6: Cf. Y. pp.41, 212.

which are transferred to Félix.<sup>1</sup> It is the brilliance of such treasures which helps to preserve them intact: 'ces sortes de scènes [...] pareilles à des diamants [...] brillent serties par des pensées pleines d'alliages [...]';<sup>2</sup> 'éternel joyau dont les feux brillent aux jours difficiles.'<sup>3</sup> Incandescence, like resonance, indicates the prestige and the permanence of the values with which certain substances and thereby certain moments are endowed. As has been seen, gold and diamonds preserve their integrity in rocks and ashes.<sup>4</sup> For values are immaculately preserved in substances which combine resistance with brilliance and translucence: thus Félix's love for Henriette will be 'pris dans la religion comme une image d'argent dans du cristal'.<sup>5</sup>

#### Substances and fire

It is evident from the previous section that fire, like light, is part of the incandescence of material substances: 'éternel joyau dont les feux brillent aux jours difficiles.'<sup>6</sup> If the primary quality of fiery as of illuminated substances is here that of latent or irrepressible energy, the activation of fire and redness often seems even more violent and more powerful than that of light. Thus, if treasures both shine and burn, their burning does, predictably enough, betray the presence of desire, frustrated sexual desire:

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1: Cf. Y. pp.144, 174. Such references are, of course, clichés.

2: Y. p.129.

3: Y. p.86.

4: Cf. Y. pp.83, 294, for gold and diamonds respectively.

5: Y. p.101.

6: Y. p.86.

'J'étalai le trésor de mes vœux brillants, [ ] tout un cœur brûlant conservé sous les glaces [ ]'.<sup>1</sup> Hence, when the young, feverish, and virginal Félix returns to Clochegourde for the second time, earth, too, burns rather than glows: 'les terres rouges de la vigne brûlaient'.<sup>2</sup> This is undoubtedly the scene that Félix later recalls as he leaves at the end of the summer: '[ ] je contemplai la vallée [ ]: ne verdoyait-elle pas, ne flambait-elle pas alors comme flambaient, comme verdoyaient mes désirs et mes espérances?'<sup>3</sup>

Given the highly sexualised character of burning rather than glowing substances, it is appropriate that Félix's bouquets should include 'quelques jeunes pousses de chêne aux feuilles magnifiquement colorées et lustrées;' and 'des flammes et de triple dards'.<sup>4</sup> After previously referring to his love 'mordant et altéré comme un fer rouge' and to 'les mille flèches du désir',<sup>5</sup> the union of substance, form, and fire does, therefore, culminate in the thrust of the brilliant red poppy. No wonder, then, that Félix should later see the bouquets as '[des] irruptions volcaniques':<sup>6</sup> the explosion of the poppy, addressed to Henriette, is consummated with lady Dudley.

Inflamed desire is, however, also a desire which consumes. From the 'tentures rouges' and the 'cuivres ardents' of the Ball<sup>7</sup> to the 'sables [ ] enflammés' which torture Henriette,<sup>8</sup> inflamed substances inflict some of the torture associated with lady Dudley's 'ardent royaume'.<sup>9</sup> Such substances, moreover, threaten not only those

1: Y. p.83. Cf. Y. p.235.

2: Y. p.65.

3: Y. p.154.

4: Y. pp.120, 121. Cf. above p.142(n.6).

5: Y. p.109. Cf. above p.142(n.4).

6: Y. p.272.

7: Y. p.23. Cf. above p.141.

8: Y. p.191. Cf. above p.152(n.1).

9: Y. p.230. Cf. above p.130(n.6).



with whom they come in contact but also themselves. If substances endowed with light and fire are endowed with life and energy, those endowed only with fire become, like the volcano, extinct. Hence the anguish associated with aridity, from the 'rives desséchées' of the volcano<sup>1</sup> to 'cette lande desséchée comme un squelette'.<sup>2</sup> Hence, too, as Félix predicted, fire eventually parches the source of Henriette's life; her eyes become glazed and dim: 'Mourir! dis-je effrayé en la regardant et revoyant le feu sec de ses yeux luisants dont on ne peut donner une idée [...] qu'en comparant ses yeux à des globes d'argent bruni.'<sup>3</sup> Fire is an energy which consummates its own destruction, leaving 'peu d'or parmi beaucoup de cendres.'<sup>4</sup> The last vestige of its power burn out: 'L'aspect de cette figure fondue, à peine animée par un sourire faible, éteignit les flammes sorties des cendres.'<sup>5</sup>

#### Substances and water

If material substances in le Lys dans la vallée are endowed with the qualities of resonance and incandescence, they are also endowed with the ability to freeze and to melt. References to ice and snow occur very early in Félix's narrative: 'A quel talent [...] devons-nous un jour [...] la peinture des tourments subis en silence par les

1: Y. p.128. Cf. of course René for a similar evocation of 'le feu des passions', a common enough theme in love poetry. See also the episode La Sylphide in Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe.

2: Y. p.295.

3: Y. pp.276-277. Cf. Y. p.41.

4: Y. p.315.

5: Y. p.220.

âmes [...] dont les fleurs sont atteintes par la gelée au moment où elles s'ouvrent?'<sup>1</sup> After rejection at school follows rejection at home, he observes: 'Une seconde tombée de neige retarda la floraison des germes semés en mon âme.'<sup>2</sup> Snow and ice do, then, stifle but do not destroy growth. Movement is combined with resistance and Félix's energies are repressed but intact.

It follows that the resistance of Félix's mother is frequently described as cool indifference: 'la froideur de ma mère';<sup>3</sup> 'la froideur de ses façons réprima l'essor de mes tendresses.'<sup>4</sup> Cold and hostility go hand in hand throughout Félix's narrative, from that of Mme de Lenoncourt in whom he recognises 'la race froide d'où procédait [s]/a mère',<sup>5</sup> of Mortsauf's 'front neigeux',<sup>6</sup> and lady Dudley's 'habitude glaciale',<sup>7</sup> to 'la silencieuse froideur de la mort'<sup>8</sup> when Henriette withdraws her love from him.

The antagonism of cold is, however, not total. As noted above, it preserves as well as frustrates: 'J'étais [...] tout un coeur brûlant conservé sous les glaces de ces Alpes entassées par un continuel hiver.'<sup>9</sup> It is similarly associated with the virginity of Madeleine: 'elle est pure comme la neige au plus haut sommet des Alpes'.<sup>10</sup> In the following description of Henriette, the snow while remaining pure, loses some of its rigidity: 'Elle fit quelques

1: Y. p.5.

2: Y. p.9.

3: Y. p.5.

4: Y. p.20.

5: Y. p.104. Cf. above pp.136-137 and Y. p.84: 'un ordre glacial [...] un baiser froidement reçu.' Numerous other references to the hostility of cold and ice may be found in le Lys. Cf. also below p.336 esp.n.2.

6: Y. p.71.

7: Y. p.281. Lady Dudley thus unites extremes of both heat and cold. Materialistic England itself is probably cold, judging by the reference to 'ce froid canal Saint-Georges' (Y. p.227).

8: Y. p.252. Cf. Y. p.242: 'le vent glacé de la mort'. These are, of course, clichés.

9: Y. p.83. Cf. above p.139(n.4).

10: Y. p.244.

pas légers, comme [...] pour livrer au zéphyr ses ruches de tulle  
 neigeuses [...];'.<sup>1</sup> Thus although the white flowers of the bouquets  
 might indicate the second of the two innocences - 'celle qui sait  
 tout',<sup>2</sup> - the thrust and the mobility of 'les pyramides neigeuses du  
 paturin des champs',<sup>3</sup> suggest that the virgin force is about to be  
 released. It follows that although Félix is, as Mortsauf remarks,  
 'écrasé par l'avalanche des idées',<sup>4</sup> his frozen energies finally  
 melt in the presence of Henriette: 'Elle me regarda curieusement,  
 et je sentis qu'en ce moment il se fondait bien des glaces entre  
 nous.'<sup>5</sup> For Henriette is associated with rich, liquid milk and 'la  
 chaleur de ce sang que j'avais aspiré'.<sup>6</sup>

A number of other images, while not combining the qualities of  
 rock and water in a single substance, offer a similar union of  
 opposing values. Very early in his narrative Félix observes: 'Si  
 dans quelques âmes les sentiments méconnus tournent en haine, dans  
 la mienne ils se concentrèrent et s'y creusèrent un lit d'où, plus  
 tard, ils jaillirent sur ma vie.'<sup>7</sup> The walls of the river-bed offer  
 the necessary resistance to the movement of the water in order to  
 preserve and accumulate its energy. This combination of water and  
 rock recurs at intervals throughout le Lys: 'Les sentiments courent  
 toujours vifs dans ces ruisseaux creusés qui retiennent les eaux [...].'<sup>8</sup>  
 The crater of the volcano has the same effect: 'n'est-il pas des âmes  
 où la passion contenue par d'insurmontables difficultés a rempli

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1: Y. p.191.

2: Y. p.115.

3: Y. p.120.

4: Y. p.51.

5: Ibid. Again a cliché at base.

6: Y. p.26.

7: Y. p.6.

8: Y. p.223.

d'une eau pure le cratère du volcan?'<sup>1</sup>

Such barriers prevent dissipation and form a reservoir of energy: '⌈...⌋ l'amour veut plus de tranquillité: je me le suis figuré comme un lac immense où la sonde ne trouve point de fond, où les tempêtes peuvent être violentes, mais rares et contenues en des bornes infranchissables, ⌈...⌋.'<sup>2</sup> Sometimes, however, the movement of the water is more powerful than the resistance of its walls: 'Ce fut pour moi, je n'ose dire pour elle, comme ces fissures par lesquelles jaillissent les eaux contenues dans un barrage invincible, ⌈...⌋.'<sup>3</sup> The 'sillon', the 'pli', and the 'vallon' do, then recur in different guises throughout the narrative, and, when combined with the force of deep and rushing waters, express variations in the tension existing between movement and resistance, between 'deux forces égales en contention'.<sup>4</sup>

In a group of images which centres on the sea-shore and on the sea - or river - bed, the conflict between rock and water does, however, become raw and exposed: 'J'ai d'imposants souvenirs ensevelis au fond de mon âme comme ces productions marines qui s'aperçoivent par les temps calmes, et que les flots de la tempête jettent par fragments sur la grève.'<sup>5</sup> Félix's memories from being safely submerged are suddenly and violently disgorged. Other references to river-beds also evoke a lack or loss of depth, the re-emergence of obstacles. Thus Félix speaks of 'ces moments où

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1: Y. p.128.

2: Y. p.266.

3: Y. p.122.

4: Catéchisme social, O.D.III, p.691. Cf. above p.117 and below p.195.

5: Y. pp.3-4.

la vie s'entrouvre et laisse voir l'aride gravier de son lit';<sup>1</sup>  
 and of 'ce moment affreux où [il] apercevait le lit pierreux  
 du torrent sous ses eaux diminuées'.<sup>2</sup> Just as the stones of Félix's  
 'sol domestique' prevent him from taking root, so does gravel uproot  
 Henriette: 'Ainsi, des orages de plus en plus troubles et chargés  
 de graviers déracinaient par leurs vagues après les espérances le  
 plus profondément plantées dans son coeur.'<sup>3</sup> If the river can  
 absorb boulders and disarm their hostility, stones can make water  
 dangerous and destructive.

However, moments of harmony occur and even the gravel softens  
 in Félix's initial description of the valley: 'Ca et là, s'élèvent  
 des masses de gravier sur lesquelles l'eau se brise en y formant  
 des franges où reluit le soleil.'<sup>4</sup> A balance has been achieved  
 between the water and the stone: the ebb and flow of the waves  
 is matched by the undulations of the shingle. Once again it is  
 serpentine movements and forms which represent an equilibrium of  
 forces, here between the movement of water and the resistance of  
 rock.

#### Substances and plants

A considerable number of references to plants and flowers in  
le Lys dans la vallée place particular emphasis on the manner of

1: Y. p.75.

2: Y. p.286.

3: Y. p.225.

4: Y. p.30. The intervention of light completes the harmony. For an  
 examination of the mobility and the rhythms of descriptions of nature  
 in Balzac, including those of 'la tranquille Touraine', see  
 J.-P.Richard: Etudes sur le romantisme, pp.120-121.



their growing and on their formation. The plant epitomises for Félix the dual qualities of substances and forms, 'cette dialectique d'invitation et d'exclusion':<sup>1</sup> 'cette fleur, incessamment fermée dans la froide atmosphère de son ménage, s'épanouit à mes regards, et pour moi seul;'.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly contrasting qualities are suggested by the form of the flower itself, the open petals conveying accessibility, the central stamen bold, even defiant self-projection - 'chaque calice plein d'étamines amoureuses.'<sup>3</sup> Hence Félix's fascination for 'une pulsatille au pavillon de soie violette étalé pour ses étamines d'or; image attendrissante de ma blanche idole, seule dans sa vallée!'<sup>4</sup> If the flower is a miniature world, it is partly because it maintains opposing qualities in harmony: the 'pavillon de soie' indeed recalls the soft, accessible valley, whereas the stamens prefigure the 'lames luisantes' of the 'flouve odorante'<sup>5</sup> and the numerous manifestations of projected aggression in the bouquets: 'les pyramides neigeuses [...], les panaches effilés [...], les plumes de la linaigrette, [...].'<sup>6</sup> culminating in the description of the poppy.

Just as the flower itself subsumes the contradictions of the physical world, so do the bouquets form a larger, more complete harmony. The aggressiveness noted above is balanced by the soft and flexuous forms of the tendrils: 'les vrilles de la vigne, les brins tortueux des chèvrefeuilles'.<sup>7</sup> They are, as Félix observes

1: Quoted from G. Bachelard: *La Terre [...]* volonté, p.18, in the Introduction to this Chapter, above p.125.

2: *Y.* pp.213-214.

3: *Y.* p.119.

4: *Y.* p.117.

5: *Y.* pp.120, 119.

6: *Y.* p.120. All this is Freudian enough.

7: *Y.* p.121.

later 'la grâce unie à la force, la tendresse et ses molles lenteurs, opposées aux irrptions volcaniques de la fougue;'.<sup>1</sup> It is, therefore, hardly surprising that Bachelard should note 'le juste équilibre des mots féminins et masculins' in the bouquet passage.<sup>2</sup>

Other images in le Lys emphasise the penetrable, enveloping nature of plants: 'elle avait paré ses ruines d'un épais manteau de lierre.'<sup>3</sup> Just so is Henriette enveloped in Nature: 'La nature était le manteau sous lequel s'abritaient ses pensées.'<sup>4</sup> Such a 'manteau de lierre' may, however, suffocate and destroy:

'[...] j'embrassai dans leurs racines et dans leurs rameaux ces difficultés qui, semblables à des lianes, étouffaient, comprimaient les mouvements et la respiration de cette famille, emmaillotaient de fils légers mais multipliés la marche du ménage, et retardaient l'accroissement de la fortune, [...].'<sup>5</sup>

Just as the walls of the prison frustrate whereas those of the valley, the furrow, and the crater reassure, so may roots and tendrils either inhibit or embrace. As has been seen on so many occasions, 'toute valeur côtoie son anti-valeur'.<sup>6</sup> Roots and branches, previously indicative of life and growth, have become a prison.

The delicate, finely-moulded contours of plants and flowers are evoked in a number of images. There are frequent references to 'dentelle', whether 'les folles dentelles du daucus'<sup>7</sup> or 'ces lignes de peupliers qui parent de leurs dentelles mobiles ce val d'amour'.<sup>8</sup> A similarity of form and contour is perceptible between delicately

1: Y. p.272.

2: G. Bachelard: La Poétique de la rêverie, p.37.

3: Y. p.64.

4: Y. p.180.

5: Y. p.112. The prime factor here is, however, 'ces difficultés'.

6: G. Bachelard: La Terre /.../ volonté, p.126.

7: Y. p.120.

8: Y. p.29. The shape of the poplar recalls perhaps that of the arrow and of the poppy.

crenelated castles - 'la dentelle des toits du château d'Azay',<sup>1</sup> and Clochegourde, 'ouvragé comme une fleur',<sup>2</sup> - and the delicacy of Madeleine and Henriette. Madeleine, 'à la taille de peuplier', is both plant and statuette.<sup>3</sup> Henriette, also the flower, is enveloped in 'des flots de dentelle.'<sup>4</sup> These parallels are continued in the 'deux grands vases en porcelaine blanche à filets d'or',<sup>5</sup> which Félix uses for his bouquets: 'Autour du col évasé de la porcelaine [...].'<sup>6</sup> The shape of the vases corresponds to the 'coupe d'émeraude' of the valley. It is interesting, therefore, that Henriette removes the vases when she wants to be more inaccessible to Félix.<sup>7</sup>

A number of references to 'les caresses des plantes',<sup>8</sup> emphasise their softness, their sensitivity to the touch. Félix embraces the lily: 'Belle fleur humaine que caresse ma pensée [...].'<sup>9</sup> and the flowers return his embrace: 'ce poème de fleurs lumineuses qui bourdonnait incessamment ses mélodies au coeur, en y caressant des voluptés cachées, [...].'<sup>10</sup> The caress smoothes away the sharp contours of material substances, of the 'angular' Mortsauf: 'Quand j'eus pour ainsi dire palpé ses défauts, je m'y pliai avec autant de souplesse qu'en mettait la comtesse à les caresser.'<sup>11</sup> In the joint caresses of Félix and the plants the outside world becomes malleable and responsive, its hostility exorcised. In a similar way Félix says of Clochegourde, 'que [s]/es yeux caressaient depuis si longtemps':<sup>12</sup>

1: Y. p.305.

2: Y. p.36.

3: Y. p.243. Cf. above pp.85-86.

4: Y. p.25. Cf. Y. p.297.

5: Y. p.44.

6: Y. p.120.

7: Cf. Y. p.245.

8: Y. p.305. Cf. Y. p.314.

9: Y. p.192.

10: Y. p.122.

11: Y. p.69.

12: Y. p.34.

'Je fus bientôt de la maison, et j'éprouvai pour la première fois une de ces douceurs infinies [..]; l'âme est alors [..] caressée dans ses plis les plus profonds.'<sup>1</sup> Clochegourde, 'ce castel ouvragé comme une fleur', also returns 'les caresses des plantes'.

Mention has already been made of the anemone's 'pavillon de soie', of the 'manteau' which is ivy and Nature, and of the lace imagery of le Lys dans la vallée. These link with a whole group of fabric imagery which, often associated with plants and flowers, epitomises the soft and yielding aspects of material substances: 'ces végétations aquatiques, si vivaces, si bien colorées, qui tapissent la rivière, surgissent au-dessus, ondulent avec elle, se laissent aller à ses caprices [..].'<sup>2</sup> Les amaryllis, le nénuphar, [..] décorent les rives de leurs magnifiques tapisseries.'<sup>3</sup> The flux and reflux of the waves is repeated in the motions of Henriette's weaving.<sup>4</sup> It is notable that she herself compares her flowered 'tapisserie' to Félix's bouquets: 'Ce que vous mettez dans vos bouquets, moi je le disais à mes dessins.'<sup>5</sup> For in the tapestry as in the bouquets, the physical world responds to the most delicate and sensitive human touch. Both bouquets and tapestry are woven. Only the most malleable Nature can become a language, or, as Félix puts it: 'j'essayai de peindre un sentiment.'<sup>6</sup>

It is a language which is not, however, appreciated by lady Dudley. The tapestry image is devalued to describe her: 'Certes,

1: Y. p.111.

2: The first words of le Lys are, of course, 'Je cède à ton désir.'

3: Y. pp.30-31. Cf. Y. p.315: 'la magnifique tapisserie des chênes dorés'.

4: Y. p.138. Cf. above, p.119.

5: Y. p.138.

6: Y. p.115. Once again Félix is the self-conscious artist. Cf. below p.416 n.4.

la femme qui sait jeter son amour comme un vêtement fait croire qu'elle peut en changer. [..] une femme prenant, interrompant, reprenant l'amour comme une tapisserie à main!'<sup>1</sup> Hence lady Dudley's surroundings are bought not moulded, contrasting with those of Henriette: 'Le luxe est en France l'expression de l'homme, la reproduction de ses idées [..]; il peint le caractère [..].'<sup>2</sup> It follows from the above that the harmony between Félix and Henriette - as when they walk arm in arm from the church to Frapesle - is expressed in terms of a soft and impressionable environment: 'la lumière filtrée dans les feuillages produisait, sur le sable des allées, ces jolis tours qui ressemblent à des soieries peintes'.<sup>3</sup> The softness of the silk is complemented by a further reference to 'peindre'; the design is not only delicate, but reflects and reproduces the ideas and values of man.

Another group of fabric images centres on silks: 'Mes yeux furent tout à coup frappés par [..] de pudiques épaules [..] dont la peau satinée éclatait à la lumière comme un tissu de soie.'<sup>4</sup> The softness of the silk is activated by the presence of light; it seems to respond to the touch, to relish its own softness: 'Un duvet follet se mourait le long de ses joues, dans les néplats du col, en y retenant la lumière qui s'y faisait soyeuse.'<sup>5</sup> The silk plays with light as light with itself,<sup>6</sup> and, as was seen with the poppy, reflected light is multiplied energy. Silk images are, moreover, usually

1: Y. pp.281-282.

2: Y. p.285.

3: Y. p.99. Quoted by J.-P.Richard: Etudes sur le romantisme, p.129. Once again sand is eminently impressionable.

4: Y. p.25.

5: Y. pp.41-42. Cf. J.-P.Richard: op.cit. pp.71-73.

6: Cf. Y. pp.274-275.



associated with plants and flowers: 'la santé [...] avait mis sur ses joues le velouté de la pêche, et le long de son col le soyeux duvet où, comme chez sa mère, se jouait la lumière.'<sup>1</sup> Once again, substances are soft, intimate, and responsive. Despite the aggressiveness of some of the plants of Félix's bouquets, flowers and fabrics are essentially soft and open. They, too, can envelop Félix in a secure cocoon, 'dans les blanches draperies d'un amour tout maternel',<sup>2</sup> where he feels at home and safe.

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1: Y. p.243.

2: Y. p.109.

### Conclusion

At home and safe is exactly what Mortsauf yearned to be as he wandered solitarily in enemy territories:

'Après douze ans de misères, il tourna les yeux vers la France où le décret de Napoléon lui permit de rentrer. Quand en passant le Rhin le piéton souffrant aperçut le clocher de Strasbourg [...], il défaillit. - "La France! France! Je criai: "Voilà la France!" me dit-il, comme un enfant crie: Ma mère! quand il est blessé."' 1

It is indeed fitting that journeying and a fear of being uprooted should pervade a novel in which an émigré plays an easily under-appreciated role. As Balzac writes to Mme Hanska of le Lys:

'Le caractère saillant est décidément M. de Mortsauf, il était bien difficile de dessiner cette figure, mais elle est terminée aujourd'hui. J'aurai élevé la statue de l'Émigration; j'aurai rassemblé dans une même création tous les traits de l'émigré revenu sur sa terre, [...].' 2

Once again, then, the themes and preoccupations of Félix's narrative reflect a particular age.

Thus, if the Lenoncourt family wishes to marry their daughter to Mortsauf, it is partly because they were themselves dispossessed, and partly because 'par le nom, monsieur de Mortsauf était un parti sortable pour leur fille.'<sup>3</sup> Given this historical background to the marriage, it is no wonder that estate-building should be one of the preoccupations of the novel, Henriette exploiting her relatively meagre if highly valued inheritance from her aunt - Clochegourde. In this, the Mortsaufts are of course very much the poor relations of Monsieur de Chessel at Frapesle, 'une massive argenterie',<sup>4</sup> - an appropriate enough description for the property

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1: Y. p.59.

2: L.H.I., p.421. (Letter of 16 May - 16 June, 1836).

3: Y. p.60.

4: Y. p.70.

of the 'nouveau riche'.<sup>1</sup> If Clochegourde is a jewel, it is not only because of its brilliance.

If Félix de Vandenesse is welcome there, it is not only because he is tired, but because he is a similarly poor aristocrat.<sup>2</sup> It is, moreover, probably no coincidence that the effects of the Restoration are felt during Félix's short absence from Clochegourde, after which he is similarly restored:

'Ma petite brouille avec le comte avait eu pour résultat de m'y implanter encore plus avant que par le passé; [...] et les antécédents de ma vie me portèrent à m'étendre comme une plante grimpante dans la belle âme où s'ouvrait pour moi le monde enchanteur des sentiments partagés.' 3

It is appropriate, then, that it is at this point that the Lenoncourt family recovers much of its property and that Henriette becomes 'l'une des plus riches héritières du Maine.'<sup>4</sup>

The predicament of the Mortsaufts is, as Alain has pointed out, more particularly that of provincial nobility of the period: "'C'est l'histoire des Cent-Jours vue d'un château de la Loire."<sup>5</sup> Félix has a certain vision of Henriette in a rural retreat - a retreat she has more or less been forced to adopt for a mixture of social, political and personal reasons. Henriette does, moreover, reinforce this vision with the result that it influences, even conditions, their whole relationship: 'songez [...] que dans une vallée vivra pour vous une mère de qui le coeur est si creusé par le sentiment dont vous l'avez rempli, que vous n'en pourrez jamais trouver le fond.'<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere this social immobility is seen in a much less favourable light: 'Vous voyez bien que je suis attachée à Clochegourde comme

1: Cf. P. Barbéris: Mythes balzaciens, pp.94-95.

2: Cf. Y. p.57.

3: Y. p.109.

4: Y. p.97.

5: Alain: Avec Balzac, p.24.

6: Y. pp.168-169. Cf. Y. p.45.

ces bouquets de plomb le sont à nos toits.'<sup>1</sup> As when Henriette refers to her wedding-ring as 'cette lourde chaîne à laquelle la femme tient par un anneau d'or',<sup>2</sup> metals reflect not only subjective values but also a specific socio-economic situation.

Similarly, if valleys are so welcoming and enveloping, it is because they offer a much-needed anonymity and security, never more important than when Félix, after crossing the Vendée,<sup>3</sup> takes refuge at Clochegourde 'traqué comme une bête fauve'.<sup>4</sup> For the first time, Félix will actually live at Clochegourde - in the Aunt's room.<sup>5</sup> Again it is Alain who remarks: 'C'est le roi qui l'a fait entrer à Clochegourde comme un hôte très précieux; après les Cent-Jours, c'est encore le roi qui l'en retirera, et qui, peut-on dire, corrompra cet homme vierge.'<sup>6</sup> For if it is Henriette who manages to preserve Félix from '[le] contact qui l'eût défleuri',<sup>7</sup> it is 'l'esprit déflorateur de Louis XVIII',<sup>8</sup> which destroys his youthful bloom. No wonder it is at the court of a king noted for his biting epigrams<sup>9</sup> that Félix meets the equally ironic, metallic lady Dudley, who seems similarly indifferent to flowers.<sup>10</sup> When Félix betrays Henriette and the Ile de France for an Englishwoman he is, perhaps, on the way to becoming, like so many of his generation, yet another

1: Y. p.89.

2: Y. p.85. Cf. Marie-Henriette Faillie: La Femme et le code civil dans la 'Comédie humaine' de Balzac, esp. pp.97-104.

3: Western France, in particular Brittany and the Vendée, is of course of greater political significance in la Comédie humaine than Touraine. Cf. P.Barbèris: Mythes balzaciens, pp.44-47.

4: Y. p.173.

5: Ibid. Félix is banished from this room after his betrayal (Cf. Y. p.245).

6: Alain: Avec Balzac, pp.25-26.

7: Y. p.262.

8: Y. p.278.

9: Cf. Y. pp.186, 287.

10: For lady Dudley, see Y. pp.234-235, 281-282 and for the King, Y. pp.286-287.

restless wanderer, himself a kind of spiritual émigré. In thus renouncing soft and yielding valleys and flowers, he acquires some of the hardness and the sterility he once deplored. As Natalie writes to him: 'Si vous tenez à rester dans le monde, à jouir du commerce des femmes, cachez-leur avec soin tout ce que vous n'avez dit: elles n'aiment ni à semer les fleurs de leur amour sur des roches, ni à prodiguer leurs caresses pour panser un coeur malade.'<sup>1</sup>

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1: Y. p. 333.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### WATER IMAGERY

#### Introduction

- (1) Water and purity; the waters of the past.
- (2) Refreshing waters; the waters of the future.
- (3) Impure waters.
- (4) The force of water.
- (5) Nutritive liquids: the waters of maternity.
- (6) Liquids and fire.
- (7) Water and death.
- (8) Procreative liquids: the waters of fertility and frustration.

#### Conclusion

### Introduction

There are several possible approaches to the study of water, or, perhaps more accurately, liquid imagery in le Lys dans la vallée. It would be possible to study the manifestations of water in topographical groups, such as seas, lakes and rivers; these are the principle divisions of Jean-Luc Steinmetz's article on L'Eau dans la 'Comédie humaine'.<sup>1</sup> It would also be possible to examine the imagery according to the particular liquid represented, such as water - salt or fresh -, milk, blood, sap, or alcohol.

An examination of the liquid imagery in le Lys does however show that liquidity consistently materialises one particular value: potentiality. Liquidity indicates the culmination of past energies which are able to project themselves into the future. A study of liquid imagery becomes a study of various kinds and degrees of potentiality, some of which are fulfilled more rapidly or more satisfactorily than others. At the same time such a study reflects the characters' attitudes to different forms of potentiality at different stages in the novel. It is, therefore, similar types of potentiality - such as sexual potency or maternal fertility - or similar degrees of potentiality - such as forceful energies or bitter frustration - which are placed in the same groupings. Within each of these groupings it is then possible to examine the characters' varying attitude to that particular kind of potentiality.

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1: A.B. 1969, pp.3-29. Although Steinmetz regrettably restricts himself to the relatively superficial and schematic study of water as an element in the décor of an unspecified number of Balzac's novels, his reference to certain 'lieux-clefs' in the Comédie humaine, including Touraine, (cf. p.29, note), points to an aspect of the water theme which may be fruitfully examined. The contribution of the Indre valley (cf. the section on water and death below) could, of course, form part of such a study. Cf. also the Conclusion to this Chapter.

As a result, no section covers one topographical group or one particular liquid. Even such liquids as milk or alcohol appear in several groups. Tears, which might technically be examined with other salt or bitter waters, are found to occur in almost every grouping but are never cited for their affinities with sea water.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the other methods of approach would undoubtedly, by placing the liquid imagery of le Lys in a different perspective, form an equally valid, complementary study. It would be particularly interesting, for instance, to see if and perhaps why certain types of potentiality correspond to particular topographical or liquid groups. The following remarks do, then, represent just one of a variety of possible approaches to water imagery in le Lys dans la vallée.

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1: Cf. G. Durand: Les Structures [...], p.279: 'Nous saisissons là [...] l'inconvénient qui existe à classer les symboles autour d'objets clefs plutôt qu'autour de trajets symboliques, [...].'

(1)

Water and purity: the waters of the past

Le Lys dans la vallée offers abundant support for Bachelard's contention that 'l'imagination matérielle trouve dans l'eau la matière pure par excellence, la matière naturellement pure.'<sup>1</sup> As Henriette exclaims to Félix: 'Quelles délices m'inondèrent en vous trouvant si pur, si complètement vrai, [..].'<sup>2</sup> It would, however, be a mistake to equate the presence of water with the elimination of sexuality. The purity of water derives from its intactness, and this intactness conveys not only past abstinence but future promise. It is the chastity of the past which anticipates and assures the fertility of the future:

'Depuis quelques jours une explication flottait entre nous, et semblait devoir éclater au premier mot qui ferait jaillir la source trop pleine en nos âmes. Quelle honte retardait l'heure de notre parfaite entente? Peut-être aimait-elle autant que je l'aimais ce tressaillement semblable aux émotions de la peur, qui meurtrit la sensibilité, pendant ces moments où l'on retient sa vie près de déborder, où l'on hésite à dévoiler son intérieur, en obéissant à la pudeur qui agite les jeunes filles avant qu'elles ne se montrent à l'époux aimé.' 3

Once again, then, water materialises the momentary equilibrium of the forces of movement and resistance. Combining immaculate purity with sexual expectancy, it expresses the potentiality of hitherto unexploited energy.

As a result, water is associated with both spirituality and sexuality in le Lys dans la vallée. Thus Félix refers to the

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1: G. Bachelard: L'Eau et les rêves, Corti, 1942, p.181.

2: Y. p.318. Cf. the light-water image Y. p.151: 'elle me versait des lueurs incessantes et incorruptibles de ce divin amour qui ne satisfaisait que l'âme.'

3: Y. p.80.

pure but nevertheless fertile waters of divine love:

'Les sentiments courent toujours vifs dans ces ruisseaux creusés qui retiennent les eaux, les purifient, rafraîchissent incessamment le coeur, et fertilisent la vie par les abondants trésors d'une foi cachée, source divine où se multiplie l'unique pensée d'un unique amour.' 1

However, liquidity also helps to characterise the fertile but nevertheless chaste qualities of Félix's desire:

'mon oeil déchirait l'étoffe, je revoyais la lentille qui marquait la naissance de la jolie raie par laquelle son dos était partagé, [...], et qui depuis le bal flamboyait toujours le soir dans ces ténèbres où semble ruisseler le sommeil des jeunes gens dont l'imagination est ardente, dont la vie est chaste.' 2

In neither of these examples is it possible to isolate the qualities of chastity and fertility: in each, water is fertile because it is chaste. It is a virgin force.<sup>3</sup>

The awakening of this virgin force from 'les eaux dormantes de l'oubli'<sup>4</sup> is, on a number of occasions, accompanied by rising waters. For instance, a more vital, more mobile, but still chaste and child-like Henriette, is characterised by her 'manches flottantes' and 'boucles fluides'.<sup>5</sup> The release of Félix's untapped energies during his first meeting with Henriette is expressed by an upsurge of

1: Y. p.223.

2: Y. p.40. 'Ruisseler' is, of course, not the main element here. Cf. below p.204 n.2 and p.323.

3: The theme of the virgin force is common in Balzac - particularly in connection with the young, industrious, poverty-stricken student-geniuses of the Comédie humaine: 'Au feu violent de leurs passions déchaînées, ils [les grands talents] acquièrent la probité la plus inaltérable, et contractent l'habitude des luttes qui attendent le génie, par le travail constant dans lequel ils ont cerclé leurs appétits trompés.' (La Messe de l'athée, II, p.1151; cf. Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan, VI, p.25; La Bourse, I, p.332; La Femme abandonnée, II, p.224). Balzac's corresponding hatred of the prostitution of artistic talent is evident in Illusions perdues, Louis Lambert (cf. H. Evans: 'Louis Lambert' et la philosophie /.../, p.100, and, on the importance of virginity, p.216), and, of course, in the July 1835 Preface to le Lys dans la vallée itself (Y. p.338).

4: Y. p.86.

5: Y. p.191.



water: 'Si vous avez bien compris ma vie antérieure, vous devinerez les sentiments qui sourdirent en mon coeur.'<sup>1</sup> The release of internal waters is, moreover, accompanied by a no doubt compensatory desire for immersion: 'je me plongeai dans ~~de~~ dos comme un enfant qui se jette dans le sein de sa mère.'<sup>2</sup>

It is because water represents potential force, force which is preserved intact, that deep and tranquil waters acquire such prestige in le Lys dans la vallée. Hence Félix identifies himself with 'les âmes dont la limpide substance est ébranlée tout entière au moindre choc, de même qu'une pierre jetée dans un lac en agite également la surface et la profondeur';<sup>3</sup> hence, too, Henriette's analogy between love and 'un lac immense où la sonde ne trouve point de fond'.<sup>4</sup> Thus Steinmetz remarks that the lakes of the Comédie humaine are 'l'image de la quiétude enclose'<sup>5</sup> and hence the deep well in Massimilla Doni conveys 'les idées de profondeur, de calme, d'immensité.'<sup>6</sup>

A group of related images emphasises an aspect of the virgin reservoir which has already been mentioned: its association with the past. There are two principal reasons for this: the association of chastity and youth is accompanied by a longing for past purity: 'elle se replongea dans notre passé si pur'.<sup>7</sup>; energy which remains unexpended is accumulated through time, ever increasing its own potentiality: hence Félix's remark 'n'est-il pas des âmes où la passion contenue par d'insurmontables difficultés a rempli d'une

1: Y. p.25. A discreet reminder of: 'Des hasards inouïs m'avaient laissé dans cette délicieuse période où surgissent les premiers troubles de l'âme, [...] où pour elle tout est sapide et frais.' (Y. pp.19-20). Félix's childhood is indeed the source of later themes!

2: Y. p.25. Henriette's blood is similarly stirred - cf. Y. p.317.

3: Y. p.85.

4: Y. p.266.

5: J.-L. Steinmetz: 'L'Eau dans la Comédie humaine', p.15.

6: Massimilla Doni, IX, p.328.

7: Y. p.250.

eau pure le cratère du volcan?'<sup>1</sup> follows an evocation of the still, deep waters of the past: 'Ici, Natalie, rien n'est romanesque: pour y découvrir l'infini des sentiments profonds, il faut dans sa jeunesse avoir jeté la sonde dans ces grands lacs au bord desquels on a vécu.'<sup>2</sup> Such images link water, 'la valorisation de la pureté',<sup>3</sup> to an identification between water and the past: 'Le passé de notre âme est une eau profonde.'<sup>4</sup>

If Henriette and Félix are to fulfil their desire to develop consistently and coherently through time, it follows from the above that they must maintain the purity and intactness of the waters of their pasts:

'Plusieurs pensées s'élevèrent en moi comme des lueurs, et me conseillèrent de laver la tache qui souillait ma candeur, [...] - Avant d'aller plus loin, lui dis-je [...] permettez-moi de purifier un souvenir du passé.' 5

The potentiality of the future depends on the integrity and integrality of the past. Once this potentiality is threatened, the waters lose their purity, their stillness, and their depth:

'En ce jour commencent les représailles des enfants dont l'indifférence engendrée par les déceptions du passé, grossie par les épaves limoneuses qu'ils en ramènent, s'étend jusque sur la tombe.' 6

The past is, therefore, a reservoir of hitherto undisturbed energy whose dissemination is seen as a violation, their chastity lost:

'Aujourd'hui tu veux mon passé, le voici. Seulement, sache-le bien,

1: Y. p.128.

2: Y. p.127.

3: G. Bachelard: L'Eau et les rêves, p.20.

4: Ibid. p.74. Water is a common time symbol of the period. Outstanding examples are Hugo's Pente de la rêverie and Lamartine's Le Lac. Cf. below pp.208-210.

5: Y. p.82. For other examples of the characters' ability to perceive - and thereby create - this consistency, see above pp.10ff.

6: Y. p.21.

Natalie: en t'obéissant, j'ai dû fouler aux pieds des répugnances inviolées. [...] J'ai d'imposants souvenirs ensevelis au fond de mon âme comme ces productions marines qui s'aperçoivent par les temps calmes, et que les flots de la tempête jettent[.] sur la grève.<sup>1</sup> Their awakening is violent and painful: 'ces anciennes émotions [...] me font tant de mal quand elles se réveillent trop soudainement'.<sup>2</sup> Félix's energies are no longer accumulated and preserved through time, but regurgitated and dissipated.

There are, however, moments when the waters of the past can be disturbed with equanimity. When Jaques' physical and financial future seems more assured, Félix speaks of '[les] regrets fondus dans le souvenir des bonheurs évanouis!'<sup>3</sup> On another occasion, the resurgence of the waters of the past would bring comfort, even stimulus: 'En échange de ce trésor englouti dans les eaux dormantes de l'oubli, elle n'avait pas obtenu ce regard mouillé qui solde tout, qui [...] est comme un éternel joyau dont les feux brillent aux jours difficiles.'<sup>4</sup> The loss of liquids which accompanies memory may indicate a moment of intense self-fulfilment: 'Ce moment m'a laissé des souvenirs ensevelis dans mon âme qui ne reparaitront jamais à sa surface sans que mes yeux se mouillent de pleurs;'.<sup>5</sup> Surrender of the waters of the past, even of the immediate past, can be exhilarating: 'chaque tour de roue emportait un monde de pensées

1: Y. pp.3-4.

2: Y. p.4.

3: Y. p.129.

4: Y. p.86. The past is, therefore, preserved by a kind of crystallization: the tear is metamorphosed into the jewel. This is consistent both with the preservative powers of hard substances, noted in Chapter 3, and with the theme of the eternity of light, examined in Chapter 5.

5: Y. p.145.

et de désirs qui a éclaté comme une tempête aussitôt que je vous ai vue ...'.<sup>1</sup>

This ambivalence in Félix's attitude towards the dissemination of the waters of the past is crystallized in the following image: 'Ses vertiges sont excités, je crois, moins par l'effroi de la mort que par une ivresse intérieure, par les fleurs fanées de sa jeunesse qui fermentent en se flétrissant.'<sup>2</sup> A parallel may be drawn, perhaps, between Henriette, poised between the intense activity of fermentation and the gradual paralysis of desiccation, and the words of Félix's own narrative, which may also be seen as 'les fleurs fanées de sa jeunesse qui fermentent en se flétrissant'. They express the most intense moments of his life but for Natalie they merely reveal 'la sècheresse de [son] coeur'.<sup>3</sup> Félix might well remark of Natalie as he did of lady Dudley: 'aussi ne découvris-je que pas à pas le tuf sur lequel je perdais mes semailles, et qui ne devait point donner de moissons.'<sup>4</sup> His memories have been dredged to the surface, and, drained of his past, he has lost his potentiality for the future.<sup>5</sup> Once again, the themes of le Lys dans la vallée are inseparable from the form of the narrative and, indeed, from the very process of composition.

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1: Y. p.189. The reason for Félix's exhilaration is no doubt that he is heedless of both past and present, being, as the violence of the tempest and the journey itself would suggest, wholly projected towards the future. Cf. below pp.192-196.

2: Y. p.292.

3: Y. p.333.

4: Y. p.285.

5: At what cost, then, does Félix learn the lesson Natalie-Balzac is trying to stress in order to complete his 'éducation sentimentale'? Cf. Alain: Avec Balzac, p.30: 'Retrouvez ce Félix dans Une Fille d'Eve, vous jugerez avec effroi ce politique, à jamais vidé de son sang.' Cf. below p.204 and n.5.

(2)

Refreshing waters: waters of the future

It has been seen in the previous section that water, in a number of images in le Lys dans la vallée, materialises the potentiality of accumulated energies. The longing to recover this energy, once dissipated, is frequently expressed in terms of a longing for water: 'Faute de repos et de bains de mer où je retremperais mes fibres, je périrai.'<sup>1</sup> Water restores Henriette's fibres to their former ability to rebound after crises, re-endowing them therefore with their past ability to cope with the future. Renewal by water is, as a result, the gift of an extended future: 'La vertu, cher enfant, a des eaux saintes où l'on se retrempe et d'où l'on sort renouvelé à l'amour de Dieu!';<sup>2</sup> 'au coeur de la religion quel courage ne se retremperait?'.<sup>3</sup> Hence Henriette eventually recovers the potentiality materialised in 'ces ruisseaux creusés qui [...] rafraîchissent incessamment l<sup>e</sup> coeur'<sup>4</sup> and she progresses towards eternity.<sup>5</sup>

Other references to 'bain' and 'se baigner' convey a similar rejuvenation. Just as Henriette longs for her 'bains de mer' so is Félix exhilarated by the prospect of 'cette rivière serpentine où l'âme se baigne entre les frênes et les aulnes'.<sup>6</sup> Here, immersion becomes total submersion: water gives, therefore, total restoration. In the same way as water seems to possess its own powers of reproduction - 'source divine où se multiplie l'unique pensée d'un

1: Y. p.88. Thus this is another aspect of the 'fibre' theme discussed above pp.114-116.

2: Y. p.147. By analogy with baptism.

3: Y. p.199.

4: Y. p.223. Such expressions abound in l'Homme de désir.

5: Cf. Y. p.308: 'Ses yeux humides de larmes annonçaient un dessillement suprême, elle apercevait déjà les joies célestes de la terre promise.'

6: Y. p.77.



unique amour'<sup>1</sup> - so does it seem to relish its own permeating power, its own ubiquity:

'Je fus bientôt de la maison, et j'éprouvai pour la première fois une de ces douceurs infinies qui sont à l'âme tourmentée ce qu'est un bain pour le corps fatigué; l'âme est alors rafraîchie sur toutes ses surfaces, caressée dans ses plis les plus profonds.' 2

Water is, perhaps, the most self-sufficient of substances, once again the virgin force. As Félix remarks elsewhere: 'L'amour a, comme la vie, une puberté pendant laquelle il se suffit à lui-même.'<sup>3</sup>

It does, therefore, follow that a number of water images in le Lys show the individual suspended between the potentiality of the past and the fulfilment of the future. Thus, in 'ce bateau mollement bercé par des pensées d'amour'<sup>4</sup> Félix savours the fullness of a present pregnant with expectation. He and Henriette are similarly suspended during their joint excursion on the river:

'le voluptueux balancement d'une barque imite vaguement les pensées qui flottent dans l'âme.'<sup>5</sup> As when 'une explication flottait entre nous',<sup>6</sup> floating on water indicates a momentary pause during which past and present energies gather force for their future explosion.

Thus as the boat journey reaches a climax, Henriette dips her hand in the Indre. Whether she is surrendering to the force of 'l'ivresse de la fécondation, qui fait qu'en bateau vous trempez vos mains dans l'onde',<sup>7</sup> or whether she is withdrawing from Félix - 'la comtesse ôta ses gants et laissa tomber ses belles mains dans l'eau comme pour rafraîchir une secrète ardeur'<sup>8</sup> - the effect of contact with water is to convey prolonged suspense, intensified but so far unfulfilled potentiality.

1: Y. p.223.

2: Y. p.111.

3: Y. p.53.

4: Y. p.69.

5: Y. p.203.

6: Y. p.80.

7: Y. p.119.

8: Y. p.203. Quoted by J.-P.Richard: Etudes sur le romantisme, p.59.

But for Richard, the river is the Vienne!

As Bachelard remarks, 'L'eau est, à certains égards, la fraîcheur substantifiée.'<sup>1</sup> In le Lys the refreshing effect of liquids is further illustrated by a group of images evoking balms, ointments, and therapeutic perfumes. The quality of the balm is gentle, soothing pervasiveness, combining the powers of infiltration of perfumes and fluids. Thus Félix finds Henriette 'pleine de cette onctueuse et fraîche bonté qui ne tarit jamais'<sup>2</sup> and, within Henriette's 'terre douce et facile' the Count feels 'ses secrètes douleurs amollies par la fraîcheur des baumes'.<sup>3</sup> Without this refreshing, envigorating effect, balm is no longer a balm: 'La prière, qui jusqu'alors avait été pour moi comme un baume, fut sans action sur mon âme.'<sup>4</sup>

The effectiveness of the balm also derives from its ability to heal wounds, to prevent further loss of blood: 'Ces arrangements et ce bonheur jetèrent quelque baume sur les plaies de l'émigré.'<sup>5</sup> 'Oh! jetez ce baume sur mes plaies!'<sup>6</sup> Once again, liquids express a balance between forces: the loss of blood is counteracted by the application of balms.

Elsewhere it is the balm's affinity with the perfume which guarantees its envigorating power. Thus Félix speaks of the dynamic quality of incense: 'cette vive et secrète piété, qui servait de lien à ses autres vertus, agissait à l'entour comme un encens spirituel.'<sup>7</sup> Incense restores and preserves, extending and intensifying the potentiality of the future: 'Les lignes de son

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1: L'Eau et les rêves, p.46.

2: Y. p.108.

3: Y. p.64.

4: Y. p.320.

5: Y. p.98.

6: Y. p.248. Such images are, of course, clichés.

7: Y. p.110. Perfumes are examined in Chapter 7.

visage se purifiaient, en elle tout s'agrandissait et devenait majestueux sous les invisibles encensoirs des Séraphins qui la gardaient.<sup>1</sup> Just as time seems defeated by Henriette 'baignée d'opium',<sup>2</sup> so is she here as embalmed on her death-bed. She has recovered the purity and intactness of the past.

The invigorating effect of balms is closely related to that of dews and gentle rains: 'cette onctueuse éloquence [...] tombe sur le coeur comme une rosée';<sup>3</sup> 'Ma confession ne vous a-t-elle pas assez montré les trois enfants [...] sur lesquels je dois faire pleuvoir une rosée réparatrice [...].'<sup>4</sup> Rain is also, on occasion, a force of life and exhilaration, from 'la pluie incessante du pollen'<sup>5</sup> of the poppy to the rain of life which is Félix for Henriette: 'Dieu ne veut pas que je meure: il vous envoie à moi [...] comme il épand la pluie des nuées sur une terre aride;'.<sup>6</sup> Thus Félix, perpetuating the ancient metaphor of 'la fontaine de Jouvence',<sup>7</sup> can justifiably speak of himself as 'la source où se rafraîchissait sa vie'.<sup>8</sup>

1: Y. p.305.

2: Ibid.

3: Y. p.293. Cf. below p.366.

4: Y. p.92.

5: Y. p.121.

6: Y. p.189.

7: Cf. G. Bachelard: L'Eau et les rêves, pp.197-201.

8: Y. p.242.

(3)

Impure waters

It may seem from the previous sections that water is invariably pure or refreshing. It does, however, occasionally turn sour: 'Moi, dont toute l'ambition était de verser le bonheur à flots dans son âme, n'avais-je pas jeté l'amertume dans la source où se rafraîchissait sa vie, où se retrempait son courage?'<sup>1</sup> The contamination of water indicates that the potentiality materialised in it is threatened or obliterated: 'Son front [...] paraissait plein d'idées inexprimées, de sentiments contenus, de fleurs noyées dans des eaux amères.'<sup>2</sup>

Sour or bitter waters are, therefore, associated with youth and vigour which does not fulfil its promise. Henriette, referring to 'la source d'eau douce, coulant au pied des monts'<sup>3</sup> mentioned by Félix at the end of their childhood confession scene, later remarks:

'Quand Agar a crié dans le désert, un ange a fait jaillir [...] une source pure; mais à moi, quand la source limpide vers laquelle (vous en souvenez-vous?) vous vouliez me guider est venue couler autour de Clochegourde, elle n'a versé que des eaux amères.'<sup>4</sup>

Thus disillusion is on other occasions associated with bitter waters:

'Ainsi, des orages [...] déracinaient par leurs vagues après les espérances le plus profondément plantées dans son coeur.'<sup>5</sup> 'Tel était le boudoir où pleurait toujours la fille d'une illustre famille, inondée en ce moment d'amertume [...].'<sup>6</sup>

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1: Y. p.242.

2: Y. p.41.

3: Y. p.91.

4: Y. p.261.

5: Y. p.225.

6: Y. p.142. Cf. also the contrast between Henriette's refreshed energies and Mortsauif's 'âcre opposition', Y. p.133.

It is noticeable that each of these images suggests that impurity - usually indicated by 'amer' or 'amertume' - has been, or is being, introduced into 'l'eau douce', or fresh water, which is naturally undefiled. Félix, for example, is a witness to this contamination: 'Sa pureté m'arracha une larme d'admiration que l'égoïsme de la passion rendit bien amère.'<sup>1</sup> If bitter-sweet waters evoke the bitter-sweetness of love, it is appropriate that Henriette should remark: 'Voyez-vous cette vallée, dit-elle en me montrant l'Indre, elle me fait mal, je l'aime toujours.'<sup>2</sup> and that this paradox should be recalled as Henriette dies of thirst and love: 'L'eau de l'Indre me fait bien mal à voir, mais mon coeur éprouve une plus ardente soif.'<sup>3</sup> It is, therefore, possible to see semantic as well as morphological or phonetic links between the words 'amer', 'amour' and 'mort' which both reveal and confirm one of the central themes of the novel - the characters' ambivalent attitude towards love.<sup>4</sup> As Henriette writes of the birth of her love in her posthumous letter to Félix: 'Ma vie fut dès lors une continuelle douleur que j'aimais.'<sup>5</sup> The theme 'amer'-'amour'-'mort' is, moreover, similarly linked to that of 'âme' in the sense of a life-force which is doomed to burn itself out,<sup>6</sup> thereby reinforcing the sense of for**o**oding and imminent death which is, as has been seen, another important theme in le Lys dans la vallée.<sup>7</sup>

It is, therefore, indeed appropriate that Henriette should seek to preserve the purity and intactness of fertile liquids, seen as a

1: Y. p.102.

2: Y. p.246. Cf. below pp.196, 216.

3: Y. p.301. Cf. below pp.196, 311.

4: They also indicate another way in which language is used in the novel.

5: Y. p.319. This paraphrase of the traditional theme of 'le doux mal' is poignantly appropriate to Henriette 'châtelaine' of Clochegourde.

6: Cf. Y. p.41.

7: Cf. p.13 n.2 above and below p.372 and n.6.



positive life-force of light and fire emanating from the soul:

'Ma confession ne vous a-t-elle donc pas assez montré les trois enfants [...] sur lesquels je dois faire pleuvoir une rosée réparatrice, et faire rayonner mon âme sans en laisser adultérer la moindre parcelle? N'aigrissez pas le lait d'une mère!' 1

Of all liquids, milk is the substance of the future, and it is the future Henriette seeks to preserve. Hence Félix's childhood, from which all potentiality seems excluded, is characterised by the bitterness of its sources: 'Quel poète nous dira les douleurs de l'enfant dont les lèvres sucent un sein amer, [...]?' 2

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1: Y. p.92. A link 'amer'-'mère' may, therefore be added to the list. Cf. below. Although Faguet (Balzac, p.136) quotes the last sentence of this passage as an example of Henriette's bad style, it can be seen that the image of soured milk is neither forced nor incongruous when viewed in the perspective of the whole liquid theme.

2: Y. p.5.

(4)

The force of water

A considerable number of images in le Lys dans la vallée evoke the surging power of rivers and torrents, floods and storms, waves and seas. The characters' attitude to these forces does, however, vary throughout the narrative. They are either stimulating or overwhelming, fecundating or lethal. It is, therefore, necessary to examine each image according to the particular qualities it embodies.

In previous sections the strength materialised in water has been seen to derive from its intactness, its depth, and its tranquillity. On occasion, however, water manages to combine these qualities with that of uninhibited power:

'L'amour n'est-il pas dans les espaces infinis de l'âme comme est dans une belle vallée le grand fleuve où se rendent les pluies, les ruisseaux et les torrents, [...]; il s'agrandit aussi bien par les orages que par le lent tribut des claires fontaines.'<sup>1</sup>

The release of the water's energy, far from being debilitating, is a source of new strength: 'aucune ambition ne traversait le cours de ce sentiment déchaîné comme un torrent et qui faisait onde de tout ce qu'il emportait.'<sup>2</sup> The overwhelming force of the storm seems welcome: 'cet orage de choses célestes me tomba sur le coeur et m'écrasa. Je me sentis petit, j'aurais voulu mourir à ses pieds.'<sup>3</sup> It is the release of the latent energy in water that accounts for its fertility: thus Félix speaks of 'ces torrents d'affection dont il [fruit] inonde les âmes, cette sève qui ranime les feuilles jaunissantes.'<sup>4</sup>

1: Y. p.211.

2: Y. p.110.

3: Y. p.192.

4: Y. p.91. Cf. Félix's reference to 'un bien faisant orage qui ravive la terre' (Y. p.175). Such imagery - in a different context - is again common in Saint-Martin.

A number of other images evoke the fertility of the force of water: 'Figurez-vous une source de fleurs sortant des deux vases par un bouillonnement, retombant en vagues frangées, et du sein de laquelle s'élançaient mes vœux en roses blanches, [...]'.<sup>1</sup> - a force which culminates and explodes in the poppy: 'Du sein de ce prolix torrent d'amour qui déborde, s'élançe un magnifique double pavot rouge [...]'.<sup>2</sup> However, on this occasion the release of these fluids is followed by a period of anti-climax and exhaustion:

'Cependant à l'aspect de ces bouquets, j'ai souvent surpris Henriette les bras pendants, abîmée en ces rêveries orageuses pendant lesquelles les pensées gonflent le sein, animent le front, viennent par vagues, jaillissent écumeuses, menacent et laissent une lassitude énervante.'<sup>3</sup>

Once again, then, water once released loses its potentiality and its force. Its energy is dissipated.

Thus, from the moment Félix is wrongly blamed for flooding the garden, floods and storms are also a threat and a danger in le Lys dans la vallée. Paris is 'une mer aussi dangereuse aux chastes amours qu'à la pureté des consciences.'<sup>4</sup> Félix is 'emporté comme un fétu dans un tourbillon',<sup>5</sup> and he later speaks of 'l'ouragan de l'infidélité'<sup>6</sup> and 'quelque inflexible inondation'.<sup>7</sup> It is, however, Henriette, with her longing for her 'lac immense',<sup>8</sup> who describes in greatest detail the fatality of violent waters:

'Les jouissances que donne la passion sont horriblement orageuses, payées par d'énervantes inquiétudes qui brisent les ressorts de l'âme. Je suis venue au bord de la mer où s'agitent ces tempêtes, je les ai

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1: Y. p.115.

2: Y. p.121.

3: Y. pp.122-123.

4: Y. p.183.

5: Y. p.24.

6: Y. p.236.

7: Y. p.237.

8: Y. p.266.

vues de trop près; elles m'ont souvent enveloppée de leurs nuages, la lame ne s'est pas toujours brisée à mes pieds, j'ai senti sa rude étreinte qui froidit le coeur; je dois me retirer sur les hauts lieux, je périrais au bord de cette mer immense.' 1

For waves and storms represent dissipated energy, followed by exhaustion and a sense of defeat:

'Les âmes douces et paisibles chez lesquelles la colère est impossible, qui veulent faire régner autour d'elles leur profonde paix intérieure, savent seules combien de force est nécessaire pour ces luttes, quelles abondantes vagues de sang affluent au coeur avant d'entamer le combat, quelle lassitude s'empare de l'être quand après avoir lutté rien n'est obtenu.' 2

Once again the violence of waves - in this case waves of blood - is contrasted with Henriette's inner calm, her inner depth, recalling the depths of tranquil waters.

As a result, if storms are almost invariably hostile in le Lys it is because they represent the unbridled dissipation of energy.<sup>3</sup> Passion dissipates in the least figurative sense of the word: 'Les jouissances que donne la passion sont horriblement orageuses, [...].'<sup>4</sup> Thus Henriette refers to their 'attachement jusqu'ici si douteux et plein d'orages'<sup>5</sup> and to 'les constantes émotions de [s]a vie orageuse'<sup>6</sup> in the same way as she refers to '[les] orages de la vie politique'<sup>7</sup> or Félix to 'les détroits orageux de la vie'.<sup>8</sup> It is because Mortsauif's violence and unpredictability deplete Henriette's resources that he is also frequently associated with storms: 'Ici j'attire sur moi les orages que je vois prêts à fondre sur les gens ou sur mes enfants, [...].'<sup>9</sup> Storms, like other water images, express

1: Y. p.260. Cf. Y. p.139: 'une de ces tranquilles soirées dont les harmonies font gagner en profondeur aux sentiments ce qu'ils perdent en vivacité.'

2: Y. p.153.

3: Cf. however, above p.188 etc.

4: Y. p.260.

5: Y. p.263.

6: Y. p.320.

7: Y. p.321. A number of these images are clichés.

8: Y. p.62.

9: Y. p.90.

potentiality, but potentiality in the form of a threat; thus Henriette fears 'une orageuse variation d'humeur chez son mari';<sup>1</sup> - a fear which is shared by Félix: 'Quelle anxiété de coeur me brisait alors que tout à coup un orage s'amassait sur ce front neigeux!'<sup>2</sup>

In other images the frenzied, undisciplined energy of the storm is opposed to the reassuring depths of tranquil waters: 'parfois l'énergie, avec laquelle je supportais les orages, me manque. Oui, parfois je suis vaincue. Faute de repos et de bains de mer où je retremperais mes fibres, je périrai.'<sup>3</sup> As before, it is water which expresses the balance between 'deux forces égales en contention',<sup>4</sup> between the expenditure and the accumulation of energy. If the potentiality of water is to be preserved it must be controlled and withheld: otherwise the activity of these internal effervescent liquids, such as of the blood<sup>5</sup> or of Henriette's 'ivresse intérieure',<sup>6</sup> threatens to explode and be lost: 'L'action de lever le bras en temps égaux berçait ma pensée et communiquait à mon âme, où grondait l'orage, la paix du flux et du reflux en réglant ainsi mes émotions.'<sup>7</sup> Feverish activity is followed by a relaxation of forces and stagnation: 'Malgré l'ivresse que me causa ce programme de fêtes inespérées, ma joie fut détendue par le vent d'orage qui impressionne si rapidement les habitués du malheur.'<sup>8</sup>

The opposing qualities materialised in violent storms and tranquil lakes further illuminates the ambivalence already noted

1: Y. p.110.

2: Y. p.71.

3: Y. p.88. Cf. above p.115.

4: Catéchisme social, O.D.III, p.691. Cf. above p.165.

5: Cf. below pp.203-207.

6: Cf. above p.184.

7: Y. p.138. Cf. p.117 n.1 above and below p.201 n.4.

8: Y. p.15.



in Henriette's attitude towards water, especially towards the end of the narrative. If the river attracts her, it is because it represents accumulated energy, the richness of the past and the promise of the future. However, it also reminds her that once Félix has betrayed her, its potentiality is gravely threatened.<sup>1</sup> On her death-bed, too, her sense of frustrated potentiality is conveyed by her heightened estrangement from water.<sup>2</sup> The ambivalence of Henriette's attitude towards water, as the contrasting qualities of the water images themselves, points to the paradox of Félix's and Henriette's predicament: they are endowed with a potentiality which can only be maintained by frustration.

Before Henriette's death the storms are, however, assuaged and she progresses towards the calm of the port: 'l'âme seule régnait sur ce visage, serein comme un beau ciel après la tempête.'<sup>3</sup> The violent waters are finally calmed; their past potentiality for the future is restored: 'Je demeurai pendant toute cette nuit les yeux attachés sur Henriette, fasciné par l'expression pure que donne l'apaisement de toutes les tempêtes, [..]. Quelle beauté dans ce repos absolu, quel despotisme dans cette immobilité: tout le passé s'y trouve encore, et l'avenir y commence.'<sup>4</sup>

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1: Cf. above p.190(n.2).

2: Cf. above p.190(n.3).

3: Y. p.305.

4: Y. p.312.

(5)

Nutritive liquids: the waters of maternity

The opening lines of Félix's narrative announce the subsequent importance of nutritive liquids in le Lys dans la vallée: 'A quel talent nourri de larmes devons-nous un jour la plus émouvante élegie, [...]?'<sup>1</sup> This theme of the liquids of the past feeding and creating the present and the future is also apparent in the 'communion' scene between Félix and Henriette: 'Deux grosses larmes [...] sortirent de ses yeux, [...]; mais je tendis la main assez à temps pour les recevoir, et les bus avec une avidité pieuse qu'excitèrent ces paroles déjà signées par dix ans de larmes secrètes, [...].'<sup>2</sup> This scene is of paramount importance in le Lys dans la vallée since it is the water of the tears which materialises not only the past but the potentiality of the future. Their pasts are united: 'Nous sentant alors jumeaux du même sein, elle ne conçut point que les confidences se fissent à demi entre frères abreuvés aux mêmes sources.'<sup>3</sup> - as are their futures: 'Les larmes que j'avais bues engendrèrent en moi comme une ivresse sublime, et je trouvai du bonheur à épouser les souffrances de cette femme.'<sup>4</sup> Such tears are indeed sources - creative liquids which rise in the past and flow into the future.

It follows from the above that Henriette, who aspires to 'la place laissée vide par madame de Vandenesse.'<sup>5</sup> should frequently

1: Y. p.5. Cf. Y. p.75: 'ma probité, nourrie de sueurs froides'. For an examination of the femininity and fecundity of liquids in the Comédie humaine, cf. J.-P. Richard: Etudes sur le romantisme, pp.57-65.

2: Y. p.93. For further examples of cups and drinking in le Lys see Y. p.45: 'le lait de cette coupe pleine d'amour'; Y. p.53: 'J'étais près d'elle, [...], je lui servais à boire.'; Y. p.94: 'Vous avez épuisé [...] une coupe offerte avec candeur.'; Y. p.146: '- Vous feriez avaler des coupes de ciguë'; Y. p.174: 'La grande nouvelle pour nous fut: "Vous aurez de la glace!" [...].'

3: Y. p.85.

4: Y. p.112. In his article 'L'Amour platonique chez Balzac', Balzac à Saché, IX, p.11, H.J. Hunt speaks of 'l'étrange geste de boire les larmes d'Henriette'. The importance of this scene has, however, already been indicated in Chapter 1, pp.25ff.

5: Y. p.262.

be associated with the nutritive liquids of maternity. Thus Félix remarks: 'la comtesse m'enveloppait dans les nourricières protections, dans les blanches draperies d'un amour tout maternel;'.<sup>1</sup> Milk is evoked even more explicitly at the beginning of her letter to Félix when she compares her preoccupation with his welfare while he is asleep to her watching over the infant Jacques, 'en attendant son réveil pour lui donner /s/on lait.'<sup>2</sup> The fact that Félix's childhood is characterised by the bitterness<sup>3</sup> or the barrenness<sup>4</sup> of its sources, and that he was 'mis en nourrice à la campagne, oublié par /s/a famille pendant trois ans'<sup>5</sup> facilitates the substitution of Henriette for Félix's mother. The nature of the letter does, moreover, show that Henriette is trying to renew Félix's past 'par quelques préceptes dont [il n'a pu se] nourrir dans ces affreux collèges'<sup>6</sup> and thereby endow him with a new potentiality for the future. Her action does indeed constitute 'une maternité spirituelle'.<sup>7</sup>

It is noticeable that while Henriette is associated with the nutritive liquids of maternity, and, therefore, an ability to renew the past and reshape the future, lady Dudley is the Amazon<sup>8</sup> associated with alcohol<sup>9</sup> and poison: 'la plaisanterie anglaise est un acide qui corrode si bien les êtres sur lesquels il tombe qu'il en fait des squelettes lavés et brossés. [...] la moquerie

1: Y. p.109.

2: Y. p.156.

3: Y. p.5.

4: Cf. Y. p.21: 'mon frère aîné semblait avoir absorbé le peu de maternité qu'elle avait au coeur.'

5: Y. p.5.

6: Y. p.156.

7: Ibid. All this is Freudian enough. Cf. also G. Durand's comments on milk: Les Structures [...], pp.294-295.

8: Cf. Y. p.286: 'J'ai remarqué depuis que la plupart des femmes qui montent bien à cheval ont peu de tendresse. Comme aux amazones, il leur manque une mamelle, [...].' A neat link between liquid and journey themes!

9: Cf. the section on liquids and fire below.

laisse un venin mortel dans les blessures qu'elle ouvre à plaisir.<sup>1</sup>  
 Thus her passion is conveyed by references to destructive, parching  
 storms such as 'le tourbillon du désert'<sup>2</sup> and by the equally stormy  
 Channel - 'mer froide, mer orageuse'.<sup>3</sup> It is also appropriate that  
 lady Dudley should have no memory and, therefore, no care for the  
 future.<sup>4</sup> As a result, she lacks the stillness and the depth of the  
 source: 'je ne sentais jamais rien de recueilli, de saint, de  
 profond comme chez Henriette: elle était toujours insatiable comme  
 une terre sablonneuse.'<sup>5</sup> She does not nourish but is nourished:  
 'Quelles oppositions avec Clochegourde! [...] l'une attirant à  
 elle les moindres parcelles humides pour s'en nourrir, l'autre  
 exsudant son âme, [...].'<sup>6</sup>

The wine-harvest offers another occasion for the association  
 of maternity and nutritive liquids - appropriately enough as  
 Henriette has already exclaimed: 'mon coeur est comme enivré de  
 maternité!'<sup>7</sup> The ripening of the fruit and the flow of wine makes  
 the harvest a period of happiness and hope: 'Les fruits sont tous  
 mûrs. La moisson est faite, le pain devient moins cher, et cette  
 abondance rend la vie heureuse.'<sup>8</sup> An unprecedented fertility  
 overflows from Clochegourde where 'Les pressoirs sont constamment  
 ouverts.'<sup>9</sup> - a fertility presided over by a radiant Henriette:  
 'C'était des allées et venues des ceps à la mère, il ne se cueillait  
 pas une grappe qu'on ne la lui montrât.'<sup>10</sup> The luxuriance of the

1: Y. p.271. Once again, images describing lady Dudley can be seen as devalued forms of those evoking Henriette.

2: Y. p.230.

3: Y. p.245. Cold England again.

4: Cf. Chapter 1, p.26.

5: Y. p.284.

6: Y. pp.230-231.

7: Y. p.92.

8: Y. p.124. The combination of bread and wine suggests a second communion (cf. Y. p.93). Cf. also below p.360.

9: Y. p.125.

10: Y. p.126. Durand sees wine as 'le symbole de la vie cachée, de la jeunesse triomphante et secrète.' (Les Structures [...], p.298).

harvest, which prefigures the apparently miraculous effect of Henriette's presence on the fishermen's catch,<sup>1</sup> and which precedes what Félix calls 'la première grande fête de sa maternité.',<sup>2</sup> is accompanied by the renewal of the past and the prospect of a renewed future: 'Je redevins enfant avec eux [Jacques et Madeleine], plus enfant qu'eux peut-être, car j'espérais aussi ma récolte.'<sup>3</sup> Thus after a past 'où tout était aride et fatigant',<sup>4</sup> Henriette exclaims: 'L'uniformité malheureuse de mes jours est rompue, la vie devient belle avec des espérances, [...].'<sup>5</sup>

Other passages in le Lys, incorporating references to 'gros' or 'gonfler', evoke situations which are pregnant with disaster: 'En ce jour commencent les représailles des enfants dont l'indifférence engendrée par les déceptions du passé, grossie des épaves limoneuses qu'ils en ramènent, s'étend jusque sur la tombe.'<sup>6</sup> Or they may indicate frustrated emotion which threatens to overflow: 'j'ai souvent surpris Henriette [...] abîmée en ces rêveries orageuses pendant lesquelles les pensées gonflent le sein, eniment le front, [...].'<sup>7</sup> Hence, after a childhood characterised by 'l'impossibilité d'épancher les sentiments dont [s]on pauvre coeur était gros',<sup>8</sup> the fulfilment of all Félix's youthful frustrations - sexual, spiritual-celestial, and, not least, filial,

1: Cf. Y. p.205. Alain, as perceptive and appreciative as ever, writes: 'Et l'image quasi biblique de la pêche miraculeuse ne fait que redoubler l'éloquence naturelle à ce pays, où tout nous crie que la nature suffit et même nous comble', relating this episode to the hunger and thirst felt by Henriette on her deathbed. Cf. Avec Balzac, pp. 28,29, and, for hunger and thirst, Chapter 6, pp.310-311.

2: Y. p.136. Félix is referring more specifically to Jacques' first riding-lesson, which follows the gathering of the chestnuts.

3: Y. p.126.

4: Y. p.127.

5: Ibid.

6: Y. p.21.

7: Y. p.122.

8: Y. p.10. Cf. Y. p.20: 'Je me jetai à ses pieds, j'embrassai ses genoux en pleurant à chaudes larmes, je lui ouvris mon coeur, gros d'affection;' and the passage 'Une brillante carrière [...] une force inerte!' Y. p.95.



is represented by the sight of Henriette de Mortsauf, whose 'globes azurés [...] douillettement couchés dans des flots de dentelle' prompt him to plunge at her 'comme un enfant qui se jette dans le sein de sa mère.'<sup>1</sup>

The presence of such nutritive, maternal liquids in le Lys accounts for the association of an upsurge of water with rebirth: 'quel aimant nous a dirigés sur l'océan des eaux amères, vers la source d'eau douce, [...]. Nous voici devant la crèche d'où s'éveille un divin enfant [...].'<sup>2</sup> Water not only gives birth to two nymphs,<sup>3</sup> but also cradles first Félix, then Félix and Henriette.<sup>4</sup> As Bachelard again observes: 'Des quatre éléments, il n'y a que l'eau qui puisse bercer. C'est elle l'élément berçant. C'est un trait de plus de son caractère féminin: elle berce comme une mère.'<sup>5</sup>

The presence of such liquids in le Lys, frequently if not invariably associated with Henriette de Mortsauf, reflects her fecundating effect on Félix who remarks of Clochegourde: 'La plupart de mes idées, [...], sont nées là, comme les parfums émanent des fleurs;'<sup>6</sup> and, after her death: 'tout ce que je puis avoir de bon émane de cette tombe, comme d'un lys les parfums qui embaument l'atmosphère.'<sup>7</sup> Félix is deeply conscious of her 'maternité spirituelle': 'apprenez que tout ce que je puis avoir de grand en moi vient de vous. Ne savez-vous donc pas que je suis votre ouvrage?'<sup>8</sup>

1: Y. p.25. Cf. above p.181.

2: Y. p.91.

3: Cf. Y. p.113.

4: Cf. the passages from Y. pp.69,203, quoted above p.186 and the passage beginning: 'L'action de lever le bras en temps égaux berçait ma pensée [...]', Y. p.138, quoted above p.195(n.7). Cf. also the reference (Y. p.54) to the 'toue' - whose shape may recall that of the valley and the goblet.

5: G. Bachelard: L'Eau et les rêves, p.177. Cf. ibid. pp.179-180 for an examination of the 'promenade en bateau' episode. Following in Bachelard's wake, G. Durand talks about 'bercer' etc. in Les Structures [...], pp.266, 286-287. The 'mer' - 'mère' association is, again, Freudian.

6: Y. p.44. Their presence no doubt also reflects Henriette's desire to prolong her apparently maternal relationship with Félix.

7: Y. p.322. As noted above, perfumes are examined in Chapter 7.

8: Y. p.255.

This is a strangely moving remark - perhaps partly because here, as elsewhere, the Balzacian character's creative autonomy is being asserted: if Félix the artist has a certain creative ability, he attributes that ability not to his actual author but to a person within his own work. Félix's preoccupation with 'sources' is also a disclosure of the genesis of his own 'ouvrage': as with so many other Romantic poets, his 'mother' is also his Muse. This, then, is yet another reason for the marvellous coherence and self-containment of Félix's narrative.

(6)

Liquids and fire

'Etre à la fois madame de Mortsauf et lady Dudley, mais, mon ami, n'est-ce pas vouloir réunir l'eau et le feu?' 1

Although, when comparing the union of lady Dudley and Henriette de Mortsauf to an attempt to unite fire and water, Natalie de Manerville implies that the two elements are incompatible, there is evidence in Félix's narrative that they can achieve periods of equilibrium: for example, in blood: 'Je restai tout hébété, savourant la pomme que je venais de voler, gardant sur mes lèvres la chaleur de ce sang que j'avais aspiré.'<sup>2</sup> In the same way as Félix is renewed by the nutritive liquids mentioned in the last section, so is he stimulated by the contagious warmth of Henriette's blood: 'L'eau et la chaleur sont nos deux biens vitaux.'<sup>3</sup> As Henriette reveals to Félix in her last letter, she was similarly aroused: 'l'ardeur de votre sang a réveillé l'ardeur du mien;'<sup>4</sup> Once again, a liquid is awakened;<sup>5</sup> its heat, its latent energy, is mobilised.

A number of other images in le Lys dans la vallée show that the energy materialised in blood is responsive and easily activated: 'Le souffle de son âme [...] expirant onduleusement à l'oreille d'où il précipitait l'action du sang.'<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere, the blood is a vehicle for absorbing and preserving new energy whose presence is revealed by its enriched redness:

1: Y. p.332. Quoted by J.-P.Richard: Etudes sur le romantisme, p.101. There is, however, also light.

2: Y. p.26.

3: G. Bachelard: L'Eau et les rêves, p.174. Elsewhere, however, (ibid. p.84) Bachelard notes: 'Il y a [...] une poétique du sang. C'est une poétique du drame et de la douleur, car le sang n'est jamais heureux.'

4: Y. p.317. This is, however, a cliché.

5: Cf. above p.180 and Y. p.20.

6: Y. pp.39-40.

'Pour les imaginations ardentes, pour les êtres chez lesquels l'enthousiasme passe dans le sang, le teint d'une pourpre nouvelle, et chez qui la passion prend les formes de la constance, l'absence n'a-t-elle pas l'effet des supplices qui raffermiraient la foi des premiers chrétiens, et leur rendaient Dieu visible?' 1

Once in the blood, this new energy gains in intensity and is projected towards its new goal; the past is consolidated and the future is assured:

'N'existe-t-il pas chez un coeur rempli d'amour des souhaits incessants qui donnent plus de prix aux formes désirées en les faisant entrevoir par le feu des rêves? [...] Le passé, repris souvenir à souvenir, s'agrandit; l'avenir se meuble d'espérances.' 2

However, Henriette's second reference to the activation of her blood is accompanied by an element of remorse:

'Votre nom prononcé par mes enfants m'emplissait le coeur d'un sang plus chaud qui colorait aussitôt mon visage et je tendais des pièges à ma pauvre Madeleine pour le lui faire dire, tant j'aimais les bouillonnements de cette sensation.' 3

For, although blood would be gladly sacrificed to the beloved - 'J'avais honte, [...] j'aurais voulu que madame de Mortsauf me demandât mon sang.'<sup>4</sup> - even when specifically associated with future potentiality - 'Pour ne pas voir un pli se former sur vos fronts, [...], nous donnons notre sang, nous dépensons l'avenir.'<sup>5</sup> - elsewhere in the narrative blood is seen as a force to be withheld: 'Voulez-vous donc m'ôter le triste plaisir de faire éteindre le sang de mes blessures par une main amie?';<sup>6</sup> 'Elle prit mon bras, s'y appuya résignée, saignant, mais ayant mis un appareil sur ses blessures.'<sup>7</sup>

1: Y. p.175.

2: Y. p.175. The reference to 'le feu des rêves' is important since it completes Félix's previous description of his nocturnal longings, Y. p.40. Cf. above p.180.

3: Y. p.318. Cf. above p.195.

4: Y. p.275.

5: Y. p.3. Thus Alain's description of Félix 'à jamais vidé de son sang' shows remarkable consistency with the imagery of the novel. (Avec Balzac, p.30; quoted above p.184 n.5.)

6: Y. p.146.

7: Y. p.250. Cf. the passages Y. p.30: 'si vous voulez [...] jours de l'automne;' and Y. p.83: 'Je lui contai [...] saignaient encore.'

Thus Félix deplores the debilitating effect of loss of blood:

'Jeux accablants dans lesquels notre puissance s'échappe tout entière sans aliment, comme le sang par une blessure inconnue.

La sensibilité coule à torrents, il en résulte d'horribles affaiblissements, [...].'<sup>1</sup> As before, the energy of liquids comes from their preservation.

Nevertheless, the warmth of other liquids than blood is occasionally indicative of increased energy. The repeated references to the Indre valley's 'lointains vaporeux',<sup>2</sup> its 'sinuosités vaporeuses',<sup>3</sup> and 'un ciel chaud et vaporeux',<sup>4</sup> emphasise its complicity and responsiveness to the birth of Félix's and Henriette's love. Their intimacy culminates in a reference to warm perspiration: 'Cher enfant, ne t'échauffe pas trop! Puis me passant la main tour à tour sur le cou et dans les cheveux, elle me donna un petit coup sur la joue en ajoutant: - Tu es en nage! Ce fut la seule fois que j'entendis cette caresse de la voix, le tu des amants.'<sup>5</sup> Warm tears, themselves associated with blood in the 'communion' scene when Félix exclaims: 'Oui, je viens [...] de m'unir à votre âme, comme nous nous unissons au Christ en buvant sa divine substance.',<sup>6</sup> convey the intensity of Félix's and Henriette's emotions: 'à ce monsieur! des larmes chaudes jaillirent de mes yeux.';<sup>7</sup> 'quelques pleurs

1: Y. p.73. In his article 'Water and desert in Le Lys dans la vallée', p.80 n.4, K.J. Fleurant sees the force referred to by Félix here as 'both the occult force fluidique, itself a fluid, albeit a spiritual one, and sensibilité, an occult force in its own right.' Fleurant also points out (ibid.) that 'The loss of vital energy refers not only to the flow of sensibilité but also to the dissipation of the animal spirits, a concept Balzac took from Swedenborg and Mesmer.' For a more detailed discussion of the origins and meanings of the word 'fluide' in Balzac (cf. Y. p.298) see P. Nykrog: La Pensée de Balzac, p.83; M. Milner: 'Le Sens "psychique" de Massimilla Doni et la conception balzacienne de l'âme', A.B. 1966, p.164; and the whole of M. Bardèche's article 'Autour des "Etudes philosophiques"', A.B. 1960, pp.109-124.

2: Y. p.67.

3: Y. p.180.

4: Y. p.31.

5: Y. p.126. 'Tu es en nage' is of course a colloquialism. For other references to perspiration in Balzac, cf. J.-P. Richard: Etudes [...] pp.40-41.

6: Y. p.93. K.J. Fleurant (op.cit. p.81) rightly emphasises the explicitly Biblical associations of many of the water and desert images in le Lys.

7: Y. p.25. Cf. Y. p.20: 'Je me jetai [...] à chaudes larmes'.



roulèrent dans mes yeux, elle les vit et me jeta un regard tiède en portant sa main à mes lèvres.<sup>1</sup> However, tears, like the Indre valley itself,<sup>2</sup> may become dry: 'Cette révélation involontaire rendait pensifs ceux qui ne se sentaient pas une larme intérieure séchée par le feu des désirs.'<sup>3</sup> Tears, like blood, may evaporate and be lost: 'son oeil lançait alors une lueur subtile qui semblait s'enflammer aux sources de la vie et devait les tarir;'.<sup>4</sup>

Thus if tears can produce a chaste and exhilarating sense of intoxication - 'une ivresse sublime' - which is a source of strength for the future,<sup>5</sup> and if Henriette's heart, 'enivré de maternité',<sup>6</sup> is fulfilled and stimulated at the wine-harvest, elsewhere in the novel such intoxication can be debilitating and destructive: past energies evaporate and potentiality for the future is lost: 'En votre présence, je suis [...] trop ardent à saisir le moment présent pour me souvenir du passé. Sachez bien cette constante ivresse pour m'en pardonner les erreurs.' writes Félix to Henriette.<sup>7</sup> Hence 'une source de fleurs sortant des deux vases par un bouillonnement'<sup>8</sup> and 'ce parfum qui communique à tous les êtres l'ivresse de la fécondation'<sup>9</sup> are followed by 'une lassitude énervante'.<sup>10</sup> This same 'ivresse' is ultimately associated with extinction: 'Ses vertiges sont excités, je crois, moins par l'effroi de la mort que par une ivresse intérieure, par les fleurs fanées de

1: Y. p.114.

2: Cf. Y. p.154.

3: Y. p.43. Cf. J.-P.Richard: op.cit. p.13.

4: Y. p.41.

5: Y. p.112.

6: Y. p.92.

7: Y. p.144.

8: Y. p.115.

9: Y. p.119. Cf. Y. p.121: 'Quelle femme enivrée par la senteur d'Aphrodise cachée dans la flouve, [...]?'

10: Y. pp. 122-123.

'sa jeunesse qui fermentent en se flétrissant.'<sup>1</sup>

Since warm, often effervescent liquids represent energy which is intense but usually short-lived, the more inflammable the liquid, the more rapidly it consumes.<sup>2</sup> Anticipating the fluid-consuming nature of passions, Félix does, moreover, as has been seen, identify their environment as the desert and their period of activity as a thirst.<sup>3</sup> When these characteristics are combined, passion develops both through time and space, consuming both as it does so.<sup>4</sup> Thus, in her more ardent moments, Henriette no longer values the future but is wholly consumed by her present demands: 'Ne m'as-tu pas dit de vivre? je veux vivre. Je veux monter à cheval aussi, moi! je veux tout connaître, Paris, les fêtes, les plaisirs.'<sup>5</sup> Henriette does, therefore, exhaust the potentiality materialised in water and demonstrate the ultimate incompatibility of 'l'eau et le feu'.<sup>6</sup>

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- 1: Y. p.292. It should be noted that references to a specifically alcoholic 'ivresse' are rare in le Lys, even with the wine-harvest. The only suggestion of alcohol as 'l'eau qui flambe' (cf. G. Bachelard: La Psychanalyse du feu, Gallimard, 1949, pp.139-159) occurs, appropriately enough, in the description of lady Dudley's love, Y. pp.234-235.
- 2: Cf. the reference to 'des torrents de lave écoulés entre des rives desséchées', Y. p.128.
- 3: Cf. Chapter 3, pp.149-150.
- 4: Cf. Y. p.284: 'elle était toujours insatiable comme une terre sablonneuse.' and the passage Y. p.79: 'il semble vraiment [...] augmenter son domaine.' Thirst and appetite will be examined more fully in Chapter 6. Cf. also above p.185.
- 5: Y. p.301. Thus of la Peau de chagrin F. Bilodeau remarks: 'Dans la mesure même où le talisman épuise la coupe des désirs en les annulant dès leur formation par leur réalisation immédiate, il exclut le désir qui se repose en lui-même, il exclut tout miroir de la vie et enlève alors tout avenir.' (Balzac et le jeu des mots, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1971, p.85; cf. ibid. pp.44,142, and idem: 'Espace et temps romanesques dans "La peau de chagrin"', A.E. 1969, p.68). If lady Dudley manages to combine immediate gratification with thoughts for the future - 'Ces femmes savent alors sentir et calculer, presser tout le suc du présent et penser à l'avenir;' (Y. p.233) - Félix is no doubt, like so many Romantic poets, trying to transcend the mortality of which he is so conscious by his very description of it.
- 6: Cf. Balzac's description of Paris at the beginning of la Fille aux yeux d'or (V, p.255): 'Là, tout fume, tout brûle, tout brille, tout bouillonne, tout flambe, s'évapore, s'éteint, se rallume, étincelle, pétille et se consume.' As Raphaël de Valentin shows, Henriette's ardour would be symptomatic of a whole generation whose motto is 'brûler la vie.' In view of the present cult of instancy, it is not surprising that the Romantic period should be arousing more interest than ever before.

(7)

Water and death

In his survey of the theme of water in the Comédie humaine, Jean-Luc Steinmetz repeatedly emphasises its association with both life and death: 'Source de vie et de mort, telle elle [l'eau] nous apparaît en suivant le cours de la Comédie humaine.'<sup>1</sup> Bachelard, too, notes the fatality of water: 'L'imagination du malheur et de la mort trouve dans la matière de l'eau une image matérielle particulièrement puissante et naturelle.'<sup>2</sup> More specifically, Steinmetz sees a connection between rivers and projected or committed suicides: 'L'eau de la Seine [...] accueille le long de ses parapets tous ceux dont les illusions furent déçues.'<sup>3</sup> Thus, although Steinmetz also claims that 'La Touraine, région aimée, inspirera davantage Balzac et suscitera des visions plus sereines.'<sup>4</sup> it is not altogether surprising that, of the five references to suicide in le Lys dans la vallée, all five are by drowning and four in the river Indre. Whether the attempt is serious, as when Félix tries to drown himself in the Loire at Blois,<sup>5</sup> or rhetorical - 'Henriette, lui dis-je, un mot de grâce, ou je me jette dans l'Indre!'<sup>6</sup> - the persistence of the motif reveals a certain preoccupation with gentle death:

'Si je l'avais rencontrée là [à Clochegourde] pour la première fois, [...] je ne lui aurais pas ravi ce délirant baiser [...]. Non, dans les noires dispositions où me mettait le malheur, j'aurais plié le genou, j'aurais baisé ses brodequins, j'y aurais laissé quelques larmes, et je serais allé me jeter dans l'Indre.' 7

1: 'L'Eau dans la Comédie humaine, p.5. Cf. ibid. pp.9,13,15.

2: G. Bachelard: L'Eau et les rêves, p.122.

3: Op.cit. p.10.

4: Ibid.

5: Y. p.20.

6: Y. p.252.

7: Y. p.45. Cf. also Y. pp.81,325.

As Bachelard remarks: 'L'eau est l'élément de la mort jeune et belle, de la mort fleurie, et, dans les drames de la vie et de la littérature, elle est l'élément de la mort sans orgueil ni vengeance, du suicide masochiste.'<sup>1</sup> Time with which water has been seen to be identified finally re-asserts itself over the individual, tempting him with the solace of gentle oblivion.

Submersion in water is, then, associated with death as well as renewed vigour. Shipwrecks and drownings imperil Félix and Mortsauf.<sup>2</sup> Henriette's potentialities are swamped: 'Son front [...] paraissait plein [...] de fleurs noyées dans des eaux amères.'<sup>3</sup> When Mortsauf is unable to appreciate her treasures, they, similarly submerged in 'les eaux dormantes de l'oubli'.<sup>4</sup> If tears may feed artistic creation - 'A quel talent nourri de larmes [...]?'<sup>5</sup> - they may also stifle and destroy: 'Génies éteints dans les larmes, [...].'<sup>6</sup> As a result, even if the energy which is stifled is violent and better repressed, the presence of water impregnates its extinction with nostalgia and regret: 'L'aspect de cette figure fondue, à peine animée par un sourire faible, éteignit les flamme sorties des cendres.'<sup>7</sup> 'Tout est fini, reprit-elle [...]; vous avez éteint en moi les flammes de la vie corporelle.'<sup>8</sup> The flame no longer threatens destruction: it is the force to be preserved: 'Les mêmes choses étaient là, mais l'esprit qui les vivifiait s'était éteint

1: L'Eau et les rêves, pp.112-113. Cf. G. Durand: Les Structures [...], p.104: L'eau qui s'écoule est une amère invitation au voyage sans retour.'

2: Cf. Y pp.49,168,323 and Monica Crawley: 'Le Lys dans la vallée: Etude stylistique, p.51.

3: Y. p.41. Shades of Millais.

4: Y. p.86. Lethe indeed.

5: Y. p.5.

6: Y. p.96. The connection between tears, drowning and death is indicated by G. Durand: Les Structures [...], pp.106-107.

7: Y. p.220. Mortsauf.

8: Y. p.250.

comme une flamme soufflée.<sup>1</sup> When Félix speaks of 'des illusions qui s'enflamment et s'éteignent comme des fils de la vierge par une nuit chaude',<sup>2</sup> it is the flame which has become the virgin force. Thus, even water, deep, penetrating water, can be associated with the destructive, parching passion of lady Dudley: 'L'amour que satisfaisait la maîtresse a des bornes, la matière est finie, [..] elle est soumise à d'inévitables saturations;'.<sup>3</sup> Even the stimulating, exhilarating 'océan de l'amour'<sup>4</sup> which Félix has crossed by the time he reaches Clochegourde can become turgid and ominous: 'Une mélancolie profonde me rongait l'âme, [..]; trouver cet abîme à l'entrée du monde, un abîme sans fond, une mer morte.'<sup>5</sup>

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1: Y. p.252. Cf. however Y. p.41.

2: Y. p.122.

3: Y. p.232. Lady Dudley has already been associated with acid and poison.

4: Y. p.27.

5: Y. p.145.



(8)

Procreative liquids: the waters of fertility and frustration

On a first impression, there would appear to be relatively few direct or sustained references to procreative or seminal liquids in le Lys dans la vallée. However, a re-examination of certain images studied in previous sections and of other, hitherto unmentioned, water images, shows that the very discreetness and discontinuity of such references reflect certain developments in the characters' attitude towards sexuality. This section may, therefore, demonstrate the usefulness of studying the same images from different perspectives.

As J. Gaudon has pointed out, the singularity of le Lys dans la vallée lies in the fact that

'Balzac ayant substitué à la construction de type dramatique une construction de type poétique a su aller jusqu'au bout de son entreprise et écrire un livre qui fût tout entier figure: figure de la longue rêverie d'un homme jeune sur le monde extérieur, figure d'une relation amoureuse toute en nuances et en contradictions qui ne peut nous être dévoilée psychologiquement que dans les dernières pages du livre.'<sup>1</sup>

Since, moreover, the events of Félix's childhood so often prefigure the theme of his later narrative, it is appropriate that explicit mention of Félix's puberty<sup>2</sup> should be followed by more discreet but equally significant suggestion of effluent liquids when, shortly afterwards, he first meets Henriette at the Ball: 'Si vous avez bien compris ma vie antérieure, vous devinerez les sentiments qui sourdissent en mon coeur.'<sup>3</sup> Nor is Henriette's reaction to his subsequent plunge exactly that of 'une vertu poinçonnée à la Monnaie

1: J. Gaudon: 'Le Rouge et le blanc: notes sur le Lys dans la vallée', p.78. Cf. above p.43(n.2) and below p.352.

2: Y. pp.19-20.

3: Y. p.25.

du rigorisme':<sup>1</sup> her sense of outrage is already disarmed by 'le pardon de la femme qui comprend une frénésie quand elle en est le principe'<sup>2</sup> and she correctly interprets what Félix describes as 'les larmes du repentir.'<sup>3</sup> Indeed, it hardly needs the psychological revelation of which Gaudon speaks - again evoked in terms of rising liquids<sup>4</sup> - to show that Henriette was fully aware that, for the first time in her life perhaps,<sup>5</sup> she was being confronted with male potency, in the form of an at least simulated orgasm.

The importance of this episode can hardly be over-estimated. On the one hand, it demonstrates the protagonists' sexual attitudes: however unprecedented the nature of Félix's attack, Henriette shows an awareness, a sensitivity, a maturity and a resilience far superior to that of the conventional prude; for the first but not the last time Félix shows that he 'appears to enjoy deliberately aborted stimulations, a kind of emotional coitus interruptus [...]'.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the episode provides the necessary relief against whose explicitness the much more muted evocations of sexuality may be contrasted. Thus, the next time Félix sees 'la lentille qui marquait la naissance de la jolie raie par laquelle son dos était partagé',<sup>7</sup> he remains rooted to his chair. His plunge has become a

1: Preface to the 2nd Edition of le Père Goriot, dated 6 mars 1835: XI, p.258.

2: Y. pp.25-26.

3: Y. p.26. He soon changes: 'Je restai tout hébété, [...], ne me repentant de rien, [...]' This solitary effusion of tears is one among many in the novel.

4: Cf. Y. p.317: 'l'ardeur de votre sang a réveillé l'ardeur du mien;'

5: A number of passages in le Lys suggest that Mortsaufr is on the verge of impotence (Cf. Y. pp.141,250). As J. Gaudon has pointed out, Henriette's children would seem to have been born by parthogenesis had they not inherited their father's syphilis (op.cit. p.73). The main reason for this is that Félix frequently emphasises Henriette's youthful innocence, despite her two children (e.g. Y. p.42). If, moreover, Félix is gratified by Henriette's reluctance to let the Count re-impose himself on her (Y. p.141), Henriette herself dresses in white to reinforce Félix's association of her with the lily. (Y. p.262). It is indeed Félix who would give Henriette a second virginity. (Cf. below pp.231,232).

6: L. Bersani: Balzac to Beckett, p.79. Bersani refers to the passage Y. p.110: 'Puis, vous le dirai-je, à vous si bien femme, cette situation comportait des langueurs enchanteresses, [...]' Not with lady Dudley, however! - but cf. Y. p.269.

7: Y. p.40.

memory, his orgasmic experience an image:<sup>1</sup> 'je revoyais la lentille  
[...]' qui depuis le bal flamboyait toujours le soir dans ces  
ténèbres où semble ruisseler le sommeil [...].'<sup>2</sup>

It is, moreover, significant that all the above remarks are prompted by Félix's explosion at the ball. Other later allusions to procreative liquids are even more veiled and less unambiguously exultant. When Félix exhorts Henriette to taste 'ces torrents d'affection dont il [le fruit] inonde les âmes, cette sève qui ranime les feuilles jaunissantes'<sup>3</sup> she replies coldly: 'Vous m'avez évité le mot amour, [...].'<sup>4</sup> The explosion of the poppy - 'Du sein de ce proluxe torrent d'amour qui déborde, [...].'<sup>5</sup> - though explicit, indicates to what extent Félix's virility has been repressed and rechannelled.

As a result, although violent and gushing waters continue to be associated with primarily sexual passion, their mood changes from one of unimpeded youthful vigour to one impregnated with a sense of guilt and dissipation. Storms - 'les mille orages de la passion'<sup>6</sup> -, seas - 'une mer aussi dangereuse aux chastes amours qu'à la pureté des consciences'<sup>7</sup> -, whirlpools - 'cette tourbillonnante agitation des sens'<sup>8</sup> -, and tempests - 'elle ne connaissait rien ni des plaisirs de l'amour ni de ses tempêtes'<sup>9</sup> - all evoke a potency which is harmful or wasteful. References to intoxication can be similarly complex-

1: The dominant motif of which is fire. cf. the development of the star from an experience to an image, above pp.18-23.

2: Y. p.40. L.-F. Hoffmann sees this passage as one of the oblique references to masturbation in Balzac: 'Eros en filigrane: "Le Curé de Tours"', A.B. 1967, p.99.

3: Y. p.91.

4: Y. p.92.

5: Y. p.121.

6: Y. p.333.

7: Y. p.183.

8: Y. p.181.

9: Y. p.206.

ridden: 'Je me penchai lentement vers son front, elle ne se baissa pas pour éviter mes lèvres, je les appuyai saintement, sans coupable ivresse, [...]'.<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere, the emphasis has changed from chaste waters with a sexual potency to chaste waters with spiritual potency: 'Les sentiments courent toujours vifs dans ces ruisseaux creusés qui [...] fertilisent la vie par les abondants trésors d'une foi cachée, [...]'.<sup>2</sup> The promise of Félix's puberty has not been realised.

Nevertheless, if Henriette is 'celle qui meurt [...] séchée sur sa tige, faute de sève.'<sup>3</sup>, if she dies of thirst and desiccation, it is at least in part because she has not satisfied her sexual appetites. It might be expected, therefore, that the theme of the repression of sexual urges should persist despite the discrediting of the violent waters of passion and the corresponding enhancement of the pure, still waters of platonic love. This more discreet but persistent theme centres on the distress and sense of frustration accompanying the shedding of solitary tears: 'Il y eut un moment où la lutte fut si terrible que je pleurais pendant toutes les nuits: mes cheveux tombaient. Ceux-là, vous les avez eus!'<sup>4</sup>

As a result, Henriette's constant effort to dominate her growing passion for Félix is accompanied by an attempt to withhold tears:

'Nous commençâmes à échanger des regards d'intelligence, mes larmes

1: Y. p.222.

2: Y. p.223.

3: Y. p.175.

4: Y. p.320. Although Henriette confides as she gives Félix her hair:

'- Voilà les cheveux qui me sont tombés depuis un an, prenez-les, ils sont bien à vous, vous saurez un jour comment et pourquoi.' (Y. p.222), Félix need not have waited for Henriette's posthumous letter to understand their significance. Cf. Y. p.262: 'Donner mes cheveux, n'était-ce pas me promettre?' Elsewhere the relation between hair and water is more explicit: Y. pp.119,191. (Cf. G. Bachelard: L'Eau et les rêves, pp.114ff.; G. Durand: Les Structures [...], pp.116-117). It would, however, be forced to see the gift of hair as a gift of water.

coulaient quelquefois quand elle retenait les siennes.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly evident when Félix becomes more pressing:

- 'Mon ami, cette proposition insensée de ...  
 - D'amour, lui dis-je à voix basse.  
 - Non, de charité, dit-elle en retenant ses larmes, [..].'<sup>2</sup>

Félix senses Henriette's fear of his tears: 'Je devinai pourquoi la comtesse m'avait interdit en Touraine la lecture de cette lettre, elle craignait sans doute de voir tomber ma tête à ses pieds et de les sentir mouillés par mes pleurs.'<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, after his betrayal, she forces him to shed them elsewhere: 'Je serrai Jacques contre mon coeur en versant sur lui les effusions de l'âme et les larmes que rejetait sa mère.'<sup>4</sup> As Félix lies outside Henriette's door, and when his frustration is perhaps at its peak, he refers to 'Cette heure de nuit passée au seuil de sa porte où j'ai pleuré de rage, sans qu'elle ait jamais su que le lendemain elle avait marché sur mes pleurs et sur mes baisers, [..].'<sup>5</sup>

These solitary effusions contrast with the ecstasy of the 'communion' scene: tears which are shed but not shared gradually deplete energy. They do not nourish but consume: 'des larmes dévorées [..] lui restaient sur le coeur;'.<sup>6</sup> Thus of the impotent Mortsauif who can no longer find 'une pâture à ses inquiétudes' Félix conjectures: 'peut-être aujourd'hui le manque d'occupations mettait-il sa maladie aux prises avec elle-même; ne s'exerçant plus au dehors

1: Y. p.72.

2: Y. p.135.

3: Y. p.170.

4: Y. p.238. Cf. Y. p.153 and note 1.

5: Y. p.182. Tears would appear to materialise the contradictory values attached to physical love in le Lys: 'La nuit je pleurais de bonheur, le matin je pleurais de remords.' (Y. p.233). Cf. too the combination of 'des larmes chaudes' and 'les larmes du repentir' (which as has been seen soon change) at the Ball. Thus, Y. p.102: 'Sa pureté m'arracha une larme d'admiration que l'égoïsme de la passion rendit bien amère.'

6: Y. p.84. Cf. Y. p.146: 'N'ajoutez pas à mes souffrances, vous ne les savez pas toutes! les plus secrètes sont les plus difficiles à dévorer.' For other references to tears, see below p.382.



elle se produisait par des idées fixes, le moi moral s'était emparé du moi physique.<sup>1</sup> Félix later relates this phenomenon to the frustration of sexual energies: 'Nous possédons une puissance qui ne saurait être abdiquée, sous peine de ne plus être hommes. Privé de la nourriture qui le doit alimenter, le coeur se dévore lui-même, et sent un épuisement qui n'est pas la mort, mais qui la précède.'<sup>2</sup>

Thus the theme of solitary or withheld tears is directly linked to that of sexual frustration and also to the wider themes of hunger and thirst. An examination of tear imagery has, however, introduced a new element into the theme of procreative liquids: not only Félix but also Henriette emits fluids; Félix, as well as Henriette, longs to absorb them. The sexual roles of Félix and Henriette do, therefore, seem somewhat more ambiguous than the episode at the Ball might have led the reader to expect.<sup>3</sup> The fact that references to procreative liquids do not, then, persist in the same form after Félix's puberty indicates a change of emphasis, a muting of his energies. After the initial confrontation, sexual potency is either associated with guilt and dissipation or painfully if not agonisingly repressed. Those images which incorporate what may be seen as procreative liquids are, moreover, balanced by others evoking nutritive, maternal liquids, which, especially perhaps after the 'communion' scene, have a relatively increased importance in the narrative. In such ways, liquids not only contribute to the themes of latent sexuality and suppressed conflicts,<sup>4</sup> but demonstrate once again the inseparability of 'forme' and 'fond' in le Lys dans la vallée.

1: Y. p.194. The conflict between 'âme' and 'corps' is noted in Chapter 7, pp.407-409.

2: Y. p.249.

3: Cf. L. Bersani: Balzac to Beckett, p.44: 'the very strength of sexual energy in Balzac makes sexual identities unstable and problematic. La Comédie humaine is full of couples where masculinity and femininity are functions of energy rather than sex.'

4: These will be further examined in Chapter 6.

### Conclusion

It can be seen from the foregoing sections that the world of liquids in le Lys dans la vallée is totally different from that of substances and forms. For only once does Henriette, removing her gloves, establish physical contact with water which even then remains strangely abstract, unresponsive and non-tactile. Only once does Félix actually perspire, and even those tears which he drinks so avidly seem remarkably insubstantial. How different from the sense of physical presence of the 'landes' and the carefully manipulated bouquets!<sup>1</sup>

For although when Félix first admires the valley, the Indre cannot be evoked without reference to a human presence - 'la rivière fouettée par la roue des moulins'<sup>2</sup> - the river itself is almost invariably kept at a safe distance from the protagonists: 'Les pentes bien ménagées mettent assez de distance entre l'habitation et la rivière pour sauver les inconvénients du voisinage des eaux sans en ôter l'agrément.'<sup>3</sup> The Indre is indeed only an element of the décor,<sup>4</sup> never allowed to intrude, to become a presence like the valley which exercises a sustained influence on the moods of the protagonists. How different from the ocean in l'Enfant maudit!: 'La mer devint pour lui un être animé, pensant. [...] Enfin, il avait épousé la mer, elle était sa confidente et son amie.'<sup>5</sup>

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- 1: In his article 'Water and desert in Le Lys dans la vallée', p.78 n.2, K.J. Fleurant notes: 'The author's description of the Landes de Charlemagne as "plates et sablonneuses" is not precise, perhaps intentionally so. The land contains clay and much of the area was then, as it is now, sufficiently arable to support farming. [...] Balzac was, therefore, not obliged to give the Indre the limpidity and the tranquility it often has in reality.'
- 2: Y. p.30. Cf. the reference to 'le chant monotone d'un berger' Y. p.31. This point is raised again, Chapter 7, p.392(n.2). Cf. also below p.266.
- 3: Y. p.35.
- 4: Cf. above p.177 n.1 and below p.419 and n.4.
- 5: IX, pp.702, 703.

Thus the river itself seems to contribute little to the valley to which it gives its name - consistently positive but anonymous, not unlike the Cise in la Femme de trente ans: 'Le murmure des eaux, la pureté de l'air et du ciel, tout s'accordait avec les pensées qui vinrent en foule dans leurs coeurs aimants et jeunes.'<sup>1</sup> Or the Lake Geneva setting for Rodolphe and Francesca: 'Ils se comprenaient au milieu d'un des plus beaux spectacles de la nature, dont les magnificences, expliquées par celles de leurs coeurs, les aidaient à se graver dans leurs mémoires les plus fugitives impressions de cette heure unique.'<sup>2</sup> If the river Indre, that most potentially mobile of elements, witnesses the raptures and torments of Félix and Henriette, it seems to remain disconcertingly unmoved and unmoving.

It is, perhaps, from this same inertia that Félix is striving to escape when he makes the considerable effort necessary to compose his narrative.<sup>3</sup> However, since this narrative is also an account of the past, it necessarily bears witness to the characterlessness and monotony of its sources. In the same way, when Félix reveals his sources' infertility, he makes an amazing and admirable bid for creativity. But, again since his narrative is an evocation of the past, the reader may, like Natalie de Manerville, take exception to this apparent sterility. The strengths and weaknesses of the water imagery are, then, the strengths and weaknesses of Félix's predicament - the predicament of trying to make a new start with a description of an impasse. If liquids show that Félix and Henriette have a potentiality

1: II, pp.720-721. Cf. however ibid. p.721: 'Si la mélancolie nous gagne infailliblement lorsque nous sommes au bord des eaux [...].'

2: Albert Savarus, I, p.792.

3: Cf. Y. p.4. (Quoted above p.33(n.3) and below p.406(n.4).)

which can only be maintained by frustration, they also show that if Félix's narrative is for him to have any potentiality, then that too can only be achieved at the expense of describing frustration. In other words, the character of Félix can only be made more sympathetic - should this be thought desirable - at the expense of the narrative's own internal coherence. If Félix seems to be just one among many 'rêveurs de nacelles', then at least le Lys dans la vallée offers its own brilliantly individual self-justification.

*S. J. M. C.*

## CHAPTER FIVE

### LIGHT AND SOUND IMAGERY

#### Introduction

- (1) (a) Light as a positive force
    - (i) Light of vitality and hope
    - (ii) Air and breathing
    - (iii) Dawn, spring and clear skies
    - (iv) White and blue; the light of purity
    - (v) Celestial and divine light; the star
  - (b) Light as a negative then again positive force
    - (i) Light of hostility and death
    - (ii) Light and dark
  - (c) Light of unity and eternity; forbidden light
- (2) (a) Sound as a positive force
    - (i) Hearing
    - (ii) The song of nature
    - (iii) Speech
    - (iv) The charm
    - (v) Chants and harmony
    - (vi) Language; mystery and disclosure
  - (b) Sound as a negative then again positive force
    - (i) Sound of hostility and death
    - (ii) Sounds and silence
  - (c) Forbidden sound

#### Conclusion



Introduction

Images of light and sound form one of the largest and most complex groups of imagery in le Lys dans la vallée. Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, in her study of light and flame imagery in the Comédie humaine,<sup>1</sup> records an average of .45 light or flame images per page of le Lys in the Pleiade edition, second only to Séraphita with .84 per page.<sup>2</sup> Since Lucienne Frappier-Mazur finds a close connection between light and spirituality and divinity,<sup>3</sup> this relative abundance may be in part accounted for - at least in the case of light images - by the primarily spiritual and celestial nature of the heroine, Henriette de Mortsauf.<sup>4</sup>

It is, however, apparent from Lucienne Frappier-Mazur's article that whereas light and fire have a more obvious physical similarity than light and sound, and although they are practically inseparable in such as the references to the sun and its rays, such a combined analysis can be justified neither on the grounds of convergence nor divergence. Light and flame imagery are neither homogeneous - thus at the outset Lucienne Frappier-Mazur observes 'une distinction fondamentale entre la lumière et la flamme'<sup>5</sup> - nor completely heterogeneous: 'Toute opposition trop systématique avec le rôle de la lumière appelle donc des réserves, même si, dans les grandes lignes, la différence est évidente.'<sup>6</sup> The relative homogeneity of light

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1: Lucienne Frappier-Mazur: 'Balzac et les images reparaisantes: lumière et flamme dans la Comédie humaine', R.S.H. (1966), pp.45-80.

2: Lucienne Frappier-Mazur: op.cit. p.79.

3: Op.cit. pp.46-51 etc. It was, of course, hardly necessary to undertake a word count to demonstrate what is essentially a tradition - Platonician, Christian, Spiritualist, - and, last but by no means least, Martiniste.

4: Lucienne Frappier-Mazur: op.cit. pp.51,56,67 etc.

5: Ibid. p.45.

6: Ibid. pp.53-54. Lucienne Frappier-Mazur does, therefore, examine 'Flamme et surnaturel' (pp.51-55) in the same way as she examines 'Lumière et surnaturel' (pp.46-51).

imagery - almost invariably associated with spirituality - does, moreover, contrast with the heterogeneity of flame imagery: 'A vrai dire, il n'est pas toujours aisé de distinguer entre feu céleste et feu infernal.'<sup>1</sup> Lucienne Frappier-Mazur's conclusions show that whereas her light-spirituality analogy gives a satisfactory interpretation of light imagery in the Comédie humaine, no such key, at least viewed from this perspective, can be found for flame imagery. This contrast between the apparent univalence, or monochrome, of light imagery contrasting with the polyvalence, or polychrome, of flame imagery, suggests that the difference between light and flame imagery is less one of degree than one of kind. It is precisely this quality of unity, of uncontaminatability, or, in a sense, of chastity, which in le Lys dans la vallée is most frequently associated with light. Light can be disassociated from heat - 'une lueur élevée, scintillante et froide'<sup>2</sup> - but flame, however hot, inevitably also illuminates. Unlike light, flame is, then, essentially polyvalent and heterogeneous. It does, therefore, constantly threaten to explode.

It is possible, however, to see more justification for the joint examination of light and sound imagery, at least in le Lys dans la vallée. Although light and sound are physically dissimilar, except in the sense that they are both transmitted in waves of air,<sup>3</sup> they are frequently and variously combined in le Lys, from the star with which Félix converses as a child to the 'harmonie voilée' of his bouquets.<sup>4</sup> Although the association of light and sound, forming part of a vast complex of 'correspondances', will be examined in a

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1: Ibid. p.53.

2: Y. p.263.

3: This is, of course, extremely important for Balzac. Cf. Chapter 7, p.375.

4: Y. p.119. The reader is in fact invited to make the connection through the reference to le père Castel (Cf. Y. p.116 and note 1.)

later chapter in this context,<sup>1</sup> the present chapter shows that despite the physical dissimilarity of sound and light they both materialise the same affective values. As Bachelard remarks: 'l'air est une pauvre matière.'<sup>2</sup> Unlike land and water, light and sound are not substances to be penetrated. Light and sound do not share the same density but the same movement, a movement which is constantly repeating itself, and as a sign of this constant repetition, which is frequently associated with the circle and the sphere. It is the phasic and rhythmic patterns described by light and sound images which, through a series of short but complementary and finally converging sections, will be the subject of the following Chapter.

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1: Cf. Chapter 7.

2: G. Bachelard: L'Air et les songes, Corti, 1943, p.15.

(1)

(a) Light as a positive force(i) Light of vitality and hope

From the moment Félix concentrates his childhood aspirations on the star, light frequently indicates the presence of vitality and energy in le Lys dans la vallée. As he returns to Clochegourde on the morning after his first visit, he watches the flight of 'les insectes qui vivent de la lumière',<sup>1</sup> in the same way as he formerly observed the insects and 'le bleu du firmament',<sup>2</sup> in the garden. Soon after his arrival, he witnesses Henriette's desperate attempt to revive Jacques: 'Elle lui tenait à la fois la tête et le dos, et de ses yeux sortaient deux rayons qui versaient la vie à cette pauvre faible créature.'<sup>3</sup>

If Félix values the light of Henriette's eyes as a life-giving source, as 'la lumière qui depuis six ans brillait sur /s/a vie',<sup>4</sup> and if he is renewed by one of her last glances: 'La femme qui se donne tout entière, m'écriai-je, en sentant mon âme illuminée par le coup d'oeil qu'elle me jeta, donne moins de vie et d'âme que je viens d'en recevoir',<sup>5</sup> he, in his turn, is the light of Henriette's life: 'Une femme qui revit sous les regards de l'aimé donne peut-être une plus grande preuve de sentiment que celle qui meurt tuée par un doute, [..].'<sup>6</sup> Thus Henriette exclaims on her death-bed: 'je vais revenir à la vie, je renaîtrai sous vos regards.'<sup>7</sup> Thus, too, as Henriette recovers from her faint after Mortsauf's attack,

1: Y. p.65.2: Y. p.6.3: Y. p.67.4: Y. p.274. Light is, therefore, also inspiration.5: Y. p.277.6: Y. p.175.7: Y. p.299.

'l'aurore d'une renaissance vient nuancer son front.'<sup>1</sup> Just as Félix is the light of Henriette's life, so do Jacques and Madeleine find him 'bienfaisant à la lumière de leur vie'<sup>2</sup> while he himself sees himself as 'le principe de la vie, le foyer d'où chacun tirait sa lumière'.<sup>3</sup> Henriette's withdrawal from him threatens to extinguish this light: 'Trouver la silencieuse froideur de la mort là où scintillaient les joyeux rayons de la vie!'<sup>4</sup>

As Félix also remarks: 'Le bonheur a sa lumière aussi.'<sup>5</sup> Light is often associated with happiness and hope: 'La lettre d'Henriette faisait briller un espoir à mes yeux.'<sup>6</sup> Just so does the light of the sun fill the future with new promise: 'Sa maternité tressaillit, éclairée par un tardif rayon de soleil qui lui jetait l'espérance.'<sup>7</sup> Henriette's death, therefore, deprives Félix of 'la lumière et l'espérance': 'depuis ce jour à jamais terrible [...] le soleil a été moins chaud et moins lumineux, la nuit plus obscure, [...].'<sup>8</sup>

1: Y. p.144.

2: Y. p.111.

3: Y. p.252.

4: Ibid.

5: Y. p.171. Cf. below p.388(n.1).

6: Y. p.323.

7: Y. p.51.

8: Y. pp.303, 322. Once again offering a parody of Félix, lady Dudley calls him 'son vivifiant soleil' (Y. p.273). References to the sun in le Lys will be examined in more detail in Chapter 6.



(ii) Air and breathing

Félix's childhood is, as has been seen, characterised by restricted movement. It is also characterised by restricted breathing: 'tout mon être dut exprimer une résignation morne sous laquelle les grâces et les mouvements de l'enfance furent étouffés, [...]'.<sup>1</sup> At the ball, where Félix's sense of suffocation reaches a climax - 'En un moment je fus suffoqué par la chaleur, [...]'.<sup>2</sup> - his meeting with Henriette enables him to breathe afresh: 'Je restai tout hébété, [...], gardant sur mes lèvres la chaleur de ce sang que j'avais aspiré, [...]'.<sup>3</sup> Thereafter he is soon free to appreciate 'le sentiment du beau qui respire dans le paysage de Tours'.<sup>4</sup> and enjoy the open air: 'En pensant que mon élue vivait en Touraine, j'aspirais l'air avec délices, [...]'.<sup>5</sup> 'j'y respirais un air chargé de bonheur'.<sup>6</sup> Just as Félix inhales 'une bienfaisante fraîcheur'.<sup>7</sup> as he approaches Clochegourde, so does he feel similarly refreshed in the presence of Henriette: 'Le souffle de son âme se déployait dans les replis des syllabes, [...]. Combien de fois [...] ne me suis-je pas fait injustement gronder [...] pour aspirer l'air qui sortait de sa lèvre chargé de son âme, [...]'.<sup>8</sup>

The therapeutic effects of the open air of Touraine are reiterated at intervals throughout the narrative: 'Si l'étude vous a rendu malade, dit-elle, l'air de notre vallée vous remettra'.<sup>9</sup>; 'il [le conte] respira dans cette vallée les enivrantes odeurs d'une espérance

1: Y. p.6.2: Y. p.23.3: Y. p.26. For other examples of Félix inhaling liquids, cf. Y. pp.93,94.4: Y. p.28.5: Y. p.26.6: Y. p.36.7: Y. p.30.8: Y. pp.39,40. It is, of course, almost tautology to speak of 'le souffle de son âme'. Cf. G. Durand: Les Structures [...], pp. 199-201.9: Y. p.51.

fleurie.<sup>1</sup> Félix's exhilarating walk from Clochegourde to Frapesle both reflects and intensifies his exhilaration with Henriette:

'Avant de me retrouver à l'étroit dans une chambre, je voulus [...] rassembler dans l'air les effluves de cette âme qui toutes devaient venir à moi.'<sup>2</sup> Their intimacy seems to be consummated when the rhythm of their breathing coincides: 'Alors j'ai su ce que c'était que respirer en respirant avec toi, quand la crise te permit d'aspirer notre air.'<sup>3</sup> Just as Félix is a source of energy and light to a failing Henriette so is he the breath of her life: he therefore tries to transmit to her 'la brise lumineuse des matins',<sup>4</sup> and elsewhere Henriette exclaims: 'Dieu ne veut pas que je meure: il vous envoie à moi comme il dispense son souffle à ses créations, [...].'<sup>5</sup>

It follows from the above that restricted air and breathing continue to be associated with frustration and death. Thus Henriette exclaims after a quarrel with Mortsauf: 'il me faut de l'air',<sup>6</sup> whereas during his illness 'la maison entière respirait;'.<sup>7</sup> Henriette's complaints will stifle her if she continues to devour them,<sup>8</sup> as the whole household is being stifled: Félix deplores 'ces difficultés qui, semblables à des lianes, étouffaient, comprimaient les mouvements et la respiration de cette famille, [...].'<sup>9</sup> Thus, after Henriette's

1: Y. p.63. Cf. Y. pp.66, 107.

2: Y. p.95. Cf. Eugénie Grandet, III, pp.628-629: 'Dans la vie morale, aussi bien que dans la vie physique, il existe une aspiration et une respiration: l'âme a besoin d'absorber les sentiments d'une autre âme, [...].' (Quoted by P. Nykrog: La Pensée de Balzac, p.340.)

3: Y. p.145. This union, which is perpetuated in a different form even after Henriette's death (cf. Y. p.322) is also experienced by Madeleine: 'Madeleine resta les yeux attachés sur sa mère, respirant quand elle respirait, imitant son souffle léger, [...].' (Y. p.306).

4: Y. p.226. Cf. Lucienne Frappier-Mazur: 'Balzac et les images "reparaissantes" [...].', p.47: 'La lumière ne se voit pas seulement, elle se respire:'.

5: Y. p.189. Cf. Y. p.233: 'Le souffle de cet amour invincible.'

6: Y. p.256. Cf. the 'peser' theme noted above p.87 and also p.143.

7: Y. p.195.

8: Cf. Y. p.92.

9: Y. p.112. Cf. Y. p.67: The countess brings the children down to the river because: 'Ils étouffaient là-haut.' Another remark which is natural enough but not quite so anodyne when viewed in the context of the theme.

death, Félix is no longer allowed to come and breathe 'l'air de cette terrasse'.<sup>1</sup> Just as when he was a child and overwhelmed by 'le vent d'orage'<sup>2</sup> now is he paralysed by 'le vent glacé de la mort.'<sup>3</sup>

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1: Y. p.325.

2: Y. p.15.

3: Y. p.242. Again, clichés whose interest lies in their relevance to the theme.

(iii) Dawn, spring and clear skies

Félix's first meeting with Henriette is accompanied and followed not only by a new, sudden freedom to breathe but also by a sudden irruption of light: 'Je regardai ma voisine, et fus plus ébloui par elle que je ne l'avais été par la fête;'.<sup>1</sup> What is 'le soleil levant des Bourbons'<sup>2</sup> is also a dawn, an awakening of light for Félix: 'Les plus légers détails de cette tête furent des amorces qui réveillèrent en moi des jouissances infinies: le brillant des cheveux lissés [...], les lignes blanches que le peigne y avait dessinées [...].'<sup>3</sup> It is significant that this sudden birth of light within Félix should be followed by his morning walk from Tours to Clochegourde,<sup>4</sup> and that he should later see this period as 'l'aurore de mon bonheur'.<sup>5</sup> This new awakening brings new hope with new light: 'Il s'éveillait en moi des idées qui glissaient comme des fantômes en enlevant les crêpes qui jusqu'alors m'avaient dérobé mon bel avenir.'<sup>6</sup> Any threat to this hope threatens to extinguish its dawn 'comme une pluie fine et grise embrume un joli pays après quelque beau lever de soleil.'<sup>7</sup>

The sudden irruption of light which marks Félix's meeting with Henriette also marks the spring of Félix's life. Previously inhibited 'à l'époque où les jeunes gens doivent se livrer aux activités enchanteresses de leur nature printanière',<sup>8</sup> Félix is now free to take his May walk in Touaine: 'au printemps, l'amour y bat

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1: Y. p.25.

2: Y. p.24. Cf. Y. p.56: 'En ce moment monsieur de Chessel était au crépuscule de son ambition, le royalisme lui souriait' and the Conclusion to Chapter 2. Cf. also below pp.387-388.

3: Y. p.25.

4: Cf. Y. p.27: 'un jeudi matin je sortis de Tours [...]' and Y. p.315: 'Nous partons presque tous au matin, comme moi de Tours pour Clochegourde.'. Cf. also Y. p.8, and above p.121.

5: Y. p.57.

6: Y. pp.64-65.

7: Y. p.51. Cf. Félix's hatred of resistance and inertia.

8: Y. p.19.

des ailes à plein ciel, [...].<sup>1</sup> Henriette felt similarly elated after the ball and Félix's kisses: 'En retournant à Clochegourde, le printemps, les premières feuilles, le parfum des fleurs, les jolis nuages blancs, l'Indre, le ciel, tout me parlait un langage jusqu' alors incompris, [...].'<sup>2</sup> It is precisely this spring-like quality which Félix first noted in Henriette: 'Son corps avait la verdure que nous admirons dans les feuilles nouvellement dépliées, [...].'<sup>3</sup> Thus he also perceives 'ses premiers rêves bleus, comme on voit le ciel par des éclaircies de nuages.'<sup>4</sup> Just as Félix is both the light and the breath of Henriette's life so is he her spring and she is reborn on his return: 'La renaissance de madame de Mortsau fut naturelle, comme les effets du mois de mai sur les prairies, [...]. Comme notre vallée d'amour, Henriette avait eu son hiver, elle renaissait comme elle au printemps.'<sup>5</sup>

It is appropriate that the personality and moods of Henriette, 'cette femme descendue des cieux',<sup>6</sup> should be identified with the moods of the sky:

'sa nature intime, son attitude aux heures sereines, sa résignation aux heures nuageuses; tous ces tournoisements de la vie où le caractère se déploie, tiennent comme les effets du ciel à des circonstances inattendues et fugitives qui ne se ressemblent entre elles que par le fond d'où elles se détachent, et dont la peinture sera nécessairement mêlée aux événements de cette histoire;'. 7

1: Y. p.30. Although no month is specified, the description of the valley, Y. pp.30-31 certainly suggests Spring rather than August - the end of which is mentioned Y. p.80. By then Félix is supposed to have spent at least 40 days at Clochegourde (Y. p.72). Cf. Chapter 1, p.17 n.1.

2: Y. p.317.

3: Y. p.43.

4: Ibid. Cf. however, above pp.22 n.4, 106(n.6).

5: Y. p.175. Cf. Lucienne Frappier-Mazur: 'Balzac et les images "reparaissantes" [...]', pp.63-64.

6: Y. p.26.

7: Y. pp.43-44. The narrative itself, then, has its seasons and its climates. Cf. the discussion of the seasons in and of le Lys in Chapter 7, p.378 and n.1, pp.413-415.

Once again, the narrative gives form to ideas expressed in a more abstract way elsewhere - even in le Lys itself: 'Si les principes de la nature se plient aux formes vouluss par les climats, pourquoi n'en seraient-il pas ainsi des sentiments chez les individus?' (Y. p.266). The variation of individual and national character according to climate was, of course, a popular Romantic notion.



For just as Henriette occasionally radiates 'des sourires qui trahissaient en elle un naturel rieur enseveli sous le maintien exigé par sa vie'<sup>1</sup> so is Touraine noted for its occasionally smiling skies: 'Ici, comme dans les patries du nord, il est des sourires dans le ciel, rares il est vrai, mais qui paient bien des peines.'<sup>2</sup> One such occasion heralded Félix's first visit to Clochegourde: 'les peupliers se balançaient en riant, pas un nuage au ciel, [..].'<sup>3</sup> It is, however, 'par un suave midi d'automne, un de ces derniers sourires du ciel'<sup>4</sup> that Félix reads Henriette's posthumous letter.

Not infrequently the clear skies of Henriette's happiness are clouded: she thus speaks of 'sa vie grise et nuageuse'<sup>5</sup> and Félix's surprise at Madeleine's age 'amassa des nuages sur le front de sa mère.'<sup>6</sup> Threatened, as has been seen, by storms and tempests - 'elles [les tempêtes] m'ont souvent enveloppée de leurs nuages'<sup>7</sup> - and, as will be seen, by lightning, she finally emerges brilliant and intact, her face 'serein comme un beau ciel après la tempête.'<sup>8</sup> The clouds are dispersed: 'Mais comme je vous ai tendrement aimé, que je suis restée votre femme soumise, que les nuages, en passant sous le ciel, n'en ont point altéré la pureté, vous me voyez sollicitant votre bénédiction d'un front pur.'<sup>9</sup>

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1: Y. p.43.

2: Y. p.90.

3: Y. p.30.

4: Y. p.315. The seasons and human moods are, therefore, related. For Balzac's consciousness of the seasonal 'ages of man' while writing la Comédie humaine, see XI, pp.207-209, 223-227 (noted above p.123).

5: Y. p.107.

6: Y. p.47.

7: Y. p.260.

8: Y. p.305.

9: Y. p.309.

(iv) White and blue; the light of purity

The invigorating effects of increased light, uninhibited breathing, and open skies have been seen to accompany Félix on his morning walk to Clochegourde. However, the skies are not only clear but blue: 'En pensant que mon élue vivait en Touraine, j'aspirais l'air avec délices, je trouvai au bleu du temps une couleur que je ne lui ai plus vue nulle part.'<sup>1</sup> Nature is not only spring-like but virginal: 'Si vous voulez voir la nature belle et vierge comme une fiancée, allez là par un jour de printemps;'.<sup>2</sup> To the awakening of dawn, spring and, indeed, of all nature, corresponds the awakening of the adolescent Félix, who is at 'ce bel âge où la bouche est vierge de mensonges, où le regard est franc, [..].'<sup>3</sup>, in the presence of the virginal Henriette 'dont les globes azurés et d'une rondeur parfaite étaient douillettement couchés dans des flots de dentelle.'<sup>4</sup>

There are innumerable references to the freshness and innocence of blues and whites in le Lys dans la vallée, from Henriette's 'premiers rêves bleus'<sup>5</sup> to 'le point blanc'<sup>6</sup> which Félix discerns from afar, although Henriette is that day wearing 'une robe rose à mille raies'.<sup>7</sup> Henriette is almost invariably dressed in white:

'Quand je fus dans le chemin de Frapesle, je vis encore sa robe blanche éclairée par la lune; puis, quelques instants après, une lumière illumina sa chambre.  
- O mon Henriette! me dis-je, à toi l'amour le plus pur qui jamais aura brillé sur cette terre!' 8

This aspect of Henriette is frequently emphasised by Félix whether by

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1: Y. p.26.

2: Y. p.30.

3: Y. p.20.

4: Y. p.25. For the use of the word 'virginal', see the comments above p.212 n.5.

5: Y. p.43. This is, however, traditionally erotic. Cf. above p.229 n.4 etc.

6: Y. p.29.

7: Y. p.43.

8: Y. p.95.

mention of 'S/a blanche idole',<sup>1</sup> 'sa forme blanche',<sup>2</sup> 'sa blanche toilette',<sup>3</sup> or of 'S/a blanche Henriette.'<sup>4</sup> She herself, also mistaken as to the colour of her dress when Félix first visits Clochegourde, habitually wears white to remind him of her purity, of the distance which must be maintained between them:

'Pourquoi donc aimai-je à mettre une robe blanche? ainsi je me croyais mieux votre lys; ne m'aviez-vous pas aperçue, pour la première fois, ici, en robe blanche?' 5

Félix himself considers wearing white as a sign of his own purity:

'Elle fut une figure si religieusement adorée que je résolus de rester sans souillure en présence de ma divinité secrète, et me revêtis idéalement de la robe blanche des lévites, imitant ainsi Pétrarque qui ne se présenta jamais devant Laure de Noves qu'entièrement habillé de blanc.' 6

It follows that threatened or lost purity is indicated by a loss of whiteness, by 'la chute des roses blanches'.<sup>7</sup> Thus the purity of Félix's 'blanche tendresse', represented by the white flowers of the bouquets, is threatened by the flaming redness of the poppy.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, 'les ailes diaprées de l'amour qui I/e fit dévorer ses épaules' are contrasted with 'les ailes blanches du séraphin.'<sup>9</sup> Alternatively, a resurgence of whiteness denotes a heightened awareness of purity. Félix is reminded of Henriette's other name, Blanche, used by her husband Mortsauf, when she feels she has overstepped the limits

1: Y. p.117.

2: Y. p.123.

3: Y. p.191.

4: Y. p.209.

5: Y. p.262. Cf. above p.212 n.5.

6: Y. pp.154-155. For consideration of the self-consciously literary nature of such allusions, see below pp.419-420.

7: Y. p.292. It is, however, by no means clear from the context whether the flowers are lost to atone for lost purity or whether they accompany the recovery of lost purity. The confusion may point to the ambivalence of Henriette's own attitude towards her purity - or to a minor theological or metaphorical muddle in the mind of l'abbé de Dominis.

8: Y. p.121.

9: Y. p.151. The interplay of the contrasting colours red and white is discussed in Chapter 6.

of their intimacy:

'- Blanche, à boire, dit le comte d'une voix éteinte.  
- Vous voyez, il ne connaît que moi, me dit-elle [...].  
Et par son accent, par ses manières affectueuses, elle  
cherchait à insulter aux sentiments qui nous liaient,  
en les immolant au malade.' 1

On her death-bed madame de Mortsauf seems to shed her identity as  
Henriette to re-emerge as a purified Blanche:

'[...] vous me voyez sollicitant votre bénédiction d'un  
front pur. Je mourrai sans aucune pensée amère si  
j'entends de votre bouche une douce parole pour votre  
Blanche, pour la mère de vos enfants, [...].  
- Blanche, Blanche, s'écria le veillard [...].' 2

As a result, Henriette remains for ever inaccessible to Félix, finally  
withdrawing as she did when he returned to Clochegourde during his  
liaison with lady Dudley:

'Je demeurai debout, confondu, la laissant aller, la  
contemplant, [...], plus blanche que je ne l'avais vue,  
[...]  
- Henriette! criai-je [...].  
Elle ne se retourna point, [...], elle dédaigna de me  
dire qu'elle m'avait retiré son nom, [...]. [...] je  
pourrai me trouver petit au sein de cette foule [...];  
mais alors je serai moins aplati que je ne le fus devant  
cette forme blanche, montant comme monte dans les rues  
d'une ville quelque inflexible inondation, [...].' 3

Thus for Félix Henriette for ever remains 'comme une vierge Marie, qui  
doit rester dans ses voiles et sous sa couronne blanche.'<sup>4</sup>

If blue and white are the colours of Honorine's retreat,<sup>5</sup> and if

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- 1: Y. p.209. Cf. Y. p.305: 'Blanche et Henriette, ces deux sublimes faces de la même femme'.  
2: Y. p.309. If the names of Balzac's heroine are significant, then so may be the colour of her hair. After noting how Honorine's 'grappes noires' change to 'des cheveux cendrés' when she is inaccessible to Octave, P. Abraham comments: 'cela nous permet de deviner les raisons pour lesquelles Balzac donne des cheveux cendrés à l'héroïne du Lys dans la vallée. Il s'agit là d'une précaution, toute physiologique, que Balzac prend contre Félix de Vandenesse et peut-être plus encore contre soi-même, pour s'assurer que madame de Mortsauf restera, pendant la durée du roman, l'héroïne de l'amour chaste.' (Créatures chez Balzac, Gallimard, 1931, pp. 206-208,209).  
3: Y. p.237. Whiteness is here becoming hostile. Cf. the section on forbidden light below. The reference to the flood (cf. Chapter 4, p.193) is appropriate enough in this 'Apocalyptic' passage. Cf. above p.13 n.2 and the references to martyrdom below.  
4: Y. p.189.  
5: Honorine, II, p.296.

fair hair and blue eyes are an indication of innocence,<sup>1</sup> then blue and white are also present in Félix's bouquets to convey the combination of two innocences:

'Sur cette fraîche étoffe brillèrent [...] toutes les fleurs bleues dont les nuances, prises dans le ciel, se marient si bien avec le blanc; n'est-ce pas deux innocences, celle qui ne sait rien et celle qui sait tout, une pensée de l'enfant, une pensée du martyr?'<sup>2</sup>

Like white, the colour blue often evokes candour and innocence: the child and adolescent Félix is, for instance, associated with his familiar 'habit bleu-barbeau'.<sup>3</sup> Once it is discarded, he is on the way to becoming a man:

'Vous savez comment j'étais équipé pendant les trois mois de mon premier séjour à Frapesle. Quand je revins à Clochegourde lors de ma mission en Vendée, j'étais vêtu comme un chasseur. [...]

Quand Henriette vit le jeune homme là où elle n'avait jamais vu qu'un enfant, elle abaissa son regard d'une tragique lenteur;'.<sup>4</sup>

Blue is also associated with 'le bleu du firmament'<sup>5</sup> of Félix's childhood contemplations and with the opening of his 'brillante carrière': 'Avant de me retrouver à l'étroit dans une chambre, je voulus voluptueusement rester sous l'azur ensemencé d'étoiles, [...].'<sup>6</sup> It is perhaps not surprising then that he should speak of 'le paradis de /s/a jeunesse.'<sup>7</sup>

1: *L'Auberge rouge*, IX, p.973. For the combination of both white and blue, see *Les Proscrits*, X, pp.330-331.

2: *Y.* p.115. Henriette will indeed be a martyr to her purity. Cf. above.

3: *Y.* p. 23. Cf. the 'petite redingote en drap bleu de ciel' and the white trousers worn by Jacques for his first riding-lesson. When these become the subject of argument 'ses yeux bleus se cernaient' (*Y.* pp.136,139). Even the smallest details are consistent in *le Lys* - or as Henriette herself remarks: 'ma vie est conforme à elle-même dans ses plus grandes circonstances comme ses plus petites.' (*Y.* p.260).

4: *Y.* pp.187, 188. Félix must, then, have had too much of the Rastignac in him when he thought Henriette rejected him at the Ball because he was 'fagoté comme le singe d'un Savoyard.' (*Y.* p.26). He is now, however, coming under the influence of 'l'esprit déflorateur de Louis XVIII', (*Y.* p.278), and needs to reassure Henriette of the continued purity of their relationship.

5: *Y.* p. 6.

6: *Y.* p.95. This is, however, far from chaste. Cf. p.22 n.4 above.

7: *Y.* p.18.



Purity is occasionally conveyed by a more explicit identification of chastity and light. Félix has already been seen to dedicate to Henriette 'l'amour le plus pur qui jamais aura brillé sur cette terre!'<sup>1</sup> His desire to preserve 'l'or vierge de /s/es désirs'<sup>2</sup> is expressed in terms of light as well as water:

'Electrisé par ce regard qui jetait une âme dans la mienne, j'eus, selon la jurisprudence mondaine, un manque de tact; [...] Plusieurs pensées s'élevèrent en moi comme des lueurs, et me conseillèrent de laver la tache qui souillait ma candeur, [...].'<sup>3</sup>

If Henriette's glance stimulates a desire for purity in Félix, his own gaze may convey a similar candour: 'Pour bien comprendre mon récit, reportez-vous donc à ce bel âge [...] où le regard est franc, [...].'<sup>4</sup>; 'il [Origet] vit dans mes yeux la claire expression d'une âme candide.'<sup>5</sup> Henriette's eyes express a similar purity when Félix refers to 'la lueur des ses yeux chastement réservée'<sup>6</sup> and his expression possesses 'un lustre inexplicable' because of his union with 'l'âme pure qui de Clochegourde rayonnait sur [lui].'<sup>7</sup> Henriette, like Félix, feels the urge to preserve this purity, also expressed in terms of light and water:

'Ma confession ne vous a-t-elle pas assez montré les trois enfants [...] sur lesquels je dois faire pleuvoir une rosée réparatrice, et faire rayonner mon âme sans en laisser adultérer la moindre parcelle?'<sup>8</sup>

Elsewhere the brilliance of Henriette's innocence is linked more explicitly to the Heavens and acquires a new, specifically religious

1: Y. p.95.

2: Y. p.83.

3: Y. pp.81-82. Given the frequency of blue and the prominence of water in le Lys it is odd the two should never be combined - perhaps because actual liquids are so rarely contemplated in the novel.

4: Y. p.20.

5: Y. p.210.

6: Y. p.106.

7: Y. p.187.

8: Y. p.92.

dimension. She awes Félix with 'l'étincelante fierté des martyrs'.<sup>1</sup> It is, moreover, the brilliance of her martyrdom which, for a while, preserves his own purity: 'l'image de la sainte qui souffrait son lent martyre à Clochegourde rayonna si fortement que je pus résister aux séductions.'<sup>2</sup> For as Félix remarked on a previous occasion, again linking light and water imagery: 'En retour de ma chair laissée en lambeaux dans son coeur, elle me versait des lueurs incessantes et incorruptibles de ce divin amour qui ne satisfaisait que l'âme.'<sup>3</sup>

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1: Y. p.267.

2: Y. p.228. Again the martyrdom theme.

3: Y. p.151.

(v) Celestial and divine light; the star

References to the open skies of Touraine have been seen to be associated with Henriette de Mortsauf, 'tombée des steppes bleus',<sup>1</sup> whose 'globes azurés',<sup>2</sup> are miniature Heavenly orbs. If Félix perceives Henriette's 'premiers rêves bleus, comme on voit le ciel par des éclaircies de nuages',<sup>3</sup> it is because her forehead is a miniature world, luminous and changeable like the dome of Heaven: 'mon étonnement amassa des nuages sur le front de sa mère.'<sup>4</sup> Henriette's eyes, also globular,<sup>5</sup> are also closely linked to the celestial and the divine: 'les regards eurent de plus éclatants rayons en participant à la lumière si largement versée par le soleil dans la prairie flamboyante.'<sup>6</sup> This link is reinforced by the fact that it is the soul, 'cette étoile humaine',<sup>7</sup> with its associations with the divine and immortality, which receives and then retransmits Heavenly light: 'Elle leva les yeux vers le ciel, [...], et les reporta sur moi. Electricisé par ce regard qui jetait une âme dans la mienne, [...].'<sup>8</sup> Once received, this light can be retransmitted once more: 'Plusieurs pensées s'élevèrent en moi comme des lueurs, [...].'<sup>9</sup> In this process, light is not only being retransmitted but, as it were, reborn: light gives birth to new light. In thus being able constantly to give birth to itself, the movement of light can be seen not only as creative but cyclical. To the orb of the Heavens and of the Heavens and of Henriette's eyes and forehead may, therefore,

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1: Y. p.26.

2: Y. p.25. Cf. above p.21 n.1.

3: Y. p.43.

4: Y. p.47. If the forehead is a sky, the sky is a forehead: Y. p.47. Cf. the references to smiling skies, above p.230 and below pp.387-388. Following C. Baudouin on Hugo, G. Durand draws attention to 'le complexe du front' in Les Structures [...], p.158. Cf. also above p.147.

5: Cf. Y. p.277.

6: Y. p.203.

7: Y. p.200.

8: Y. p.81.

9: Y. p.82.

correspond the cycle of time. For as Durand remarks:

'Il n'y a dès lors plus de distinction entre le temps et l'espace pour la raison bien simple que le temps est spatialisé par le cycle, l'annulus.'<sup>1</sup>

Thus, while Henriette sleeps before her imminent rebirth in immortality, it is on her forehead that converge these same elements: the divine, the soul, the celestial light: 'Oui, les anges veillaient au-dessus de ce noble Henriette! Oui, leurs glaives brillaient/front où revenaient les augustes expressions de la vertu qui en faisaient jadis comme une âme visible [...].'<sup>2</sup> The cycle of Henriette's life is completed: 'Les lumières de la pensée annonçaient le retour de Dieu dans un de ses plus beaux tabernacles.'<sup>3</sup>

Ever since Henriette, 'cette femme descendue des cieux',<sup>4</sup> is identified with the star of Félix childhood contemplations, 'en conservant sa clarté, ses scintillements et sa fraîcheur',<sup>5</sup> she is frequently associated with celestial and occasionally specifically sidereal light: 'je veux être l'étoile et le sanctuaire, dit-elle en faisant allusion aux rêves de mon enfance, [...]. - Vous serez ma religion et ma lumière, [...] m'écriai-je.'<sup>6</sup> As a result, Henriette is among those women '[qui] partagent ici-bas les privilèges des Esprits Angéliques, et répandent comme eux cette lumière que Saint-Martin, [...], disait être intelligente, mélodieuse et parfumée.'<sup>7</sup> She has a divine aura - 'Henriette, la céleste créature, était radieuse'<sup>8</sup> - which envelops 'ses fidèles d'une lumineuse atmosphère.'<sup>9</sup>

1: Les Structures [...], p.324.

2: Y. p.305. Cf. Louis Lambert's apostrophe to Pauline, where he describes the divine light of her forehead, eyes and face, 'céleste image de /s/on âme;'. (X, p.434).

3: Y. p.305.

4: Y. p.26.

5: Y. p.26. Quoted in Balzac et les images "reparaissantes" [...], p.66, by Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, who also notes (ibid. p.51) that women are more often associated with light than men and lists Mme de Mortsauf among 'des êtres proches de la divinité.'

6: Y. p.151.

7: Y. p.214. For the reference to Saint-Martin, see Chapter 1, p.57.

8: Y. p.148.

9: Y. p.231.

Even when her health is failing Félix observes 'la fatale teinte jaune-paille qui, sur ce céleste visage, ressemblait au reflet des lueurs divines que les peintres italiens ont mises à la figure des saintes.'<sup>1</sup> It is not perhaps surprising, then, that at her death she ascends to 'le royaume de lumière.'<sup>2</sup>

Although the identities of Henriette and the star merge to the extent that Henriette replaces the star in Félix's aspirations, and to the extent that star experiences virtually vanish from the narrative once the initial identification is made, Henriette does, as seen above, continue to have contact with a celestial light which has an existence independent from herself. Thus, although Henriette at first appeared to have absorbed and subsumed the Heavenliness and the brilliance of the star, she still aspires to these two qualities: 'Bien, je veux être l'étoile et le sanctuaire, [..].'<sup>3</sup>

The paradoxicality of this situation points to the significance of the star and celestial light in le Lys dans la vallée. The star is, as was seen in the Journey Chapter, associated with the guiding star, the star which illuminates a traveller on his journey: 'Pendant cette nuit baignée de lumière où cette fleur sidérale m'éclaira la vie, je lui fiançai mon âme avec la foi du pauvre chevalier castillan [..], par laquelle nous commençons l'amour.'<sup>4</sup> In dedicating himself to the celestial light which is Henriette, Félix fortifies his faith and takes his vows: 'Semblable au prêtre qui, par un seul pas, s'est avancé dans une vie nouvelle, j'étais consacré, voué',<sup>5</sup> thus becoming

1: Y. p.242.

2: Y. p.294.

3: Y. p.151. Henriette is, therefore, not wholly unlike Félix who, while ascending towards Heaven, bears with him the memory of a previous Heaven. (Cf. Chapter 2, p.90).

4: Y. p.65.

5: Y. p.95.



one of Henriette's 'fidèles'.<sup>1</sup> A journey presided over by a star is, however, a unique way of travelling: the star is present at the outset, beckoning the traveller to leave; it seems, therefore, welcoming and accessible, as it were 'tombée des steppes bleus'.<sup>2</sup> Since, however, the star also accompanies the traveller to a distant goal he has not yet reached, the star is also momentarily inaccessible, 'une lueur élevée, scintillante et froide, [...].'<sup>3</sup> The star is, therefore, at both beginning and end of the journey:

'Mais il est dans les choses de ce monde une invisible trame de causes célestes qu'un oeil religieux aperçoit, et si vous êtes venu ici, peut-être y êtes-vous amené par une de ces célestes étoiles qui brillent dans le monde moral, et qui conduisent vers le tombeau comme vers la crèche ...' 4

Similarly, l'abbé Birotteau sees Henriette as either a morning or an evening star.<sup>5</sup> It follows that a journey presided over by a star can indicate a journey which can be taken in either or even any direction; it is a circular path which leads the traveller back to whence he came. Thus 'cette femme descendue des cieux'<sup>6</sup> is also 'LE LYS DE CETTE VALLEE où elle croissait pour le ciel, [...].'<sup>7</sup> Henriette returns to the Heavens of her origin and the star which once fell rises once more: 'N'ai-je pas dit que l'étoile se lèverait

1: Y. p.231.

2: Y. p.26.

3: Y. p.263.

4: Y. p.293. These words are spoken by l'abbé de Dominis. Although G. Durand does refer to the 'voyage sidéral' (Les Structures /.../, p.372) in the context of circular symbols, he takes the moon as 'la première mesure du temps.' (Ibid. p.326). Although the night when Félix commits himself to Henriette's service is 'baignée de lumière' and marked by 'la voix des heures' (Y. p.65), more specific reference to the moon are too few and too scattered to constitute a theme. (Cf. Y. pp.53, 93, 95, 256, 263-264).

5: Cf. Y. p.297. It is interesting that while it is of course Félix who introduces the star, 'le thème du mage' is brought out by the priests of le Lys. This shows how the mystical language Félix acquires as a child from his own confessor (Y. p.12) prefigures the vocabulary used by the confessors of Henriette. It is not, therefore, altogether out of character for Félix to suggest he becomes a priest (Y. p.101), even if, unlike Amaury, he never does so. For further reference to Félix's mystical vocabulary, see Chapter 7, p.417 n.3.

6: Y. p.26.

7: Y. p.29. 'Spiral' or 'annular' might be more apt than 'circular' here since the traveller moves in time as well as space.

brillante?'<sup>1</sup> It is, moreover, the very circularity of Henriette's trajectory which confirms her immortality: in returning to the beginning of her journey she also reverses time. As Durand again observes: 'Le cercle, où qu'il apparaisse, sera toujours symbole de la totalité temporelle et du recommencement.'<sup>2</sup>

Other references to divine and celestial light reinforce this theme of circularity and, therefore, of immortality. If Félix is 'le foyer d'où chacun tirait sa lumière',<sup>3</sup> it is because he, too, is a Heavenly orb radiating divine light. The association of light with an extended and more rewarding future on earth, with Félix's 'brillante carrière',<sup>4</sup> and his 'bel avenir',<sup>5</sup> prefigures the later importance of the light of Henriette's resurrection. Henriette's dawn or spring renaissances identify her not only with the brilliance of dawns and spring mornings but with the renewal of the days and the seasons.<sup>6</sup> Henriette thereby participates in the eternal cycle of nature, in the immortality of the cosmos.

Air and uninhibited breathing are similarly identified with the Heavens, the divine, and immortality. The air of Touraine is also a microcosm: thus, on his quest for flowers for his bouquets, Félix

1: Y. p.306. Cf. the passage Y. p.294: 'Oui, ce brillant esprit [...] royaume de lumière.' On both occasions it is l'abbé de Dominis speaking.

2: G. Durand: Les Structures [...], p.372. It is important to note that the above observations apply to Henriette only. Félix's position with regard to light - and time - is very different - as will be seen below in the section on 'forbidden light'. Cf. also the comments on Ballanche, Chapter 1, pp.63-66.

3: Y. p.252. The fact that Félix seems to believe this shows that lady Dudley's irony has had little effect and that he is indeed ripe for Natalie's reproof. The almost literal self-centredness of his remark shows how limited his vision must be - however grandiose. As Nykrog says of the 'fou': 'Son caractère strictement personnel le rend sans défense du côté de l'illusion: rien ne garantit l'authenticité de l'expérience.' (La Pensée de Balzac, p.27).

4: Y. p.95.

5: Y. p.65.

6: Cf. G. Durand: Les Structures [...], p.324: 'La nouvelle année est un recommencement du temps, une création répétée.'

admires 'un monde dans l'éther!'<sup>1</sup> It is this divine air which, like light, is associated with the immortal soul.<sup>2</sup> The ultimate in infinity is, as has been seen, 'un éther infranchissable'.<sup>3</sup> Air is further associated with immortality through the references to the rhythm of regular, sustained breathing: 'Il est des personnes que nous ensevelissons dans la terre, mais il en est de plus particulièrement chéries qui ont eu notre coeur pour linceul, dont le souvenir se mêle chaque jour à nos palpitations, nous pensons à elle comme nous respirons, [...].'<sup>4</sup> The rhythm of breathing repeats the rhythm of the seasons, recalls the circularity of the Heavens, and the 'foyer' of light which is Félix, radiated from centre to circumference.

The whiteness of purity and innocence is similarly identified with the divine, from Félix's 'blanche idole',<sup>5</sup> to his 'robe blanche des lévites',<sup>6</sup> and 'les ailes blanches du séraphin'.<sup>7</sup> Thus, too, must Henriette remain, like the Virgin Mary, 'sous sa couronne blanche'.<sup>8</sup> This reference to the crown may also recall the theme of the 'front' and that of circularity associated with divine light. Hence, bearing in mind Abraham's remarks about Henriette's 'cheveux cendrés', it is possible to appreciate the significance of the following passage: 'Je fus pétrifié par un regard animé d'une sainte colère, par une tête sublime couronnée d'un diadème de cheveux cendrés, [...].'<sup>9</sup> If Henriette withdraws from Félix at the ball 'par un mouvement de reine',<sup>10</sup> it is partly because she is later

1: Y. p.118.

2: Cf. above p.237(n.7).

3: Y. p.109. Cf. above p.91.

4: Y. p.322.

5: Y. p.117.

6: Y. p.155.

7: Y. p.151.

8: Y. p.189.

9: Y. p.25.

10: Y. p.26. Cf. below p.258.

associated with Mary, the queen of the Heavens, because she later accedes to 'le royaume de lumière.'<sup>1</sup>

It is evident from the above that ' $\sqrt{1}$ ' isomorphisme du céleste et du lumineux'<sup>2</sup> plays both a vital and specific role in Félix's narrative. If Félix and Henriette feel a sense of progress and achievement at the end of their circular journey, it is perhaps because 'Il en faut très peu pour passer du cycle au progrès.'<sup>3</sup> However, it is primarily because this group of imagery, establishing and conveying the circular whence immortal nature of Félix's and Henriette's journey, constitutes one of Félix's most coherent and consistent acts of defiance against time in the context of the greater act of defiance which is his total recreation of his past:

'Bien loin de plaider pour le temps, la mémoire, comme l'imaginaire, se dresse contre les visages du temps, et assure à l'être, contre la dissolution du devenir, la continuité de la conscience et la possibilité de revenir, de régresser, au-delà des nécessités du destin.' 4

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- 1: Y. p.294. Cf. Y. p.316: 'Ce que je confierai à Dieu dans mes derniers moments, vous devez le savoir aussi, vous le roi de mon coeur, comme il est le roi du ciel.' While hardly on a par with Henriette's cosmic vision, it is perhaps not altogether inappropriate to recall here that Félix was the confidant of a Wing.
- 2: G. Durand: Les Structures /.../, p.163.
- 3: Ibid. p.338.
- 4: G. Durand: Les Structures /.../, p.468.

(b) Light as a negative then again positive force(i) Light of hostility and death

Light and air are not invariably positive, life-giving forces in le Lys dans la vallée. Just as gentle breezes may be transformed into 'le vent d'orage' and 'le vent glacé de la mort',<sup>1</sup> so may light be transformed into lightning:

's'il s'agissait de ses enfants, [..] son oeil lançait alors une lueur subtile qui semblait s'enflammer aux sources de la vie et devait les tarir; éclair qui m'avait arraché des larmes quand elle me couvrit de son dédain formidable et qui lui suffisait pour abaisser les paupières aux plus hardis.' 2

The brilliance of Henriette's glances may convey aloofness and hostility as well as hope and renewed energy; their very vitality means that they are also a source of self-destruction. Thus Félix says of Jacques that 'le regard laissait échapper trop de pensées. C'était l'intelligence, l'âme, le coeur d'Henriette dévorant de leur flamme rapide un corps sans consistance;'.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, while engaged in her weaving, Henriette hopes to avoid 'les atonies qui suivent les grandes dépenses de force, aussi bien que les éclairs de l'exaltation.'<sup>4</sup>

The light of lightning is frequently ominous: 'L'expression d'Henriette m'avait éclairé, mais comme éclaire la foudre qui ruine les moissons engrangées.'<sup>5</sup> 'la naissance de Jacques fut un coup de foudre qui ruina le présent et l'avenir:'.<sup>6</sup> Mortsauif, already seen to be associated with storms and storm-clouds, is similarly associated with lightning: 'Devant certaines suppositions, son nez se contractait,

1: Y. pp.15, 242. Cf. above p.227.

2: Y. p.41.

3: Y. p.243. Cf. below pp.407-409.

4: Y. p.138.

5: Y. p.206. A faded metaphor is carefully revived. Cf. Y. p.258:

'l'Anglaise m'éclaire un abîme.' In both cases, descent is, as before, devastating.

6: Y. p.63.



son front s'éclairait, et ses yeux lançaient une foudre aussitôt amollie.<sup>1</sup> Although Félix hastens towards Henriette 'avec la rapidité de l'éclair', it is with this very lightning that her greeting crushes him: '- Ah! vous voilà! Ces trois mots me foudroyèrent.'<sup>2</sup> Her gaze may be equally devastating: 'Je [...] baissai les yeux pour éviter la foudre de son regard.'<sup>3</sup>

Paralysing or wounding glances are by no means uncommon in Félix's narrative. Mention has already been made of madame de Vandenesse and 'son oeil bleu foncé': 'Je fus arrêté par son regard et demeurai comme l'oiseau devant le serpent.'<sup>4</sup> In the eyes of madame de Lenoncourt the blue of innocence also acquires an unusual hostility.<sup>5</sup> A cold gaze is invariably antagonistic: 'elle [Henriette] tourna sur moi des yeux froids et sévères qui me firent baisser les paupières, [...].'<sup>6</sup> Thus, of Mortsauf, Félix remarks: 'Son oeil clair, jaune et dur tombait sur vous comme un rayon de soleil en hiver, lumineux sans chaleur, [...].'<sup>7</sup> Lady Dudley, previously noted for 'sa langue à triple dard',<sup>8</sup> can deliver equally wounding glances: 'elle nous enveloppa d'un regard plein de son mépris anglais et disparut [...]. - Vite à Clochegourde! cria la comtesse pour qui cet âpre coup d'oeil fut comme un coup de hache au coeur.'<sup>9</sup>

Just as the very brilliance of Henriette's gaze will eventually prove self-destructive so does she occasionally feel threatened by the fierceness of Félix's glances: 'elle m'agita le bras comme si

1: Y. p.71. Cf. Y. pp.70, 193, 314.

2: Y. p.236. The hostility of sound will be examined in the corresponding section of Part 2 of this Chapter.

3: Y. p.219.

4: Y. pp.15,18-19. Such remarks are common enough in Balzac. Cf. also above p.134.

5: Cf. Y. p.104.

6: Y. p.38.

7: Y. p.49.

8: Y. pp.283-284.

9: Y. p.265. A number of the above images offer various combinations of light, journeys and metals.

mes regards l'atteignaient trop vivement; quoiqu'elle eût les yeux baissés, elle savait bien que je ne regardais qu'elle;'.<sup>1</sup> Félix, who was 'ébloui par les lumières',<sup>2</sup> at the ball, cannot bear 'l'éclat d'une mise en scène constante':

'De même que les yeux habitués à ne voir que des couleurs douces sont blessés par le grand jour, de même il est certains esprits aux quels déplaisent les violents contrastes.'<sup>3</sup>

Hence Félix's eventual preference for the mystery and 'le caché' of Henriette: 'Madame de Mortsauf aurait dérobé son bonheur à tous les regards, lady Arabelle voulait montrer le sien à tout Paris, [...]'.<sup>4</sup> Hence Félix's later disaffection for lady Dudley, 'cette créature dont l'éclat semble phosphorescent et passager',<sup>5</sup> despite or even because of her African passion 'avec son ciel inaltérable'.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps Félix prefers his occasional but therefore all the more precious glimpses of Henriette's 'premiers rêves bleus'.<sup>7</sup> In the same way he prefers the more gentle, more subdued light of a future still full of promise: 'Une douce lumière éclairait le lit où reposait Henriette baignée d'opium.'<sup>8</sup>

1: Y. p.180.

2: Y. p.23.

3: Y. p.224.

4: Y. p.283. Cf. the section below on mystery and disclosure.

5: Y. p.230. Cf. Y. p.266: 'Son teint efface le lys, et ses yeux ont l'éclat du diamant!' Henriette thinks that two in love should live 'loin du monde dont le luxe et l'éclat les offenseraient.'

6: Y. p.230.

7: Y. p.43.

8: Y. p.305.

(ii) Light and dark

The prestige attached to gentle, subdued light is occasionally transferred to gentle, subduing shade, to 'une douceur ineffable qui, pour [lui] seulement, voilait la lumière de ses yeux;'.<sup>1</sup> However, almost immediately this shade is seen as a form of self-protection: ' - Est-ce que nous nous quittons? demandai-je en lui jetant un regard qui lui fit abaisser ses paupières pour voiler sa muette réponse.'<sup>2</sup> It is assumed out of necessity: 'pour elle, il fallait être amour voilé, force mêlée de tendresse, [..].'<sup>3</sup> As Henriette herself says: 'Je résisterai toujours à la force de l'homme;'.<sup>4</sup> Its subduing, restraining effect is respected, but not without reservation; it is increasingly a veil behind which Félix's 'curiosités allumées'<sup>5</sup> increase in intensity: 'Pour bien comprendre mon récit, reportez-vous donc à ce bel âge [..], où le regard est franc, quoique voilé par des paupières qu'alourdissent les timidités en contradiction avec le désir, [..].'<sup>6</sup> Just as this veil of darkness originally restrained desire, so does it contrast with this desire once released: 'je revoyais la lentille [..] qui depuis le bal flamboyait toujours le soir dans ces ténèbres [..].'<sup>7</sup> However, darkness is, if it ever was, no longer a restraining force. Félix's desire seems to be ignited in the war of attrition with darkness in the same way as he later speaks of 'des illusions qui s'enflamment et s'éteignent comme des fils de la vierge par une nuit chaude.'<sup>8</sup>

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1: Y. p.192.

2: Y. p.153.

3: Y. p.110.

4: Y. p.190.

5: Y. p.17.

6: Y. p.20. For other examples of light evoking virginal desire, see below pp.256-261.

7: Y. p.40.

8: Y. p.122. Flames illuminate. The theme of the maternity of night is examined in Chapter 6.

This war of attrition between light and darkness characterises a large number of images in le Lys dans la vallée. In each case it is the antagonism between them which seems to heighten their respective values. Darkness, like the 'landes', bears its submerged treasure: 'vous la retrouverez [...] pure comme un diamant encore enfoui dans les cendres.'<sup>1</sup> It is a backcloth which can offset light which is sufficiently radiant or intense:

'Quand ces sortes de scènes arrivent, l'âme savoure leurs délices sans les analyser; mais avec quelle vigueur elles se détachent plus tard sur le fond ténébreux d'une vie agitée! pareilles à des diamants, elles brillent serties par des pensées pleines d'alliages, [...]'<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, it is the very effort of penetrating the surrounding darkness which seems to give the light added brightness: 'Les chétives voluptés, [...], se détachaient vivement sur les ombres douloureuses de la scène actuelle.'<sup>3</sup> It is this darkness which offsets and enhances the inner shaft of light: 'elle devint [...] la lumière qui brille dans l'obscurité comme le lys dans les feuillages sombres.'<sup>4</sup>

This mutual enhancing of values accounts for the frequency of points or glimpses of light in le Lys dans la vallée. From the moment Félix first communes with the star in the darkness of the garden, he is fascinated by distant but nevertheless intense or instantly visible sources of light. Such light can cleave the darkness: 'Oui, ce brillant esprit, étoile angélique, sortira splendide de ses nuages pour aller dans le royaume de lumière.'<sup>5</sup> From the 'point blanc'<sup>6</sup> which is Henriette in her garden to the

1: Y. p.294.

2: Y. p.129. The ambivalence of the alloy neatly materialises 'l'harmonie des contraires'. Cf. above pp.139-142.

3: Y. pp.212-213. Cf. Y. p.128: 'ce fut une scène où les ingénues félicités de l'enfance paraissaient charmantes au milieu des teintes graves de l'automne commencé.' Cf. above p.140(m.4) and Chapter 7, pp.413-415.

4: Y. p.152. Cf. p.59 n.l. Cf. also below p.384(m.8).

5: Y. p.294. The continuation of the above quotation.

6: Y. p.29. Cf. Y. p.30.

'éclair'<sup>1</sup> of Henriette's essentially intermittent glances and to the single point of light at 'la dernière fenêtre du côté d'Azay',<sup>2</sup> he is drawn towards a light which has to be concentrated in one point to radiate from within peripheral darkness. The more intense this surrounding darkness becomes, the more intensely the light burns:

'Mes yeux ternis ne voyaient plus les objets extérieurs. Je contemplais les fenêtres de la chambre où souffrait Henriette, croyant y apercevoir la lumière qui l'éclairait pendant la nuit où je m'étais fiancé à elle.' 3

This accounts for Henriette's appreciation of the 'éternel joyau dont les feux brillent aux jours difficiles',<sup>4</sup> of 'un point brillant que vint souvent caresser son souvenir aux heures difficiles.'<sup>5</sup>

The beam, like the point of light, can also penetrate darkness: 'elle éclaira les ténèbres par un regard'.<sup>6</sup> Such light, so often associated with movement, is intense and powerful: 'Puis Henriette acheva de dissiper ces noires vapeurs et ces ténèbres par un regard de sollicitude qui rayonna dans mon âme comme le soleil.'<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere the shaft takes the form of an illuminated human figure, similar to the lily in the 'feuillages sombres': 'Elle était là, sereine sur son bûcher de sainte et de martyre! J'admirais sa figure qui m'apparut au milieu des ténèbres, [ ]';<sup>8</sup> 'Il s'éveillait en moi des idées qui glissaient comme des fantômes en enlevant les crépes qui jusqu'alors m'avaient dérobé mon bel avenir.'<sup>9</sup> Occasionally the shaft of light is even more clearly defined, as when Henriette strains her eyes to glimpse the Heaven above: 'Après être descendue dans

1: Y. p.41. Cf. Y. p.38.

2: Y. p.64.

3: Y. p.303. Once again 'le thème du Mage'.

4: Y. p.86.

5: Y. p.139.

6: Y. p.83.

7: Y. p.221.

8: Y. p.95. Once again, fire illuminates.

9: Y. pp.64-65.



l'abîme d'où elle put voir encore le ciel, [...].<sup>1</sup> Perhaps it is no coincidence that Félix hastens along 'la longue antichambre qui traverse la maison' to be greeted by Henriette's 'voix d'or'.<sup>2</sup>

Félix and Henriette do, then, have a predilection for those forms of light which are able to penetrate and, therefore, conquer darkness. As Bachelard remarks of Charles Ploix: 'Tous les mythes racontent la même histoire: le triomphe du jour sur la nuit.'<sup>3</sup> As has been said, however, the conflict between darkness and light enhances their respective values: if surrounding darkness heightens the value of penetrating light, light's struggle to penetrate darkness endows darkness with equal prestige. Thus Félix and Henriette are constantly fearful lest they should no longer have access to light, to 'de somptueux appartements où brillèrent des lumières'.<sup>4</sup> Thus, too, Félix refers to 'la douloureuse ignorance de tout bonheur qui avait assombri [s]a jeunesse'.<sup>5</sup> Henriette, too, refers to her childhood as 'cette sombre enfance':<sup>6</sup> 'Ces choses que je vous résume, elle me les dit alors dans leur ténébreuse étendue, avec leur cortège de faits désolants, [...].'<sup>7</sup> Thus, too, at the end of his narrative, Félix finds 'peu d'or parmi beaucoup de cendres';<sup>8</sup> his sun is darkened.<sup>9</sup>

1: Y. p.63. Félix also descends into an 'abîme', but 'tout seul, à la nuit' (Y. p.274). He has neither Henriette's perceptions, aspirations, nor her future.

2: Cf. Y. p.37. Cf. J.-P. Richard's notes on the 'allée' in le Lys: Etudes sur le romantisme, p.134. Such glimpses of distant sky from within confined spaces are used to great effect by Fellini in his film Satyricon. The description may also be seen to combine horizontal and vertical axes, forming a cross - appropriate enough given the martyr theme in le Lys, illustrated once again above. These various reactions to what is, admittedly, one of the richest and most suggestive descriptions in le Lys, demonstrate yet again the variety of levels of language in the novel.

3: G. Bachelard: L'Eau et les rêves, p.208.

4: Y. p.176.

5: Y. p.252.

6: Y. p.260.

7: Y. p.86.

8: Y. p.315.

9: Cf. Y. p.322.

Even if Félix cherishes the sombre light of Saché, his appreciation is tinged with gloom: 'mélancolique séjour plein d'harmonies, trop graves pour les gens superficiels, chères aux poètes dont l'âme est endolorie.'<sup>1</sup>

However, whereas there have been seen to be innumerable references to light without darkness, there are few references to total darkness in le Lys dans la vallée.<sup>2</sup> The sombre childhood of Henriette belongs to a past which contrasts with the half-lights of the present of Félix's narrative. Although Félix and Henriette dread submersion in darkness, their light, often dimmed, is never totally extinguished. Thus although Félix remarks of Henriette: 'elle me retira la lumière qui depuis six ans brillait sur ma vie',<sup>3</sup> he soon afterwards feels his soul 'illuminée par le coup d'oeil qu'elle [lui] jeta'.<sup>4</sup> Although Henriette's eyes grow dark before her death: 'elle jette sur ceux qui sont pleins de vie des regards où, pour la première fois, se peignent des sentiments sombres et envieux',<sup>5</sup> this temporary relapse is followed by the explosion of light which accompanies her death and resurrection. Although Henriette's death dims the light of Félix's life, it is not totally extinguished; even his moments of darkness coincide with a heightened awareness of the ultimate source of light: 'Maintenant, quand mes yeux sont obscurcis par un nuage et se reportent vers le ciel, [...], ne me demandez plus: - A quoi pensez-vous?'<sup>6</sup> This temporary dimming

1: Y. p.32.

2: Cf. p.106 of G. Genette's study entitled 'Le jour, la nuit' in Figures II, Seuil, 1969, pp.101-122: 'On pourrait parler du jour sans penser à la nuit, on ne peut parler de la nuit sans penser au jour:'. Cf. however G. Durand: Les Structures [...], p.69. Genette's article was published in almost exactly the same form in C.A.I.E.F., No.20, 1968 (mai), pp.149-165.

3: Y. p.274.

4: Y. p.277.

5: Y. p.292.

6: Y. p.323.

of Félix's light is itself followed by a resurrection, the resurrection of Henriette's 'fantôme', '[qui] se dessine vaguement au moindre mot qui le provoque, [...]'.<sup>1</sup> It is, moreover, the periodic visitations of darkness which guarantee the continuity of the cycle of days. If points and shafts of light are so frequently surrounded in darkness or, like the star and the light of Henriette's window, contemplated at night, it is because they are inevitably followed by dawn, thereby participating in the eternal cycle of days, seasons and years: 'Un mot, un espoir né le matin avait rendu la nature lumineuse;'.<sup>2</sup>

It is evident that, from the outset, the conflict between light and darkness is an unequal one in which night exists primarily to contrast with and thereby enhance the splendour of day; as Genette remarks:

'Ainsi, le couple jour/nuit n'oppose pas deux contraires à parts égales, car la nuit est beaucoup plus le contraire du jour que le jour n'est le contraire de la nuit. En vérité, la nuit n'est que l'autre du jour, ou encore, comme on l'a dit d'un mot brutal et décisif, son envers. Et cela, bien sûr, est sans réciproque.' 3

As a result, darkness in le Lys indicates the intermittent absence of a light which will invariably re-emerge.<sup>4</sup> It is for this reason that darkness so often takes the form of clouds which obscure but do not obliterate the Heavens.<sup>5</sup> It is also for this reason that darkness often takes the form of a veil which can disguise but not destroy the

1: Y. p.3.

2: Y. p.107. Cf. G. Durand: Les Structures [...], p.135: 'Imaginer le temps sous son visage ténébreux, c'est déjà l'assujettir à une possibilité d'exorcisme par les images de la lumière.'

3: 'Le jour, la nuit', Figures II, p.106.

4: Cf. Y. pp.263-264 - where, despite the storm which announces and then reflects the turmoil within Henriette soon to be confronted with lady Dudley, the moon still illumines 'les brouillards supérieurs'. Just so will Henriette eclipse even lady Dudley.

5: Cf. Y. p.309 quoted above p.230 (n.9). A cloud of pollen even reflects light (Y. p.121). Cf. also the temporary obscuring of Henriette's visions - either by the 'brouillard' which envelops Jacques and Madeleine (Y. p.179) or by Félix turning his back on her (Y. p.189). In the latter case the inversion or reversal could hardly be more explicit.

light which continues to filter through and prepare for the ultimate unveiling:

'Deux fois, [ . . . ], la comtesse s'avance peut-être au-delà des bornes dans lesquelles se refermait notre affection; mais encore ces deux événements furent-ils enveloppés d'un voile qui ne se leva qu'au jour des aveux suprêmes.' 1

It is moreover the very difference between darkness and light which guarantees the ultimate integrity of light; any attempt to widen this difference, to intensify the conflict between them, merely accentuates this integrity; as again Genette points out: 'Exalter la nuit, c'est presque nécessairement s'en prendre au jour - et cette référence inévitable est un hommage involontaire à la dominance que l'on voudrait contester.'<sup>2</sup>

The images of this and previous sections can, therefore, themselves be seen to form a cycle, also demonstrating the ultimate integrity of light in its various phases: if the very intensity and brilliance of a light otherwise indicative of life, energy and hope can become hostile and even fatal, it is eventually subdued and exorcised by the presence of beneficent darkness. This darkness, at first identified with subdued light, gradually detaches itself and assures a separate identity whose eventual hostility towards light encourages light to re-emerge with new energy.<sup>3</sup> It will then again become the light of life and hope and the whole cycle will begin once more. In this way, the unity and integrity of light is maintained.<sup>4</sup>

1: Y. p.216. Cf. the section below on mystery and disclosure.

2: G. Genette: 'Le jour, la nuit', Figures II, p.106.

3: This cycle exactly parallels that of movement and resistance described in the section on Plant journeys in Chapter 2.

4: Cf. Massimilla Doni, IX, p.360: 'La lumière est une seule et même substance, partout semblable à elle-même, [ . . . ].' Hence Lucienne Frappier-Mazur observes: 'Balzac renonce en grande partie à la distinction entre lumière du ciel et lumière du monde, s'orientant ainsi d'un système dualiste vers un système moniste, [ . . . ].' ('Balzac et les images "reparaissantes" [ . . . ]', p.70; cf. ibid. pp.48,54,71). In this respect, too, Balzac confirms his fidelity to the tradition noted in the Introduction to this Chapter. For a fuller examination of the unity of and in le Lys, see Chapter 7.

(c) Light of unity and eternity; forbidden light

It is apparent from the above sections that light represents the qualities of eternity and unity: if the circle indicates the eternity of light, then its unity is indicated by the shaft or the point. The two ideas are, moreover, closely associated: the star is both a point and follows a circular trajectory; Henriette, whose eyes and features radiate light from centre to circumference, also follows a circular path. Both point and circle can be seen to merge in the sphere:

'Les lumières de la pensée annonçaient le retour de Dieu dans un de ses plus beaux tabernacles. [...] Oui, les anges veillaient Henriette! Oui, leurs glaives brillaient au-dessus de ce noble front où revenaient les augustes expressions de la vertu qui en faisaient jadis comme une âme visible avec laquelle s'entretenaient les esprits de sa sphère.' 1

Henriette's resurrection, which marks her reunion with the divine for eternity, is announced by the return of points or shafts of divine light - the angels' swords - which re-radiate outwards, forming a divine aura, a halo of light. The sphere of light round Henriette indicates both unity in the form of reunion - Henriette resumes contact with Heaven and her own past - and eternity - this reunion is part of a now uninterrupted exchange between a soul and angels.

If, however, the interruptions in this exchange are seen as deviations from the norm of unity and eternity, imagery of light, following as it does the afore-mentioned circular trajectories, forms a vast tautology whose presence is disguised by the apparent

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1: Y. p.305. The spheres of the Heavens also belong to ancient tradition, seven or nine according to the system. Nykrog has a whole Chapter on 'Les sphères' in Balzac: La Pensée de Balzac, pp.179-263. The whole passage is, moreover, suggestive of a Medieval painting.



intermittence of Henriette's union with light and by the apparent danger that she might not rise whence she came and thereby complete the circle.<sup>1</sup> As J.-P. Richard remarks: 'L'identité ne se définit [...] que grâce à une suite d'écartés différentiels qui la situent dans un système global de références.'<sup>2</sup> Although these 'écartés différentiels' do, in their turn, reveal an ultimate, underlying identity, ultimate identity is also, as G. Poulet points out, ultimate nothingness.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, however interesting it may be to perceive the ultimate unity and eternity of light in le Lys dans la vallée, the imagery cannot be fully appreciated without also maintaining the illusion that these qualities are threatened. Félix and Henriette themselves see their path less as circular than as one of progress and achievement. For them darkness is genuinely threatening and not merely a herald of light. Thus: 'Le lecteur, comme le spectateur, doit mimer à la fois les mouvements du personnage et ceux de l'auteur, [...].'<sup>4</sup> It is only by readopting the perspective of Félix that it is possible to appreciate his final sense of frustration mingled with hope: 'Demand, je saurai [...].'<sup>5</sup> It is, perhaps, so that this perspective should predominate in the mind of the reader that Balzac wrote le Lys dans la vallée in the form of a letter-novel: 'Telle est la loi étrange des sentiments échangés par lettre; ils ne sont jamais échangés; ils ne sont qu'histoire, regret, et perception de l'irréparable.'<sup>6</sup> It is precisely this form which contributes to

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- 1: It has been seen, however, in the section on Air journeys that however much Henriette falls, she always manages to recover, invariably rising higher than Félix.
  - 2: J.-P. Richard: 'Balzac, de la force à la forme', Poétique, 1970, 1, p.24. Cf. p.111 of Richard's Études sur le romantisme, in which a slightly modified form of this article is incorporated.
  - 3: Cf. the passage quoted below, Chapter 7, p.422(n.3) from G. Poulet: Les Métamorphoses du cercle, p.227.
  - 4: J.-L. Backès: 'La Métaphore géométrique dans l'oeuvre de Jean Rousset', Critique, No.272, 1970 (janvier), p.40.
  - 5: Y. p.329.
  - 6: Alain: Avec Balzac, p.130.

conveying the disintegration of Félix's life at the end of the narrative: the same could be said of the effect of Natalie de Manerville's final letter as Alain observes of the end of les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan and l'Interdiction: 'on dirait qu'une porte se ferme; il n'y a plus qu'à s'en aller, en pensant ce qu'on veut.'<sup>1</sup> Just as it is the form of the letter-novel which impregnates the end of le Lys with a sense of disunity and darkness so does it emphasise the irretrievability of the past: 'Le temps y est sensible, le temps qui change tout, par un vieillissement irrésistible, exactement par cette loi que tout ce à quoi on pense est déjà passé et dépassé.'<sup>2</sup> Despite the unity and eternity of light imagery, Félix continues to be a victim of time and of isolation - and of himself.<sup>3</sup>

The ultimate frustration of Félix's hopes is prefigured by a group of imagery evoking the tantalising inaccessibility of light. From the moment Félix concentrates his childhood aspirations on the star, light indicates a form of self-fulfilment which is supremely satisfying but prohibited:

'Mais châtement horrible! je fus persiflé sur mon amour pour les étoiles, et ma mère me défendit de rester au jardin le soir. Les défenses tyranniques aiguissent encore plus une passion chez les enfants que chez les hommes; les enfants ont sur eux l'avantage de ne penser qu'à la chose défendue, qui leur offre alors des attrait irrésistibles. J'eus donc souvent le fouet pour mon étoilé.' 4

1: Ibid. p.19.

2: Ibid. p.129.

3: Cf. the note on Félix's self-centredness above p.241 and the concluding section of Chapter 7.

4: Y. pp.7-8. Félix's parents' reaction does, therefore, anticipate Natalie's somewhat kinder reproof, and lady Dudley's more specific mockery of his celestial analogies: 'Ton vaste et lumineux coeur ressemble tant au ciel que je m'y trompe comme les moucherons qui viennent se brûler aux bougies d'une fête!' (Y. p.272). Thus, after quoting this passage, Lucienne Frappier-Mazur comments: 'La rigueur du raisonnement, la vulgarité de l'expression paraissent suspectes. La caustique Arabelle, quand elle s'essaye au style mystique, force la note, et, volontairement ou non, tombe dans la caricature, ce qui l'oppose encore à l'héroïne du Lys.' (Balzac et les images "reparaissantes" [L...], p.67). Cf. above p.42 and n.1, and the Conclusion to the thesis.

Félix feels similarly propelled towards Henriette at the ball: 'Je regardai ma voisine, et fus plus ébloui par elle que je ne l'avais été par la fête; elle devint toute ma fête.'<sup>1</sup> However, this light, too, becomes remote and inaccessible: 'Je fus pétrifié par un regard animé d'une sainte colère, [...].'<sup>2</sup> Throughout Le Lys dans la vallée the 'fête', like the star and Henriette, is associated with a light which exerts an irresistible fascination but which carries the sign of an interdiction: 'Malgré l'ivresse que me causa ce programme de fêtes inespérées, ma joie fut détendue par le vent d'orage [...]';<sup>3</sup> 'elle avait habité comme un palais sombre en craignant d'entrer en de somptueux appartements où brillaient des lumières, où se donnaient des fêtes à elle interdites, [...].'<sup>4</sup> Hence l'abbé de Dominis warns Félix not to enter Henriette's room: 'Attendez, ne vous montrez pas encore, vous lui apporteriez les clartés de la cour, elle retrouverait sur votre visage un reflet des fêtes mondaines et vous rendriez de la force à ses plaintes.'<sup>5</sup> The 'fête' becomes the epitome of forbidden delights, of frustrated pleasures: 'je veux tout connaître, Paris, les fêtes, les plaisirs.'<sup>6</sup>

Félix's attitude towards royalty is marked by a similar ambivalence: although at the Ball Félix is filled with 'un enfantin désir d'être duc d'Angoulême',<sup>7</sup> he is also overwhelmed with a feeling of revulsion and isolation.<sup>8</sup> Félix envies his brother Charles, 'le roi de la maison',<sup>9</sup> and even burns the crowns he received as prizes because a reminder of his parents' indifference as well as a measure

1: Y. p.25.

2: Ibid.

3: Y. p.15.

4: Y. p.176. Cf. above p.102 n.1.

5: Y. pp.292-293.

6: Y. p.301.

7: Y. p.24.

8: Cf. Y. pp.23-24: 'Cette fête était une débâcle [...] me replia sur moi-même.'

9: Y. p.8.

of his own achievement.<sup>1</sup> Later, however, he is still attracted to the crown as a sign of attainment: thus Henriette is 'la Dame aux mains de laquelle reluit la couronne promise aux vainqueurs du tournoi.'<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that Félix becomes, in Henriette's words 'le roi de  $\sqrt{s}$ /on coeur',<sup>3</sup> even this achievement is only partially realised: 'Roi détrôné, j'allais me demandant qui pouvait me rendre mon royaume.'<sup>4</sup> If Henriette is 'une vierge Marie, qui doit rester dans ses voiles et sous sa couronne blanche',<sup>5</sup> she is both the object of desire and inaccessible: 'Mon Dieu! je suis restée neutre, fidèle à mon mari, ne vous laissant pas faire un seul pas, Félix, dans votre propre royaume.'<sup>6</sup> Although Henriette is 'la femme qui devait/sans cesse  $\sqrt{s}$ /es ambitieux désirs, et les combler en  $\sqrt{l}$ /e jetant au coeur de la Royauté',<sup>7</sup> she finally withdraws, as she did at the ball, 'par un mouvement de reine'.<sup>8</sup>

If lady Dudley's 'ardent royaume'<sup>9</sup> becomes accessible to Félix, images relating light with desire almost invariably express a desire whose fulfilment has hitherto been frustrated: 'Le Palais-Royal était un Eldorado d'amour [..]. Là cessaient les doutes les plus vierges, là pouvaient s'apaiser nos curiosités allumées!'<sup>10</sup> Such desires do, therefore, belong to Félix's inhibited childhood - 'Les enfants devinent la convoitise dans les regards aussi bien que vous

1: Cf. Y, p.11.

2: Y, p.83.

3: Y, p.316.

4: Y, p.206.

5: Y, p.189.

6: Y, p.319.

7: Y, p.24.

8: Y, p.26. Cf. above p.242.

9: Y, p.230.

10: Y, p.17. Since Félix never got there, the reader will never know whether or not he could have afforded it.

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y lisez l'amour: je devins alors un excellent sujet de moquerie,<sup>1</sup> - or similarly inhibited youth: 'É! me dit mon hôte en lisant dans mes yeux l'un de ces pétillants désirs toujours si naïvement exprimés à mon âge, [..].'<sup>2</sup> Even when Félix surrenders some of his inhibitions and looks at where he kissed Henriette's shoulders - 'je les regardais! mon oeil déchirait l'étoffe, [..].'<sup>3</sup> - the light with which his looks continue to be linked does, perhaps, help to convey the acute sense of guilt and frustration which accompanies even his most private memories and innermost thoughts.

Elsewhere, too, illuminated desire is, however sensual, unpredictable, even unwanted desire, desire born despite itself, often in an atmosphere of purity: 'En tombant sur mon coeur, ce coup de foudre y alluma des désirs qui sommeillaient à mon insu;'.<sup>4</sup> In such a context, even 'les feuillages éclairés par la lune' may excite desire: 'elle redoutait peut-être de rester sous ces ombrages à travers lesquels passaient des lueurs voluptueuses, [..].'<sup>5</sup> Such images do, therefore, epitomise the paradoxes and ambiguities in Félix and Henriette. As Félix tells her: 'vous ignorez l'amour, et il a des voluptés qui rayonnent jusque dans les cieux.'<sup>6</sup> Henriette,

1: Y. p.8. Just as Félix will later find Henriette's 'richesses certaines' (Y. p.46) finally inaccessible, so is the lack of money a constant obstacle for Félix - especially in his early years when he first becomes fascinated by forbidden light. (Cf. Y. pp.8,10,13,14 etc.). Félix's visions and, later, a resplendent Nature, offer him compensatory enrichment (Y. pp.12,36). Socio-economic factors are, therefore, ingeniously individualised in Félix's description of his childhood experiences which, as ever, prefigure the later themes of his narrative. Cf. the Conclusions to Chapters 2 and 3 and the note on gold, above p.140.

2: Y. p.32. Monsieur de Chessel continues: 'vous sentez de loin une jolie femme comme un chien flaire le gibier.' If Félix and Henriette are not infrequently associated with dumb but sensitive animals (cf. Chapter 2, p.80 and n.3) it is partly because the impossibility of open communication has developed an extreme sensitivity to the slightest glance, the slightest sound. As Nykrog shows (La Pensée de Balzac, p.281) such animal-like qualities characterise the two extremes of Balzac's world - 'spécialiste' and 'instinctif', poet and child. Félix is both.

3: Y. p.40. For a more detailed examination of this evocation of transposed rape, see Chapter 4, pp.212-213.

4: Y. p.317.

5: Y. p.256.

6: Y. p.146. Cf. the quotation from Y. p.20, above p.247.



however, reacts immediately, with her own interdiction: 'Taisez-vous [...] je n'en veux rien connaître.'<sup>1</sup>

The interdiction placed on the star may account for the frequency with which light and whiteness are indicative of purity in le Lys dans la vallée and also for the association between whiteness and paralysis and death: 'Les teintes vertes de la souffrance corporelle faisaient place aux tons entièrement blancs, à la pâleur mate et froide de la mort prochaine.'<sup>2</sup> As when Félix refers to 'ces blanches sirènes',<sup>3</sup> whiteness is both fascinating and fatal, tantalisingly inaccessible:

'Je demurai pendant toute cette nuit les yeux attachés sur Henriette, fasciné par l'expression pure que donne l'apaisement de toutes les tempêtes, par la blancheur du visage que je douais encore de ses innombrables affections, mais qui ne répondait plus à mon amour.' 4

The reiteration of Henriette's other name, blanche, after her death-bed confession, is a reminder not only of her purity, but of 'les tons de cire de sa face allongée',<sup>5</sup> of her premature decline: 'elle était mortifiée comme le fruit [...] qu'un verz intérieur fait prématurément blondir.'<sup>6</sup> If her whiteness recalls the lily, it also recalls 'la pâleur verdâtre des fleurs de magnolia';<sup>7</sup> the white frock she will wear for her death is no longer a bridal-gown but a shroud.<sup>8</sup>

Thus if Félix refers to 'le paradis de sa jeunesse',<sup>9</sup> his paradise is also 'un paradis perdu'. His illuminated desire, whether

1: Y. p.146.

2: Y. pp.305-306.

3: Y. p.228.

4: Y. p.312.

5: Y. p.298.

6: Y. p.242.

7: Y. p.298. The presence of green does, however, modify the effect of whiteness here and may, in any case, refer to a more exuberant, earlier Henriette. Similarly with 'la blancheur fauve' of madame de Lenoncourt (Y. p.104), the presence of an ingeniously ambiguous 'fauve' affects the whiteness just as the presence of other metals can affect the qualities of iron. The palour of Henriette's eyes may, however, announce either incipient light (Y. p.41) or imminent death (Y. p.225).

8: Cf. Y. pp.297,308.

9: Y. p.18.

manifested by a fascination for 'fêtes', royalty, whiteness, the star or Henriette is never fulfilled. Their brilliance, like that of the lily, the diamond and the treasure, remains for Félix unobtainable and inaccessible.

(2)

(a) Sound as a positive force(i) Hearing

Félix's childhood is characterised not only by a longing for light, blue skies, and the open air, but also by a longing for responsive sounds: 'Trompé par le silence de mes parents, je les attendais en m'exaltant le coeur, [..]; et quand, à l'arrivée des familles, le pas du vieux portier qui appelait les écoliers retentissait dans les cours, j'éprouvais alors des palpitations malades.'<sup>1</sup> His acute sense of hearing which, when he was contemplating the star, also registered his sisters' 'lointain tapage comme un accompagnement à  $\sqrt{s}$ /es idées',<sup>2</sup> does not receive any welcome sounds until his morning walk into Touraine: 'les oiseaux chantaient, les cigales criaient, tout y était mélodie.'<sup>3</sup> The music of the landscape is repeated in the lapping of the water, itself evoked by a proliferation of labial sounds; thus Félix speaks of 'ces végétations aquatiques, si vivaces, si bien colorées, qui tapissent la rivière, [..], se laissent aller à ses caprices et se plient aux tempêtes de la rivière fouettée par la roue des moulins!'<sup>4</sup>

In this way Touraine heralds the second meeting between Félix and Henriette whose voice he recognises before he enters her presence:

'je reconnus sa voix qui pénétra mon âme [..].'<sup>5</sup> Despite the explosion of light which accompanies their first meeting it is

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1: Y. 12. The psychopathological theme here has already been indicated above p.86 n.4.

2: Y. p.7.

3: Y. p.30.

4: Y. p.30.

5: Y. p.37. In 'La langue de Balzac', pp.251-252, M. Roques gives a phonetic analysis of the sounds of Henriette's voice as they are indicated by Félix Y. pp.40-41.

Henriette's voice, 's[ə]/ voix d'or,'<sup>1</sup> which establishes the first contact between them, at a time when 'ses yeux furent constamment attachés sur la rivière;'<sup>2</sup>: 'semblable aux aveugles, elle savait reconnaître les agitations de l'âme dans les imperceptibles accents de la parole.'<sup>3</sup> Thus Félix dwells on 's[ə]/es oreilles d'esclave et de mère'<sup>4</sup>: 'Plus tard, quand j'habitais son coeur, elle me disait: "Voici monsieur de Mortsauf!" et avait raison, tandis que je n'entendais rien encore, moi dont l'ouïe possède une remarquable étendue.'<sup>5</sup> He later continues to emphasize the acuteness of his own hearing by listening both to Mortsauf and the children in the distance: 'Tous deux rejoignirent leur mère, car j'entendis leurs voix et leurs mouvements, semblables, dans le lointain, aux bourdonnements des abeilles autour de la ruche aimée.'<sup>6</sup> This announces Félix's later association of the language of flowers he uses to communicate with Henriette with the language of bees: 'Je m'entendis bientôt avec les productions de la flore champêtre, comme un homme que j'ai rencontré plus tard à Grandlieu s'entendait avec les abeilles.'<sup>7</sup>

The sensitivity of Félix and Henriette to sound contrasts with that of Félix's mother who remains deaf to the most impassioned

1: Y. p.37.

2: Ibid.

3: Ibid.

4: Y. p.42.

5: Y. p.42. Félix is not Balzac's only character to distinguish himself by his sensitivity to sound. Cf. l'Enfant maudit, IX, p.684; Sur Catherine de Médicis, X, p.138; Modeste Mignon, I, p.383: Modeste betrays her love to her blind mother: 'vous ne saisissez pas ces nuances trop délicates pour des yeux trop occupés par le spectacle de la nature. Cette gaieté se trahit par les notes de sa voix, par des accents que je saisis, que j'explique. [...] Si je suis aveugle, ma tendresse est clairvoyante, [...].' As Poulet remarks (La Distance intérieure, p.151): 'La volonté est donc un télescope. Elle est aussi un microphone. Elle vainc encore la distance par le développement prodigieux de l'ouïe.' Cf. also P. Métadier: Balzac au petit matin, La Palatine, 1965, p.26, and, for a similar sensitivity to smell, p.368 and n.1, below.

6: Y. p.49.

7: Y. p.116. Cf. Henriette's 'lèvre emmiellée' (Y. p.114). (Borrowed from Virgil!)

pleading: 'j'essayai de la toucher par l'éloquence d'une plaidoirie affamée d'amour, et dont les accents eussent remué les entrailles d'une marâtre. Ma mère me répondit que je jouais la comédie.'<sup>1</sup>

Lady Dudley is similarly immune: 'la marquise n'était jamais accablée par un regard, ni par un serrement de main, ni par une douce parole.'<sup>2</sup>

Thus of the English he remarks: 'c'est bien des lèvres qui se remuent et des yeux qui voient, mais ni le son ni le regard ne les atteignent.'<sup>3</sup> Mortsauf's hearing is so disrupted that he imagines sounds: 'J'entends positivement sonner des cloches.'<sup>4</sup> It is not, therefore, surprising that he and Henriette 'n'avaient jamais eu ces constantes communications qui ravivent les sentiments;'<sup>5</sup>

It is the receptivity of Félix and Henriette to sound which makes communication then communion between them possible: it enables them not only to receive 'les plus légers retentissements',<sup>6</sup> but also to retain what they hear: 'je reçus un coup qui retentit encore dans ma vie, car à chaque heure il trouve un écho.'<sup>7</sup> The sensitivity and faithfulness of this internal echo prompts both Félix and Henriette to seek another person with an equal ability to retain and reproduce sounds faithfully: 'j'eus, selon la jurisprudence mondaine, un manque de tact; mais, [...] n'est-ce pas l'interrogation brusque faite à un coeur, un coup donné pour savoir s'il résonne à l'unisson?'<sup>8</sup> Their intimacy does, therefore arise from the discovery of a joint or mutual echo: 'Oui, c'était bien le son arrivé dans l'écho, [...].'<sup>9</sup>

1: Y. p.20.

2: Y. p.284.

3: Y. p.227.

4: Y. p.77.

5: Y. p.314.

6: Y. p.170.

7: Y. p.286. Cf. above p.96 n.4.

8: Y. pp.81-82.

9: Y. p.317.



Henriette is Félix's echo and Félix is Henriette's. It is this shared resonance of 'une voix émue qui vibre dans ces deux coeurs'<sup>1</sup> which produces the melody, the harmony so treasured by Félix and Henriette:

'N'appartenons-nous pas au petit nombre de créatures  
[...]  
de qui les qualités sensibles vibrent toutes à  
l'unisson en produisant de grands retentissements  
intérieurs, et dont la nature nerveuse est en harmonie  
constante avec le principe des choses!' 2

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1: Y. p.254.

2: Y. p.72. A fascination for reflected sounds - in echos and harmonies - is, of course, just as much a preoccupation of the period as reflected light - whether 'le jeu de miroirs' or in tranquil waters. Cf. the introductory section to the 'correspondances' in Chapter 7.

(ii) The song of nature

Among the sounds which Félix has been seen to appreciate are the songs of the birds, the lapping of water, and the voices of Jacques and Madeleine which remind him of 'les bourdonnements des abeilles autour de la ruche aimée.'<sup>1</sup> If Félix's May walk into Touraine is noted for its fresh air and clear skies, it also marks his sudden awareness of the voice of nature: 'les moulins situés sur les chutes de l'Indre donnaient une voix à cette vallée frémissante, [...].'<sup>2</sup> Sounds, like light, endow this day with an unprecedented prestige: 'Ce jour si marquant dans ma vie ne fut dénué d'aucune des circonstances qui pouvaient le solenniser. La Nature s'était parée comme une femme [...], mon âme avait pour la première fois entendu sa voix, [...].'<sup>3</sup>

From this day when 'tout y était mélodie',<sup>4</sup> the sounds of nature accompany some of Félix's most memorable moments:

'je traversai l'Indre [...]; en entendant le chant clair, la note unique, pleine de mélancolie que jette incessamment par temps égaux une rainette dont j'ignore le nom scientifique, mais que depuis ce jour solennel je n'écoute pas sans des délices infinies.'<sup>5</sup>

This is, indeed, in the full sense of the word, an accompaniment: just as first Félix's sisters then Jacques and Madeleine offer 'comme un accompagnement à ses idées'<sup>6</sup> so does the persistent rhythm of

1: Y. p.49.

2: Y. p.30. If the work of art is meaningful because it represents the artist's attempt to totalise experience (cf. Chapter 7, pp.418ff) then the valley is meaningful to Félix partly because its various attributes converge on, and are epitomised in, a human focal point. Cf. Y. p.31: 'le chant monotone d'un berger' and above p.217.

Those critics who restrict themselves to lyrical praises of the Touraine descriptions do, therefore, over-simplify, even distort, Balzac for whom Nature was essentially a raw material to be moulded by man - as Véronique Graslin and indeed Henriette show. Unless of course you want to vegetate like Raphaël de Valentin (cf. IX, p.231) or, as even Mortsauf sees, like Félix de Vandenesse: '- Eglogue! fit-il d'un ton amer, ici n'est pas la vie d'un homme qui porte votre nom.'(Y. p.77).

3: Y. p.36.

4: Y. p.30.

5: Y. p.53.

6: Y. p.7.

the tree-frog's call accompany the rhythm of Félix's rowing. It is this rhythm which, as has been seen on previous occasions,<sup>1</sup> disciplines and sublimates emotion, here transforming distress into melancholy. The rhythm of song transforms the sadness of 'old, unhappy far-off things' into elegy: 'A quel talent nourri de larmes devrons-nous la plus émouvante élégie, [..]?'<sup>2</sup>

It follows from this connection between song and the water of the Indre and of Félix's tears that the regularity and repetitiveness of vocal and musical rhythms should elsewhere be more explicitly associated with the rhythm of waters: 'Belle fut cette nuit passée sous ses fenêtres, au milieu du murmure des eaux passant à travers les vannes des moulins, et entrecoupé par la voix des heures sonnées au clocher de Saché!'<sup>3</sup> Bird-song is also associated with water: 'Je retrouvai mes anciennes contemplations mais paisibles, mais entremêlées par les roulades du chanfre des nuits amoureuses, et par la note unique du rossignol des eaux.'<sup>4</sup> Once again, repeated, rhythmical sounds combine with single, harmonious sounds; unity combines with variety. The tempering rhythm of 'ces végétations aquatiques, si vivaces, si bien colorées, qui tapissent la rivière, surgissent au-dessus, ondulent avec elle, [..]'<sup>5</sup> has had its effect. Hence, too, Félix's fascination for 'le bruit onduleux d'une robe';<sup>6</sup> it, too, represents tranquillity and harmony. Thus Félix remarks of

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1: Cf. for example, the serpentine movements of fibres, plants and water.

2: Y. p.5. Cf. l'Enfant maudit, IX, p.707: 'L'harmonie montait par nuages, remplissait les airs, versait du baume sur toutes les douleurs, ou plutôt elle les consolait en les exprimant.'

3: Y. p.65. Sound and water will be one of the combinations examined in the Correspondances of Chapter 7.

4: Y. p.64. Cf. below pp.380-383.

5: Y. p.30.

6: Y. p.217.

Henriette: 'les plis de sa robe, quand elle s'en allait, s'adressaient à mes yeux comme leur bruit onduleux arrivait joyeusement à mon oreille quand elle revenait; [..] sa voix, cette voix musicale, était une caresse continuelle; [..] elle se ressemblait toujours à elle-même;'.<sup>1</sup>

The combination of melancholy and delight, found in the reference to the tree-frog, also characterises a number of references to bird-song. For example, the silence of the 'bengali transporté dans la froide Europe' offsets a new, more vital Henriette 'chantant ses poèmes orientaux dans son bocage au bord du Gange, [..]'.<sup>2</sup> Two birds are similarly contrasted in: 'Quelle chant d'hirondelle joyeuse, quand elle pouvait rire! mais quelle voix de cygne appelant ses compagnes, quand elle parlait de ses chagrins!'.<sup>3</sup> The ability of the bird, here particularised in the swan, to assuage sadness in song is further illustrated in the following reference to the nightingale: 'A travers la tempête, j'entendis aussi la voix de l'ange qui, par intervalles, s'élevait comme un chant de rossignol au moment où la pluie va cesser.'<sup>4</sup> Like the 'par temps égaux', 'entrecoupé' and 'entremêlées' of previous quotations, 'par intervalles' emphasises the regular, rhythmical qualities of nature's song: sorrow is being gradually but relentlessly absorbed, mastered and exorcised.

Just as different notes blend and harmonise in 'la mélodie des sons graves parfaitement unis aux sons élevés'<sup>5</sup> so, at Henriette's

1: Y. p.283. The 'pli' has already been seen to offer a harmonisation of opposites.

2: Y. p.214.

3: Y. p.40. Cf. Y. p.190: 'Pour la première fois je connus ces jolis cris d'hirondelle,' and Y. p.95: '[..] je voulais [..] entendre encore en moi-même ces chants de ramier blessé,'.

4: Y. p.79. Cf. above p.188.

5: Y. p.203. A remark worthy of Saint-Martin (cf. L'Homme de désir, No.46) - or Cataneo in Massimilla Doni (Cf. IX, p.329).

death, does the blending of two nightingales' songs indicate the restoration of unity and harmony: 'Par un hasard assez naturel à la campagne, nous entendîmes alors le chant alternatif de deux rossignols qui répétèrent plusieurs fois leur note unique, purement filée comme un tendre appel.'<sup>1</sup> A similar reunion is noticeable in 'un gémissement unanime mêlé de pleurs qui semblait faire croire que cette vallée pleurait son âme',<sup>2</sup> in the final merging of the music of man and nature:

'Les murmures du soir, brise mélodieuse dans les feuillages, derniers gazouillements d'oiseau, refrain et bourdonnements d'insectes, voix des eaux, cri plaintif de la rainette, toute la campagne disait adieu au plus beau lys dans la vallée, [...]. Cette poésie religieuse unie à toutes ces poésies naturelles exprimait si bien le chant du départ que nos sanglots furent aussitôt répétées.'<sup>3</sup>

Sounds, like light, emphasise the circularity of Félix's journey in that the music of 'le chant du départ' recalls and repeats the music of Félix's arrival, from the buzzing of Jacques and Madeleine to the river, the 'rainette', and the bird-song. The reunion of man and nature coincides with the completion of the circle of time, after a temporary period of separation of bengali and song-bird, lark and swan.<sup>4</sup> Sound, like light, does therefore indicate unity in eternity.

1: Y. p.311. Quoted by J.-P.Richard: Etudes sur le romantisme, p.138,n.5.

2: Y. p.313. This is perhaps an evocation of Virgil on the death of Orpheus - or Ballanche: cf. above p.147 n.2.

3: Y. p.306. The reference to '[une] brise mélodieuse' recalls the 'brise lumineuse' Y. p.226. Light and sound images will also be discussed in the 'correspondances' sections. cf. esp. below p.389.

4: Cf. above.



(iii) Speech

It has been seen in the previous section on air and breathing that breath is, naturally enough, associated with speech as well as light: 'Le souffle de son âme se déployait dans les replis des syllabes, comme le son se divise sous les clefs d'une flûte; il expirait onduleusement à l'oreille d'où il précipitait l'action du sang.'<sup>1</sup> Félix here shows the unity and the variety of Henriette's voice: each sound representing different notes of the same instrument, each wave of sound combining different notes in a rhythmical pattern. Thus Félix goes on to speak of 'ces concerts de voix humaine'<sup>2</sup> and frequently refers to the harmony - the blending of disparate elements in one - of Henriette's voice: 'son adieu, monsieur! avait fait retentir en mon âme les harmonies [...]';<sup>3</sup> 'Combien votre voix était harmonieuse!'<sup>4</sup>

Because Henriette's voice is, then, a single instrument with a particular repertoire of sounds whose range Félix thinks he appreciates: 'je fus dès lors initié dans les secrets de sa voix',<sup>5</sup> and whose essence he thinks he possesses: 'Je n'étais donc pas seul à souffrir! la comtesse me dit de sa voix réservée pour parler à ses chers petits, [...]',<sup>6</sup> Félix emphasises the ultimate unity behind the apparent variety of her tones: 'Quel enivrement pour un jeune homme [...] de connaître assez toutes les nuances de sa voix pour trouver dans sa parole, en apparence légère ou moqueuse, les preuves d'une pensée constante, [...].'<sup>7</sup> Once this range is familiar to Félix and

1: Y. pp.39-40. 'Souffle' is not literally 'breath' here but, as noted above, almost tautologous with 'âme'. Both 'souffle' and 'âme' could refer to the soul of the universe. Cf. above p.75.

Again the source is likely to be Saint-Martin.

2: Y. p.40.

3: Y. p.76.

4: Y. p.144.

5: Y. p.76.

6: Y. p.84.

7: Y. p.106.

also, in Félix's voice, to Henriette, each note becomes a revelation of the whole: 'Nous connaissions trop l'un et l'autre les modes de notre voix, quelque infinis qu'ils fussent, pour nous déguiser la moindre de nos émotions.'<sup>1</sup>

This accounts for Félix's references to the voice of Nature: the different elements of nature combine to speak with one note, to convey one meaning: 'il était impossible de ne pas écouter la voix de cet éternel Cantique des Cantiques par lequel la nature convie ses créatures à l'amour.'<sup>2</sup> Not only does a voice indicate unity; it encourages other separate beings to converge in a single sentiment. Thus, when Félix wants to show how his own sentiments converge on a single object he endows them with voices: 'Tous les sentiments nobles réveillés faisaient entendre en moi-même leurs voix confuses.'<sup>3</sup> Henriette's voice does, moreover, not only unite different elements but also physical as well as non-physical qualities: 'Dans mes rêves, sa voix devint je ne sais quoi de palpable, une atmosphère qui m'enveloppa de lumière et de parfums, une mélodie qui me caressa l'esprit.'<sup>4</sup> It is for this reason that her voice is 'une caresse continuelle',<sup>5</sup> is 'comme un brise',<sup>6</sup> and has the rhythm of gentle waters: 'elle me parlait de ce ton doux et bas qui faisait ressembler ses phrases à des flots menus, murmurés par la mer sur un sable fin.'<sup>7</sup> Her voice is a caress which unites the elements because its rhythm, the rhythm of eternity, restores the harmony of ultimate unity.

1: Y. p.258.

2: Y. p.72. Although Félix is describing one particular occasion, there are, as will be seen in Chapter 6, a number of similarly provocative sunsets in le Lys. As ever, the moods of valley and protagonists respond to one another, contributing to the theme of 'correspondances' in the novel.

3: Y. p.95.

4: Y. p.76. Cf. the materialism/spiritualism analogies, Chapter 7, p.375 n.2

5: Y. p.283.

6: Y. p.194.

7: Y. p.133.

Despite Félix's familiarity with Henriette's voice, she is not one of those 'blanches sirènes, [ ] dont l'âme n'a qu'une note, dont la voix n'a qu'une syllabe, [ ]'.<sup>1</sup> Such a voice, would, continues Félix, have the monotony of a poet ignorant of the sea, of a poet lacking a string to his lyre. For just as tears produce the elegy so does the rhythm of the sea produce the poem, - the variety without which 'il n'y a plus rien'.<sup>2</sup> As a result Henriette's voice is not wholly familiar, not wholly predictable: 'La comtesse eut, [ ], un son de voix nouveau, comme si l'instrument eût perdu plusieurs cordes, et que les autres se fussent détendues.'<sup>3</sup> Occasionally Félix hears a completely new note: 'Ce n'était ni sa voix de jeune fille et ses notes joyeuses, [ ]; c'était une déchirante, une nouvelle voix pour des douleurs nouvelles.'<sup>4</sup> Thus, as before, after initiation into Henriette's voice, Félix combines possession of infinity with the prospect of an even greater infinity.<sup>5</sup>

1: Y. p.228. The magical qualities of sound, suggested here by the reference to the siren, will be examined in the following section.

2: Cf. G. Poulet: Les Métamorphoses du cercle, p.227, referred to above p.255(n.3) and quoted Chapter 7, p.422.

3: Y. p.222. Cf. above p.93(n.3) and p.115 n.8.

4: Y. p.262.

5: Cf. Y. p.40. Cf. also above pp.93,119.

(iv) The charm

As early as his opening letter to Natalie de Manerville, Félix evokes the incantatory power of sound: 'oui, ma vie est dominée par un fantôme, il se dessine vaguement au moindre mot qui le provoque, [...].'<sup>1</sup> Sounds can summon up the shades of the past, endowing them with new, gradually visible form; the Word creates Light. If Henriette is a fairy whose 'baguette' seems to touch the fishermen's nets,<sup>2</sup> the names of her farms, la Cassine and la Rhétorière, have similar magical effect for Félix: they are 'des paroles constellées'.<sup>3</sup> It is not, perhaps, surprising, then, that it is to the star that Félix makes his first confession: 'Ne pouvant me confier à personne, je lui disais mes chagrins dans ce délicieux ramage intérieur par lequel un enfant bégaye ses premières idées, comme naguère il a bégayé ses premières paroles.'<sup>4</sup> Nor is it perhaps surprising that these communings with the star are later linked to Félix's visions which, apart from enabling him to see 'l'esprit intime des choses',<sup>5</sup> also endow him with the gift of the tongues: 'elles [les visions] ont écrit dans ma tête un livre où j'ai pu lire ce que je devais exprimer, elles ont mis sur mes lèvres le charbon de l'improvisateur.'<sup>6</sup> If sound produces light, then light produces sound. A new cycle of births and rebirths is born.

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1: Y. p.3.

2: Y. p.205.

3: Cf. Y. p.130. Cf. also Internal sound journeys in Chapter 2. Félix's references to 'les vertus talismaniques des paroles constellées' inevitably recalls Raphaël's talisman with its Oriental inscription and almost as inevitably, Z. Marcas: 'Toute la vie de l'homme est dans l'assemblage fantastique de ces sept lettres. Sept! le plus significatif des nombres cabalistiques. [...].' (VII, p.737). For other references to the talisman, see below p.373.

4: Y. p.8.

5: Y. p.12. Such an expression does, of course, recall both Ballanche and a number of Romantic poets such as Hugo or even Wordsworth.

6: Y. pp.12-13.

References to the almost magical power of sound are not infrequent in le Lys dans la vallée: 'J'étais assis sur la balustrade en briques, quand le retentissement de son pas mêlé au bruit onduleux de la robe flottante anima l'air calme du soir.'<sup>1</sup> The creativity of this force is shown to be contagious when Félix's confession prompts Henriette's:

'Lorsque, courbé sous le poids de mes souffrances redites avec les charbons d'Isaïe, j'attendis un mot de cette femme qui m'écoutait la tête baissée, elle éclaira les ténèbres par un regard, elle anima les mondes terrestres et divins par un seul mot.  
- Nous avons eu la même enfance!' 2

The evocation of their pasts - in the fullest sense of the word - also prompts Félix to try to create a new future: 'Nous voici devant la crèche d'où s'éveille un divin enfant [...] qui nous ranimera le monde par ses cris joyeux, [...].'<sup>3</sup>

If words can be a charm in the sense that they conjure up new life - as when Henriette's arrival fills him with 'un parfum de femme qui brilla dans /s/on âme comme y brilla depuis la poésie orientale',<sup>4</sup> or when Henriette is identified with 'l'oiseau chantant ses poèmes orientaux dans son bocage'<sup>5</sup> - the song or the poem is also a charm whose 'hiéroglyphes divins'<sup>6</sup> are a key to the universe. If the word opens chasms - 'Ce mot, [...], ouvrit entre ces deux femmes des abîmes [...].'<sup>7</sup> - it can also withhold unfathomable mysteries: 'soudain je crus deviner un sens à ses paroles, une mystérieuse signifiante qui me la rendit complètement sublime.'<sup>8</sup>; 'La parole,

1: Y. p.80. The link between sound and 'animer' - also evident in the following quotations - recalls the 'souffle'-'âme' link noted above.

2: Y. p.83. For comment on 'les charbons d'Isaïe' see Chapter 6, pp.329,341.

3: Y. p.91.

4: Y. p.25.

5: Y. p.214.

6: Y. p.149. Cf. Chapter 7, p.372 and n.4.

7: Y. p.108.

8: Y. pp.95-96.



si libre pendant l'aller, avait au retour de mystérieuses significations, [...].<sup>1</sup> Hence if Félix's visions endow him with the gift of the tongues, they also present him with a text to be deciphered and interpreted: 'elles ont écrit dans ma tête un livre où j'ai pu lire ce que je devais exprimer, [...].'<sup>2</sup>

It follows from the above that the word is a power which is used to demystify the word.<sup>3</sup> It is the charm which unravels the riddle, the confession which discloses the secret. Hence, as has been seen, the act of Félix speaking with the power of 'les charbons d'Isaïe' prompts Henriette to disclose her past. Hence the importance of the communion of the light of their two souls, and of Henriette's final communion with the angels.<sup>4</sup> Hence, too, the importance of Félix's narrative-confession which constitutes a gradual but relentless disclosure of the past, from his initiation into the secrets of Henriette's voice to the final revelations of her posthumous letter, 'l'écrit mystérieux écrit':

'Félix, ami trop aimé, je dois maintenant vous ouvrir mon coeur, moins pour vous montrer combien je vous aime que pour vous apprendre la grandeur de vos obligations en vous dévoilant la profondeur et la gravité des plaies que vous y avez faites.' 5

This letter is the culmination of Félix's elegy because it constitutes the final exorcism of his past. Sorrow is finally charmed away by the demystifying power of the word and Félix perceives 'les profondeurs inconnues de cette vie alors éclairée par cette dernière flamme.'<sup>6</sup>

1: Y. p.123.

2: Y. pp.12-13. Cf. Chapter 7, p.372 for further references to 'texts' in Balzac.

3: Cf. J.-P. Richard: 'De la force à la forme', p.15 and G. Durand: Les Structures [...], pp.174-175.

4: Cf. Y. pp.274-275, 305.

5: Y. pp.310, 315-316.

6: Y. p.322.

Like Henriette's previous letter, 'lumière qui brillait encore sur /s/a vie',<sup>1</sup> a light notably created by sound:

'Pendant la nuit, je baisai le papier sur lequel Henriette avait manifesté ses volontés, où je devais reprendre les mystérieuses effluves échappées de sa main, d'où les accentuations de sa voix s'élançeraient dans mon entendement receuilli. [...] Voici, natalie, l'adorable voix qui tout à coup retentit dans le silence de la nuit, [...].'<sup>2</sup>

her last letter is a light created by sound creating the future:

'La lettre d'Henriette faisait briller un espoir à mes yeux.'<sup>3</sup>

In the same way, Félix's own letter-confession to Natalie de Manerville is the word which will, we are promised, finally unveil his 'fantôme' and illuminate and create a new future.<sup>4</sup>

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1: Y. p.284.

2: Y. p.155.

3: Y. p.323.

4: The section on mystery and disclosure below will discuss to what extent and in what way this promise can be seen to be fulfilled.

(v) Chants and harmony

There are a number of references to liturgical song in le Lys dans la vallée, from 'le chantre des marais [...] psalmodiant sa note plaintive'<sup>1</sup> to the joyous choir of birds in 'une longue allée de forêt semblable à quelque nef de cathédrale, [...]'<sup>2</sup> Religious music, like bird-song, is noted for its ability to transform grief into gentle melancholy: 'En l'écoutant, il me semblait que la harpe de Job de laquelle j'avais tiré de sauvages accords, maintenant maniée par des doigts chrétiens, y répondait en chantant les litanies de la Vierge au pied de la croix.'<sup>3</sup> Although this grief may on occasion seem unalleviated,<sup>4</sup> this period of separation and death is followed by a resurrection. Hence the 'chant du départ' at Henriette's death is accompanied by the Angelus and the 'Ave Maria': 'Ce soir l'Ave Maria nous parut une salutation du ciel.'<sup>5</sup> In liturgical music, then, the charm combines with the chant: grief is experienced, absorbed and exorcised; harmony is restored.

Mention has already been made of the ability of Henriette's voice to transport Félix's soul into 'un monde surhumain'<sup>6</sup> and also of the harmony established between Félix, Henriette, and the cosmos: 'N'appartenons-nous pas au petit nombre de créatures [...] dont la nature nerveuse est en harmonie constante avec le principe des choses!'<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere the voices of Félix and Henriette achieve a cosmic dimension: 'Les paroles, montées au diapason de la nature,

1: Y. p.180. For more general remarks on celestial music in Balzac, see P. Laubriet: L'Intelligence de l'art chez Balzac, pp.419-422 and M. Eigeldinger: La Philosophie de l'Art chez Balzac, Chapter IV: 'La Musique, langage céleste', pp.79-95.

2: Y. p.118.

3: Y. p.85.

4: Cf. the reference to the 'Consummatum est!' Y. p.274, quoted in the section on Internal sound journeys, above p.95.

5: Y. p.306. Cf. above p.269(n.3) and also the reference to the 'O filii, ô filiae! de la résurrection pascalle' Y. p.76, also quoted above p.95. In his Balzac et la musique religieuse, Paris, Naert, 1929, p.86, P. Bertault indicates other references to this song in Balzac's work.

6: Y. p.40.

7: Y. p.72.

déployèrent une grâce mystérieuse, [...].'<sup>1</sup> Thus if nature has a song which accompanies that of man, then man, in his turn, can embrace the whole of nature with his response.

This harmony between man and nature is particularised in the sympathy existing between Félix and Henriette and their natural environment: 'Toujours en harmonie avec mes pensées, la vallée où se mouraient les rayons jaunes d'un soleil tiède, me présentait encore une vivante image de mon âme.'<sup>2</sup> This type of harmony is varied and deepened by being combined with another type of harmony hitherto associated with the charm and now with the chant: the moods of man and nature share the same harmonious tranquility: 'En harmonie avec cette vie reposée et sans autres émotions que celles données par la famille, ces lieux communiquaient à l'âme leur sérénité.'<sup>3</sup> A further example of this kind of particularisation is found when Félix speaks of 'une de ces tranquilles soirées dont les harmonies font gagner en profondeur aux sentiments ce qu'ils perdent en vivacité.'<sup>4</sup> The reason why, as Givens notes, the word 'harmonie' and its associates such as 'accord' are relatively infrequent in *le Lys*<sup>5</sup> may be that in a novel where Balzac was particularly conscious of his need to materialise his ideas,<sup>6</sup> he prefers to express the ultimate unity of Félix's vision through the imagery of the novel rather than through more explicit statement. Nevertheless, Félix

1: *Y.* p.203.

2: *Y.* p.154.

3: *Y.* p.45.

4: *Y.* p.139.

5: Cf. Mary L. Givens: *Balzac and the 'roman personnel'* [...], p.304.

For other allusions to harmony in Balzac, see P. Nykrog: *La Pensée de Balzac*, p.145 and A. Allemand: *Unité et structure* [...], p.93.

6: Cf. the previously quoted July 1835 Preface to *le Lys*, *Y.* p.337.

still savours 'l'harmonieux silence de la campagne'<sup>1</sup> and  
 'd'indéfinissables harmonies au milieu d'un silence qui confond.'<sup>2</sup>  
 In a remarkable combination of light and sound imagery he also  
 appreciates 'une vue si harmonieuse à l'oeil'.<sup>3</sup>

The harmony of Félix's bouquets derives in part from the union  
 of light and sound:

'je pensai que les couleurs et les feuillages avaient  
 une harmonie, une poésie qui se faisait jour dans  
 l'entendement en charmant le regard, comme les phrases  
 musicales réveillent mille souvenirs au fond des coeurs  
 aimants et aimés. Si la couleur est la lumière  
 organisée, ne doit-elle pas avoir un sens comme les  
 combinaisons de l'air ont le leur?' 4

The 'harmonie voilée'<sup>5</sup> of the bouquets is, moreover, the blending of  
 music with the Heavens:

'Aucune déclaration, [...] n'eut de contagion plus  
 violente que ces symphonies de fleurs, où mon désir  
 trompé ne faisait déployer les efforts que Beethoven  
 exprimait avec ses notes; retours profonds sur lui-  
 même, élans prodigieux vers le ciel.' 6

Thus, if the harmony of the bouquets enjoys unparalleled prestige  
 in le Lys dans la vallée it is because they blend and thereby  
 transcend not only the unity and eternity materialised in light but  
 the unity and eternity of divine music.<sup>7</sup>

1: Y. pp.180-181.

2: Y. p.118. Such passages do indeed suffer from being both too explicit  
 and too vague.

3: Y. p.77.

4: Y. p.115. Cf. below pp.394ff.

5: Y. p.119.

6: Ibid. The universal harmony which can be conveyed by music is examined  
 by G. Durand: Les Structures [...], pp.255-256.

7: The above remarks do not, of course, explain why Félix should choose  
 the bouquets rather than another aspect of his environment or  
 experience as harmony's culminating expression, nor indeed why harmony  
 itself should have such prestige for Félix. These points will be  
 discussed in the following section and in Chapter 7.



(vi) Language; mystery and disclosure

It can be seen from the above sections that sounds and voices are among those phenomena whose variety harmonises in ultimate cosmic unity. Just as the different flowers of Félix's bouquets combine their different notes to form one symphony, one language, one poem, so do the different notes of Henriette's voice combine to form one instrument. Thus Félix sees the bouquets as 'ce discours',<sup>1</sup> as 'cette langue à notre usage'.<sup>2</sup> To 'ce poème de fleurs lumineuses',<sup>3</sup> corresponds Henriette 'chantant ses poèmes orientaux dans son bocage'.<sup>4</sup> Thus, too, does Félix correspond with an isolated and secluded Henriette in the same way as he previously delved into the study of the bouquets 'moins en botaniste qu'en poète, étudiant plus leur esprit que leur forme':<sup>5</sup>

'Je correspondis avec madame de Mortsauf, à qui j'envoyais mon journal de toutes les semaines, et qui me répondait deux fois par mois. Vie obscure et pleine, semblable à ces endroits touffus, fleuris et ignorés, que j'avais admirés naguère encore au fond des bois en faisant de nouveaux poèmes de fleurs pendant les deux dernières semaines.' 6

The dialogue of Félix's and Henriette's correspondence repeats the dialogue of the bouquets. The union of Félix, Henriette and bouquets forms part of a vast cosmic correspondence:

'Aucune déclaration, [...] n'eut de contagion plus violente que ces symphonies de fleurs, [...]. Madame de Mortsauf n'était plus qu'Henriette à leur aspect. Elle y revenait sans cesse, elle s'en nourrissait, elle y reprenait toutes les pensées que j'y avais mises,

1: Y. p.122.

2: Y. p.123.

3: Y. p.122.

4: Y. p.214.

5: Y. p.117.

6: Y. p.223. Cf. the Conclusion to Chapter 3, pp.174-175.

and, for another reference to unexplored natural beauty: Le Curé de village, VIII, p.566. Cf. also below p.286,299 and p.401 n.3.

[...]. Vous comprendrez cette délicieuse correspondance par le détail d'un bouquet, comme d'après un fragment de poésie vous comprendriez Saadi.' 1

Thus the correspondence between Félix and Henriette and between them both and the bouquets - and between Félix and the 'vous' of the above passage, Natalie de Manerville - do themselves correspond and evince the presence of a universal language: 'La nature morale a-t-elle donc, comme la nature physique, ses communications électriques et ses rapides changements de température?'<sup>2</sup> Thus Félix likens their love to communicating stars: 'Les astres [...] se communiquent ainsi le mouvement et la lumière.'<sup>3</sup> Man and nature are engaged in a perennial dialogue in which even 'les marches des perrons étaient éloquentes',<sup>4</sup> in which as has been seen 'ces lieux communiquaient à l'âme leur sérénité.'<sup>5</sup>

If harmony and harmonies are so pervasively present in le Lys they do, then, reflect and reinforce the correspondences within the correspondence which is the novel. Once again an almost miraculous conformity - it is tempting to say 'correspondence' - between 'fond' and 'forme' is revealed and confirmed. However, the unity and harmony within and which is Félix's narrative has, almost incredibly, yet another dimension: what has been called 'la circularité du chant': 'Le chant, ne débouchant que sur lui-même recommencé, est sa propre

1: Y. p.119. The significance of references to poems and poetry in le Lys will be discussed in Chapter 7, p.416 and n.4 etc.

2: Y. p.36.

3: Y. p.96.

4: Y. p.314.

5: Y. p.45.

totalité, c'est-à-dire, dans ce contexte, son propre sens.<sup>1</sup> It is this aspect of Félix's poem which can now be examined.<sup>2</sup>

Félix's perspective on his past as he relates it to Natalie de Manerville is not that of an omniscient narrator. For example, it is only at the end of the narrative, when Félix and, therefore, the reader, becomes acquainted with Henriette's 'mystérieux écrit',<sup>3</sup> that 'les profondeurs inconnues de cette vie'<sup>4</sup> are revealed. One reason for this perspective may be, as Balzac points out in the March, 1835 Preface to le Père Goriot, the difficulty of presenting a woman who is tempted, resists temptation, but remains throughout uncontaminated by her contact with it:

'[...] pour savoir si elle est vertueuse, il faut la faire tentée. Si elle est tentée et qu'elle soit vertueuse, il faudrait logiquement la représenter n'ayant pas même l'idée de la faute. Mais si elle n'a pas l'idée de la faute, elle n'en saura pas les plaisirs. Si elle n'en sait pas les plaisirs, sa tentation sera très-incomplète, elle n'aura pas le mérite de la résistance. Comment désirerait-on une chose inconnue? Or la peindre vertueuse sans être tentée est un non-sens. Supposez une femme bien constituée, mal mariée, tentée, comprenant les bonheurs de la passion: l'oeuvre est difficile, mais elle peut encore être inventée.' 5

Since the reader's insight into Henriette's struggle with temptation is essentially retrospective, the violence of this struggle is disguised.<sup>6</sup>

1: P. Zumthor: 'De la circularité du chant (à propos des trouvères des XII<sup>e</sup> et XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles)', Poétique, 1970, 2, p.139. Cf. Chapter 1, p.34.

2: The correspondences, or, more accurately and suggestively, the 'correspondances' in le Lys, are too complex and too interesting to be more than hinted at here. They form one of the main subjects of Chapter 7.

3: Y. p.310.

4: Y. p.322. As will be pointed out in the Conclusion to the thesis, this perspective on past events is not unique to le Lys.

5: XI, p.259.

6: Apart from the more or less explicit remarks such as the one quoted below, the images themselves betray the presence and the progress of inner torments and conflicts. Cf. for example, the section on procreative liquids above pp.211-216 and Chapter 6, pp.308-312.

Although the reader is, then, ignorant of the contents of Henriette's letter until Félix reaches the stage in his life when it was actually received, the existence of such a moment of revelation does not come as a complete surprise:

'Deux fois, en ces cinquante jours, la comtesse s'avance peut-être au-delà des bornes dans lesquelles se refermait notre affection; mais encore ces deux événements furent-ils enveloppés d'un voile qui ne se leva qu'au jour des aveux suprêmes.' 1

The effect of such glimpses of the future is, however, less to disclose the future than to intensify the mystery of the present. The constantly postponed promise of ultimate demystification intensifies the reader's sense of a need for demystification. Hence, monsieur de Chessel's information about the Mortsaufts - 'Sa connaissance du monde lui avait fait entrevoir quelques-uns des mystères ensevelis à Clochegourde'<sup>2</sup> - heightens Félix's desire to penetrate these mysteries. In the same way, the more he discovers of Henriette, her husband and the children, the more he realises there is to discover: 'Quand sa femme rentra, suivie des deux enfants attachés à ses flancs, je soupçonnai donc un malheur, comme lorsqu'en marchant sur les voûtes d'une cave les pieds ont en quelque sorte la conscience de la profondeur.'<sup>3</sup>

Thus, although Félix's narrative has been seen to be an exercise in demystification, Félix seems unwilling to dissipate such mystery. As Alain puts it: 'Tout est clair, et tout s'obscurcit par recouvrement.'<sup>4</sup> As a result, once Félix discovers Henriette's home

1: *Y.* p.216.

2: *Y.* p.64. The prestige of glimpsed experiences has already been mentioned in Chapter 2, p.103.

3: *Y.* pp.50-51.

4: Alain: *Avec Balzac*, p.70.

and something of her private life, he surrounds her in new mystery: 'Habituellement recueillie, [...] il lui échappait parfois des sourires qui trahissait en elle un naturel rieur enseveli sous le maintien exigé par sa vie. Sa coquetterie était devenue du mystère, [...].'<sup>1</sup> Mystery, like deep and tranquil waters, represent the potentiality she both promises and withholds: 'Cacher est une fonction première de la vie. C'est une nécessité liée à l'économie, à la constitution des réserves.'<sup>2</sup> Thus, from the moment Félix hides in the garden watching his star, and the moment he contracts debts with Doisy, 'le secret chaperon de nos écarts',<sup>3</sup> he can be seen to cherish and seek to preserve mystery and secrecy: 'Après m'être assuré que personne ne me voyait, je me plongeai dans ce dos comme un enfant qui se jette dans le sein de sa mère, [...].'<sup>4</sup> Dawn and daylight threaten to break the spell: 'A la première lueur dans le ciel, au premier cri d'oiseau, je me sauvai dans le parc de Frapesle; je ne fus aperçu par aucun homme de la campagne, personne ne soupçonna mon escapade, [...].'<sup>5</sup> The charm is no longer a charm if disclosed.

It is, moreover, a shared secret which first links Félix and Henriette: 'Enfin nous étions liés par ce terrible baiser, espèce de secret qui nous inspirait une honte mutuelle.'<sup>6</sup> Mention of it also threatens to compromise their future: 'Electrisé par ce regard qui jetait une âme dans la mienne, j'eus, selon la jurisprudence mondaine

1: Y. p.43. The last phrase crystallises the beautifully enigmatic portrait of Henriette - and also illustrates the litotes Bersani notes in le Lys (cf. above p.154).

2: G. Bachelard: La Terre [...] repos, p.10. Hence Henriette's fondness for deep and tranquil waters.

3: Y. p.14.

4: Y. p.25.

5: Y. p.65. Cf. Henriette's 'qui ressemblait à une fée dont la baguette magique aurait touché les filets.' (Y. p.205). Even if, unlike a Hoffmann or a Nodier, Balzac cultivated the 'conte fantastique' rather than the fairy story, he did, of course, often liken the Comédie humaine to the Arabian Nights. Cf. also above p.69 n.6 and below pp.330-

6: Y. p.53.



un manque de tact: [...]'.<sup>1</sup> Its disclosure is accordingly followed by the promise of deeper mystery: 'Plusieurs pensées s'élevèrent comme des lueurs, et me conseillèrent de laver la tache qui souillait ma candeur, au moment où je prévoyais une complète initiation.'<sup>2</sup> If Félix's penetration into the secrets of Clochegourde is, by the references to his initiation, likened to initiation into an esoteric religious cult, it is perhaps because such experiences withhold as many mysteries as they disclose. Furthermore, just as Félix was exhilarated by being initiated into the secrets of Henriette's voice,<sup>3</sup> so is he exhilarated by the mystic union promised by her words: 'J'admirais sa figure qui m'apparut au milieu des ténèbres, quand soudain je crus deviner un sens à ses paroles, une mystérieuse signification qui me la rendit complètement sublime.'<sup>4</sup>

This accounts for Félix's delight in the 'mystérieuses significations' of their conversations,<sup>5</sup> for mystery illuminated by revelation: 'Henriette se plut à me relever le pesant rideau qui nous cachait l'avenir, [...]'.<sup>6</sup> as for revelation clouded by mystery: 'mais encore ces deux événements furent-ils enveloppés d'un voile qui ne se leva qu'au jour des aveux suprêmes.'<sup>7</sup> Mystery is contagious, and Félix's penetration of the secrets of Henriette and Clochegourde

1: Y. p.81.

2: Y. p.82. The link between secrecy and erotic mysticism is confirmed when, after Félix's communion of Henriette's tears, he is allowed to call her by the name used by her Martiniste aunt. (Cf. Y. pp.93-94). Lady Dudley also uses a special name for Félix - Amédée. Cf. the remarks on the Charm above and on erotic mysticism, Chapter 7, pp.417ff. Even the prison is not irrelevant here: cf. above p.139 n.3.

3: Cf. Y. p.76.

4: Y. pp.95-96. Cf. Y. p.154: 'Initié maintenant [...] famille', - and p.11 n.2.

5: Y. p.123. Henriette and Félix create a secret language not understood by Mortsauf. Clandestinity is, of course, a natural and necessary aspect of Félix's love for 'une mère secrètement désirée' (Y. p.189). However, as the Conclusion to Chapter 4 showed, Félix is a master at making emotional and literary capital out of what is, after all, a necessary (?) evil.

6: Y. p.214.

7: Y. p.216.

endows him with new prestige: 'Un homme seul connaît le plaisir d'être, au sein d'une maison étrangère, le privilégié de la maîtresse, [...] les chiens n'aboient plus après vous, les domestiques reconnaissent, aussi bien que les chiens, les insignes cachés que vous portez;'.<sup>1</sup> Hence, too, the importance of Félix's initial discovery of this 'lys dans la vallée' with 'sa vie simple et champêtre':<sup>2</sup> 'Vie obscure et pleine, semblable à ces endroits touffus, [...].'<sup>3</sup> She is as isolated and secluded as she is impenetrable: 'Voyez tous, nul ne touche!'<sup>4</sup> Even her bedroom is a 'cachette' within the 'cachette' of Clochegourde: 'Que de poésie dans ce lieu! [...] Noble cellule de religieuse mariée [...]. Quelle retraite pour une femme de qui l'apparition dans le grand monde eût fait pâlir les plus belles!'<sup>5</sup> As Félix himself says, if he had met Henriette for the first time at Clochegourde 'entre le comte et ses deux enfants, au lieu de la trouver splendide dans sa robe de bal,'<sup>6</sup> he would never have kissed her. It is only Henriette's momentary discarding of the veil of secrecy by going to the ball of the duc d'Angoulême at Tours that exposes her to Félix's intrusion on her life. Without this initial revelation, Félix and Henriette would never have met, she would never have heard 'un langage jusqu' alors incompris',<sup>7</sup> Félix would never have witnessed this 'véritable épopée domestique',<sup>8</sup> 'le spectacle de cette vie intérieure',<sup>9</sup> and his elegy would never have been written. But nor would Henriette have

1: Y. p.111.

2: Y. p.306.

3: Y. p.223. Cf. above p.280 and n.6 and below p.299.

4: Y. p.35.

5: Y. p.142. Henriette's furniture is also hidden - Y. p.44.

6: Y. p.45. Félix also hides at Clochegourde - as the King's envoy. Cf. Alain: Avec Balzac, p.24 and the Conclusion to Chapter 3.

7: Y. p.317.

8: Y. p.44.

9: Y. p.145. For Félix the self-conscious artist, see Chapter 7, p.416 and n.4 etc.

been exposed to the love from which she died. As in le Chef d'oeuvre inconnu, the death of love signals the birth of the work of art.<sup>1</sup>

Félix's narrative does, then witness the at first reluctant, then unwilling, and finally violent disclosure of Henriette's secrets. At first Henriette almost savours 'ces moments où l'on retient sa vie près de déborder, où l'on hésite à dévoiler son intérieur, [...]'.<sup>2</sup> However, the secret illness of Mortsauf, once revealed, must be preserved from all but Félix.<sup>3</sup> She conceals as much as possible: 'Henriette, qui passait pour une femme heureuse, ne voulait dévoiler à personne, pas même au coeur d'une mère, ses horrible souffrances, ni trahir l'incapacité de son mari'<sup>4</sup> and later regrets her openness: 'La comtesse [...] se repentait presque de n'avoir dévoilé ses douleurs [...]'.<sup>5</sup> Just as Henriette tried to disguise 'la nature malade de cet homme ruiné',<sup>6</sup> from the outside world, so do l'abbé Birotteau and l'abbé de Dominis try to disguise Henriette's final agonies:

'Les cris de sa chair révoltée s'éteignent dans mon coeur où ils blessent des échos encore trop tendres; mais monsieur de Dominis et moi nous avons accepté cette tâche religieuse, afin de dérober le spectacle de cette agonie morale à cette noble famille [...]'.<sup>7</sup>

1: Cf. P. Métadier: Balzac au petit matin, p.109; J.-P. Richard: Etudes sur le romantisme, pp.131-132; and Balzac's own remarks in la Femme abandonnée, II, p.235: 'Pendant neuf années entières, ils goûterent un bonheur qu'il est inutile de décrire; le dénouement de cette aventure en fera sans doute deviner les délices [...]'.  
 2: Y. p.80.  
 3: Cf. Y. p.80.  
 4: Y. p.107. Henriette, one of Balzac's 'anges solitaires' (cf. the note to page 3, Y. p.451) is also one of the 'coeurs blessés' who are predestined to 'l'ombre et le silence' (Cf. the Epigraph to le Médecin de campagne, VIII, p.317 and also Y. p.211: 'Voilà les vrais malades, ils cachent leur blessure et l'oublient!' - Origet of Félix and Henriette.)  
 5: Y. p.205. Cf. Y. p.263: 'en prononçant ces paroles [...] par lesquelles en arrachant le dernier voile qui me cachait son âme et ses douleurs, [...]'. It is noticeable that, although each revelation of Henriette's secrets is supposed to be the last, it is invariably followed by another. Cf. Cataneo's 'horizons fuyants' Chapter 2, p.92.  
 6: Y. p.86.  
 7: Y. p.297.

Although Félix had constantly tried to penetrate the mysteries of Clochegourde and Henriette, he is in despair when Henriette's attitude loses both its mystery and its potentiality: 'En est-il ainsi de tous les mourants? dépouillent-ils tous les déguisements sociaux, de même que l'enfant ne les a pas encore revêtus?'<sup>1</sup> He is accordingly relieved when, under the influence of the opium, she once again becomes calm and inaccessible. Once again, exposure is in danger of destroying love. Just as it was the revelation of Félix's love of Henriette in Paris that attracted lady Dudley's attention and made her determined to seduce Félix,<sup>2</sup> so is it the revelation of Félix's love with lady Dudley which finally kills Henriette.

As a result, if, as has been seen, Félix's narrative seems the gradual but relentless disclosure of his past, such disclosures are habitually followed by renewed or intensified mystery. If Henriette's final letter seems the ultimate disclosure, it also intensifies the enigma surrounding her personality: 'Je tombai dans un abîme de réflexions en apercevant les profondeurs inconnues de cette vie alors éclairées par cette dernière flamme.'<sup>3</sup> Thus Félix's confession, - 'L'indiscrétion suprême, n'est-elle pas finalement ici le fait même de raconter, d'écrire?'<sup>4</sup> - accumulates as many mysteries as it unfolds. Although Alain remarks 'Car Le Lys est tout en clair;',<sup>5</sup> he also observes: 'Balzac ne craint jamais d'être obscur; il l'est

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1: Y. p.300.

2: Cf. Y. p.228. Hence again the importance of the 'prison heureuse' theme.

3: Y. p.322.

4: J.-P.Richard: 'Balzac, de la force à la forme', p.16. Cf. idem: Etudes sur le romantisme, p.97.

5: Alain: Avec Balzac, p.32.

naturellement.<sup>1</sup> Félix's - or rather Henriette's - final revelation is, as has been seen, retrospective and does, therefore, rejoin the beginning of the narrative. The mystery of the end of Félix's confession can be dispelled only by a reappraisal of the promise of light which was the resurrection of Henriette's 'fantôme', and the cycle of mystery and revelation accompanied by further mystery begins again. In thus maintaining the demystifying power of the word and the mystery of the word in equilibrium, the sound imagery of le Lys dans la vallée does, like that of light, materialise the theme of unity in eternity.

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1: Ibid. p.137. Cf. R. Kempf: Sur le corps romanesque, pp.134,135 and G. Genette: Figures, Seuil, 1966, pp.223-243, on the significance of silence and silences in Flaubert. Cf. also p.XII of the Introduction to the Dictionnaire des Symboles (sous la Direction de Jean Chevalier, Robert Laffont, 1969): 'les symboles révèlent en voilant et voilent en révélant.' Cf. also Bersani's comments on the letter-novel, quoted above p.154.



(b) Sound as a negative then again positive force(i) Sound of hostility and death

The hostility of light has been seen to be closely connected to that of sound: '- Ah! vous voilà! Ces trois mots ne foudroyèrent.'<sup>1</sup> To the antagonism of lightning corresponds that of thunder and storms: 'Je suis jalouse! dit-elle avec un accent d'exaltation qui ressemblait au coup de tonnerre d'un orage qui passe.'<sup>2</sup> Mortsauif, already associated with lightning, is also characterised by his stormy out-breaks: 'il croyait triompher de sa femme, et l'accablait alors d'une grêle de phrases qui répétaient la même idée et ressemblaient à des coups de hache rendant le même son.'<sup>3</sup> He is accordingly noted for his 'criailleries continuelles'<sup>4</sup> and for 'des scènes de violence et des criailleries'.<sup>5</sup> The hostility of the 'éclat' is auditory as well as visual; thus, again in connection with the Count, Félix remarks: 'De la terrasse [...] j'entendis les éclats de sa voix et ses gémissements [...].';<sup>6</sup> 'elle [Henriette] avait été brisée par le premier éclat de ses folles colères.'<sup>7</sup>

If numerous remarks in Félix's narrative illustrate what Balzac elsewhere refers to as 'le mot qui tue',<sup>8</sup> it is largely because the very sensitivity of Félix's and Henriette's hearing makes them particularly vulnerable to loud or jarring sounds: 'N'appartenons-nous pas au petit nombre de créatures privilégiées pour la douleur

1: Y. p.236.

2: Y. p.90. If 'les éclairs de l'exaltation' (Y. p.138) debilitate and exhaust, then so does the excessive expenditure of sound: 'L'organe livrait un trop fort volume de son, [...].'<sup>6</sup> (Y. p.243).

3: Y. p.177. Cf. Y. p.83: 'Ma voix retentit comme la hache des bûcherons dans une forêt. Devant elle tombèrent à grand bruit les années mortes, [...].'<sup>3</sup> Although G. Roubichou sees this as one of the 'images incohérentes ou saugrenues' of the novel (Cf. his edition of le Lys, Bordas, 1967, p.230) it can be seen to be perfectly consistent with one of its major themes. Cf. below p.361 and n.3.

4: Y. p.111.

5: Y. p.218. Cf. Y. p.139.

6: Y. p.79.

7: Y. p.86.

8: Cf. Les Martyrs ignorés, X, p.1150. J.M. Burton's ability to see only ten figures representing speech as something that wounds (Honoré de Balzac and his figures of speech, p.17) does, while recognising the existence of the theme, show the limitations of an analysis which restricts itself to two-part comparisons.

et pour le plaisir, [..]! Mettez-les dans un milieu où tout est dissonance, ces personnes souffrent horriblement, [..].<sup>1</sup> Thus, just as the prizes Félix receives 'au milieu des acclamations et des fanfares'<sup>2</sup> serve to emphasize his sense of isolation, so do 'Les cuivres ardents et les éclats bourboniens de la musique militaire'<sup>3</sup> convey a similar sense of alienation at the ball. It is the receptivity of Henriette to sound which prolongs her suffering: 'Votre faute n'est pas si funeste par vous que par le retentissement que je lui ai donné au-dedans de moi-même.'<sup>4</sup> The internal echo reproduces and perpetuates painful as well as therapeutic sounds: 'je reçus un coup qui retentit encore dans ma vie, car à chaque heure il trouve un écho.'<sup>5</sup> It is precisely this sensitivity which does, for example, make Henriette so vulnerable to Mortsauf's attacks: 'Il finissait toujours par attaquer chez sa femme une corde sensible; et quand il l'avait fait résonner, il semblait goûter un plaisir particulier à ces nullités dominatrices.'<sup>6</sup> Hence the devastating power of a single sentence - as when Mortsauf scorns Henriette's visions during Jacques' illness.<sup>7</sup>

Words and phrases are not infrequently associated with the wounding power of metals in le Lys dans la vallée: 'Quoique coupable, j'avais un coeur, et tous ces mots étaient des coups de poignard froidement donnés aux endroits les plus sensibles qu'elle semblait choisir pour frapper.'<sup>8</sup> When Félix seeks to wound the metallic lady

1: Y. p.72.

2: Y. p.11. Even earlier in Félix's childhood, the 'rumeur générale' (Y. p.7) was full of forboding after the discovery of the flooding of the garden.

3: Y. p.23.

4: Y. p.316.

5: Y. p.286. Cf. Y. p.289: 'Ma conscience menaçante prononça un de ces réquisitoires qui retentissent dans toute la vie et quelquefois au-delà.'

6: Y. p.112.

7: Cf. Y. p.176.

8: Y. p.245.

Dudley with her 'langue à triple dard',<sup>1</sup> he, in his turn, tries to do so through words: 'Elle savait le désastre de lady Brandon: le lui rappeler, c'était lui donner un coup de poignard au coeur quoique l'arme dût s'y émousser.'<sup>2</sup> At one point, even Origet's words have a similar effect on Félix.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, if Félix speaks of 'ces moments de faiblesse où la voix qui gronde est une voix meurtrière',<sup>4</sup> Madame de Lenoncourt's reference to a possible 'amourette' between Henriette and Félix has just such an effect,<sup>5</sup> and it is she who delivers the final blow when she writes to Henriette of Félix's liaison with lady Dudley.<sup>6</sup>

A related group of imagery evoking lugubrious sounds emphasises the connection between sound and sorrow and death.<sup>7</sup> From 'ce jour solennel' when Félix first hears 'le chant clair, la note unique, pleine de mélancolie que jette [...] une rainette',<sup>8</sup> to '[le] gémissement unanime mêlé de pleurs' of 'le chant du départ',<sup>9</sup> music is often evocative of melancholy and mourning. From Henriette's 'chants de ramier blessé',<sup>10</sup> to her 'voix de cygne [...] quand elle parlait de ses chagrins!',<sup>11</sup> Henriette's song is frequently an elegy within the elegy of Félix's narrative.

1: Y. pp.283-284. Cf. Chapter 3, pp.142-144.

2: Y. p.328.

3: Cf. Y. p.288.

4: Y. p.92. Cf. Y. p.9: 'Ils [...] n'assassinaient d'un: - Tu n'as donc pas de quoi?'

5: Cf. Y. p.108. Cf. above p.94.

6: Cf. Y. pp.236,287.

7: Cf. the section on substances and sounds, above pp.155-157.

8: Y. p.53.

9: Y. pp.313, 306.

10: Y. p.95.

11: Y. p.40. Cf. Y. p.311: 'le concert de nos sanglots' and Y. p.294: 'Frappé des messages successifs [...] qui, dans ce grand concert d'infortunes, préparaient par de douloureuses modulations le thème funèbre, le grand cri de l'amour expirant, [...].'

(ii) Sounds and silence

Félix's and Henriette's inability to withstand loud or jarring sounds and harsh or dazzling light is reiterated at intervals throughout le Lys dans la vallée: 'Avant d'avoir connu madame de Mortsauf, un regard dur me blessait, l'accent d'un mot brusque me frappait au coeur;'.<sup>1</sup> As Félix says of Henriette: 'Le son d'une parole trop vive ébranlait son être, un désir l'offensait; pour elle il fallait être amour voilé, [..].'<sup>2</sup> In the same way as darkness is mysterious and infinitely penetrable, the deepest sounds are also the most profound:

'Puis je vis dans un fond les masses romantiques du château de Saché, mélancolique séjour plein d'harmonies, trop graves pour les gens superficiels, chères aux poètes dont l'âme est endolorie. Aussi, plus tard, en aimai-je le silence, les grands arbres chenus, et ce je ne sais quoi mystérieux épandu dans son vallon solitaire!' 3

Harmony is essentially subdued.<sup>4</sup> Thus, as Félix wanders away from Clochegourde in the search of flowers, he savours 'd'indéfinissables harmonies au milieu d'un silence qui confond.'<sup>5</sup> Gentle sounds and gentle light do, like tranquil waters, materialise infinite potentiality.

From the 'lointain tapage' of Félix's sisters while he contemplates the star<sup>6</sup> to the 'bourdonnements' of Jacques and Madeleine 'autour de la ruche aimée',<sup>7</sup> the association of subdued sound with children emphasises its potentiality. Thus Félix relishes 'cette religieuse atmosphère qui nous communiquait en sons adoucis les cris

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1: Y. p.170.

2: Y. p.110.

3: Y. p.32.

4: Cf. Y. pp.45,138-139. As has been noted, Félix's bouquets have '[une] harmonie voilée'. (Y. p.119).

5: Y. p.118.

6: Y. p.7.

7: Y. p.49.

des deux enfants, [...].<sup>1</sup> He feels supremely at ease in the house where the children 'viennent à vous sur la pointe des pieds, vous sourient et s'en vont sans bruit.'<sup>2</sup> It is in such a milieu that his 'insignes cachés' are recognised: once again, silence deepens and enriches mystery. Elsewhere, the subdued but irrepressible babble of Jacques and Madeleine indicates the resurgence of new life: 'Ils babillaient pour babiller, allaient, trottaient, revenaient sans raison apparente;'.<sup>3</sup> Youth and potentiality are essentially subdued, even silent; thus Félix explains to Henriette: 'Je vous ai rencontré dans un âge auquel le sentiment peut étouffer les désirs [...], et votre constant triomphe a été d'en prolonger les muettes délices.'<sup>4</sup> It is not perhaps surprising then that at one point Félix seems to prefer a silent to a singing Henriette: 'M'êut-elle demandé la fleur qui chante ou les richesses enfouies par les compagnons de Morgan l'exterminateur, je les lui aurais apportées afin d'obtenir les richesses certaines et la fleur muette que je souhaitais!'<sup>5</sup>

The potentiality of subdued sound is emphasised not only by its association with childhood and youth, but also by its association with Nature, and, more especially, with water: 'Belle fut cette nuit passée sous ses fenêtres, au milieu du murmure des eaux passant à travers les vanes des moulins, [...].'<sup>6</sup> Of the following morning Félix remarks: 'Tout y était silencieux et frémissant comme est la

1: Y. p.113.

2: Y. p.111.

3: Y. p.126.

4: Y. p.249.

5: Y. pp.45-46. Elsewhere, however, (Y. p.214), Félix deploras the facet of Henriette epitomised in 'le bengali transporté dans la froide Europe, [...], muet et mourant dans sa cage [...].'

6: Y. p.65.



campagne à midi.<sup>1</sup> Subdued sounds are, therefore, the sounds which promise to grow stronger, the sounds of spring. Thus 'les bruits sourds du printemps' do, like 'les feuillages éclairés par la lune', intensify desire.<sup>2</sup>

It is apparent from the above that silence, as well as subdued sound, can be a positive force. Silence is, however, positive not only because it is tranquil and soothing but because it contrasts with and offsets sound. Just as darkness offsets light, so does silence heighten the perceptibility of the slightest sound: 'Voici, Natalie, l'adorable voix qui tout à coup retentit dans le silence de la nuit, [...].'<sup>3</sup> Silence is positive not only because it represents the absence of hostile noise but because it develops the sensitivity of hearing: 'mais la solitude morale produit les mêmes effets que la solitude terrestre: le silence permet d'y apprécier les plus légers retentissements, [...].'<sup>4</sup> Silence does not minimise the value of sound but endows it with a new prestige: 'C'était le tour de Madeleine à dire les prières: la chère petite les prononça de sa voix enfantine dont les tons ingénus se détachèrent avec clarté dans l'harmonieux silence de la campagne [...].'<sup>5</sup> In the same way as light increased in intensity in the war of attrition with darkness, so may light and sound be born out of silence; thus Henriette writes to Félix:

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1: Ibid.

2: Y. p.256.

3: Y. p.155.

4: Y. p.170. Cf. Y. p.82: 'Avant d'aller plus loin, lui dis-je d'une voix altérée par des palpitations facilement entendues dans le profond silence où nous étions, [...].'

5: Y. pp.180-181.

'N'est-ce pas, mon enfant, que vous obéirez à votre Henriette, que vous lui permettrez de continuer à vous dire ce qu'elle pense de vous et de vos rapports avec le monde: j'ai dans l'âme un oeil qui voit l'avenir pour vous comme pour mes enfants, laissez-moi donc user de cette faculté, à votre profit, don mystérieux [...] qui, loin de s'affaiblir, s'entretient dans la solitude et le silence.' 1

The sound-creating quality of silence is further illustrated by its ability to become itself communicative: 'Je reconnus l'âme de la contesse dans son silence;'.<sup>2</sup> The presence of a universal language is irrefutable when silence itself begins to speak: 'La femme française [...] parle par son silence même, et sait vous regarder les yeux baissés;'.<sup>3</sup> The silence of the night thus speaks for Félix and Henriette: '- La nuit est femme, madame. - Quelle tranquillité!',<sup>4</sup> preceding and precipitating their mutual confessions. It is appropriate, then, that so many of Félix's and Henriette's exchanges should take place in the twilight and the silence of the terrace - 'je voulais avoir pour complice/s/ le silence de la nuit',<sup>5</sup> - and that Félix should be so sensitive to 'les bruissements du soir'. Such sounds accompany Madeleine's prayer: 'La nature répondait aux paroles de l'enfant par les mille bruissements du soir, accompagnements d'orgue légèrement touché.'<sup>6</sup> They also awaken energy and desire: 'La soirée était une de ces soirées chaudes où le ciel prend les teintes de cuivre, où la campagne envoie dans les échos mille bruits confus.'<sup>7</sup>

1: Y. p.169.

2: Y. p.129. Cf. Y. p.39: 'à quelques mois de là, je sus combien est significatif le silence d'une femme, et combien de pensées couvre une diffuse conversation.' Cf. also the delightful description of Madame Firmiani (I, p.1036) whose harmonious voice betrays the harmony and singlemindedness of her character - despite the diverging opinions of her. And if such harmonies are in Henriette impeccably French, Mme Firmiani is, superbly, 'une Parisienne'. Lady Dudley is less fortunate: 'le silence des Anglaises est absolu'. (Y. p.282).

3: Y. p.281. Cf. Y. p.113: 'Quand les mots manquaient, le silence servait fidèlement nos âmes [...].'

4: Y. p.74. Darkness and silence combine to give birth to revelation.

5: Y. p.45.

6: Y. p.181.

7: Y. p.216.

Similarly subdued sounds also herald Henriette's resurrection: 'Les murmures du soir, brise mélodieuse dans les feuillages, derniers gazouillements d'oiseau, refrain et bourdonnements d'insectes, voix des eaux, cri plaintif de la rainette, toute la campagne disait adieu au plus beau lys de la vallée'.<sup>1</sup>

Silence is, however, not invariably positive in that it highlights gentle sounds or is itself creative of sound. It is occasionally hostile, as when Félix deplores the silence whose emptiness prevents the reverberation and therefore the perpetuation of the notes of 'Un orgue expressif doué de mouvement'.<sup>2</sup> Silence can indeed indicate the absence of welcome sound whether that of the children - 'Quoique l'on vendangeât les clos, l'on n'entendait ni bruit ni babil. Les vignes semblaient inhabitées, tant le silence était profond'.<sup>3</sup> - or of Félix's parents: 'Trompé par le silence de mes parents, je les attendais en m'exaltant le coeur, [..].'<sup>4</sup> The strained or erratic nature of a relationship is also conveyed by an inability to maintain communication, by moments of effusion interrupted by long periods of silence: 'A Orléans, [..], ma mère me reprocha mon silence. Je me jetai à ses pieds, [..].'<sup>5</sup>; similarly, between Henriette and her mother: 'C'était [..] un silence imposé, reproché tour à tour'.<sup>6</sup> Henriette's relationship with Mortsauf is equally inconsistent: 'Tantôt il ne voulait pas de bruit, et quand la comtesse établissait

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1: Y. p.306.

2: Y. p.72.

3: Y. p.295. Cf. the association of silence and death, Y. pp.175,252.

4: Y. p.12.

5: Y. p.20.

6: Y. p.84.

autour de lui un silence absolu, tout à coup il se plaignait d'être comme dans une tombe, [..].<sup>1</sup> She is, moreover, constantly striving to break down 'son silence obtus'.<sup>2</sup>

Elsewhere, however, such silence is a sign of strength: 'Si ses duretés rencontraient une silencieuse patience, il [Mortsauf] se fâchait en sentant une limite à son pouvoir'.<sup>3</sup> The silence of those who suffer, of those whose motto is 'Je souffre et je me tais',<sup>4</sup> indicates patient resignation and resistance. Their silence withholds and preserves their forces; as before, force which is preserved is force accumulated and multiplied.<sup>5</sup>

Henriette, too, knows from experience that it is her solitude, her suffering and her silence which conserve and multiply her forces. Just as her first letter to Félix, the expression of her 'maternité spirituelle',<sup>6</sup> associated both with liquids through milk and with light,<sup>7</sup> is written in the silence of the night,<sup>8</sup> so does she, in the letter itself, speak of her visions born of solitude and silence,<sup>9</sup> and counsel a similar silence to Félix whose heart has been conserved

1: Y. p.195. Félix does, however, appreciate such an attention on the part of Henriette when he rests after watching over Mortsauf: 'elle faisait régner autour de moi le plus absolu silence; sans être avertis, Jacques et Madeleine jouaient au loin.' (Y. p.214). Once again, the distant sounds of children seem to contribute to Félix's repose. If potentially hostile sound is expressed in terms of hostile, fathomless distance (Cf. Chapter 3, pp.155-157) perhaps potentially positive sound is expressed in terms of a distance which is relatively close and reassuring.

2: Y. p.87.

3: Y. p.112.

4: Honorine, II, p.262. Cf. Y. p.139: 'Jacques maigrissait déjà [..]; pour ne pas causer de chagrin à sa mère, il aimait mieux souffrir en silence.' This is a favourite theme of Balzac (cf. above p.287 n.4) and Proust: Du côté de chez Swann, Pléiade Vol.1, p.127) as of Vigny.

5: Cf. Y. pp.126-127. Quoted by Alain: Avec Balzac, pp.185-186. Cf. also Chapter 2, Introduction etc.

6: Y. p.156. Cf. Chapter 4, p.198.

7: For milk, see Y. pp.155-156; for light, Y. p.284.

8: Y. p.155.

9: Y. p.169.

by suffering.<sup>1</sup> Thus, before introducing the subject of the letter Henriette remarks: 'Ceux qui ont beaucoup souffert ont beaucoup vécu; ne croyez pas que les âmes solitaires ne sachent rien de ce monde, elles le jugent.'<sup>2</sup> Thus, too, does Félix later remark of her: 'Elle disait des poésies suggérées par la solitude, [...].'<sup>3</sup> The silent strength of Henriette - 'Oui, du fond de mon clochegourde, je veux assister, muette et ravie, à vos succès'<sup>4</sup> - is again that of the mysterious, unknown flower, hidden in the forest: 'Vie obscure et pleine, semblable à ces endroits touffus, fleuris et ignorés, [...].'<sup>5</sup> who corresponds with Félix. Similarly, it is the silent suffering of Félix and Henriette which prepares the exposure which is Félix's narrative: 'la peinture des tourments subis en silence'.<sup>6</sup> The potentiality of silence is most fully realised in the articulation of the past which is Félix's narrative. In the same way as darkness is followed by light, silence is followed by confession. Once again, then, silence announces the triumph of the word.<sup>7</sup>

1: Cf. Y. p.162. Henriette is in favour of silence being imposed on youth until its judgement matures. Since silent suffering is preservative, it is also chaste; as again Henriette writes to Félix: 'Votre instruction est immense, votre coeur conservé par la souffrance sans souillure;'. (Y. p.169). It follows then that Henriette herself is both discreet (Y. p.320) and chaste (Y. pp.147,199). How appropriate, then, that Félix should see his narrative-confession as a violation! (Y. p.3).

2: Y. p.150.

3: Y. p.176.

4: Y. p.135.

5: Y. p.223. Cf. above pp.280, 286. It follows that Henriette's actions in the valley are discreet but enduring; they have the creative power of silence, darkness and penetrable earth: 'Nous étions suivis d'une foule immense accourue pour dire les regrets de cette vallée où elle avait enterré dans le silence une foule de belles actions.' (Y. pp.312-313).

6: Y. p.5.

7: And resistence gives birth to movement. Cf. above p.125 and n.5. Cf. also that most famous and most moving passage in les Proscrits: 'Il s'enferme dans sa chambre, alluma sa lampe inspiratrice, en demandant des mots au silence, des idées à la nuit.' (X. p.344).



(c) Forbidden sound

Despite the apparent triumph of the word in Félix's confession, both as a means of demystification and as a means to break the silence which has hitherto sealed off the past - 'je saurais mourir, mais non mourir les lèvres closes. Elle m'imposa silence en me lançant son regard fier, [...]'<sup>1</sup> - his narrative does, as has been seen, fail to release the ultimate secrets, to break the final silence. Like light, sound remains tantalisingly inaccessible.

If, then, sound indicates desire, it is almost invariably, like that of light, a desire which is finally frustrated. In the same way as Félix and Henriette never respond to '[les] lueurs voluptueuses' of the moonlight filtering through the branches, so do they finally resist the temptations expressed by 'les bruits sourds du printemps'.<sup>2</sup> Although, at one stage, Félix claims that 'il était impossible de ne pas écouter la voix de cet éternel Cantiques des Cantiques par lequel la nature convie ses créatures à l'amour',<sup>3</sup> both he and Henriette do, in the end, fail to respond to nature's cry.<sup>4</sup> Thus, when Félix speaks of 'un divin enfant [...] qui nous ranimera le monde par ses cris joyeux',<sup>5</sup> Henriette answers coldly: '- Vous m'avez évité le mot amour, [...]; mais vous avez parlé d'un sentiment que j'ignore et qui ne m'est point permis.'<sup>6</sup>

Throughout le Lys sound does, then, express a desire which is almost unwelcome: 'Quand la volupté nous cueille de ces fleurs nées sans racines, pourquoi la chair murmure-t-elle?'<sup>7</sup>, which, like the

1: Y. p.114.

2: Y. p.256.

3: Y. p.72. If silence is chaste ... The whole of le Lys is, after all, supposed to constitute an invitation: 'Je cède à ton désir. [...] Je voudrais que ma confidence redoublât ta tendresse. A ce soir.' (Y. pp.3,4).

4: Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that they do respond but separately, and, as it were, out of phase with one another.

5: Y. p.91.

6: Y. p.92.

7: Y. p.113.

light of desire, is born in and almost despite an atmosphere of purity:

'Malgré l'énervante poésie du soir qui donnait aux briques de la balustrade ces tons orangés, si calmants et si purs; malgré cette religieuse atmosphère qui nous communiquait en sons adoucis les cris des deux enfants, et nous laissait tranquilles, le désir serpenta dans mes veines [..].' 1

Just as illuminated desire is unexpected, almost virginal desire, so is desire which begins to find its first voice:

'Que donne-t-on à Dieu? des parfums, de la lumière et des chants, les expressions les plus épurées de notre nature. Eh! bien, tout ce qu'on offre à Dieu n'était-il pas offert à l'amour dans ce poème de fleurs lumineuses qui bourdonnait incessamment ses mélodies au coeur, en y caressant des voluptés cachées, des espérances inavouées, des illusions qui s'enflamment et s'éteignent comme des fils de la vierge par une nuit chaude.' 2

Thus Félix's references to 'la poésie des sens'<sup>3</sup> may be palliated, even purified, by 'la poésie religieuse' of Henriette's death and resurrection.<sup>4</sup> In the same way the various references to 'les mille bruissements du soir' can be seen to culminate in the final adieu of the valley to Henriette.<sup>5</sup>

On other occasions when sound is associated with desire, this desire is either regarded with horror -

'- Qu'avez-vous? lui dis-je.  
- Je ne sais plus ce qu'est la vertu, dit-elle et n'ai pas conscience de la mienne!  
Nous restâmes pétrifiés tous deux, écoutant le son de cette parole comme celui d'une pierre jetée dans un gouffre.' 6

or deeply deplored:

1: Ibid.

2: Y. p.122.

3: Y. pp.228,234.

4: Y. p.306. For other references to 'poésie' etc. in le Lys see below pp.328-329, 410, 418ff.

5: Cf. Y. p.306. Once again, then, form and content in le Lys harmonise perfectly: Félix's love is immortalised in his narrative, which is poem, love-song and elegy. Cf. above p.267.

6: Y. p.251.

'Ah! Natalie, cette clameur horrible que le matérialisme des sens trompés rend froide à distance, nous faisait tinter les oreilles au vieux prêtre et moi: les accents de cette voix magnifique peignaient les combats de toute une vie, les angoisses d'un véritable amour déçu.' 1

Such desire is agonisingly repressed: 'Tout à coup, malgré le bruit onduleux d'une robe, j'entendis la contraction gutturale d'un soupir violemment réprimé;'.<sup>2</sup> The pain it causes is only gradually eased and forgotten: 'Les cris de sa chair révoltée s'éteignent dans mon coeur où ils blessent des échos encore trop tendres;'.<sup>3</sup> x

Thus, however beguiling the perfume of the 'flouve odorante', 'ce parfum qui communique à tous les êtres l'ivresse de la fécondation',<sup>4</sup> and however much Félix might at first appreciate with lady Dudley 'ces enivrants bavardages' and 'les gradations les plus savantes de la musique appliquées au concert de [leurs] voluptés;',<sup>5</sup> both the relationship with Henriette and with lady Dudley end with Félix's sense of exclusion and separation.<sup>6</sup> If Henriette's posthumous letter ends with an unanswered question, Félix's whole narrative constitutes a question and a request to Natalie de Manerville which is bluntly and unequivocally blocked. Natalie first reproaches Félix for his silence - 'pourquoi ta jolie colère de femme aimée, à propos d'un silence?'<sup>7</sup> - and then for his frankness: 'Il fallait me tromper;'.<sup>8</sup> Natalie, like Félix's mother and like Henriette's mother with Henriette,

1: Y. p.301.

2: Y. p.217.

3: Y. p.297. Cf. Y. p.248: 'les cris de la chair révoltée' and Y. p.318: 'le bruit des sens révoltés remplissaient alors mon oreille.'

4: Y. p.119.

5: Y. p.272.

6: Cf. for example Félix's mention of 'la mélodie de nos deux âmes [ ] qui ne se retrouvera plus jamais.' (Y. p.204).

7: Y. p.3.

8: Y. p.332.

### Conclusion

The impression left by the themes of light and sound in Félix's narrative is, then, one of failure. Although his own reaction to Natalie's reply is tantalisingly absent, the content of that reply should not greatly have surprised him.<sup>1</sup> His childhood observations prefigure not only the events of the narrative itself but, even those which the narrative provokes: 'Vous verrez toujours mon malheur s'agrandissant en raison de la circonférence des sphères sociales où j'entrerai.'<sup>2</sup> With such remarks, Félix almost seems to invite a reply which is the culmination and the confirmation of his predictions. Félix not only fails but seems fated to fail:

'Lorsque, par un décret des puissances suprêmes,  
Le Poète apparaît en ce monde ennuyé, [..]'<sup>3</sup>

For not only is Félix one of the disillusioned of the Scènes de la vie de campagne - 'les hommes froissés par le monde, par les révolutions, à moitié brisés par les fatigues de la guerre, dégoûtés de la politique',<sup>4</sup> not only is he one of the many 'proscrits' of the Comédie humaine from 'la femme abandonnée' to Minna and Wilfrid, but he is also, of course, one of the perhaps even more numerous 'naufragés des passions' who, drained and spent of their youthful vigour and promise, seek refuge and consolation in the arms of a 'soeur de charité qui panse les blessures'.<sup>5</sup>

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1: Nor her!

2: Y. p.11.

3: Baudelaire: Bénédiction.

4: Félix Davin's Introduction to the Etudes de moeurs au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, XI, p.226.

5: Y. p.329. The new, liberated woman is however at hand to dispel such myths: 'Je puis faire [..] une infinité de choses par charité, tout, excepté l'amour.' (Y. p.331).

For although it is notable that Félix does not sit disconsolately watching the ocean waves, railing the fickleness of man and deploring 'le peu de fange où nous sommes', he does, being more consistently socially and politically minded, see Henriette's decline as but one of many similar disasters:

'Je ne sais quelle main vengeresse leva tout à coup le rideau peint qui couvre la société. Je vis plusieurs de ces victimes qui vous sont aussi connues qu'à moi: madame de Beauséant partie mourante en Normandie [...] Lady Brandon arrivée en Touraine pour y mourir dans cette humble maison où lady Dudley était restée deux semaines, [...]. Notre époque est fertile en événements de ce genre.' 1

Although Félix, 'ce tempérament de fer' and creative writer, does not seem to attribute his sense of failure and disenchantment to a disease he shares with many others of his generation, his attitude obviously has the same characteristics as those who do - the Werthers, the Renés, the Obermans, and the Amaurys.

Had Félix written a final lament, he might well have echoed an Olympe:

'O douleur! j'ai voulu, moi dont l'âme est troublée,  
Savoir si l'urne encor conservait la liqueur,  
Et voir ce qu'avait fait cette heureuse vallée  
De tout ce que j'avais laissé là de mon coeur!'

He might well have felt himself still pursued by a 'fantôme', a 'fantôme' which also has a confidence to make: 'Ami, je suis la Solitude.'

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1: Y. pp.289-290. If, as Le Yaouanc points out (Y. p.290 n.1) the reference to lady Brandon is included at the expense of chronological consistency, it gives internal support for Félix's extrapolation.



## CHAPTER SIX

### Fire Imagery

#### Introduction

- (1) Fire and sensuality; the crucible.
- (2) Sunsets.
- (3) Reds, reds and blacks.
- (4) Fire and sound.
- (5) The Orient.
- (6) Fire and life and death.
- (7) Fire and light: yellow and gold.

#### Conclusion

### Introduction

It will be seen from a consideration of the preceding four Chapters that the themes under discussion have become increasingly remote from the actual events of the novel. If journeys clearly punctuate Félix's experiences, alternately bringing him closer to or further from Henriette, then the equilibrium of forces materialised in the valley does, for example, correspond to a certain if already less obviously significant physical reality. Thus, if actual or imagined effusions referred to by Félix reflect or evoke actual or imagined experiences, the Indre of his environment plays little enough part in his narrative and, when it does, is strangely anonymous, even abstract.

This abstraction may be seen to culminate in the themes of light and sound. For, apart from the period when Félix communes with the star, and, perhaps, from certain remarks and glances, nowhere does the actual physical reality or experience which might have given birth to the themes seem more tenuous or more irrelevant. When the subject-matter of Félix's vision is vision, and the theme of his words, words, then the subject and 'object' of his narrative do indeed seem to merge, both becoming his "Weltanschauung" - his way of viewing the world. As a result, nowhere in le Lys do some of the more vertiginous pronouncements of a Barthes or a Genette receive more disconcerting corroboration. As Barthes observes: 'Finalement, il n'y a pas d'objet du récit: le récit ne traite que de lui-même: le récit se raconte.'<sup>1</sup>

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1: R. Barthes: S/Z, Seuil, 1970, p.219. Cf. also G. Genette: Figures II, pp.143 (note 2), 150 and J. Starobinsky: La Relation critique, p.121.

However, just as it was finally necessary to review the apparent transcendence of light and sound themes from the more limited and limiting perspective of Félix's own and actual experiences, so is it now necessary to return to those experiences, at, perhaps, their most raw and their most feverishly physical: in the imagery of fire. For it is only in this way that justice can be rendered to the different facets or levels of experience described in le Lys. Such is, however, the violence and prestige of desire for the Balzacian character that, as will be seen, the very transience of the energy of fire seems to permit and to prepare its ultimate transcendence.

(1)

Fire and sensuality; the crucible

If light is traditionally associated with spirituality and purity, then just as traditional is the association between fire and sensuality. As Lucienne Frappier-Mazur observes after quoting the following remark from Etude de femme: "'Oh! tisonner quand on aime, n'est-ce pas développer matériellement sa pensée?": 'Cet exemple fait ressortir sur un mode un peu badin les rapports évidents qui, chez Balzac, rattachent tant d'images de flamme à la tradition du feu sexuel'.<sup>1</sup> Nor does Lucienne Frappier-Mazur neglect Félix's explicit affirmation of such a link: "'le désir serpenta dans mes veines comme le signal d'un feu de joie.'"<sup>2</sup> Examples of the fire-passion analogy are, of course, common in le Lys, from Félix's love 'mordant et altéré comme un fer rouge'<sup>3</sup> to Henriette who dips her hand in the water of the Indre 'comme pour rafraîchir une secrète ardeur.'<sup>4</sup>

What is, however, important in such passages is less the fire-sexuality link, which is predictable enough, than, as J. Gaudon has so expertly demonstrated, the way in which the persistence of red and fire in le Lys prefigures the psychological revelations at the end of the novel, showing that 'Madame de Mortsauif n'est pas ce personnage monolithique qu'elle s'efforce d'être'.<sup>5</sup> The presence of reds - like that of rising waters<sup>6</sup> - does, therefore betray 'au niveau des mots, le sourd cheminement des tensions et des déchirements'.<sup>7</sup> It

1: 'Balzac et les images "reparaissantes" lumière et flamme dans la Comédie humaine, pp.62-63, quoting I, p.1051. For examples of this traditional association, see G. Durand: Les Structures /.../, pp.383-385 and G. Bachelard: La Psychanalyse du feu, Gallimard, 1949, pp.54-56, 75-97.

2: Lucienne Frappier-Mazur: op.cit. p.62, quoting Y. p.113.

3: Y. p.109.

4: Y. p.203.

5: J. Gaudon: 'Le Rouge et le blanc: notes sur le Lys dans la vallée, p.77. Cf. Chapter 4p.211 and the section on mystery and disclosure above

6: Cf. Chapter 4, pp.192-196 and p.211 (n.3).

7: J. Gaudon: op.cit. p.78. F. Nourrissier notes a similar restrained violence in the film of a novel whose plot and setting inevitably recalls le Lys - Simone Rattel's La Maison des Bories: 'Il faut s'attacher moins à la lettre de l'histoire qu'à ses cheminements secrets, à ses échos.' (L'Avant-Scène Cinéma, No.118, 1971 (octobre), p.9; from a review first appearing in L'Express, 1971 (3 août).)

is, therefore, significant that the desire which explodes like 'un feu de joie' is born of and in an atmosphere of purity,<sup>1</sup> and that Henriette's 'secrète ardeur' follows closely on an evocation of grandiose Platonic union.<sup>2</sup> Just so is Félix's first meeting with the chaste Henriette, all blues and whites, framed by his kisses and what Gaudon calls 'une tente poussiéreuse où domine le rouge.'<sup>3</sup> The ambivalence of the bouquets - again blues and whites but also flamboyant red - and the final ambiguities in Henriette's attitude and personality, could hardly be more daringly but subtly anticipated.

Thus, if Félix's reaction to his kisses links fire and sexuality with almost equal explicitness: 'Je restai tout hébété, savourant la pomme que je venais de voler, gardant sur mes lèvres la chaleur de ce sang que j'avais aspiré, [...]'<sup>4</sup> much less certain is the extent to which he repents of this action, since 'les larmes du repentir' seem to be invalidated by the later 'ne me repentant de rien'.<sup>5</sup> Félix's uncertainty undoubtedly reflects that of Henriette, both 'fille d'Eve' and Blanche de Mortsauf.

1: Cf. Y. p.113. However superficially chaste, 'les ondulations d'une même rêverie' are a fitting precursor of the serpentine movement of Félix's desire. For other examples of the similarity of pure and sensual loves, see Chapter 7, pp.409-411.

2: Cf. Y. p.203. In her article entitled 'Balzac et l'androgynie' (A.B. 1973, pp.253-277) Lucienne Frappier-Mazur sees le Lys as offering a virtually unique example in the Comédie humaine of 'le rêve d'une union androgynie purement spirituelle.' (p.266). The couple's heightened sense of union not only with each other but with nature may have Orphic resonances similar to those noted by Mme Frappier-Mazur (ibid. pp.268-269) in l'Enfant maudit. Cf. B. Juden: 'L'Esthétique: "l'harmonie immense qui dit tout"', Romantisme, 1973, No.5, p.5.

3: J. Gaudon: 'Le Rouge et le blanc [...]', p.77.

4: Y. p.26. Later (Y. p.45; cf. Y. p.151) Félix hopes to finish this apple which is a crucial if obvious example of the again traditional association between hunger and sexuality. (Cf. G. Durand: Les Structures [...] pp.50,59,129,130,131; and Physiologie du mariage, X, p.631: 'L'amour physique est un besoin semblable à la faim'). In le Lys such references belong to a much wider theme, incorporating light, flame, plants and hunger and thirst imagery; cf. below p.332(n.5) and Chapter 7, pp.358-360. Cf. also G. Bachelard: La Psychanalyse du feu, p.109: 'le feu s'alimente' and, for the fire-hunger analogy in Balzac: J.-P. Richard: Etudes sur le romantisme, pp.11-12.

5: Y. p.26.



The ambivalence of Félix's attitude towards Eve, the apple, and temptation reflects and reinforces a similar ambivalence in other references to fire and appetite in le Lys, even if this appetite is less explicitly sexual. Thus Félix is, of course, both attracted and repelled by Arabelle 'toujours insatiable comme une terre sablonneuse'.<sup>1</sup> Even Mortsauif has, on occasion, a kind of savage if destructive grandeur: 'ses yeux jaunes eurent une expression qui le fit ressembler à une bête affamée sortant d'un bois.'<sup>2</sup> As Gaudon remarks of le Lys: 'chaque détail est écho ou préfiguration',<sup>3</sup> for the above notations do, of course, anticipate and culminate in the conflicting allegiances

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- 1: Y. p.284. Given that lady Dudley 'aimait à déchirer, à mordre [...] pour satisfaire un goût' (Y. p.283), and that she treats Félix as her prey (cf. Y. pp.233,279), it is appropriate that she has the same 'ironie mordante' (Y. p.21) as Mesdames de Lenoncourt and Vandenesse: 'La langue d'une Anglaise spirituelle ressemble à celle d'un tigre qui emporte la chair jusqu'à l'os en voulant jouer.' (Y. p.271). It is also appropriate that Arabelle, herself fond of 'des condiments enflammés' (Y. p.228), should use that biting irony to offer Félix 'des tartines beurrées de vertu' and 'd'excellents sandwiches' - of vice and virtue - prepared by her own fair hand (Y. pp.270,271).
- 2: Y. p.141. If Arabelle is noted for 'des cheveux de couleur fauve' (Y. p.230), then Mortsauif has yellow, tiger-like eyes: cf. Y. pp.75,79. (Cf. the reference to 'blancheur fauve' above p.260). Mortsauif is also compared to a wolf (Y. pp.49,141), a lion (Y. p.73), a monkey (Y. p.197), a boar (Y. p.208) and an insect (Y. pp.113,193). Despite their divergent sexual habits, Mortsauif has, therefore, the same need of 'une pâture' (cf. Y. pp.73,79) as lady Dudley (Y. p.227). When Mortsauif can no longer prey on others, his appetite seems to turn inwards and he begins to devour himself (Y. p.194), for, like Henriette (cf. Y. p.41), Jacques (cf. Y. p.243) and Félix (cf. Y. p.249) the Count is threatened by an internal fire: (cf. Y. pp.49,140,193). One reason for this may be, as Eigeldinger suggests (La Philosophie de l'art [...], p.33): 'La pensée [...] est dévorante dans la mesure où elle n'est pas incarnée, où elle ne coïncide pas avec une forme.' For other examples of this 'se dévorer' theme, see Y. pp.84,92,146, and indeed Y. p.145: 'Une mélancolie profonde me rongait l'âme'. This theme does, therefore, relate to that of 'dégoût' (cf. Y. pp.221,225,326) already noted by Monica Crawley in her stylistic study of le Lys, pp.74-75.
- 3: 'Le Rouge et le blanc [...]', p.71.

which torture Henriette on her death-bed: 'Ils croient que ma plus vive douleur est la soif. Oh! oui, j'ai bien soif, mon ami. L'eau de l'Indre me fait bien mal à voir, mais mon coeur éprouve une plus ardente soif.'<sup>1</sup>

Such is, moreover, the ambivalence of the characters' attitude towards fire that this ambivalence seems to be transferred to fire itself which is, as a result, not only sexually rousing but pure, even chastening. Thus, if Henriette dies consumed by the fires of sexual passion, she is also reborn from the crucible of suffering; as l'abbé de Dominis tells Félix: 'Vous l'avez laissée fleur encore, [..], mais vous la retrouverez consumée, purifiée dans le feu des douleurs, et pure comme un diamant encore enfoui dans les cendres.'<sup>2</sup> Fire still consumes, but the period during which this takes place is seen as but one stage in a vast cosmic movement. As Henriette herself points out: 'Félix, nous devons passer par un creuset rouge avant d'arriver saints et parfaits dans les sphères supérieures.'<sup>3</sup> For Henriette, then, the contradictions of fire are eventually subsumed and transcended.

For Félix, however, the effects of the crucible are irremediably destructive and debilitating: 'Nous partons presque tous [..] le coeur affamé d'amour; puis, quand nos richesses ont passé par le

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- 1: Y. p.301. Henriette suffers from both hunger and thirst, both linked since it is the wine-harvesters who are about to eat. Cf. above p.190.  
 2: Y. p.294. Cf. Y. p.101: 'Je me consumerai dans la flamme, et vous aimerai d'un amour purifié.' The purifying effect of fire, again a traditional theme, occurs repeatedly in Saint-Martin's l'Homme de désir. Cf. the Conclusion to this Chapter. Cf. also G. Durand: Les Structures [..] pp.191-197, and G. Bachelard: La Psychanalyse du feu, pp.163-175.  
 3: Y. p.200. An image with alchemistic connotations and indeed worthy of a Martiniste Henriette (cf. Le Yaouanc's note). Cf. also G. Bachelard: La Psychanalyse du feu, p.39 and below p.350 (n.4).

creuset, [∴], tout se repétisse insensiblement, nous trouvons peu d'or parmi beaucoup de cendres.<sup>1</sup> Whereas Henriette's thirst, even in destroying her, prepared and precipitated her rebirth in immortality, Félix's thirst, even when at least temporarily quenched, offered no permanent satisfaction.<sup>2</sup> Unlike ultimately for Henriette, Félix's sense of desiccation merely serves to intensify his isolation and his rejection.<sup>3</sup>

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1: Y. p.315. Since Félix opens with a passing reference to 'le feu dévorant d'un oeil sévère' (Y. p.5) the ravaging effects of fire can be seen to encompass his narrative. This is, of course, further evidence of the Apocalyptic as of the 'épreuve' - 'palingénésie' themes. Cf. above pp.62-66. Cf. also below p.425 and n.2.

2: Cf. Y. p.249.

3: Since Henriette did, after all, refuse to share with Félix 'les saveurs du fruit mûri dans [leurs] roches' (Y. p.91) Félix was often forced, as during his childhood, to see the satisfaction of appetite as a solitary activity. (Cf. Y. p.45). Cf. the shedding of solitary tears, the isolation endemic to the afore-mentioned 'se dévorer' theme, and the increased sense of isolation conveyed by 'dégout'.

(2)

Sunsets

Félix and Henriette show a marked predilection for the sunsets which they often admire from the perfumed terrace of acacias, a predilection which seems to derive from the calm and tranquillity embodied in a sun whose radiance has gained in depth what it has lost in fierceness:

'Enfin, à la tombée du jour, ils me reconduisirent jusqu'au chemin de Frapesle, par une de ces tranquilles soirées dont les harmonies font gagner en profondeur aux sentiments ce qu'ils perdent en vivacité.' 1

Such is the sense of depth conveyed by the gentle, subdued glow of a sunset, that it stimulates Henriette to plunge into the deep and tranquil waters of the past. The gentle heat of the setting sun is, perhaps surprisingly, related to the purity and potentiality of water:

'Elle me regarda sous les tièdes rayons du soleil couchant qui glissaient à travers le feuillage, et prise de je ne sais quelle compassion pour nos débris, elle se replongea dans notre passé si pur, en se laissant aller à des contemplations qui furent mutuelles. Nous reprenions nos souvenirs, [...].' 2

Just as Henriette is poised between the prestige of the past and the impoverishment of the present and future, so does the sunset materialise a period of transition between midday splendour and nocturnal extinction. Both the sun and Henriette, poised momentarily between past and future,

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1: Y. pp.138-139. Cf. J.-P.Richard: Etudes sur le romantisme, p.118.

2: Y., p.250. Sunsets also preside over the similarly unfulfilled love of Julie and Arthur in la Femme de trente ans: 'Le soleil, au moment de sa chute, les enveloppa de ses reflets rouges avant de disparaître; image mélancolique de leur fatal amour.' (II, p.725).

unite and thereby transcend them both in an aggrandizing moment in the present and achieve a moment of eternity;

'Nous reprenions nos souvenirs, nos yeux allaient de la vallée au clos, des fenêtres de Clochegourde à Frapesle, en peuplant cette rêverie des romans de nos désirs. Ce fut sa dernière volupté, savourée avec la candeur de l'âme chrétienne.' 1

A previous description of a sunset conveys a similar sense of the eternal in a period of transition:

'pour satisfaire aux conditions de l'unité qui marque le sublime, cette assemblée recueillie était enveloppée par la lumière adoucie du couchant dont les teintes rouges coloraient la salle, en laissant croire ainsi aux âmes, ou poétiques, ou superstitieuses, que les feux du ciel visitaient ces fidèles serviteurs de Dieu agenouillés là sans distinction de rang, dans l'égalité voulue par l'Eglise.' 2

If a sunset presides so majestically over a moment of reconciliation between men and between man and God, it is because it itself represents a momentary reconciliation, the reconciliation of the splendour of life and the extinction of death. The coincidence of this dual reconciliation is emphasised by the fact that the reconciliation of men and the reconciliation which is the sunset are themselves reconciled by the movement of the sunset between God and man.

Just as, in the previous section, the fire of sensuality was seen to be the same fire as the crucible that purifies, so may the redness of the sunset be as sexually rousing as, above, it was divinely pure:

'Un soir je la trouvai religieusement pensive devant un coucher de soleil qui rougissait si voluptueusement les cimes en laissant voir la vallée comme un lit, qu'il était impossible de ne pas écouter la voix de cet éternel Cantique des Cantiques par lequel la nature convie ses créatures à l'amour.' 3

The presence of religious terms in the description of both profane and sacred redness suggests that both types of redness have a quality in

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1: Y. p.250.

2: Y. p.181. Cf. also Y. p.118.

3: Y. p.72.



common beneath and beyond the redness-purity, redness-sexuality analogies. What is common to both the above sunsets is that the sun sublimates and immortalises the emotions experienced during the period of its presence. Félix not only establishes a communion between man and nature but makes this moment of communion appear as one episode in a communion which has lasted and will last for eternity. The 'Cantique des Cantiques', like the pronouncements of the prophets,<sup>1</sup> are born of an immemorial past and will endure into an illimitable future. Like the sunset, they transcend time.<sup>2</sup>

Elsewhere, the period of equilibrium represented by the sunset is in danger of being disrupted by the birth of a more violent, volatile fire:

'Malgré l'énervante poésie du soir qui donnait aux briques de la balustrade ces tons orangés, si calmants et si purs; malgré cette religieuse atmosphère qui nous communiquait en sons adoucis les cris des deux enfants, et nous laissaient tranquilles, le désir serpenta dans mes veines comme le signal d'un feu de joie.' 3

Whether fire multiplies itself to destroy itself or to perpetuate itself the effect is the same: either the sunset preserves itself from decline and stagnation by exploding into new life, preserves its own transcendence by reacting against the surpassing itself; or fire multiplies itself in order to threaten and destroy itself by itself. In either case, fire is perpetually renewing itself. The paradox of fire is that it is eternal change.

1: Cf. below pp.325-329.

2: As do the passions. It must not be forgotten that the Song of Songs is, of course, a love poem.

3: Y. p.113. Although J. Haas (Honore de Balzac's "Lilie im Tal", p.47) objects to the apparent contradiction in this passage, the opposition introduced by the two 'malgré que' epitomises the ambivalence of fire. It might, however, be argued that there are two different fires here, the latter one, the 'feu de joie', being the real fire which destroys itself or its container. This, of course, would fulfil Félix's earlier forboding (Y. p.41) and account for Henriette's eventual martyrdom.

Sunsets in le Lys are, however, rarely characterised by such violent activity. Their transcendent harmony is, however momentary, intact:

'La soirée était une de ces soirées chaudes où le ciel prend les teintes du cuivre, où la campagne envoie dans les échos mille bruits confus. Un dernier rayon de soleil se mourait sur les toits, les fleurs des jardins embaumaient les airs, les clochettes des bestiaux ramenés aux étables retentissaient au loin.' 1

The deep calm of warm colours is repeated in the subdued and echoing sounds; the depth of 'teintes' contrasts with and balances the shaft of 'un dernier rayon'; the faintness of the sun's present beam offsets the warm orange glow of the sun at its height. It is the ability of the sunset to combine 'les teintes de cuivre' of its past splendour with the intuition of its imminent extinction from 'un dernier rayon' which enables it to combine past and future in an eternal present moment.

Other such sunsets are not uncommon in le Lys dans la vallée. Like the Indre valley itself where 'la vue s/é/ repose sur des touffes dorées qui communiquent à l'âme leurs paisibles douceurs'<sup>2</sup> and like the autumn which is to the year as the setting sun is to the day, the setting sun has a becalming, almost therapeutic effect on Félix and Henriette.<sup>3</sup> Thus, after Félix's first departure from Clochegourde, Félix, who has returned to say a final farewell, remarks of Henriette: 'elle descendait en ce moment le perron avec ses deux enfants pour venir respirer, triste et lente, la douce mélancolie empreinte sur ce paysage, au coucher du soleil.'<sup>4</sup> The same sunset

1: Y. pp.216-217.

2: Y. p.30.

3: For further reference to the seasons, see Chapter 7, pp:413-415.

4: Y. p.153.

impregnates Félix himself with melancholy, but a melancholy tinged with a gentle nostalgia:

'En ce moment les champs étaient dépouillés, les feuilles des peupliers tombaient, et celles qui restaient avaient la couleur de la rouille; les pampres étaient brûlés, [..]. Toujours en harmonie avec mes pensées, la vallée où se mouraient les rayons jaunes d'un soleil tiède, me présentait encore une vivante image de mon âme.' 1

The prestige of this moment derives from the parallel which may be established between a sun bearing traces of its past grandeur and its future extinction and a Félix haunted by past happiness and the prospect of future isolation.<sup>2</sup> However, just as the prestige of the present moment was seen to be placed in a more grandiose perspective by reference to the venerable tradition and extended future of the pronouncements of the prophets and of the 'Cantique des Cantiques' so is a similar effect achieved by Félix's reference to the tradition of royal mourning: 'la cime des bois offrait les teintes graves de cette couleur tannée que jadis les rois adoptaient pour leur costume et qui cachait la pourpre du pouvoir sous le brun des chagrins.'<sup>3</sup>

The suggestion that the sunset represents a moment of transcendent equilibrium receives surprising confirmation in an apparent contradiction in Félix's description: although it is the sun which has parched and desolated the valley, the eclipse of the sun threatens to eclipse

1: Y. p.154. This is, of course, an outstanding example of the 'paysage état d'âme'.

2: Cf. the quotation from Y. p.250, above pp.313,314.

3: Y. p.154. It is notable that Le Yaouanc's attempt to find a historical basis for this remark has not met with success (Cf. Y. p.154,n.1). This passage may also relate to Henriette's reaction to the eventuality of Mortsauf dying from his illness: 'J'aurais porté le deuil de cour, rose et noir' (Y. p.218) - another remark for which Le Yaouanc can find no historical foundation. Opposites are also combined in the pink and black of 'le parfum chaste et sauvage' of the heather gathered by Félix and Natalie (Y. pp.42-43). Cf. Y. p.121 and the following section, esp. p.321.

Félix's hopes. The sun is at one and the same time the source and the destroyer of happiness. In the same way, when Henriette despairs 'en apercevant pour la première fois son désert sans soleil',<sup>1</sup> both the absence and the presence of the sun are equally destructive and equally desirable. Once again, then, the sun is able to unite and subsume contradictions.

It is therefore remarkably appropriate that a sunset should preside over Henriette's death, itself a moment of reconciled forces when the opiate from the poppy neutralises the perfumes of the bouquets:

'Je revins chez la mourante au moment où le soleil se couchait et dorait la dentelle des toits du château d'Azay. Tout était calme et pur. Une douce lumière éclairait le lit où reposait Henriette baignée d'opium.'<sup>2</sup>

Like the paradox itself, the descriptions of the setting sun are figures where contradictions are momentarily neutralised and surpassed. For the sunset is both life and death, or, perhaps more accurately, neither life nor death, but the momentary transcendence of them both.<sup>3</sup>

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1: Y. p.222. Cf. Chapter 3, p.153 and below p.336 and n.6.

2: Y. p.305. As above, perfumes combine opposites. Cf. Chapter 7 pp.365-369.

3: It is interesting that Balzac - or at least Félix Davin - should refer to the Scènes de la vie de campagne as 'le soir après une journée bien remplie, le soir d'un jour chaud, le soir avec ses teintes solennelles, ses reflets bruns, ses nuages colorés, ses éclairs de chaleur et ses coups de tonnerre étouffés.' (Introduction to the Etudes de moeurs au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, XI, p.227).

(3)

Reds, reds and blacks

The colour red is associated with both the themes previously discussed, with hunger - 'mon amour, s raphique en sa pr sence, devenait loin d'elle mordant et alt r  comme un fer rouge;<sup>1</sup> - and with the sunset - 'Un soir je la trouvai religieusement pensive devant un coucher de soleil qui rougissait si voluptueusement les cimes [...].<sup>2</sup> Both these examples can be seen to support an identification between redness and sexual desire. Thus Gaudon speaks of 'la note rouge, couleur de la passion imparfaitement assouvie'.<sup>3</sup> The sunset of the prayer scene is, however, as has been seen, equally impregnated with red: it is the dominant colour in 'un tableau dont les couleurs r p taient en quelque sorte   l'esprit les id es r veill es par la pri re;'.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, in F lix's description of the poppy, the flaming redness of his desire reaches a climax, and, threatening to explode, seems to wed redness incontrovertibly to sexuality: 'Du sein de ce proluxe torrent d'amour qui d borde, s' lance un magnifique double pavot rouge accompagn  de ses glands pr ts   s'ouvrir, [...].<sup>5</sup>

The redness in the above four quotations may, however, be characterised in a different way, in a way which cuts across the red-sexuality/purity identification. In the references to the 'fer rouge' and the poppy, redness is indicative of accelerated vertical

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1: Y. p.109.

2: Y. p.72.

3: J. Gaudon: 'Le Rouge et le blanc: notes sur le Lys dans la vall e, pp.77-78. Cf. la Fille au yeux d'or, V, p.303: 'l'amour se pla t dans le rouge'. After quoting the passage from which this is taken O. Bonard, however, points out: 'ce symbolisme ne saurait se r duire   un syst me de correspondances stables, mais tire sa force m me et son extraordinaire pouvoir de suggestion d'un perp tuel renouvellement et d'une constante recreation   m me l' criture.' (Cf. O. Bonard: La Peinture dans la cr ation balzacienne, G n ve, Droz, 1969, pp.159-160.)

4: Y. p.181.

5: Y. p.121. Quoted by Lucienne Frappier-Mazur: 'Balsac et les images "reparaissantes" [...]', p.64.



movement; the redness is volatile and explosive. In the other two descriptions, the redness extends horizontally over a series of surfaces and, in doing so, creates an impression of increased depth, both physical depth, where the valley becomes a bed, a cradle,<sup>1</sup> and emotional or spiritual depth, where the red light of the setting sun expresses harmony and sanctity. The above reference to 'tableau' does, moreover, reinforce this impression of physical and spiritual depth: the 'tableau' is both a group of people arranged in such a way that the overall effect is pregnant with meaning; it is also a horizontal canvas whose single dimension the artist seeks to render multidimensional, to give substance and depth in a painting.

It is, therefore, significant that when Félix first describes Henriette at Clochegourde, he describes her as an artist trying to compensate for the linearity of language and the horizontality of the portrait by resorting to redness to convey depth and potentiality:

'Je puis vous crayonner les traits principaux qui partout eussent signalé la comtesse aux regards; mais le dessin le plus correct, la couleur la plus chaude n'en exprimeraient rien encore. Sa figure est une de celles dont la ressemblance exige l'introuvable artiste de qui la main sait peindre le reflet des feux intérieurs, et sait rendre cette vapeur lumineuse que nie la science, que la parole ne traduit pas, mais que voit un amant.'<sup>2</sup>

As Bachelard remarks: 'Par la chaleur, tout est profond.'<sup>3</sup> However, Félix does not merely describe Henriette's potentiality in terms of 'la couleur la plus chaude' - which is inadequate - nor, even, in terms

1: Cf. Y. p.72 (quoted above p.314) and Y. p.76 (quoted below p.323).

2: Y. pp.40-41. Félix can, therefore, be included among those characters for whom 'l'amour naît en effet d'une sorte de fascination esthétique' - at least at this second meeting with Henriette. (Cf. O. Bonard: La Peinture /.../, p.24; cf. ibid. p.11). Félix the artist is further discussed in Chapter 7, pp.416 n.4ff. Cf. esp. p.419 and n.1.

3: G. Bachelard: La Terre et les rêveries du repos, p.52. Cf. idem: La Psychanalyse du feu, p.70 and G. Durand: Les Structures /.../, p.228. Cf. also Y. p.103: 'Je fus vivement touché par ces paroles où la profondeur politique se cachait sous la chaleur de l'affection.' (A cliché.)

of 'le reflet des feux intérieurs' - even though this is a kind of multidimensional redness. For this fire of depth and potentiality is also a fire which is explosive and volatile: 'son oeil lançait alors une lueur subtile qui semblait s'enflammer aux sources de la vie et devait les tarir;'. The 'reflet' is also an 'éclair'.<sup>1</sup> It is, therefore, one aspect of the potentiality of horizontal but also multidimensional redness that it gives birth to explosive, vertical redness. The movement of 'une lueur subtile', eventually leading to the cosmic movement of the 'creuset', explodes from a colour, a 'reflet'.

A parallel may be drawn between this description of Henriette and the equally artistic and flamboyant bouquets. The bouquets are as a warm night whose creativity is manifested by their inflammability. They spark off 'des illusions qui s'enflamment et s'éteignent comme des fils de la vierge par une nuit chaude.'<sup>2</sup> The explosiveness of fire is as born of the stillness and fertility of warm darkness in which the colours black and red have almost achieved the three-dimensional qualities of material substance.<sup>3</sup> The richness of red combines with the opacity of black to create an impression of irrepressible fecundity. It is perhaps for this reason that Henriette should remind Félix of a flower which is both pink and black.<sup>4</sup> In the hothouse fertility of 'une nuit chaude' the marriage of the sun and the night, evoked perhaps in the sunsets themselves, seems consummated. However, fire is both offspring and creator. It is by being, like

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1: Y. p.41.

2: Y. p.122.

3: Cf. G. Bachelard: La Psychanalyse du feu, p.122: 'puisque le feu se dépense dans l'animal, c'est qu'il s'économise dans le minéral.'

4: Cf. Y. pp.42-43, quoted above p.317 n.3.

the plants, prolifically and prodigally self-generating that it guarantees its survival.<sup>1</sup>

It is at this point and in this context that the analogy between fire and sexuality can be situated. Thus Bachelard remarks that 'cette fête des Natchez, qui cumule la fête du Soleil et la fête de la moisson, est surtout une fête de la semence du feu',<sup>2</sup> and, in La Flamme d'une chandelle, notes 'entre le soleil, l'arbre et la fleur, une unité de feu.'<sup>3</sup> Durand, too, notes the association between the tree and fire<sup>4</sup> and between fire and the seasons.<sup>5</sup> The cycles of the seasons, like those of the flowers, link to the <sup>l</sup>hythms of music and dance<sup>6</sup> and to the rhythms of sexual motion.<sup>7</sup> Through these other symbols of procreation and generation fire is, then, associated with perpetual self-procreation and eternity.

The tendency of reds and blacks to demonstrate their fecundity by giving birth to explosive, volatile fire can be found elsewhere in le Lys dans la vallée. It can be seen as one of the elements in the description of the sunset where the subdued or darkened reds of 'ces tons oranges, si calmants et si purs' explode into 'un feu de joie'.<sup>8</sup> Once again, horizontal colouring gives birth to vertical combustion. Similarly, after Félix admires with Henriette 'un effet de soleil dans la prairie' and remarks: '- La nuit est femme, madame'<sup>9</sup> the blacks and

1: Hence references to 'poussière diaprée' do, for example, combine the fertility of both plants and fire: cf. Chapter 7, pp. 358ff. Cf. above for the self-sufficiency of water and of light; pp. 185-186; pp. 254-255.

2: G. Bachelard: op.cit. p.58. Cf. ibid. p.71.

3: G. Bachelard: La Flamme d'une chandelle, P.U.F. 1970, p.81. Chapter IV (pp.70-88) of this work is entitled: 'Les images poétiques de la flamme dans la vie végétale.' Cf. Chapter 7, pp.358-364.

4: Cf. G. Durand: Les Structures /.../, pp.381-382.

5: Cf. ibid. p.388.

6: Cf. ibid. pp.385-389. The bouquets are, of course, a symphony.

7: Cf. ibid. p.385 and G. Bachelard: La Psychanalyse du feu, p.51 etc.

8: y. p.113.

9: Hence Felix's present outpourings! - Balzac is Freudian 'avant la lettre'.

reds of night spark off a violent explosion of energy:

'Je m'endormis en des langes de pourpre. Des flammes passèrent devant mes yeux fermés en se poursuivant dans les ténèbres comme les jolis vermisses de feu qui courent les uns après les autres sur les cendres du papier brûlé.' 1

Again, like the bouquets themselves, the product and description of a vision, this passage also emphasises, in the reference to 'des langes de pourpre', the substantiality as well as the fecundity of warm colours and the night.<sup>2</sup> Again redness and darkness unite and regenerate fire. Again, vertical fire is born of horizontal fire, movement is born of form.<sup>3</sup>

Félix describes a similar vision as he contemplates Henriette's shoulders and relives the kissing of them at the ball:

'je revoyais la lentille qui marquait la naissance de la jolie raie par laquelle son dos était partagé, mouche perdue dans du lait, et qui depuis le bal flamboyait toujours le soir dans ces ténèbres où semble ruisseler le sommeil des jeunes gens dont l'imagination est ardente, dont la vie est chaste.' 4

The darkness of the night combined with Félix's ardour breeds a new, violent flamboyance.

1: Y. pp.74,76. This passage provides the natural introduction to the 'feu de joie' passage. Cf. above pp.308, 315. and la Femme de trente ans, II, p.719: 'Personne ne reste froid sous ce ciel pur, devant ces eaux scintillantes. Là meurt plus d'une ambition, là vous vous couchez au sein d'un tranquille bonheur, comme chaque soir le soleil se couche dans ses langes de pourpre et d'azur.' The link between 'ténèbres' and 'cendres' ingeniously confirms the inflammability of darkness: cf. below p.341 n.2.

2: In his article 'Le jour, la nuit', G. Genette refers to the spatiality of night (Figures II, pp.108-109) as also to its femininity and its maternity (ibid. p.121). Thus Henriette's 'maternité spirituelle' is epitomised in a letter written at night (cf. Y. pp.155,156) and thus, perhaps, Félix speaks of 'les roulades du chantre des nuits amoureuses' (Y. p.64). While J.-P. Richard ('Balzac, de la force à la forme', p.22 and Etudes sur le romantisme, p.108) speaks of 'une ressource infinie de l'ombre', G. Durand directly relates the fertility of night and the fertility of colours: Les Structures [...], p.253.

3: Cf. Chapter 2, p.120 and Chapter 3, p.125 and n.5. Life is born of destruction.

4: Y. p.40. Cf. above p.180.

The faculty of fire to breed fire is seen in yet another of his visions, where the accumulation of energy represented by red blood is immediately projected onto the beloved:

'Pour les imaginations ardentes, pour les êtres chez lesquels l'enthousiasme passe dans le sang, le teint d'une pourpre nouvelle, et chez qui la passion prend les formes de la constance, l'absence n'a-t-elle pas l'effet des supplices qui raffermiraient la foi des premiers chrétiens, et leur rendaient Dieu visible? N'existe-t-il pas chez un coeur rempli d'amour des souhaits incessants qui donnent plus de prix aux formes désirées en les faisant entrevoir colorées par le feu des rêves?' 1

The self-generating quality of fire is here made still more evident by the fact that it is the fiery vision which creates a vision of fire. As in the case of Félix's description of Henriette's 'feux intérieurs', the creativity of Henriette is itself a creation of Félix the painter, Félix the artist. The description of the bouquets offers a further example of the creative creation, of the creation which is in its turn creating: the creativity of the poppy is a creation within the creation which is the bouquets - the poem, the symphony<sup>2</sup> - just as the bouquets themselves are a creation within the creation which is Félix's narrative. This is, of course, particularly appropriate for le Lys dans la vallée which is itself a creation within a creation: 'A chaque oeuvre, sa forme.'<sup>3</sup> Once again, moreover, fire is associated with perpetual change, perpetual renewal.

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1: Y. p.175.

2: Cf. Chapter 7, p.392, p.406, p.415.

3: Y. p.337.



(4)

Fire and sound

It has been seen from the above section that fire in le Lys dans la vallée is associated with Félix's description, as an artist, of Henriette's 'feux intérieurs' and, as a poet and a musician, of the bouquets, culminating in the 'double pavot rouge'. This connection between fire and artistic creation<sup>1</sup> receives surprising and revealing corroboration from one of Félix's early descriptions of his childhood visions:

'elles ont écrit dans ma tête un livre où j'ai pu lire ce que je devais exprimer, elles ont mis sur mes lèvres le charbon de l'improvisateur.' 2

It appears from this that inflamed speech is characterised by its impulsiveness, - an impulsiveness which does not, however, detract from its authenticity. On the contrary, this vision forms as it were 'une Apocalypse où /s/a vie [lui] fut figurativement prédite: chaque événement heureux ou malheureux s'y rattache par des images bizarres, liens visibles aux yeux de l'âme seulement.'<sup>3</sup> The revelations of the Apocalypse and the pronouncements of the prophets are words which originate in the depths of the past but which apply to both the present and to the future. The inflamed words of the prophets do, therefore, manifest themselves in a momentary outburst yet their inspiration and their application are eternal.

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1: A common one in the period. Hence the frequent references to Prometheus.

2: Y. pp.12-13. This passage was ridiculed by Chaix-d'Est-Ange in Balzac's lawsuit with the Revue de Paris (Cf. M.F. Bar: 'Balzac styliste', C.A.I.E.F., 1963, No.15, p.310). It can, however, be seen to be both coherent and significant in the context of the theme. Cf. also the references to 'texte' and 'hiéroglyphe' in Balzac, quoted in Chapter 7, p.372.

3: Y. p.37. Cf. above p.13.

The above passages also relate to the fervour of 'les charbons d'Isaïe' with which Félix recounts his childhood sufferings to Henriette:

'Je lui contai mon enfance, non comme je vous l'ai dite, en la jugeant à distance; mais avec les paroles ardentes du jeune homme de qui les blessures seignaient encore.'<sup>1</sup>

Once again the inflamed character of Félix's words expresses their immediacy, their closeness to the present. However, although Félix recounts his sufferings with the immediacy of one still experiencing them, the very recounting of them, followed by Henriette's similar confession, enables him to see them in perspective with past and future. His and Henriette's joint confession enables him to see them as 'le grain répandu à flots par la main du Semeur pour faire éclore la moisson déjà dorée par le plus beau des soleils.'<sup>2</sup> Yet another fire-Biblical image gives immediate experience a venerable past and a meaningful future. Once again, then, inflamed speech is immediate and eternal.

The above reference to the sun and the harvest recalls other examples of sunny or fiery speech in le Lys dans la vallée. For example, Henriette's voice, which draws Félix's soul into 'un monde surhumain',<sup>3</sup> is also a ray of sunlight.<sup>4</sup> However fleeting and banal Henriette's words - '-Entrez donc, messieurs!' - they do, for Félix, link with the past of the ball and illuminate the future with new

1: Y. p.83. The link between fire and the word is noted by G. Durand: Les Structures /.../, pp.198-199 and by J.-P.Richard: Etudes sur le romantisme, pp.23-24. For other examples of fiery or ardent speech, see Y. pp.94,134,193. Cf. also Félix's ardent expression once Arabelle begins her 'sorcelleries' (Y. p.270) and Y. p.20: 'une plaidoirie affamée d'amour'.

2: Y. p.91.

3: Y. p.40.

4: Cf. Y. p.37. Cf. also la Femme de trente ans, II, p.697: 'Tu trouvas la première que ce soleil lointain nous parlait d'avenir.'

hope. Like the prophecy they do, therefore, transcend time. The action of Henriette's words on Félix is like the action of the sun on plants - an action which is both immediate and in the present and which is also part of an eternal cycle of birth, growth, fruition, death and rebirth.<sup>1</sup>

The interaction of the sun and plants is, moreover, reunited with the theme of sound in Félix's description of his bouquets. The bouquets are, like the pronouncements of the prophets, a message, an articulation, as fragile and as transient as the flowers of which they are composed. However, their internal sun endows them with a fertility for the future and they are, as has been seen, placed in a cosmic cycle. The isolated, individual movements of 'tout ce que ces naïves créatures ont de plus échevelé, de plus déchiré, des flammes et de triples dards, des feuilles lancéolées, [...]'<sup>2</sup> do, like the flux of the seasons and the notes of the symphony, repeat and reiterate to eternity: thus Félix speaks of 'ce rouge désir de l'amour qui demande un bonheur refusé dans les luttes cent fois recommencées de la passion contenue, infatigable, éternelle'.<sup>3</sup> The word, the flame and the flower are all both immediate and eternal. It is perhaps for this reason that Bachelard says of the poet: 'Il ne peut alors comprendre la fleur qu'en animant les flammes de la fleur par des flammes de parole.'<sup>4</sup>

1: Thus Félix later says of Clochegourde: 'Mais là verdoyait la plante inconnue qui jeta sur mon âme sa féconde poussière, là brillait la chaleur solaire qui développa mes bonnes et dessécha mes mauvaises qualités.' (Y. p.44).

2: Y. p.121.

3: Y. pp.121-122.

4: G. Bachelard: La Flamme d'une chandelle, p.80. Cf. Massimilla Doni, IX, p.351: 'Tous les buissons ardents de la jeunesse flambent et redisent leurs mots divins [...]'. 'Feu' and 'Parole' are also associated in Saint-Martin: see, for example, l'Homme de désir, édition établie et présentée par Robert Amadou, Bibliothèque 10/18, 1973, p.180 (Chant, 142). Cf. B. Juden: 'L'Esthétique [...]', p.6 and also the Conclusion to this Chapter.

It is almost certainly in this context that it is best to interpret references to 'poésie orientale' in le Lys dans la vallée. The poems of the East like the predictions of the prophets are isolated utterances whose precise moment of utterance is of less importance than the tradition they represent, the future they hold, and the immortality they have obtained. Hence Félix draws attention to the antiquity of their source and the fertility of their future:

'J'inventai donc la théorie du père Castel au profit de l'amour, et retrouvai pour elle une science perdue en Europe où les fleurs de l'écritoire remplacent les pages écrites en Orient avec des couleurs embaumées. Quel charme que de faire exprimer ses sensations par ces filles du soleil, les soeurs des fleurs écloses sous les rayons de l'amour!' 1

Once again the isolatedness of the phenomenon does not detract from its authenticity nor from its revelatory force: 'Vous comprendrez cette délicieuse correspondance par le détail d'un bouquet, comme d'après un fragment de poésie vous comprendriez Saadi.'<sup>2</sup>

The placing of 'poésie orientale' in the context of sound and fire also facilitates an interpretation of Félix's initial description of Henriette:

'Trompée par ma chétive apparence, une femme [...] se posa près de moi par un mouvement d'oiseau qui s'abat sur son nid. Aussitôt je sentis un parfum de femme qui brilla dans mon âme comme y brilla depuis la poésie orientale.' 3

Despite the lightness and transience of Henriette's movement, despite the fleeting presence of her perfume, the movement and

1: Y. p.116. Even if, as Le Yaouanc claims, (ibid. n.1), Félix exaggerates the similarity of his theories and those of le père Castel, the analogy here points to a whole technique: the attempt to relate sounds, colours and perfumes, a process crucial to an understanding of the 'correspondances' in le Lys. Cf. Marmontel and B. Juden: 'L'Esthétique [...]', pp.9,15. For other references to le père Castel in this thesis, see the Introduction to Chapter 5 and Chapter 7, p.376(n.1).

2: Y. p.119.

3: Y. pp.24-25. The complexity of the references to Oriental poetry in Balzac is indicated by P. Citron: 'Le Rêve asiatique de Balzac', A.B. 1968, p.336 n.2.

perfume of Henriette like the movement and perfume of the bouquets are with Félix for eternity. If Félix associates his experiences and his narrative with the fiery utterances of the prophets and with the luminous, perfumed poetry of the East, it is because his own poem has for him - and will, perhaps, have for his reader, Natalie de Manerville - the singularity and the immortality of 'les charbons d'Isaïe' and of 'la poésie orientale'.



(5)

The Orient

From Félix's adolescent longing to penetrate 'le monde oriental et sultanesque du Palais-Royal',<sup>1</sup> to Henriette's feverish suggestion that she and Félix should escape together to Italy: 'J'ai fait des projets délicieux, nous les laisserons à Clochegourde et nous irons ensemble en Italie',<sup>2</sup> hotter climates and the countries of the East epitomise freedom from inhibition in le Lys dans la vallée:

'madame de Mortsauf était le bengali transporté dans la froide Europe, tristement posé sur son bâton, muet et mourant dans sa cage où le garde un naturaliste; Henriette était l'oiseau chantant ses poèmes orientaux dans son bocage au bord du Gange, et comme une pierrerie vivante, volant de branche et branche parmi les roses d'un immense volkamérica toujours fleuri.' 3

Hence Henriette repudiates the affinity Félix tries to establish between her and the Orient:

'- Nous vivions dans la même sphère avant de nous retrouver ici, vous partie de l'orient et moi de l'occident. Elle agita la tête par un mouvement désespéré:  
- A vous l'orient, à moi l'occident, dit-elle. Vous vivrez

1: Y. p.17. As can be seen from Gautier and others, the Orient was in fashion at the time. Cf. Chapter 1, p.69 n.6.

2: Y. pp.299-300. On a previous occasion, Henriette realised she was forced to live and die in 'la froide Europe': 'Le Groënlandais mourrait en Italie!' (Y. p.146). Cf. Physiologie du mariage, X, pp.760,765. The inclusion of Italy - and the Middle East - in an examination of the Orient may at first seem surprising. As F. Baldensperger, however, remarks of Balzac's East: 'c'est un domaine de rêve et de magnificence, /.../, mais sans frontières bien dessinées.' (Orientations étrangères chez Honoré de Balzac, Champion, 1927, pp.3-4; Cf. P. Citron: 'Le Rêve asiatique de Balzac', pp.306-307).

3: Y. pp.214-215. Félix continues: 'Sa beauté se fit plus belle, son esprit se raviva. Ce continuel feu de joie était un secret entre nos deux esprits, /.../.'

heureux, je mourrai de douleur! Les hommes font eux-mêmes les événements de leur vie, et la mienne est à jamais fixée. [...] 1

As a result, lady Dudley's unrestrained passion is, as has been seen, associated with the unlimited expanses of the desert:

'Aussi sa passion est-elle tout africaine; son désir va comme le tourbillon du désert, le désert dont l'ardente immensité se peint dans ses yeux, [...] 2

- a desert whose vast spaces Félix can cross with the swiftness of his Arab horse.<sup>3</sup>

However, once Félix enters with lady Dudley the equivalent of 'le monde oriental et sultanesque du Palais-Royal' its character is transformed. The sultanate has its harem and Félix becomes its prisoner. Thus, although lady Dudley poses as 'une cadine du sérail' it is she who almost imperceptibly manoeuvres Félix: 'Elle savait rester tout un jour, étendue à mes pieds, silencieuse, occupée à me regarder, épiant l'heure du plaisir comme une cadine du sérail et l'avançant par d'habiles coquetteries, tout en paraissant l'attendre.'<sup>4</sup> Although she acknowledges Félix as her sultan,<sup>5</sup> she is the true sultan

1: Y. p.85. Cf. however the celebrated passage from the Physiologie du mariage, (X, p.692): 'A l'Orient donc, la passion et son délire, les longs cheveux bruns et les harems, les divinités amoureuses, la pompe, la poésie et les monuments. A l'Occident, la liberté des femmes, la souveraineté de leurs blondes chevelures, la galanterie, les fées, les sorcières, les profondes extases de l'âme, les douces émotions de la mélancolie, et les longues amours.' (Quoted by F. Baldensperger: op.cit. p.22; P. Citron: op.cit. p.309; P. Nykrog: La Pensée de Balzac, p.402 n.4. Cf. also Honorine, II, pp.290-291). The Orient is, however, again the symbol of freedom and self-fulfilment for Louise de Chaulieu (Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées, I, p.160) and for the Havana-born Paquita Valdés: 'si tu veux choisir une retraite digne de nous, l'Asie est le seul pays où l'amour puisse déployer ses ailes...'. (V, p.316).

2: Y. p.230.

3: Cf. Y. p.236 - and above p.79.

4: Y. p.234. Cf. M. Le Yaouanc: 'Le Plaisir dans les récits balzaciens', A.B. 1973, esp. p.223. (The first part of this article appeared in A.B. 1972).

5: Cf. Y. pp.269,272.

and he her slave: 'Pendant cette nuit, Arabelle voulut montrer son pouvoir comme un sultan qui, pour prouver son adresse, s'amuse à décoller des innocents.'<sup>1</sup> 'Les draperies rouges de la grande dame couvraient cette nature de bronze. La délicieuse Almée qui se roulait le soir sur ses tapis, [..], réconciliait promptement un homme jeune avec l'Anglaise insensible et dure.'<sup>2</sup>

The paradox of Balzac's Orient is, however, that 'volupté et claustration' are two of its constant characteristics.<sup>3</sup> Claustration does not preclude passion; it intensifies it.<sup>4</sup> Thus, even though Félix's liaison with lady Dudley becomes 'l'anneau du forçat', he continues:

'ce lien [..] laisse dans l'âme une ineffaçable empreinte, il y met un dégoût anticipé pour les amours [..] qui ne savent pas servir d'alcool dans des coupes d'or curieusement ciselées, enrichies de pierres où brillent d'inépuisables feux.'<sup>5</sup>

The confinement of the harem intensifies passion just as the concentration of fire in the jewel makes it burn with eternal intensity: 'Comme toute richesse, le feu est rêvé dans sa concentration.'<sup>6</sup>

As a result, the bouquets materialise not only movement and combustion but a movement and a combustion whose intensity is accentuated by its - at least temporary - restraint. Thus if Félix notes 'une forte marge uniquement composée des touffes blanches particulières au sédum des vignes en Touraine; vague image des formes

1: Y. p.271.

2: Y. p.285.

3: Cf. P. Citron: 'Le Rêve asiatique de Balzac', p.309.

4: Had 'concentration' been used instead of 'claustration', the link between this theme and those examined in Chapter 2 would have been even more apparent.

5: Y. pp.234-235.

6: G. Bachelard: La Psychanalyse du feu, p.84.

souhaitées, roulées comme celles d'une esclave soumise.', from within this coil spring 'les spirales des liserons à cloches blanches, les brindilles de la bugrane rose, [..].'<sup>1</sup> It is apparent that the very immobility of the slave, like the immobility of the panther in Une passion dans le désert, is merely movement at rest, movement temporarily restrained before a further surge forward, a further explosion of energy. Hence, when Félix compares his experiences with lady Dudley to the bouquets, they both have in common 'la grâce unie à la force, la tendresse et ses molles lenteurs, opposées aux irruptions volcaniques de la fougues;'. If Félix goes on to refer to 'des jeux pareils à ceux des serpents entrelacés' it is perhaps because lady Dudley, like the 'sédum des vignes', is coiled ready to pounce. Like the isolated notes of the bouquets, the isolated movements of their passion combine in the rhythms of a symphony: 'tantôt les gradations les plus savantes de la musique appliquée au concert de nos voluptés;'.<sup>2</sup>

The theme of the Orient does, therefore, continue the theme of, on the one hand, the volcanic explosiveness of fire and, on the other, the stillness and potentiality of static heat. To the stillness and potentiality of static heat, to the hothouse atmosphere of 'une nuit chaude', corresponds the confined, almost claustrophobic enclosure of the harem. To the volcanic explosiveness of fire corresponds the intensity of energy bred in confinement and perhaps too the vastness and the vagueness of the geographically vast and amorphous Orient. The

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1: Y. p.120. For the Oriental associations of the lily, see Chapter 7, pp.396-397.

2: Y. p.272. Cf. Y. p.235, above pp.114ff, and below p.410 and n.3.

Orient is, then, associated with the potentiality of a fire which is both rigidly confined in the harem and freely universalised in the vastness of the East. It does, therefore, like fire, evoke the particular and the universal.



(6)

Fire and life and death

Although Bachelard remarks: 'nous voulons dénoncer cette fausse évidence qui prétend lier la vie et le feu',<sup>1</sup> there is ample evidence in le Lys dans la vallée for such an identification. It is this which accounts for Félix's reference to 'les flammes de la vie corporelle',<sup>2</sup> for the brilliant sunshine which matures and fructifies bouquets, vines, and Félix alike: 'là [Clochegourde] brillait la chaleur solaire qui développa mes bonnes et dessécha mes mauvaises qualités.'<sup>3</sup> Heat, like light, is a source of life and energy: 'Il faut avoir été le centre de tout, [..], le foyer d'où chacun tirait sa lumière, pour connaître l'horreur du vide. Les mêmes choses étaient là, mais l'esprit qui les vivifiait s'était éteint comme une flamme soufflée.'<sup>4</sup>

However, fire is also associated, as has been seen, with death and destruction, from Félix's description of 'la vallée où se mouraient les rayons jaunes d'un soleil tiède'<sup>5</sup> to Henriette's fatal desiccation, from the parched deserts, 'lande', and river-beds,<sup>6</sup> to burning sands and spent volcanoes. Paradoxically enough, however, death haunts analogies between fire and life: 'vous avez éteint en moi les flammes de la vie corporelle' and life animates analogies between fire and death.<sup>7</sup> Even in the most innocent conversation, heat can be associated with equal facility with both energy and exhaustion:

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1: G. Bachelard: La Psychanalyse du feu, p.79. Cf. ibid. p.118.

2: Y. p.250.

3: Y. p.44.

4: Y. p.252. Perhaps it would be clearer to separate fire and heat, with heat more consistently indicating life and vitality.

5: Y. p.154.

6: Eg. Y. p.75. Cf. Chapter 3, pp.165-166.

7: Cf. Y. p.154.

'Malgré la chaleur, [...] je descendis dans la prairie afin d'aller revoir l'Indre et ses îles, [...]. Tout à coup je sautai hors de la barque et remontait le chemin pour tourner autour de Clochegourde d'où je croyais avoir vu sortir le conte. [...].

- Bien, dit-il, mais vous aimez donc la campagne pour vous promener par cette chaleur?

- Ne m'a-t-on pas envoyé ici pour vivre en plein air?' 1

Heat is alternately therapeutic and refreshing<sup>2</sup> or feverish and overwhelming.<sup>3</sup>

The dual association of fire with both life and death is equally apparent when the sun, although evocative of life and energy, at the same time heightens by contrast the presentiment of death:

'Elle, si calme dans ses douleurs, se trouva faible pour supporter la joie en admirant son enfant chevauchant sur ce sable où souvent elle l'avait pleuré par avance, en le promenant au soleil.' 4

The ambivalence of the sun is even more apparent when, although still associated with life and vitality, its presence heightens by contrast the presentiment of death which, in turn, seems to turn against itself and stifle the incipient energies of fire:

'Nous étions arrivés sur la terrasse, nous y trouvâmes le conte assis dans un fauteuil, au soleil. L'aspect de cette figure fondue, à peine animée par un sourire faible, éteignit les flammes sorties des cendres.' 5

It would, however, be invidious to try to discern at what moment sun evokes life, at what moment sun evokes death. As has been noted on previous occasions, it is both simultaneously positive and negative.<sup>6</sup>

1: Y. pp.65,66.

2: Cf. Y. pp.48,249,322,331. Hence of course the hostility of 'froid' and 'froideur'. Cf. above p.163.

3: Hence the hot/season seems to aggravate Mortsauf's illness (Y. pp.81,113) and heat is something the children have to be protected from: Y. pp.67, 205. Cf. also Y. pp.98,124.

4: Y. p.137.

5: Y. p.220.

6: Cf. the passage Y. p.222, quoted above p.318 and Chapter 3, p.153. The double valorisation of the sun is noted by Lucienne Frappier-Mazur ('Balzac et les images "reparaissantes" [...]', pp.60,61) and by G. Durand: Les Structures [...], pp.81-82. It can, therefore, be argued that the paradox both divides and unites. As G. Genette remarks: 'l'antithèse verbale suggère une synthèse matérielle. [...] toute différence porte opposition, toute opposition fait symétrie, toute symétrie vaut identité.' (Figures, p.37. Cf. ibid. p.38 and R. Girard: 'Dionysos et la genèse violente du sacré', Poétique, 1970, 3, p.269). The theme of unity in duality is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7, p.375 and n.2, pp.407ff.

Elsewhere, the very opposition of the fire-life and fire-death analogies does indeed bring them closer together. When Félix spends the night outside Henriette's room, the very intensity of his ardour for her is in danger of jeopardising his life and it is to this that the intensity of the experience is due:

'cette heure, sotté aux yeux de plusieurs, est une inspiration de ce sentiment inconnu qui pousse des militaires, quelques-uns m'ont dit avoir ainsi joué leur vie, à se jeter devant une batterie pour savoir s'ils échapperaient à la mitraille, et s'ils seraient heureux en chevauchant ainsi l'abîme des probabilités, en fumant comme Jean Bart sur un tonneau de poudre.' 1

It is apparent from the above that death, at least as a risk or a threat, need not be the antithesis to life: the possibility or the presence of death can intensify the sense of fulfilment to be gained from life. The more rapidly life burns itself out, the more intensely it must have been lived. Thus Félix speaks of lady Dudley as 'cette créature dont l'éclat semble phosphorescent et passager'.<sup>2</sup>

It is undoubtedly for this reason that suicide by fire has such prestige for lady Dudley:

'Il fallait l'entendre à ce sujet célébrer la coutume des veuves indiennes qui se brûlent sur le bûcher de leurs maris. - "[...] Comment puis-je apprendre aux bourgeois que le sang de mes veines ne ressemble pas au leur, si ce n'est en mourant autrement qu'ils ne meurent? [...]' 3

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- 1: Y. p.182. Cf. J.-P. Richard: Etudes sur le romantisme, pp.10-11. This passage, expressing an idea which is common enough - cf. for example Baudelaire - shows just what can be done with a cliché.
- 2: Y. p.230. Cf. Lucienne Frappier-Mazur: 'Balzac et les images "reparaissantes" [...]', pp.57-58 and l'Enfant maudit, IX, p.730: 'Mais il se trouvait de plus en Gabrielle le sang de la belle Romaine qui avait jailli à deux générations, [...]; de là procédait une exaltation qui [...] lui fit exhaler comme une lueur, et communiqua les pétilllements d'une flamme à ses mouvements. Beauvouloir frissonna quand il remarqua ce phénomène qu'on pourrait aujourd'hui nommer la phosphorescence de la pensée, et que le médecin observait alors comme une promesse de la mort.' How like the similarly inherited fatality of Jacques de Mortsauf! (Cf. Y. pp.43,243-244). Lady Dudley, however, not only survives but thrives.
- 3: Y. pp.233-234. This passage unites Oriental, blood and 'bûcher' imagery. Again this is not an uncommon theme - cf. la Chaumière indienne. De Maistre speaks disapprovingly of the custom in les Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg.

For lady Dudley suicide by fire is an act of defiance against God - 'soumettre le monde et le ciel à un homme en dérobant ainsi au Tout-Puissant le droit de faire un Dieu'<sup>1</sup> - an act of defiance of the creature against the Creator, of the son against the Father; it is, therefore, tantamount to an act of self-defiance and no two forces are more equally matched than when one force opposes itself. Since in this case it is the vitality of fire which defies its own fatality, this fatality is neutralised and counteracted. The opposition between life and death is suspended and thereby transcended; as Bachelard remarks:

'Quand le feu se dévore lui-même, quand la puissance se retourne contre soi, il semble que l'être se totalise au moment de sa perte et que l'intensité de la destruction soit la preuve suprême, la preuve la plus claire de l'existence.'<sup>2</sup>

Félix's intuition of this paradox can also be seen in the appetite and 'creuset' imagery in Le Lys, where the fact that fire is seen to be the agent of its own destruction ensures that destructiveness is no more fatal than fire is also vital. The dual allegiance of fire ensures that the apparent victory of destruction must be paralleled by a similar victory for life: increased destructiveness is accompanied by intensified renewal.

The principal character of fire in le Lys dans la vallée is, therefore, a paradoxical one: fire is at one and the same time rapid explosive, destructive change - 'C'était l'intelligence, l'âme, le coeur d'Henriette dévorant de leur flamme rapide un corps sans consistance;<sup>3</sup> - and an enduring, pervading, restoring presence:

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1: Y. p.234. The Promethean theme - like that of 'brûler la vie' - is, of course, common in Balzac.

2: G. Bachelard: La Psychanalyse du feu, p.131.

3: Y. p.243.

'En échange de ce trésor englouti dans les eaux dormantes de l'oubli, elle n'avait pas obtenu ce regard mouillé qui solde tout, qui pour les âmes généreuses est comme un éternel joyau dont les feux brillent aux jours difficiles.' 1

It is, however, important to realise that the apparently contradictory qualities of fire are by no means incompatible: it is the very changeability, the very volatility of fire which enables it to indicate perpetual or eternal renewal. As Bachelard remarks: 'le feu suggère le désir de changer, de brusquer le temps, de porter toute la vie à son terme, à son au-delà.'<sup>2</sup> Thus the apparently dual character of fire noted in this and previous sections - the serenity and explosiveness of sunsets; the substantiality and the volatility of reds, blacks, and warm nights; the eternity and singularity of inflamed words; the uninhibitedness and restraint of the Orient - can all be seen to converge on the single theme of change and renewal and renewal through change - or renewal through combustion as was noted in the opening section: 'Un être se rend libre en se consumant pour se renouveler, en se donnant ainsi le destin d'une flamme, [...]'.<sup>3</sup> The fire imagery of le Lys can, therefore, be seen to centre on the idea of the 'creuset' or the 'bûcher': 'L'être fasciné entend l'appel du bûcher. Pour lui, la destruction est plus qu'un changement, c'est un renouvellement.'<sup>4</sup>

It is because fire materialises the theme of perpetual change and thus perpetual renewal that it is frequently associated with the eternal soul in le Lys dans la vallée: 'Hier j'ai entrevu je ne sais quel être dégagé des entraves corporelles qui nous empêchent de secouer les feux de l'âme.'<sup>5</sup> 'pourquoi l'âme, cette étoile humaine, n'envelopperait-

1: Y. p.86.

2: G. Bachelard: op.cit. p.35. Cf. idem: La Flamme d'une chandelle, p.25: 'La flamme est naissance facile et mort facile.'

3: G. Bachelard: La Flamme d'une chandelle, p.66.

4: G. Bachelard: La Psychanalyse du feu, p.35. Cf. ibid. p.19. Hence again the themes of the Apocalypse and of the 'palingénésie'.

5: Y. p.144.



elle pas de ses feux un ami, quand on ne laisse aller à lui que de pures pensées?'<sup>1</sup> The theme of light and the theme of fire do here join forces. However, the immortality of the star-soul like that of the star-diamond or star-jewel<sup>2</sup> is endowed with a new force when also associated with fire: the light is not only eternal but self-renewing, self-perpetuating. The static quality of light acquires a new direction, a new dynamism:

'- Vous l'avez laissée fleur encore, [...], mais vous la retrouverez consumée, purifiée dans le feu des douleurs, et pure comme un diamant encore enfoui dans les cendres.' 3

It is, perhaps, this cosmic destiny of fire which enables it to be associated with both Hell and the Heavens, from 'les feux du ciel' of the prayer scene<sup>4</sup> to lady Dudley's 'ardent royaume'.<sup>5</sup> For it is the passion - in both senses of the term<sup>6</sup> - of self-consumption which precedes and prepares the ascent to Heaven. Just so is it Félix's suffering which, although leaving him with 'peu d'or parmi beaucoup de cendres',<sup>7</sup> leaves him with sufficient gold to compose his narrative to Natalie de Manerville: 'Je fouille ce monceau de cendres et prends

1: Y. p.200.

2: Cf. Y. p.86 and Y. pp.234-235.

3: Y. p.294. Cf. G. Bachelard: La Flamme [...], p.33: 'Le devenir du feu n'est-il pas le plus dramatique et le plus vif des devenirs?' Cf. also the comments on the movement of fire, Chapter 2, pp.104-108.

4: Cf. Y. p.181. Cf. also Adieu, IX, p.790: 'les yeux de Stéphanie lancèrent un rayon céleste, une flamme animée. Elle vivait, elle pensait! [...] Dieu [...] jetait de nouveau son feu dans cette âme éteinte.' But, almost immediately, she dies. As Balzac writes in a celebrated passage of les Martyrs ignorés: 'la vie est un feu qu'il faut couvrir de cendres. Penser, mon enfant, c'est ajouter de la flamme au feu.' (X, p.1149).

5: Y. p.230. Cf. Y. p.74: 'les brasiers d'un supplice imprévu.'

6: These are neatly juxtaposed Y. p.101. Cf. la Recherche de l'absolu, IX, p.647: 'L'idée de l'Absolu avait passé partout comme un incendie.'

7: Y. p.315.

plaisir à les étaler devant vous, [...].<sup>1</sup> For it is out of his own combustion, from his own ashes, that he will compose the eternal work of art.<sup>2</sup>

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1: Y. p.326.

2: This does, of course, relate to the analogies already noted between fire and Félix the artist, the visionary as between fire and Félix the prophet, the amateur of Oriental poetry. The above-mentioned link between 'ténèbres' and 'cendres' (cf. above p.323 n.1) no doubt also helps to explain the potentiality of 'le charbon de l'improvisateur' and of 'les charbons d'Isaïe'. Cf. also above p.274.

(7)

Fire and light: yellow and gold

Despite the differences in their aims and methods, Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, Gilbert Durand, and Bachelard all agree as to the ambivalence of fire: 'Parmi tous les phénomènes, il [le feu] est vraiment le seul qui puisse recevoir aussi nettement les deux valorisations contraires: le bien et le mal.'<sup>1</sup> Although at one point Durand criticizes Bachelard for claiming 'les images les plus belles sont souvent les foyers d'ambivalence',<sup>2</sup> Durand himself emphasises the ambivalence of fire: 'nous devons prendre soin de signaler combien le symbole du feu est polyvalent, [...]'.<sup>3</sup> Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, in her turn, also speaks of 'cette ambivalence du feu': 'A vrai dire, il n'est pas toujours aisé de distinguer entre feu céleste et feu infernal.'<sup>4</sup>

One of the main reasons for this ambivalence would appear to be the combination of light and heat which characterises fire. Thus Bachelard continues: 'Il [le feu] brille au Paradis. Il brûle à l'Enfer.'<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere he argues, after Novalis, that '"La lumière est le génie du processus du feu".': 'Le feu ne reçoit alors son vrai être qu'au terme d'un processus où il devient lumière, [...]'.<sup>6</sup> Durand who, after Bachelard, quotes Novalis' expression '"La lumière est le génie du phénomène igné."<sup>7</sup> associates the ability of fire to separate and thereby purify substances with other images in which light wages

1: G. Bachelard: La Psychanalyse du feu, p.19.

2: G. Durand: Les Structures [...], p.32. Cf. G. Bachelard: La Terre [...] volonté, p.10.

3: G. Durand: op.cit. p.195. Cf. ibid. pp.196,197.

4: Lucienne Frappier-Mazur: 'Balzac et les images "reparaissantes" [...]', p.53.

5: G. Bachelard: La Psychanalyse du feu, p.19.

6: G. Bachelard: La Flamme d'une chandelle, p.62. Cf. ibid. pp.28-29.

7: Quoted from G. Bachelard: La Psychanalyse du feu, p.174 in Les Structures [...], p.196. Cf. also J.-P. Richard: Etudes sur le romantisme, pp.17-18.

war against the forces of darkness: 'Nous retrouvons donc constamment, sous le symbolisme complexe du feu, un thème diafrétique très marqué et qui permet de rattacher partiellement l'élément igné, par la lumière qu'il comporte, au Régime Diurne de l'image.'<sup>1</sup>

Since, however, it is not the light but the heat of fire which separates and purifies - 'Le feu est flamme purificatrice'<sup>2</sup> - the above represents no argument for 'l'idéalisation du feu par la lumière'.<sup>3</sup> The purifying force of fire does not necessarily increase in proportion to an increase in the presence of light and/or a decrease in the presence of heat. As appears from Lucienne Frappier-Mazur's article, if light is almost invariably associated with spirituality, heat, however parching, is not invariably associated with infernality. Thus one of Frappier-Mazur's main sections is entitled 'Flamme et surnaturel'.<sup>4</sup> Thus, too, after discussing the association between fire and 'l'aspect terrible de la divinité' she remarks: 'Le feu de l'enfer ne brûle que plus rarement (dix images)'.<sup>5</sup> It would appear that fire's association with purity and spirituality does not invariably derive from its combination of light and heat. It is fire as fire - not as a mixture of heat and light - which is less dissimilar than might appear from Durand and Bachelard to images of light. Hence Lucienne Frappier-Mazur can note examples of 'un chevauchement de sens entre lumière et flamme'.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, although Bachelard and Durand seem to assume that light and fire can be readily distinguished and disassociated one from the other, whether the elements be indicated separately, whether light be an aspect

1: G. Durand: op.cit. p.198. Cf. ibid. p.201.

2: Ibid. p.196.

3: G. Bachelard: La Psychanalyse du feu, p.175. Cf. however, above pp.106-

4: 'Balzac et les images "reparaissantes" [L...]', pp.51-55. 107.

5: Ibid. p.52. For a list of the novels covered, see ibid. pp.79-80.

6: Ibid. p.73. Cf. ibid. pp.53-54.

of fire - or, indeed, whether fire be an aspect of light - an examination of this group of imagery in le Lys dans la vallée reveals that light and heat, when thus connected, are closely identified. Flame itself is a torch that illuminates: 'Je tombai dans un abîme de réflexions en apercevant les profondeurs inconnues de cette vie alors éclairées par cette dernière flamme.'<sup>1</sup> Light itself is inflammable: 'son oeil lançait alors une lueur subtile qui semblait s'enflammer aux sources de la vie [...].'<sup>2</sup> The effect of such references to light and heat is, when so combined, to make them virtually interchangeable: 'Les enfants dont les yeux s'attachaient à ceux de leur mère, comme s'ils en tiraient leur lumière, voulurent l'accompagner, [...]'. Comme les enfants, j'eus moins chaud quand elle ne fut plus là.'<sup>3</sup> If Henriette's eyes can, on such occasions, emit both light and heat, then they can emit either light or heat: the two qualities are barely differentiated. In such cases, light and heat are different forms of the same energy, similarity in difference, difference in similarity.<sup>4</sup>

This similarity is emphasised in the dual qualities of light and heat attributed to the 'rayon': 'Trouver la silencieuse froideur de la mort là où scintillaient les joyeux rayons de la vie!'<sup>5</sup> The sun also inevitably combines both light and heat: 'depuis ce jour [...] le soleil a été moins chaud et moins lumineux, [...]'.<sup>6</sup> This resemblance is rendered even more striking by the very absence of any particularising qualities in a large number of references to 'rayon' and 'soleil'.<sup>7</sup> In

1: Y. p.322.

2: Y. p.41. Cold light is rare in le Lys - cf. Y. pp.49,263.

3: Y. p.48.

4: Cf. G. Genette: Figures, p.84.

5: Y. p.252. One of the characteristics of the 'rayon' is, of course, movement. Cf. G. Durand: Les Structures [...], pp.148-149.

6: Y. p.322.

7: Eg. Y. p.116.



the absence of any contrary indication, the 'rayons' can be assumed to be bearing both light and heat, but a light and heat whose individual qualities have been so lost and forgotten in their union that their individual presences need no longer be specified. Light and heat have become anonymous. Thus, rather than contribute to the different though connected groups of light or fire imagery, such 'rayon' and 'soleil' images are, therefore, of greater relevance to the group of images which evokes the virtual merging of identities, where individual identity is as a kind of memory in present anonymity, where once again the emphasis is on similarity in difference, difference in similarity, - in the imagery of the 'correspondances'.<sup>1</sup>

This similarity is emphasised not only by the luminosity of flame referred to by the above writers but by the corresponding inflammability of light, the inflammability of Félix's visions,<sup>2</sup> of 'le feu dévorant d'un oeil sévère'.<sup>3</sup> This reciprocal contamination of flame by light and light by flame ensures that however paradoxical the character of fire, it is not, at least in le Lys dans la vallée, uniquely and enigmatically ambivalent. Fire is, moreover, associated with light just as it is also associated with land in lady Dudley's 'ardent royaume', with liquid in 'sang', with plants in 'double pavot rouge' and with sound in 'charbons d'Israël.' Light-fire and fire-light images are, therefore, themselves just one relatively large and obvious group within the much wider group of 'correspondance' imagery.

It is nevertheless possible to distinguish from such imagery a small but not insignificant group of light/flame, flame/light images associated with the previously discussed theme of fire, life and death:

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1: Cf. Chapter 7.

2: Cf. above pp.323-324.

3: Y. p.5.

'Voyez mon teint jaune-paille, mes yeux secs et brillants, ma maigreur excessive! Je me dessèche.'<sup>1</sup> Throughout Félix's narrative, the colour yellow, seen here to be linked with a combination of desiccation and light, evokes destruction and deterioration, from his reference to 'les feuilles jaunissantes',<sup>2</sup> 'la vallée où se mouraient les rayons jaunes d'un soleil tiède',<sup>3</sup> and 'la vallée jaunie dont le deuil répondait [...] aux sentiments qui [...] agitaient',<sup>4</sup> to 'la jaune empreinte du sceau de la plus amère mélancolie',<sup>5</sup> of the ailing Henriette. Just as warmth and redness have been seen to endow energy with depth and substantiality so does the combination of the whiteness and the flame of death in yellow acquire a similarly multi-dimensional quality: 'je voyais la fatale teinte jaune-paille qui, sur ce céleste visage, ressemblait au reflet des lueurs divines que les peintres italiens ont mises à la figure des saintes. Je sentis en moi le vent glacé de la mort. Puis quand le feu de ses yeux dénués de l'eau limpide où jadis nageait son regard tomba sur moi, je frissonnai'.<sup>6</sup>

The reference to 'céleste' and 'lueurs divines' shows that the paradox of yellow, like that of the 'creuset', is that it should prefigure not only death but eternity. Thus, like fire and redness, yellow is associated with the fertility of plants: 'Au-dessus, voyez les fibrilles déliées, fleuries, sans cesse agitées de l'amourette purpurine qui verse à flots ses anthères presque jaunes'.<sup>7</sup> Yellow, like red and 'diapré', evokes the fecundity of pollen; 'Je rencontrais [...] une pulsatile au pavillon de soie violette étalé pour ses

1: Y. p.241.

2: Y. p.91.

3: Y. p.154.

4: Y. p.295.

5: Y. p.237.

6: Y. p.242. For whiteness and death, see Chapter 5, p.260.

7: Y. p.120.

étamines d'or';<sup>1</sup> The gold of the sun and the harvest contrasts with and offsets the decay of 'les feuilles jaunissantes'.<sup>2</sup> It is, therefore, particularly appropriate that the golden light of the sun should preside over Félix's first entry into the Indre valley<sup>3</sup> as it presides over Henriette's death.<sup>4</sup>

Elsewhere, gold is more specifically linked to a combination of fire and light:

'En se mariant, elle possédait ses épargnes, ce peu d'or qui représente les heures joyeuses, les mille désirs du jeune âge; en un jour de détresse, elle l'avait généreusement donné sans dire que c'était des souvenirs et non des pièces d'or; [...] En échange de ce trésor englouti dans les eaux dormantes de l'oubli, elle n'avait pas obtenu ce regard mouillé qui solde tout, qui pour les âmes généreuses est comme un éternel joyau dont les feux brillent aux jours difficiles.' 5

Only eternal brilliance and flamboyance can repay a gift of gold.

Whites and reds are, therefore, united not only in the yellow of death, but in the gold of eternity. Thus Félix speaks of 'des coupes d'or curieusement ciselées, enrichies de pierres où brillent d'inépuisables feux.'<sup>6</sup> It is perhaps for this reason, too, that gold is enclosed and preserved with light and fire in the heart of the mountains: 'J'étais le trésor de mes vœux brillants, l'or vierge de mes désirs, tout un cœur brûlant conservé sous les glaces de ces Alpes entassées par un continuel hiver.'<sup>7</sup>

It is clear from the above remark that if gold is able to combine and thereby transcend opposites, these opposites are not only life and

1: Y. p.117. Although Félix does not seem to distinguish between yellow and gold when describing the flowers, it can be argued that elsewhere the words embody different values.

2: Cf. Y. p.91.

3: Cf. Y. pp.29-31.

4: Cf. Y. p.305.

5: Y. pp.85-86. This passage has already been quoted in an apparently very different but, as can now be seen, related context, above p.26.

6: Y. p.235. The expression 'd'inépuisables feux' may also have other connotations here.

7: Y. p.83. Again an important passage - one of the points of intersection where different axes of meaning cross. Cf. Chapter 1, p.45.

death but also those with which this Chapter began: sexuality and purity. For gold materialises both the chastity of Félix's preserved energies and the flamboyant fertility of the pollen. As Geneviève Delattre remarks: 'Symbole de la possession matérielle, de ce qui satisfait le désir charnel, l'or n'est-il pas aussi le symbole du soleil, de la lumière éblouissante, de la purification et, pour l'alchimie que Balzac connaissait bien, le secret même de la vie où s'opère la fusion des éléments contraires?'<sup>1</sup> How appropriate, then, that after undergoing the indeed alchemistic influence of the crucible, Félix should be left with a small core of gold - epitomising both his ambivalence towards passion and towards his own predicament: he is both disillusioned and hopeful, hopeful and disillusioned: 'Demain, je saurai si je me suis trompé en vous aimant.'<sup>2</sup>

There is, moreover, yet another dimension to this ambivalence - indicated by the inseparability in the above examples of the substance and the colour gold. For as Durand remarks: 'l'or est à la fois couleur céleste et solaire, mais aussi quintessence cachée, trésor de l'intimité.'<sup>3</sup> Thus, the qualities of singularity and eternity already seen to be associated with fire are reinforced by the intimacy and the transcendence of gold. Hence, once again, the particularity and the typicality of Félix's experiences, the uniqueness and at the same time the universality of his narrative.

1: 'De Séraphite à la Fille aux yeux d'or', A.B. 1970, p.190.

Cf. G. Bachelard: La Poétique de la rêverie, p.62: 'L'or alchimique est une réification d'un étrange besoin de royauté, de supériorité, de domination qui anime l'animus de l'alchimiste solitaire.'

2: Y. p.329.

3: G. Durand: Les Structures /.../, p.54. Cf. ibid. pp.69,165,166,299-301. A study of la Fille aux yeux d'or and Facino Cane would also show the inseparability of the radiance and the substance of gold. For other aspects of the latter, see Chapter 3.

### Conclusion

If the identification of fire and passion is traditional to the point of being a cliché, it was, of course, particularly common among writers apparently so preoccupied with their own self-destructive energies. An obvious example is to be found in Chateaubriand's description of 'le vague des passions':

'Mais, de nos jours, quand les monastères où la vertu qui y conduit, ont manqué à ces âmes ardentes, elles se sont trouvées étrangères au milieu des hommes. Dégoûtées par leur siècle, effrayées par leur religion, elles sont restées dans le monde sans se livrer au monde; alors on a vu naître cette coupable mélancolie qui s'engendre au milieu des passions, lorsque ces passions, sans objet, se consomment d'elles-mêmes dans un cœur solitaire.' 1

Thus, despite evident dissimilarities of situation and attitude, Félix and Adolphe can be seen to have much in common:

'Ce n'était pas les regrets de l'amour: c'était un sentiment plus sombre et plus triste. L'amour s'identifie tellement à l'objet aimé, que, dans son désespoir même, il y a quelque charme. Il lutte contre la réalité, contre la destinée; l'ardeur de son désir le trompe sur ses forces, et l'exalte au milieu de sa douleur. La mienne était morne et solitaire. Je n'espérais point mourir avec Ellénore. J'allais vivre sans elle dans ce désert du monde [...]' 2

If Indiana is, moreover, as Henriette might have been, in danger of being affected by 'le souffle embrasé d'un homme jeune et ardent',<sup>3</sup> Félix is not the only young aspirant whose desire is quickened by sunsets. As madame de Duras writes in Edouard:

'les coteaux, la rivière, la forêt étaient enveloppés d'une vapeur violette qui n'était plus le jour, et qui n'était pas encore l'obscurité. Une vive émotion s'empara de mon cœur. De temps en temps un souffle d'air arrivait à moi; il m'apportait le parfum de jasmin et ce souffle embaumé semblait

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- 1: Génie du Christianisme, Garnier-Flammarion, 1966, 2 Volumes, Vol.1, p.310. It is, of course, at this point that René occurs - appropriately enough if he is spent like a volcano. The passage also shows that the theme of 'dégoût' noted in le Lys, as indeed that of 'se dévorer' is a frequent one at the time. Cf. also Lélia, Garnier, 1966, p.185.
  - 2: B. Constant: Adolphe, edited by G. Rudler, Manchester University Press, 1956, p.92.
  - 3: G. Sand: Indiana, Garnier, 1962, p.71. Heat and passion are also linked in, for example, Paul et Virginie.



s'exhaler de celle qui m'était si chère! Je le respirais avec avidité. La paix de ces campagnes, l'heure, le silence, l'expression de ce doux visage, si fort en harmonie avec ce qui l'entourait, tout m'enivrait d'amour.' 1

Although such themes pervade the literature of the period,<sup>2</sup> perhaps even more significant for le Lys dans la vallée is, however, the frequency in Saint-Martin's l'Homme de désir not only of associations between fire, plants and sound,<sup>3</sup> but of the purifying effects of fire:

'Voyez-vous tous ces esprits purifiés s'élever dans les airs, comme la flamme d'un grand incendie, et ne montrer qu'une clarté éblouissante, à la place de toutes ces matières qu'ils ont consumées, et qui ne sont plus?' 4

For Saint-Martin, too, desire is conveyed both by hunger - 'une faim dévorante'<sup>5</sup> - and by thirst.<sup>6</sup> Although both these express man's longing for God, Saint-Martin, too, is not unaware of the ambivalence of fire: 'vous jugerez [...] si cette parcelle de feu qui vous anime, peut venir d'un autre feu que d'un feu divin.'<sup>7</sup> For him, too, fire is the substance of life - 'l'interissable feu, où tout a puisé le mouvement'.<sup>8</sup> It is indeed by following this movement that man may ascend to God: 'Suis donc la loi du feu. Il était avant le temps;

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- 1: Madame Claire de Durfort, duchesse de Duras: Edouard, Librairie le Charlier, Bruxelles/Gand/La Haye, 1826, pp.128-129. This is one of the novels which critics have cited as a possible influence in the genesis of le Lys. Jasmin - which Edouard gathers for his beloved, ibid. pp. 130-131 - is mentioned twice by Felix: Y. pp.45,121. For other flowers of appropriately Oriental origin, see Chapter 7, pp.396-397.
- 2: One work from which fire - both sacred and profane - is noticeably absent is, however, Volupté.
- 3: For 'feu' and 'parole' see above p.327 n.4. For 'germe' and 'feu' see, for example, l'Homme de désir, édition établie et présentée par R. Amadou, p.188. (Chant 151) and also p.109 (Chant 67). Cf. also the reference to the burning bush, p.85 (Chant 47).
- 4: Saint-Martin: op.cit. p.237 (Chant 203). Cf. above p.311 and n.3.
- 5: Saint-Martin: op.cit. p.37 (Chant 9). Cf. ibid. p.115 (Chant 73): 'l'homme de désir est brûlé de zèle' and the note on 'désir' above p.57.
- 6: Cf. Saint-Martin: op.cit. p.71 (Chant 37).
- 7: Ibid. p.94 (Chant 55). References to 'feu sacré' are also common in Sand.
- 8: Ibid. p.82 (Chant 46). This chant is of particular relevance to le Lys. Cf. Chapter 7, p.379 n.1.

il s'élève au-dessus du temps. Il s'élève dans une forme brillante.  
Suis la loi du feu, et monte avec lui dans la demeure de la lumière.<sup>1</sup>

While indicating certain coincidences of vocabulary and of thought, the above quotations do, however, help show that the originality of the treatment of the fire theme in le Lys lies in the way Félix manages to combine the multifarious attributes and manifestations of fire into a single, coherent theme. These elements are, however, combined in such a way that their potential disparateness, their possible explosive redissemination,<sup>2</sup> is never wholly forgotten. The paradox of fire is that it can show both the ultimate unity of diversity - for Henriette - and also the ultimate incompatibility of diversity - for Félix, and indeed Henriette. The paradox of fire is that it represents a vision which is both perfect and vitiated, vitiated and perfect - a vision which, in other words, needs a combination of first-person narrative and letter-novel: le Lys dans la vallée.<sup>3</sup>

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1: Ibid. p.140 (Chant 97). A good example of the theme of ascension which permeates the work.

2: Cf. the Introduction to Chapter 5 and, of course, Félix's description of the poppy.

3: Cf. the quotation from Bersani, above p.154(n.2), below p.426(n.2). and the concluding paragraphs of Chapter 7.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Plants; perfumes; the correspondances

#### Introduction

- (1) Plants and distance
- (2) Plants and time: the seed; the tree
- (3) Perfumes
- (4) Correspondances:
  - (i) Introduction
  - (ii) Light, sound and water
  - (iii) Light, water and plants
  - (iv) Light, plants and ideas
  - (v) Sound, plants and ideas
  - (vi) Light and sound; light, sound and perfumes; the lily
  - (vii) The bouquets
  - (viii) Unity in variety and conclusion

### Introduction

As was noted in the Introduction to the previous Chapter, the themes under discussion have tended to become increasingly abstract - at least in the sense of being increasingly divorced from the actual physical environment of the protagonists. While this was not, of course, the case for the descriptions of sunsets and parched landscapes in Félix's narrative, many of his evocations of fire are not so substantiated. As J. Gaudon points out, Balzac, giving a poetic rather than a dramatic construction to le Lys, 'a su aller jusqu'au bout de son entreprise et écrire un livre qui fût tout entier figure'.<sup>1</sup> Or, as G. Genette would say: 'la seule merveille, c'est le langage.'<sup>2</sup>

With plants and flowers, however, once again the perspective changes. Once again the reader is plunged into the Touraine environment, with Félix not only admiring its flora, but going to and from the fields and woods where he gathers his bouquets just as, in a broader perspective, he goes to and from Clochegourde and Paris. The rhythms of journeys punctuate his activities in the Indre valley just as they punctuate the whole period of his life while he knew and loved Henriette.<sup>3</sup>

This change in perspective has two important repercussions for a study of the plants and flowers of le Lys. The first, and more obvious, is that whilst this Chapter will not have as its central theme one of the natural elements, the plant naturally depends on these elements for its germination and growth. If the plants Félix describes are to be seen germinating and growing in their actual habitat, it is both

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1: 'Le Rouge et le blanc [...]', p.78. Cf. above pp.43, 211.

2: Figures, p.183.

3: Félix is, of course, continually going back and forth across the Indre to Frapesle. Cf. p.77 n.1 etc.

natural and appropriate that it is on and in the plant that the various elements hitherto discussed should be seen to converge.<sup>1</sup> Plants are, therefore, at the centre of the synaesthesias or correspondances which pervade the novel.

The second important repercussion of the association of plants with a particular environment is that such plants belong, irretrievably, to Félix's past - to the time of his relationship with Henriette.<sup>2</sup> If, moreover, the plants or flowers are gathered on a particular journey or search, they are made to belong even more specifically to a particular moment in that past, a moment when Félix is conscious of a distance between himself and Henriette which the bouquets seek to eliminate. If, then, flowers in le Lys are often evocative of fragility and transience, this is not merely the confirmation of a literary cliché. For plants and flowers remind the reader that Félix is throughout a victim of time and of separation. Like the journeys, plants and flowers do, therefore, reinforce the necessarily linear or horizontal aspect of Félix's experiences. How appropriate, then, that it is his visits to the tree that should punctuate these journeys!

At the same time, however, Henriette the 'femme-étoile-fleur' is reborn into immortality.<sup>3</sup> For if plants and flowers make a vital contribution to what may be called the horizontal dimension of le Lys, they also contribute to the protagonists' sense of potentiality and purpose, of ultimate unity and coherence - not least through the association of plants and perfumes and, of course, the correspondances.

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1: Cf. below p.360. For the origins of the flora in le Lys, see below pp.396-397, p.405.

2: Cf. Natalie's remark: 'Vous m'avez donné le désir de recevoir quelques-uns de vos bouquets enivrants, mais vous n'en composez plus.' (Y. p.331; cf. Y. p.123).

3: Cf. Y. p.294. For other 'femmes-fleurs' in Balzac see below p.400. The flower is also a woman: cf. above pp.332-333 and also above pp.146-147.



It is, indeed, because plants and flowers manage to combine these different dimensions or levels of Félix's experiences<sup>1</sup> that an examination of le Lys dans la vallée which began with internal and external journeys can culminate in and conclude with an examination of plants and flowers, of the bouquets which Félix so painstakingly seeks, to give to Henriette.

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1: These might be labelled 'synchronic' and 'diachronic'.

(1)

Plants and distance

'Balzac se fait arboriculteur chaque fois qu'il envisage la formation de ses personnages.'<sup>1</sup> It is hardly necessary to emphasise the appropriateness of Roger Kempf's remark for, of all novels, le Lys dans la vallée. From the outset of Félix's narrative, where he identifies himself with a delicate plant whose growth is stunted by hostile elements,<sup>2</sup> to its close in Natalie's letter, where it is apparent that Félix's desiccation is antagonistic towards the delicate potentiality of flowers, the development of Félix as of Henriette is constantly described in terms of the plant and the flower.

The potentiality of the flower, like that of the protagonists, is, as has been seen, constantly threatened by stones, metals, and icy, turbulent, or bitter waters - indeed by contact of any kind: 'mes yeux revenaient au point blanc, à la femme qui brillait dans ce vaste jardin comme au milieu des buissons verts éclatait la clochette d'un convolvulus, flétrie si l'on y touche.'<sup>3</sup> In thus linking frustrated human development with the despoilation of nature, as elsewhere with an uprooting,<sup>4</sup> suffering is endowed with the prestige of a distortion of the whole natural order.<sup>5</sup> Cosmic harmony is violated.

As a result, it can be argued that the prestige of the Indre valley, in which such flowers grow in profusion, derives largely from the facility with which it lends itself to adoption by outsiders who

1: Cf. p.82 of 'Coutumes et hiéroglyphes balzacien' in R. Kempf: Sur le corps romanesque, Seuil, 1968.

2: Y. p.5. Cf. Y. p.333. Félix is identified more specifically with a tree Y. p.20.

3: Y. p.30. As noted in the Introduction, the elements converge on the plant.

4: Cf. Chapter 3, pp.126-127.

5: Cf. P. Nykrog's comment in a section entitled: 'Les Grâces initiales et le paradis terrestre': 'Mais contrairement à ce qui vaut pour le vrai, le Paradis balzacien ne se gagne pas: l'individu y est né;'. (La Pensée de Balzac, p.338).

have been so uprooted.<sup>1</sup> Hence, Félix's walk in Touraine, though his first, seems like a return to a former home - for him, like Mortsauif, it is the return of the 'proscrit': 'il me restait, des premiers souvenirs de ma vie, le sentiment du beau qui respire dans le paysage de Tours avec lequel je m'étais familiarisé.'<sup>2</sup> Just so, of course, does Henriette, 'proscrite' on this earth, eventually return to the Heavens whence she came, where she will be able to bloom once more.<sup>3</sup> The order is gradually and painfully re-established.

If Henriette leaves the Indre valley to return to an anterior and more prestigious home, Félix is, at the end of the narrative, suffering from the same instability as at the beginning. For him, therefore, flowers are associated with untraversable distance and an agonising sense of isolation: 'Aussitôt, comme un enfant qui, descendu dans un abîme, en jouant, en cueillant des fleurs, voit avec angoisse qu'il lui sera impossible de remonter  $\sqrt{\dots}$ .'<sup>4</sup> Félix, like Mlle des Touches in Béatrix, perhaps savours 'les fleurs pâles, étiolées, mais délicieuses qui croissent au fond des précipices.'<sup>5</sup> As Sabine du Guénic remarks, again in Béatrix: 'il y a les fleurs du diable et les fleurs de Dieu!'<sup>6</sup> Thus, even the greenness of a plant, usually evocative of health and promise, can convey despair, even death: 'La vie réelle

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- 1: Thus, like Félix, both Henriette (Y. p.60) and the Count (Y. p.63) become naturalised or adopted in the Indre valley. Madeleine 'qui n'aurait sans doute pas vécu dans l'atmosphère d'une ville' (Y. p.47) is similarly transplanted. (Cf. ibid. and Y. p.243.) The valley does, of course, in a way replace the unnatural mothers which are mesdames de Vandenesse and de Lenoncourt (cf. Y. pp.21,260). Society therefore, 'plus marâtre que mère' (Y. p.161), deflowers (Y. p.278). Cf. the Conclusion to Chapter 3.
- 2: Y. p.28. It is interesting to note, therefore, that Balzac's sources are being increasingly shown to be 'Tourangeau' in origin. Cf. for example: Nicole Mozet: 'Les Personnages anglais et la Touraine dans l'oeuvre de Balzac', A.B. 1970, pp.129-146.
- 3: Cf. Y. p.294.
- 4: Y. p.274. Cf. above p.156 and Y. p.113. The flower and the abyss are also associated in le Curé de village, VIII, p.550 as in Massimilla Doni, IX, p.317. Cf. also Lucien de Rubenpré's reference to 'la plante vénéneuse aux riches couleurs qui fascine les enfants dans les bois.' (Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes, V, p.1036). Shades, perhaps, of Hoffmann or Tieck.
- 5: II, p.454.
- 6: II, p.536. Cf. below pp.404-405.

est une vie d'angoisses: son image est dans cette ortie, [..], qui, sans soleil, demeure verte sur sa tige.<sup>1</sup>

If it is, then, the plants and flowers of the Indre valley which confirm that the valley is indeed paradise on earth, with Henriette the lily descending from '[les] steppes bleus',<sup>2</sup> it is these same flowers which, vulnerable and transient, confirm that this 'paradis imaginaire' evoked by Félix is irreparably 'un paradis perdu'. Hence, 'ces productions marines [..] que les flots de la tempête jettent par fragments sur la grève'<sup>3</sup> belong to the irreparable if not wholly irretrievable past. If, moreover, Félix had heeded Henriette's advice, these flowers would have remained inaccessible: 'Placez vos sentiments purs en des lieux inaccessibles où leurs fleurs soient passionnément admirées, où l'artiste rêvera presque amoureuxment au chef-d'oeuvre.'<sup>4</sup> Hence Henriette herself, like the star and, more importantly here, like the convolvulus and the lily, remains, after her temporary sojourn in the valley, eternally pure and unapproachable.

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- 1: Y. p.90. Not, of course, an original image. Plants can, however, also suffocate: Y. pp.102, 112. Hence, perhaps, too, the expression 'sarcler ses heures' (Y. p.87) which R. Kempf would see as an example of a whole 'sarcler' theme in Balzac: cf. Sur le corps romanesque, p.83.
- 2: Y. p.26. How interesting, then, that J. Gaudon should remark: 'Lorsque Madame de Mortsaufl apparaît pour la première fois à Félix, telle la vierge dans le jardin clos des enlumineuses, l'image qui la désigne est celle du convolvulus:'. ('Le Rouge et le blanc [..]', p.74). Cf. also the reference to 'le ciel où fleurissait la palme promise' (Y. p.12). Most of the above flower/plant images have obvious religious associations.
- 3: Y. pp.3-4.
- 4: Y. P.162. For other examples of the flower-work of art analogy, see below pp.411-412.

(2)

Plants and time: the seed; the tree

If the young Félix is endowed with an innate potentiality whose temporary frustration is identified with the despoilation of a young plant, the nature of this potentiality is more exactly indicated through a related though slightly different image: that of a seed: 'Une seconde tombée de neige retarda la floraison des germes semés en mon âme.'<sup>1</sup> Félix is no longer a plant whose first delicate flowers are destroyed but a seed whose germination is retarded. Like the 'trésor' hidden in the 'landes'<sup>2</sup> or in the Alps,<sup>3</sup> the seed represents energies accumulated and enhanced through time. The seed preserves the energies of the past to fertilise the future: 'Les souffrances dont vous parlez étaient le grain répandu à flots par la main du Semeur pour faire éclore la moisson déjà dorée par le plus beau des soleils.'<sup>4</sup> A continuity is established between past, present, and future.<sup>5</sup>

Elsewhere, too, the fertility of the seed augurs well for the future. For example, Henriette is assimilated not only to a fruit - 'Je restai tout hébété, savourant la pomme que je venais de voler',<sup>6</sup>

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1: Y. p.9.

2: Cf. Y. p.77.

3: Cf. Y. p.83.

4: Y. p.91. A remark that could almost come from l'Homme de désir: references to germination and growth do, of course, abound in Saint-Martin. According to L. Porter ('Charles Nodier and Saint-Martin', Romance Notes, 1972 (Winter), p.284), both Nodier and Saint-Martin adopted Bonnet's notion, expounded in the Palingénésie philosophique of 1770, that 'each living thing possessed an immaterial soul with which a 'germe' was permanently associated. [...] Through successive incarnations, each soul progressed towards higher forms of life, and towards a clearer vision of God.' This casts an interesting light on Henriette's rebirth in refflorescence and on the whole 'palingénésie' theme in le Lys dans la vallée.

5: Cf. above pp.10-11, 62-66.

6: Y. p.26. Cf. Y. p.45.



- but a celestial fruit who, with her 'globes azurés',<sup>1</sup> descends from 'les steppes bleus'<sup>2</sup> to fertilise Félix: 'La plupart de mes idées, [...], sont nées là, [at Clochegourde] comme les parfums émanent des fleurs; mais là verdoyait la plante inconnue qui jetait sur mon âme sa féconde poussière, là brillait la chaleur solaire qui développa mes bonnes et dessécha mes mauvaises qualités.'<sup>3</sup> To the light and fertility of Henriette's eyes - 'ses yeux verdâtres, semés de points bruns',<sup>4</sup> corresponds the light and fertility of 'l'azur ensemencé d'étoiles'.<sup>5</sup> Henriette, 'fleur sidérale', is both plant and light, star and seed. As stars are the seeds of Heaven, so are seeds the stars of the earth.<sup>6</sup> The link established by the seed between past, present and future does, therefore, extend not only through time but also over space. The flower-star or star-flower is both cosmic and immortal.<sup>7</sup> Hence, Henriette, descended from the 'steppes bleus', is also aspiring to be 'un lys éternel' both in Félix's memory and once again in Heaven.<sup>8</sup>

It follows that Félix's 'blanche idole' should also be 'une fleur sublime et solitaire, un pulsatile au pavillon de soie violette étalé pour ses étamines d'or'<sup>9</sup> and that he should speak of her as 'la souveraine dont la robe blanche ondoyait dans les taillis, [...], et dont la pensée s'élevait, comme un fruit promis, de chaque calice plein d'étamines amoureuses.'<sup>10</sup> Once again, the flower and the seed are associated with the whiteness and light of the stars and the Heavens.

1: Y. p.25.

2: Y. p.26.

3: Y. p.44.

4: Y. p.41.

5: Y. p.95.

6: Cf. the references to jasmin and poppy, Y. p.121.

7: Cf. Y. p.294.

8: Cf. Y. p.299 and Y. p.29.

9: Y. p.117.

10: Y. p.119.

As can be seen from the above references to 'étamines d'or' and also to 'la moisson déjà dorée par le plus beau des soleils', flowers and seeds are, moreover, closely associated with the light and heat of the sun. Thus Félix speaks of his flowers as 'ces filles du soleil, les soeurs des fleurs écloses sous les rayons de l'amour!'<sup>1</sup> If flowers and seeds are immortalised through their association with light, their potentiality is matured and brought to fruition by their contact with the sun: 'Les fruits sont tous mûrs. La moisson est faite, le pain devient moins cher, et cette abondance rend la vie heureuse. [...] La vendange est alors comme le joyeux dessert du festin récolté, le ciel y sourit toujours en Touraine, [...].'<sup>2</sup> If the wine-harvest is one of the culminating points in Félix's and Henriette's achievement of self-fulfilment, it is partly because in it light and heat, nutritive liquids, and the fertile earth all combine to produce the, in its turn, equally fertile grape: the different and scattered elements of the cosmos unite to produce the harvest which is also one of the culminating points in the eternal cosmic cycle of seasons and years. As before, seeds and fruits can be seen to mark the union of ubiquity and eternity.

One of the characteristics of the tree in le Lys dans la vallée is that it, like the seed, represents the slow but reassuring maturation of past energies to ensure a fertile future: 'J'étais entre ma puberté

1: Y. p.116.

2: Y. p.124. In Mythes balzaciens, pp.157,188, P. Barbéris compares and contrasts the wine-harvests at Clochegourde and Clarens. Cf. also above pp.199-200.

prolongée par mes travaux et ma virilité qui poussait tardivement ses rameaux verts.<sup>1</sup> The cutting down of a forest is, therefore, the destruction of reserves accumulated through time and, therefore, the destruction of the future: 'Mais essentiellement dissipatrices, les premières passions, de même que les jeunes gens, coupent leurs forêts à blanc au lieu de les aménager.'<sup>2</sup> Hence Félix's exposure of an unproductive past is compared to the felling of leafless trees: 'Ma voix retentit comme la hache des bûcherons dans une forêt. Devant elle tombèrent à grand bruit les années mortes, les longues douleurs qui les avaient hérissées de branches sans feuillages.'<sup>3</sup> Hence, too, after the walnuts and chestnuts have been gathered by Jacques and Madeleine, Mortsauf emphasises 'la nécessité de créer des réserves pour les années où les arbres seraient inféconds'.<sup>4</sup> Man learns from the tree the need to conserve past energies to assure a prosperous future.

Henriette, too, is a cultivator of trees as well as of land. Thus Félix remarks after the harvests: 'En ce moment les arbres fruitiers plantés depuis dix ans étaient en plein rapport. [...] Les peupliers, les ormes, tout était bien venu.'<sup>5</sup> It is, moreover, notable that the avenue of poplars, 'dont la plantation avait été dirigée par Henriette',<sup>6</sup> should be the scene of one of Félix's most harrowing departures from Clochegourde,<sup>7</sup> and that the leafless poplars should not only witness his last visit to Clochegourde and a dying

1: Y. p.20.

2: Y. p.279.

3: Y. p.83. This is another reason for disagreeing with G. Roubichou's criticism of this passage. Cf. Chapter 5, p.290 n.5. Cf. also below /p.391.

4: Y. p.129.

5: Y. p.132. Cf. the importance Félix - and 'les deux docteurs en Pomologie' - attach to the possible felling of Henriette's trees (Y. pp.135-136).

6: Y. p.291.

7: Y. pp.276-278. The passage on p.291 makes it clear that the avenue mentioned p.277 is indeed that lined by poplars. The avenue can still be seen - though at la Chevrière, not at Vonne-Clochegourde (cf. Y. Intro. pp.LXXXV-VI).

Henriette but also remind him of this last farewell.<sup>1</sup> Both these latter references to poplars are, in addition, themselves a reminder of earlier descriptions where the poplars' fresh foliage and young mobility reflect Félix's own youthful mobility,<sup>2</sup> and, perhaps, of the analogy established between the poplar and the thriving Madeleine.<sup>3</sup> It is, too, perhaps not mere coincidence that makes Henriette or Henriette and Félix approach fruit-bearing almond-trees in moments of incipient intimacy<sup>4</sup> or during the wine-harvest itself.<sup>5</sup>

The most outstanding examples of the tree as a signpost marking the passing of the years are, of course, to be found in the references to the 'noyer'. Just as Félix anticipates later sojourns under the 'noyer' in his initial description of his first visit to Clochegourde:

'je m'appuyai contre un noyer sous lequel, depuis ce jour, je me repose toutes les fois que je reviens dans ma chère vallée. Sous cet arbre confident de mes pensées, je m'interroge sur les changements que j'ai subis pendant le temps qui s'est écoulé depuis le dernier jour où j'en suis parti.' 6

so do later visits remind him of previous ones:

'nous nous arrêtâmes au noyer; je le lui montrai, lui disant comment de là je l'avais aperçue quatre ans auparavant.' 7

'Je pris le chemin que j'avais parcouru pédestrement six ans auparavant, et m'arrêtai sous le noyer. De là, je vis madame de Mortsaufr [...].' 8

In this way, the descriptions of the 'noyer' enable Félix to move both forwards and backwards in time. If the 'noyer' stands out among Félix's

1: Y. p.291. Cf. Y. p.154.

2: Cf. Y. pp.29,30,31 and also p. 287.

3: Cf. Y. p.243 - and p.47.

4: Y. p.200. Cf. also Y. p.220 and n.1.

5: Y. p.126.

6: Y. p.29. Cf. G. Durand: Les Structures [...], p.342: 'Le symbole végétal est enfin très souvent explicitement choisi comme modèle de métamorphose.'

7: Y. p.222.

8: Y. p.236.

descriptions of trees, despite the relative infrequency of their occurrence,<sup>1</sup> it is because they mark Félix's return to the same spot where he can conjure up a mounting accumulation of similar moments in the past. He can be seen to be accumulating years like a tree rings. At the same time, in placing certain measurable intervals of time between each visit and in ever coming back to the same spot, each visit marks less the accumulation than the recurrence of years. Félix begins to participate in the repeated, almost rhythmic, return of the seasons and years of which the visit to the tree is, like the wine-harvest, a culminating moment. He thereby begins to partake, perhaps, of the eternity of 'des chênes deux fois centenaires'.<sup>2</sup> 4/

At the end of the novel, however, Félix is no longer the regular visitor to the Indre valley he once was. Henriette's last request to Félix, that he should indeed return,<sup>3</sup> seems to have been ignored - a neglect for which Natalie is quick to upbraid him: 'quand vous avez fait quelques phrases sentimentales, vous vous croyez quitte avec son cercueil.'<sup>4</sup> Since Félix thus deserts the efflorescent Indre valley for a society antagonistic to youthful illusion and bloom, it is hardly surprising that thereafter he can dredge up only flowerless, seedless 'productions marines'. How different from even the most delicate of

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1: There are only 4 references to this particular 'noyer' in the whole of le Lys. The only other in addition to those quoted here is in a different context: Henriette wonders if Félix's rendez-vous with lady Dudley is there and not, as he claims, in the 'landes' (Y. p.259). It is, however, interesting to note the suggestion that 'la froideur que distillent les noyers' may have contributed to Mortsauf's illness: cf. Y. pp.202, 206, 209 and, for a somewhat similar remark: la Femme de trente ans, II, p.725. For local superstition has it that anyone who rests in the shade of a walnut-tree dies shortly afterwards. Mortsauf, however, appropriately enough given his name, survives both his illness and Henriette's death (cf. Y. p.324). A number of critics have noted the presence of a possible ancestor of the Count in the Contes drolatiques: cf. XI, p.535.

2: Y. p.314. Cf. Y., pp.31, 32.

3: Cf. Y. p.322.

4: Y. p.332.



Félix's former seed-filled grasses and the luxuriant poppy!<sup>1</sup> Félix's narrative may be a valiant act of creation, but this final - or initial - infertility confirms that he will remain a victim of time as of separation.

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1: Hence, as noted above p.17 n.2 the time of this period at Clochegourde seems infinitely expandable: 'Des que je fus certain de rester une soirée sous ce toit, j'eus à moi comme une éternité.' (Y. p.39).

(3)

Perfumes

The preceding sections have shown that plants materialise the natural potentiality with which Félix endows or identifies himself and Henriette. This delicate but persistent potentiality can be seen to be epitomised in the delicate but pervasive scent emitted by the lily: 'Elle était, [...] LE LYS DE CETTE VALLEE où elle croissait pour le ciel, en la remplissant du parfum de ses vertus.'<sup>1</sup> This dual association of perfume with the Heavens - 'Près d'Henriette, il se respirait un parfum du ciel'<sup>2</sup> - and with purity - 'Que donne-t-on à Dieu? des parfums, de la lumière et des chants, les expressions les plus épurées de notre nature'<sup>3</sup> - might seem to derive from its more obvious physical affinity with air rather than any other of the elements; in every sense of the term perfume would seem to be ethereal.

However, perfumes, though borne on the air, are by no means exclusively associated with air and the Heavens. If, as Pfeiffer remarks, 'Le Lys dans la vallée offers us a symphony of perfume appeal',<sup>4</sup> it perhaps because the Indre valley as well as its skies may be perfumed: 'il [Mortsau] respira dans cette vallée les enivrantes odeurs d'une espérance fleurie.'<sup>5</sup> Earth itself exudes its balms: 'Le caractère variable [...] du conte rencontra donc chez sa femme une terre douce et facile où il s'étendit en y sentant ses secrètes douleurs amollies par la fraîcheur des baumes.'<sup>6</sup> Even of the infertile 'lande' Félix remarks: '- Quelles délicieuses odeurs arrivent ici, et les beaux

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1: Y. p.29.

2: Y. p.210. Cf. the reference to incense, above p.187(n.7).

3: Y. p.122.

4: C. Pfeiffer: 'Taste and smell in Balzac's novels', University of Arizona Bulletin, Tucson, Arizona, Vol.XX, No. 4, 1949 (Oct.), p.49.

5: Y. p.63.

6: Y. p.64.

effets de lumière!<sup>1</sup> From his comment about England 'qui double de cèdre et parfume les commodes'<sup>2</sup> to his deep attachment to Glochegourde's 'terrasse embaumée'<sup>3</sup> perfumes can be seen to be retained, emitted and absorbed by material substance. What characterises perfume is its mobility, pervasiveness, and Protean ability to insinuate itself into and subjugate other elements. Its discreetness merely disguises its penetrating power:

'De même qu'une cathédrale aux voûtes sombres et silencieuses conseille la prière; de même, les feuillages éclairés par la lune, parfumés de senteurs pénétrantes, et animés par les bruits sourds du printemps, remuent les fibres et affaiblissent la volonté.' 4

Such is the ubiquity of perfumes that, as is indicated by the above references to balms, they may also be materialised in a third, and, perhaps, equally pervasive element: water. Hence Félix refers to 'cette onctueuse et fraîche bonté qui ne tarit jamais'<sup>5</sup> and to 'cette onctueuse éloquence qui tombe sur le coeur comme une rosée'.<sup>6</sup> Perfumes themselves may be poured: 'tout ce que son coeur enferme d'affection, il [Mortsau] le verse à mes pieds, comme la Madeleine a versé le reste de ses parfums aux pieds du Sauveur.'<sup>7</sup> Water and perfume are also associated in the celebrated description of the 'flouve odorante': 'Avez-vous senti dans les prairies, au mois de mai, ce parfum qui communique à tous les êtres l'ivresse de la fécondation, qui fait qu'en bateau vous trempez vos mains dans l'onde, [..]?'<sup>8</sup> Like alcohol, perfume intoxicates: 'Les amours de la terre, les fêtes de la fécondation, les caresses des plantes l'avaient enivrée de leurs parfums [..]'.<sup>9</sup> If the combination of perfume and liquid can overwhelm as an intoxicant, the

1: Y. p.77.

2: Y. p.231.

3: Y. p.256. (Two references). Cf. Y. p.286.

4: Y. p.256.

5: Y. p.108. Cf. above p.188.

6: Y. p.293.

7: Y. p.90.

8: Y. p.119.

9: Y. p.305.

same combination can also subjugate as a narcotic: 'Une douce lumière éclairait le lit où reposait Henriette baignée d'opium.'<sup>1</sup>

Intoxication has, however, been seen to be not a humidifying but a desiccating process, allied to fire rather than water.<sup>2</sup> It is appropriate, therefore, if paradoxical, that heat too is an ally of perfume, making it more heavy, more intense and more subjugating. Hence Henriette fears the infectiousness of 'cette tiède terrasse embaumée',<sup>3</sup> and moments of intimacy or complicity between man and nature are accompanied by reference to 'les collines vaporeuses',<sup>4</sup> or 'ces horizons fumeux, avec leurs sinuosités vaporeuses.'<sup>5</sup> Félix's first evening in the intimacy of Clochegourde is 'un soir chaud et parfumé'.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, if Félix's first and most intense physical contact with Henriette, his kisses at the ball, are retained both mentally and physically in terms of the contagious, inhaled warmth of her blood - 'la chaleur de ce sang que j'avais aspiré',<sup>7</sup> her initial presence was communicated to him by a perfume he later associates with Oriental poetry: 'Aussitôt je sentis un parfum de femme qui brilla dans mon âme comme y brilla depuis la poésie orientale.'<sup>8</sup> It is appropriate, therefore, that throughout le Lys dans la vallée, the Oriental lily should be noted for the strength and pervasiveness of its perfume.<sup>9</sup>

1: Y. p.305.

2: Cf. Chapter 4, pp.206-207.

3: Y. p.256.

4: Y. p.74.

5: Y. p.180.

6: Y. p.53.

7: Y. p.26.

8: Y. p.25. Since the 'poésie orientale' replaces the first perfume, the perfume combines - as the poetry itself has already been seen to do - both transience and immortality. Given the importance a character's reading may have (cf. Julien Sorel, *Véronique Sauviat*), it is a pity Félix makes no more than passing references to the taste he develops for Oriental poetry (cf. Y. p.119).

9: Cf. Y. pp.29, 192, 322. The lily is discussed in more detail below pp.396-397.

The association of perfume and fire receives forceful confirmation from Henriette's deathbed consumption by fire and appetite: 'Elle s'arrêta, parut écouter, et sentit à travers les murs je ne sais quelle odeur. - Félix! les vendangeuses vont dîner, et moi, moi, [...], j'ai faim.'<sup>1</sup> Just as, in the form of balms, perfumes could moisten and heal, so may they here exacerbate an appetite which parches and inflames. In both cases the prime characteristic of perfume is apparent: its all-pervasive, contagious, monopolising power.

If perfume does, then, spread and penetrate like a contagion, it thereby becomes a unifying, cohesive force in the cosmos. It moves both through space - 'Elle était [...] LE LYS DE CETTE VALLEE où elle croissait pour le ciel, en la remplissant du parfum de ses vertus'<sup>2</sup> - and through time, out of the past and into the present and the future: 'Nous reprenions nos souvenirs, [...] en peuplant cette rêverie de nos bouquets embaumés, des romans de nos désirs.'<sup>3</sup> Its influence can extend outwards through space and forwards through time: 'tout ce que je puis avoir de bon émane de cette tombe, comme d'un lys les parfums qui embaument l'atmosphère.'<sup>4</sup> Perfume does, therefore, counteract and perhaps exorcise the transience and the unattainability hitherto associated with the flower. With perfume, both time and space can be annexed and possessed.

For through its mobility and its association with air, land, water and fire, and finally light and sound, perfume not only reinforces the

1: Y. p.301. Just as he is sensitive to sound, Félix, too, is sensitive to smell (cf. Y. p.274 and his appreciation of fresh air and open skies). For a similar sensitivity in other characters of Balzac, see: Illusions perdues, IV, p.649; le Médecin de campagne, VIII, pp. 409-410; l'Enfant maudit, IX, p.711; Louis Lambert, X, p.371 (quoted by Monica Crawley: 'Le Lys [...]': Etude stylistique, p.72, who indicates the importance of 'l'odorat' in le Lys); and also L'Avertissement du 'Gars', XI, p.140.

2: Y. p.29.

3: Y. p.250.

4: Y. p.322. Cf. Y. p.44. Like the references to 'germe' above, this recalls Balzac's treatment of history, examined in Chapter 1.



links noted in this and previous chapters between plants and the imagery of the four elements and the journey theme, but also acts as a physical link between these elements. These elements are themselves beginning to appear as the 'effets',<sup>1</sup> as the variety in a final cosmic unity. If perfume can, as the above reference to the 'flouve odorante' shows, give the clue to the existence of this unity, perfume is but one aspect of 'cette délicieuse correspondance' which is the bouquet.<sup>2</sup> It is, therefore, now both possible and necessary to examine this 'correspondance' both in the bouquets and in le Lys dans la vallée as a whole.

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1: Cf. le Chef d'oeuvre inconnu, IX, p.394.

2: Perfumes are, of course, not uncommon either in Saint-Martin or in Volupté. In the latter, however, they cannot be seen to contribute to a network of correspondances as in le Lys.

(4)

Correspondances

## (i) Introduction

Before studying the correspondances in le Lys dans la vallée in more detail it may be useful to examine the meaning and implications of the term and to place them in their historical perspective.<sup>1</sup> Both the dual meaning of the word correspondance - that of agreement or harmony and of written or verbal communication or exchange - and the continuity of the tradition to which the "correspondances" of le Lys belong, can perhaps be illustrated by placing Félix's description of one of his Touraine walks alongside quotations from Chateaubriand, Baudelaire and Hugo.<sup>2</sup>

The analogy established by Chateaubriand between the Gothic church and the forest is celebrated: 'Les forêts ont été les premiers temples de la Divinité, et les hommes ont pris dans les forêts la première idée de l'architecture.'<sup>3</sup> Chateaubriand does, moreover, associate the voice of the cathedral with the voice of nature: 'L'architecte chrétien, non content de bâtir des forêts, a voulu, pour ainsi dire, en imiter les murmures; et au moyen de l'orgue et du bronze suspendu, il a attaché au temple gothique jusqu'au bruit des vents et des tonnerres, qui roule dans la profondeur des bois.'<sup>4</sup> The choir - 'Bare ruin'd choirs, where late

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1: The following remarks do, therefore, develop points raised in the section on the historical context of le Lys, in Chapter 1.

2: The above definition does, however, over-simplify the notion of correspondances in which, as B. Juden has shown, after quoting the Dictionnaire de Trévoux, 'il ne s'agit [...] pas d'un rapport simple, mais de deux analogies qui conduisent à un troisième fait. Ce mécanisme est typique de l'ésotérisme et revient d'ailleurs par moments dans l'enchaînement baudelairien des correspondances, notamment dans l'article sur Gautier.' ('L'Esthétique: "l'harmonie immense qui dit tout"', p.9). This undoubtedly helps explain the correspondances' ability to condition the reflexes of the reader through indirect suggestion, of crucial importance in le Lys since, at least until Natalie's rejoinder, the reader has only Félix's view of the story recounted.

3: Chateaubriand: Génie du Christianisme, Garnier-Flammarion, 1966, in 2 vols, Vol.1, p.400.

4: Ibid. p.401.

the sweet birds sang' - is, therefore, the voice of God, nature and man.

This is made more explicit in le Lys by reference to a choir of birds:

'Soit une longue allée de forêt semblable à quelque nef de cathédrale, où les arbres sont des piliers, où leurs branches forment les arceaux de la voûte, au bout de laquelle une clairière lointaine aux jours mélangés d'ombres ou nuancés par les teintes rouges du couchant point à travers les feuilles et montre comme les vitraux coloriés d'un choeur plein d'oiseaux qui chantent.' 1

This harmonisation of the voices of God, nature and man does, therefore, combine the two meanings of the term correspondances:

'La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers  
Laisserent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;  
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles  
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.' 2

e/

Nature communicates familiarly if mysteriously with man:

'Les fontaines chantaient. Que disaient les fontaines?  
Les chênes murmuraient. Que murmuraient les chênes?  
Les buissons chuchotaient comme d'anciens amis.' 3

As Hugo also writes elsewhere:

'Tout dit dans l'infini quelque chose à quelqu'un.' 4

It is, therefore, not surprising that Balzac sees nature as a divine text of which man, and more particularly the artist, is the interpreter: 'L'homme ne trouve pas d'idées, il n'invente pas de formes, il imite les rapports éternels qui l'enveloppent de toutes parts.'<sup>5</sup> Thus, - with particular reference to Novalis - Eigeldinger remarks: 'La tâche du poète consiste à redécouvrir l'unité primitive, dissimulée derrière les signes hiéroglyphiques de la nature, et à

1: Y. p.118. Cf. below p.391 (n.4).

2: Baudelaire's Correspondances.

3: Hugo: A quoi songeaient les deux chevaliers dans la forêt. (In Les Contemplations).

4: Hugo: Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre.

5: Ursule Mirouët, III, p.457. quoted by M. Eigeldinger: La Philosophie de l'Art chez Balzac, p.35. Cf. Saint-Martin, Ballanche, Hugo, Lamartine, George Sand ...

étendre le réseau des analogies sensibles.<sup>1</sup>

It is indeed this vision of nature which accounts for the popularity of the word hieroglyph with such authors as Ballanche,<sup>2</sup> Fourier,<sup>3</sup> and Saint-Martin.<sup>4</sup> The hieroglyph is a sign both in the sense that it is a clue to the existence of meaning and the visual representation of that meaning. It is one of the orientally enigmatic letters in the divine text which the similarly oriental poet-'mage' endeavours to decypher.<sup>5</sup> Hence to the Apocalyptic book with which Félix's visions endow him may perhaps be seen to correspond the text which Balzac himself develops in the Etudes philosophiques:<sup>6</sup>

'Ainsi que nous le disions, le jour où l'artiste a quitté l'envers de sa tapisserie pour voir le dessin de son fil et ce que produisaient ses couleurs, il s'est aperçu que, malgré lui peut-être, il développait le texte qu'il avait dans l'âme, qu'il déduisait les preuves de sa science cachée, qu'il faisait une oeuvre analytique dont il portait la synthèse en lui-même, qu'il exprimait le drame et la poésie de son monde avant d'en mettre au jour les formules physiologiques.'<sup>7</sup>

Hence, too, to the hieroglyph of nature and natural phenomena corresponds the talisman of the artist's insight: 'Les hommes ont-ils le pouvoir

1: M. Eigeldinger: op.cit. p.181.

2: Cf. Chapter 1, p.64.

The term was, indeed, common in the eighteenth century. Cf. also Bonald (B. Juden: Traditions orphiques /.../, pp.300, 309, 320, and K. Vittori: 'Remarques sur la langue moderniste: Bonald', le Français moderne, 1972 (October), esp. pp.315-319)

3: Cf. Chapter 1, pp.66-67.

4: Eg. l'Homme de désir, édition établie et présentée par R. Anadou, p.189 (Chant 153). For other references to the hieroglyph in this thesis, see above p.64 notes 2 and 7, p.274, p.325 and below p.403.

5: Cf. Y. p.149. The poet-'mage' and the Orient are, of course, popular literary themes of the period. See above pp.69 n.6 and 330-334 (Orient) and above pp.239-241 (the poet-'mage').

6: For Félix's Apocalyptic book, see Y. pp.12-13 and pp. 36-37. For other references to the Apocalyptic motif in this thesis, see above pp.11 n.2, 13 n.2, 63 n.1, 102, 149, 156, 233, 236, 249, 312, 325, 340.

7: Félix Davin's Introduction to the Etudes philosophiques: XI, pp.206-207. Cf. Intro. p. xvii. Cf. Y. pp.12-13, quoted in Chapter 6, p.325. These passages recall the theme of the 'texte préexistant' which is not uncommon in Balzac. Cf. for example the celebrated passage in la Femme de trente ans (II, p.761; quoted by G. Poulet: La Distance intérieure, p.158 and by G. Picon: Balzac par lui-même, p.81). Cf. also Louis Lambert X, p.415; la Duchesse de Langeais, V, p.133; Des Artistes, O.D. I++, p.137. The connection between the text and the hieroglyph is made more explicit in the Traité de la vie élégante, (O.D. II, Vol. 39, Conard, 1938, p.180: cf. below p.403(n.3)).

de faire venir l'univers dans leur cerveau, ou leur cerveau est-il un talisman avec lequel ils abolissent les lois du temps et de l'espace?..'<sup>1</sup>

As Eigeldinger's reference to 'l'unité primitive, dissimulée derrière les signes hiéroglyphiques de la nature' suggests, the existence of this divine text infers the ultimate unity of the cosmos, the cosmos - being both the creation and the incarnation of the divine word. In claiming that in nature 'tout [...] tend à l'unité'<sup>2</sup> Félix not only corroborates Balzac's innumerable references to a universe where 'tout s'enchaîne' and 'tout se tient'<sup>3</sup> but reiterates the assertions of a plethora of philosophers, mystics, religious, poets and scientists of a multitude of creeds and allegiances.<sup>4</sup> In l'Homme de désir, for example, Saint-Martin writes: 'Unité suprême et universelle, oui, nous participons tous à la même pensée. Le même esprit circule dans tous les êtres pensants, nous puisons sans cesse à la même source.'<sup>5</sup>

This belief in a single, original unifying substance or essence does, of course, account for the frequency of references to 'substance mère' and 'substance étherée' in Balzac's works.<sup>6</sup> This substance is, moreover, frequently if not originally identified with air or light. Thus, commenting on Louis Lambert, Per Nykrog observes: 'la lumière figure parmi les phénomènes voisins de la substance élémentaire;'<sup>7</sup>

1: This is, appropriately enough, in the preface to the first edition of La Peau de chagrin, (XI, p.175). For other references to the talisman in this thesis, see above p.64(n.5), p.74 n.1, p.95(n.3), p.273 n.3, and below p.394 and n.7.

2: Y. p.210.

3: Cf. for example: A. Allemand: Unité et structure [...], p.150 and M. Eigeldinger: La Philosophie [...], p.100.

4: Cf. M. Eigeldinger: op.cit. pp.149-157.

5: Cf. p.38 (Chent 11).

6: A number of critics have examined various aspects of this 'substance étherée' as described by Balzac and, helped by his philosophical, mystical and scientific sources, tried to organise his ideas into a coherent philosophy. See for example: H. Evans: 'Louis Lambert' et la philosophie de Balzac, esp. pp.139-140; M. Bardèche: 'Autour des "Etudes philosophiques"', A.B., 1960, pp.109-124; Madeleine Fargeaud: Balzac et "la Recherche de l'Absolu", Hachette, 1968, pp.132-156.

H.J. Hunt does, however think that the 'value of Balzac's 'philosophy' has been exaggerated in our day.' (Review of J. Borel's 'Séraphita' et le mysticisme balzacien, in F.S. 1969 (October), p.414). Cf. below p.375.

7: P. Nykrog: La Pensée [...], p.87.



For Saint-Martin, too, 'ce fluide simple et fixe, principe et source de tous les mouvements' seems to be closely allied if not identified to light.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Balzac's 'fluide vital', whatever it owes to Mesmer the the 'vitalistes', is less related to actual liquids than to the 'substance éthérée'.<sup>2</sup>

As Lucienne Frappier-Mazur has shown, one of the prime characteristics of light is that it links material and spiritual worlds.<sup>3</sup> Light and air are the most immaterial of material substances and the most material of spiritual phenomena. Hence, if people such as Henriette and objects such as precious stones emit light and are thereby spiritualised, thoughts, ideas and intelligence are also identified with light and thereby materialised.<sup>4</sup> Thus, as Louis Lambert remarks: 'Peut-être les mots matérialisme et spiritualisme expriment-ils les deux côtés d'un seul et même fait.'<sup>5</sup> This theme of unity in duality is, of course, further reflected in the similarity already noted between

1: L'Homme de désir, p.39 (Chant 11). It is also identified with fire.

2: This is an ancient expression, often held to be Orphic, and also referred to as "le feu subtil". For comments on Mesmer's 'fluide universel' with reference to Balzac, see M. Bardèche: op.cit. p.110; M. Eigeldinger: La Philosophie /.../, p.159; M. Fargeaud: op.cit. pp.149-153. For a study of the 'vitalistes' see M. Bardèche: op.cit. pp.111-124. M. Milner ('Le Sens "psychique" de Massimilla Doni et la conception balzacienne de l'âme', A.B. 1966, p.164), seems to corroborate P. Nykrog's contention (La Pensée /.../, p.85) that this 'fluide' is not a fluid in the same sense that water is a fluid; A. Allemand does, however, associate Balzac's 'fluide vital' with the ocean in l'Enfant Maudit (Unité et structure /.../, p.93). Magnetism has already been referred to in this thesis, Chapter 2, p.99 n.3, p.100 and n.7. See also above p.60 and below p.378 n.3.

3: Cf. Lucienne Frappier-Mazur: 'Balzac et les images "reparaissantes" /.../' pp.46-51.

4: For the luminous aura surrounding people and substances, see Chapter 3, pp.157-160. For the light-ideas analogy, see below pp.386-390. The materiality of ideas is, of course, one of the leitmotifs of the Comédie humaine: cf. the much quoted passages in Sur Cathérine de Médicis, X, pp.296-297; le Peau de chagrin, IX, p.91; Louis Lambert, X, pp.395-396 and Aventures administratives d'une idée heureuse. Also related is the theme of 'la pensée qui tue': cf. Physiologie du mariage, X, pp.850-851 and les Martyrs ignorés - one of whom is Henriette (cf. Y. pp.289-291).

5: Louis Lambert, X, p.379. Cf. Maître Cornélius (IX, p.898): 'Les statues semblaient animées, et les hommes paraissaient pétrifiés.' Balzac shares this theme of the interpenetration of material and spiritual worlds with the 'magnétiseurs': cf. Madeleine Fargeaud: 'Madame Balzac, son mytisme /.../' p.26. Nykrog attributes Balzac's theories to the mutual contamination of the influences of Swedenborg and Lavater (La Pensée /.../, pp.99-107).

physical and moral laws - 'Le monde moral est taillé pour ainsi dire sur le patron du monde naturel'<sup>1</sup> - and in the 'tout est double' motif which is found throughout the Comédie humaine.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in a variety of ways and forms, the first main link in the chain of correspondences has been forged.

Light is, however, not the only perceptible form of the ubiquitous 'substance éthérée': 'Selon moi, la nature du son est identique à celle de la lumière.'<sup>3</sup> As P.-G. Castex has pointed out, this identification is far from being unique to Balzac: 'Au début du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, les travaux de plusieurs physiciens, et en particulier de Fresnel, ont abouti aux théories ondulatoires qui rendent compte des effets lumineux et sonores par des vibrations: il devient dès lors naturel de formuler l'hypothèse d'une identité fondamentale de la lumière et du son, [...]'.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Eigeldinger notes of the light-sound analogy: 'Elle est latente dans la tradition alchimique et dans le courant illuministe, elle se retrouve, avec des nuances dont Balzac ne s'est pas embarrassé,

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- 1: Le Cousin Pons, VI, p.626. (Quoted by M. Eigeldinger: La Philosophie [...], p.18). In the same passage Balzac writes: 'les idées, créations réelles et agissantes, s'impriment dans ce qu'il faut nommer l'atmosphère du monde spirituel, y produisent des effets, y vivent spectralement [...]'. Cf. Chapter 1, p.24.
  - 2: Cf. Illusions perdues, IV, pp.788-789 and the dedication of la Cousine Bette (VI, p.134). The theme of unity in duality has already been noted on a number of occasions in this thesis, see above pp.68-69, p.86 n.4, p.114 n.2, p.125(n.4), p.130(n.2), p.138(n.2), p.271(n.4), p.336 and n.6, and below p.386(n.1), p.390, pp.407ff.
  - 3: Gambara, IX, p.434. Gambara and Massimilla Doni, Balzac's two musical and perhaps most Hoffmannesque novels, contain numerous statements as to the identity of 'lumière-son' and examples of 'lumière-son' correspondance imagery. Cf. in Massimilla Doni the reference to 'cette chaude essence éthérée que lui infusait un regard où la moindre parole de la Cataneo.' (IX, p.323). (Cf. M. Milner: 'Le sens "psychique" de Massimilla Doni [...]'. pp. 167-168). Cf. also Modeste Mignon (I, p.521): 'voilà comment nous sommes unis, à peu près comme l'est la nature à Dieu, par la lumière et le verbe.' H. Evans ('Louis Lambert' et la philosophie de Balzac, pp.139-140), P.-G. Castex (Nouvelles et contes de Balzac: 'Études philosophiques', "Les cours de la Sorbonne", C.D.U., 1963, pp.72-73) and M. Eigeldinger (La Philosophie [...], pp.168-182) examine some of the scientific theories which may have influenced Balzac's 'lumière-son' analogies.
  - 4: P.-Georges Castex: op.cit. p.72.

dans les grands systèmes physiques des XVIII<sup>e</sup> et XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles, elle oriente les recherches du Père Castel et stimule l'imagination des poètes.<sup>1</sup>

An important corollary of the light-sound analogy is a similar analogy drawn between painting, music and literature; thus Gambara continues: 'Le son est la lumière sous une autre forme: l'une et l'autre procèdent par des vibrations qui aboutissent à l'homme et qu'il transforme en pensées dans ses centres nerveux. La musique, de même que la peinture, emploie des corps qui ont la faculté de dégager telle ou telle propriété de la substance-mère, pour en composer des tableaux.'<sup>2</sup> As Eigeldinger himself remarks: 'Puisque la lumière et l'harmonie, la couleur et le son peuvent s'identifier, la peinture et la musique présentent certaines similitudes du point de vue des ressources dont elles disposent et des effets qu'elles produisent.'<sup>3</sup> This identification, which will be seen to be of importance in le Lys dans la vallée,<sup>4</sup> Balzac shared with a number of contemporary and subsequent writers: 'Non seulement Proust a fréquemment usé de la transposition et des équivalences de la sensation, mais, à la suite de Balzac et du mouvement symboliste, il s'est persuadé de l'identité originelle des arts.'<sup>5</sup> Hoffmann, too, insists on the correspondences which can be established between the arts<sup>6</sup> and Saint-Martin writes:

1: M. Eigeldinger: op.cit. p.182. For other references to le père Castel see ibid. pp.171 n.1 and 176 and above Chapter 5, p.221 n.4 and Chapter 6, p.328 and n.1.

2: Gambara, IX, p.434. Cf. Massimilla Doni, IX, p.377: 'L'Art peint avec des mots, avec des sons, avec des couleurs, avec des lignes, avec des formes; si ses moyens sont divers, les effets sont les mêmes.' Hence Eigeldinger (op.cit. p.110) can speak of a 'poésie cosmique' which is both the divine text and its emulation by the poet-'mage'.

3: M. Eigeldinger: Le Philosophie de l'art /.../, p.109.

4: Cf. below pp.418-420.

5: M. Eigeldinger: op.cit. pp.115-116.

6: Cf. Ibid., pp.97-98.

'La poésie, la musique et la peinture sont trois soeurs qui devraient être inséparables.'<sup>1</sup>

It is not always clear from Balzac's statements whether sound is a derivative of light or whether sound and light are twin derivatives of the 'substance mère'. What is, however, important is less the precise genealogy of the two phenomena than the fact that they are just synesthetic variants of the same essence. They are the variety in the ultimate cosmic unity which is reiterated throughout the Comédie humaine. 'Unité fixe, unité variable, unité composée:' writes Saint-Martin.<sup>2</sup> 'Unité composée, Unité variable, Unité fixe' echoes Louis Lambert.<sup>3</sup> Thus if the triumvirate of synesthesias, light-sounds-perfumes, form part of a vast cosmic network of correspondences it is precisely because they are all variations of the original 'substance mère':

'Le son est une modification de l'air; toutes les couleurs sont des modifications de la lumière; tout parfum est une combinaison d'air et de lumière; ainsi les quatre expressions de la matière par rapport à l'homme, le son, la couleur, le parfum et la forme, ont une même origine;'.<sup>4</sup>

This variety does, moreover, at least in theory, seem to derive from the interplay of moral and physical climate - hence Nykrog notes: 'une même structure donne des effets variables à l'infini selon les contextes

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- 1: In l'Homme de désir, édition établie et présentée par R. Amadou, p.216 (Chant 180). Cf. B. Juden's article entitled 'L'Esthétique: "l'harmonie immense qui dit tout"'.  
2: Op.cit. p.188. (Chant 152).
  - 3: Louis Lambert, X, p.454. (Cf. Nykrog: La Pensée /.../, pp.149-150). The theme of unity in variety is one of the more obvious leitmotifs of the Comédie humaine. Cf. for example: Massinilla Doni, IX, p.361 and Sur Catherine de Médicis, X, p.263. Cf. above p.144 n.1. and the last section of this Chapter.
  - 4: Louis Lambert, X, p.449. (Quoted by H. Evans ('Louis Lambert' et la philosophie de Balzac, p.249; by M. Eigeldinger (La Philosophie /.../, p.169; by P. Nykrog: La Pensée /.../, p.87).)

ou les milieux dans lesquels elle se manifeste.<sup>1</sup> and the amount of 'substance éthérée' involved: 'tout provient donc de la SUBSTANCE dont les transformations ne diffèrent que par le NOMBRE, par un certain dosage dont les proportions produisent les individus [...]'.<sup>2</sup>

It is, then, because the phenomena of light, sound and perfume, and, it will be seen, other elements such as fire and water, are the visible or at least sensorially perceptible incarnations of 'substance éthérée' that they can be endowed with the status of hieroglyphs, the visible representations of the cosmic text. It is for this reason, too, that synesthesias form their own language, their own correspondances, within the "correspondance" which is le Lys dans la vallée.

In systematically exploiting the correspondances and synesthesias in a number of his novels Balzac does, perhaps, show more originality than in their actual conception: 'Balzac utilisait un des premiers en France - après Diderot et Fourier, mais avant Gautier, Nerval et Baudelaire - ce nouveau moyen de suggestion que l'on rencontre déjà dans les deux fragments de Falturne-Séraphita.<sup>3</sup> However, mention should not only be again made of the Swedish theosopher Swedenborg,

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- 1: P. Nykrog: La Pensée [...], p.133. A similar remark occurs in the passage already quoted from le Cousin Pons (VI, p.626): 'Le monde moral est taillé pour ainsi dire sur le patron du monde naturel; les mêmes effets s'y doivent retrouver avec les différences propres à leurs divers milieux.' Cf. the 'climatic' variations proposed by Henriette: 'Si les principes de la nature se plient aux formes voulues par les climats, pourquoi n'en serait-il pas ainsi des sentiments chez les individus? [...]' (Y, p.266). For the variations of light according to 'les objets qu'elle rencontre' see Massinilla Doni, IX, p.360. Cf. also Physiologie du mariage, X, pp.670-671. For other references to seasons and climates in this thesis, see above p.117 n.1, pp.229-230, p.248 n.3, p.316. See also below p.409 and pp.413-415.
- 2: Louis Lambert, X, p.449 (Quoted by Nykrog: op.cit. p.87). Cf. M. Eigeldinger: La Philosophie [...], p.105.
- 3: M. Eigeldinger: op.cit. pp.96-97. Swedenborg, Hoffmann and Balzac - and Senancour - are among the traditional sources of Baudelaire's correspondances. Cf. P.-G. Castex: 'Balzac et Baudelaire', R.S.M., 1958 (janvier-mars), pp.142-143. Like Castex, Jean-Pierre Boon tries to suggest additional influences and, significantly enough, postulates the 'magnétiseurs'. For 'sous l'empire de cet état [magnétique], [...], le sujet perçoit dans l'univers une interpénétration des mondes spirituel et matériel.' ('Baudelaire, Correspondances, et le magnétisme animal.', P.M.L.A., Vol. 86 (no.3), 1971 (May), p.407.)



but of Ballanche and Saint-Martin; thus, in l'Homme de désir we find: 'La lumière rendait des sons, la mélodie enfantait la lumière, les couleurs avaient du mouvement, parce que les couleurs étaient vivantes; et les objets étaient à la fois sonores, diaphanes et assez mobiles pour se pénétrer les uns et les autres et parcourir d'un trait toute l'étendue.'<sup>1</sup> Mention should also be made of Hoffmann who exploited synesthesias just as he emphasised the unity of the arts.<sup>2</sup>

In this respect, then, as in so many others, le Lys dans la vallée reflects the themes and preoccupations of its age. Now that the existence of this common ground has been established, it is possible to examine the correspondances in le Lys dans la vallée and their artistic function in Félix de Vandenesse's narrative.

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1: See p.83 (Chant 46). A passage from the same page is quoted by M. Eigeldinger: La Philosophie /.../, p.170 n.2. The importance of this particular Chant was noted above p.350 n.8.

2: Cf. M. Eigeldinger: op.cit. p.98.

(ii) Light, sound and water

Although, in his critique of the first volume of J.F. Herschell's Traité de la lumière, Balzac refrains from committing himself to the 'théories ondulatoires qui rendent compte des effets lumineux et sonores par des vibrations',<sup>1</sup> these theories may be seen to be given literary expression in the light-water-sound analogies which, as Philippe Bertault remarks, are frequent in his works: 'On en pourrait citer des exemples à foison empruntés à Séraphîta, Massimilla Doni, la Duchesse de Langeais, Ganbara, Ferragus, Melmoth réconcilié, et même à l'un de ses romans de jeunesse, Jane la Pâle.'<sup>2</sup> Even though Bertault does not include le Lys dans la vallée in his list, light, sound and liquids are linked, for example, in one of the culminating moments of Félix's narrative:

'L'agitation d'un amour plein de désirs contenus s'harmonise à celle de l'eau, [...]. Les paroles, montées au diapason de la nature, déploierent une grâce mystérieuse, et les regards eurent de plus éclatants rayons en participant à la lumière si largement versée par le soleil [...].'<sup>3</sup>

As will be noted elsewhere, the union of the elements is accompanied by a heightened, almost mystic, sense of cosmic unity and harmony.<sup>4</sup>

Water-light and water-sound images do, moreover, abound in le Lys dans la vallée. Water and sound, for example, are naturally united in Félix's descriptions of the Indre: 'Belle fut cette nuit passée sous ses fenêtres, au milieu du murmure des eaux passant à travers les

1: Quoted from P.-G. Castex, above p.375. For the critique attributed to Balzac, see O.D. 14, Vol. 381, Conard, 1956, pp.222-223.

2: P. Bertault: Balzac et la musique religieuse, Naert, 1929, p.59. Cf. Lucienne Frappier-Mazur's comment about Séraphîta: 'L'eau est souvent explicitement associée à la lumière' ('Balzac et les images "reparaissantes" [...]', p.47). Cf. also Y. p.94: 'Vous avez épuisé, par votre première aspiration, une coupe offerte avec candeur.'

3: Y. p.203. Cf. Y. p.95 ('Avant de me retrouver [...] venir à moi.')

4: It is not surprising, therefore, that the expression 'la lumière de l'amour céleste et l'huile de la joie intérieure' (Y. p.62) should be attributed to Saint-Martin. (Cf. Chapter 1, pp.56-57).

vannes des moulins, et entrecoupé par la voix des heures sonnées au clocher de Saché!'<sup>1</sup> If the water of the Indre has a rhythmic murmur, then Henriette's murmurs have a rhythmic flow: 'elle me parlait de ce ton doux et bas qui faisait ressembler ses phrases à des flots menus, murmurés par la mer sur un sable fin.'<sup>2</sup> Henriette's voice is often associated with water: 'Le souffle de son âme [...] expirait onduleusement à l'oreille [...].'<sup>3</sup> just as her approach is heralded by 'le bruit onduleux d'une robe'.<sup>4</sup> It is not inappropriate, therefore, that a combination of sounds and liquids in the Indre valley should accompany her funeral: 'Les flots de l'air adouci jetèrent par ondées les tintements qui nous annonçaient qu'à cette heure la chrétienté tout entière répétait les paroles dites par l'ange à la femme qui racheta les fautes de son sexe.'<sup>5</sup> Once again, synesthesia goes hand in hand with a feeling of universal harmony.

Analogies between water and light are even more common in le Lys dans la vallée and are also frequently centered on the Indre valley: 'Çà et là, s'élèvent des masses de gravier sur lesquelles l'eau se brise en y formant des franges où reluit le soleil'<sup>6</sup> and on Henriette, who is noted for 'la constante émanation de son âme sur les siens, cette essence nourrissante épanchée à flots comme le soleil émet sa lumière'.<sup>7</sup> To the liquid tones of her voice may be seen to correspond the liquid light from her eyes: 'Je sentais en moi-même ce regard, il

1: Y. p.65. Félix continues: 'Pendant cette nuit baignée de lumière [...].'  
Thus water-sound and water-light passages are frequently juxtaposed if not directly linked. Cf. the description of Henriette's tears Y. p.93.

2: Y. p.133.

3: Y. pp.39-40. In his Honoré de Balzac and his figures of speech J.M.Burton notes eight speech-fluid images in le Lys dans la vallée. Cf. Y. p.293: 'cette onctueuse éloquence qui tombe sur le cœur comme une rosée'.

4: Y. p.217. Cf. Y. pp.80,283,

5: Y. p.306. Cf. the reference in Gambara (IX, p.444) to 'des torrents d'harmonie'.

6: Y. p.30.

7: Y. p.43. Cf. Y. p.118: 'tantôt des torrents de soleil ruisselant comme des ondes nourrissantes'.

m'avait inondé de lumière, [..].<sup>1</sup> Further references to liquid light are naturally prompted by her tears: 'Une larme brilla dans les yeux d'Henriette.'<sup>2</sup> As the above allusions to 'soleil' suggest, liquid light may also be tinged with heat: 'de ses yeux sortaient deux rayons qui versaient la vie à cette pauvre faible créature.'<sup>3</sup> or even explicitly inflamed.<sup>4</sup> In such passages, light, water and fire are almost inextricably linked: 'elle n'avait pas obtenu ce regard mouillé qui solde tout, qui [..] est comme un éternel joyau dont les feux brillent aux jours difficiles.'<sup>5</sup>

Just as both Henriette's voice and eyes are associated with liquids, so is her dress associated with water and light as well as water and sound: 'Elle fit quelques pas légers, comme pour aérer sa blanche toilette, pour livrer au zéphyr ses ruches de tulle neigeuses, ses manches flottantes, [..], et les boucles fluides de sa coiffure [..].'<sup>6</sup> Hence Félix admires 'la souveraine dont la robe blanche ondoyait dans les taillis, flottait sur les pelouses, [..].'<sup>7</sup> The identification between water and light is moreover as aggrandizing as that between water and sound:

'Il est dans la nature des effets dont les significances sont sans bornes, et qui s'élevèrent à la hauteur des plus grandes conceptions morales. Soit une bruyère fleurie,

1: Y. p.76. Cf. the combination of 'regard' and 'couleur' Y. pp.25, 257 and Y. p.274: 'Elle savait donc que la source des rayons épanchés de nos yeux était dans nos âmes.'

2: Y. p.254. A commonplace. Tears are associated with first light then sound Y. p.93 and with sound Y. p.153. For an analysis of tears in another of Balzac's novels, see Madeleine Fargeaud: 'Une lecture de Béatrix', A.B. 1973, pp.112-114. Cf. also above pp.214-215.

3: Y. p.67.

4: Cf. Y. p.41.

5: Y. p.86.

6: Y. p.191.

7: Y. p.119.

couverte de diamants de la rosée qui la trempe, et dans laquelle se joue le soleil, immensité parée pour un seul regard qui s'y jette à propos.' 1

In other words, the eye of the poet, endowed with the visionary qualities of 'spécialité', is indeed the 'miroir concentrique de l'univers',<sup>2</sup> and this vision is expressed in the work of art which is, as has been seen, 'dans un petit espace, l'effrayante accumulation d'un monde entier de pensées'.<sup>3</sup> The variety, or 'effets', in the cosmic text with its 'signifiances', are the manifestation of cosmic unity, also expressed in terms of the analogy between physical and moral worlds, and, of course, in the synesthesias. Félix's remarks do, therefore, give form to Balzac's theories. As Eigeldinger observes, after quoting from the July, 1835 preface to le Lys: 'Chaque artiste s'applique à intégrer sa vision intérieure dans une forme concrète qu'il façonne, toute création procède d'un effort pour prendre possession de l'univers par la pensée.'<sup>4</sup>

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1: Y. p.117.

2: Cf. Suzanne Bérand: 'Une énigme balzacienne: la "Spécialité"', esp. pp. 62-63.

3: Des Artistes, O.D. I++, p.140. Cf. Chapter 3, p.146 and n.5.

4: M. Eigeldinger: La Philosophie /.../, p.34.



(iii) Light, water and plants

Félix's reference to 'une bruyère fleurie, couverte de diamants de la rosée qui la trempe' illustrates not only an affinity between light and water but a further possible affinity between light, water and plants. It is, for example, possible to distinguish varying types and degrees of association between plants and water, one of which is the contiguity or juxtaposition of the two as in 'une fleur plus épanouie et d'où tombe une larme'<sup>1</sup> or the description of Henriette as 'un lys trop chargé de pluie.'<sup>2</sup> This association becomes closer when the flowers are immersed in liquid as with 'des fleurs noyées dans des eaux amères'<sup>3</sup> and closer still when the immersed plants are 'ces productions marines'<sup>4</sup> and thus in a natural habitat from which they cannot be dislodged without difficulty and distress. When plants and water form 'une prairie d'eau' they can barely be distinguished: 'quel autre nom donner à ces végétations aquatiques, [..], qui tapissent la rivière, [..], ondulent avec elle, [..]!'<sup>5</sup> Plants and water are as one.

Flowers and plants are equally identifiable with light.<sup>6</sup> If the flower is light as in 'cette fleur sidérale'<sup>7</sup> then light is a flower: 'la lumière qui brille dans l'obscurité comme le lys dans les feuillages sombres.'<sup>8</sup> Like Circe and Phèdre, flowers are the daughters of the sun.<sup>9</sup> They do, therefore, form 'un poème de fleurs lumineuses' which has to be placed 'dans la lumière d'une croisée'<sup>10</sup> to be fully

1: Y. p.122.2: Y. p.237.3: Y. p.41.4: Y. p.3.5: Y. p.30.

6: Cf. Chapter 3, pp.171-172.

7: Y. p.65.8: Y. p.152. The relevance and the accuracy of Le Yaouanc's claim that this image derives from Volunté has already been questioned, Chapter 1, p.59 n.1. Cf. also above p.248(n.4).9: Cf. Y. p.116.10: Y. p.122.

appreciated and no doubt so it can absorb and reflect light. From 'les feuilles d'or pâle' of the poplars<sup>1</sup> to the 'chênes dorés' of Saché<sup>2</sup> the association of plants and light can be seen to endure from the youth to the maturity of the trees as from the youth to maturity of Félix.

As with light, sound and water, the light-water-plant analogy may be seen to culminate in the prelude to Félix's bouquets:

'Soit de grandes mares d'eau sur lesquelles la nature jette aussitôt des taches vertes, espèce de transition entre la plante et l'animal, où la vie arrive en quelques jours, des plantes et des insectes flottant là, comme un monde dans l'éther!' 3

The 'végétations aquatiques' have acquired a new, aerial dynamism, and with it a more explicit and more grandiose cosmic dimension. The weed-stream ponds, like the dew-covered heather, and like the work of art in which they are inscribed, are microcosms of a unified, harmonious universe.

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1: Y. p.31.

2: Y. p.315.

3: Y. p.118. Cf. Y. p.91 for further light, water and plant imagery.

(iv) Light, plants and ideas

Although the association of light and ideas is in such expressions as 'selon mes lumières' or 'according to my lights' a humorous cliché in both French and English languages, the analogy does, as was noted in the introductory section on the correspondances, have a particular significance for Balzac: the linking of spiritual and material worlds.<sup>1</sup> Such links can indeed be found in le Lys dans la vallée, not only in banal expressions such as 'les dernières lueurs de mon intelligence',<sup>2</sup> or even 'Plusieurs pensées s'élevèrent en moi comme des lueurs',<sup>3</sup> but in less obvious and more striking constructions: 'Le luxe [...] donne entre amants du prix aux moindres soins en faisant rayonner autour de nous la pensée dominante de l'être aimé';<sup>4</sup> speaking of particularly memorable scenes Félix remarks: 'pareilles à des diamants, elles brillent serties par des pensées pleines d'alliages, regrets fondus dans le souvenir des bonheurs évanouis!'<sup>5</sup> Light does, therefore, endow thoughts and ideas with an unwonted permanence and prestige which may, even, be those of eternity and divinity: 'Les lumières de la pensée annonçaient le retour de Dieu dans un de ses plus beaux tabernacles.'<sup>6</sup>

The analogy between light and ideas does, moreover, at least in part account for the significance of looks and glances in Balzac, as, for example, in the description of Facino Cane: 'L'expression amère et douloureuse de cette magnifique tête était agrandie par la cécité,

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1: Cf. above p.375 and n.2.

2: Y. p.316.

3: Y. p.82. The continuation of this quotation links light and ideas to water.

4: Y. p.285. The first part of this passage (up to 'soins') undoubtedly comes from Fourier.

5: Y. p.129. This passage also illustrates light-water imagery.

Cf. Y. p.139 ('Ce fut une journée [...] difficile.').

6: Y. p.305.

car les yeux morts revivaient par la pensée; il s'en échappaient comme une lueur brûlante, [..],<sup>1</sup> or the passage in Gaudissart II: 'Puis les idées de chacun sont transmises de l'un à l'autre avec une rapidité télégraphique par des regards, [..], vous diriez de l'éclairage soudain de la grande avenue des Champs-Élysées, où le gaz vole de candélabre en candélabre comme cette idée allume les prunelles de commis en commis.'<sup>2</sup> This light-idea-look analogy is also found, if less strikingly, in le Lys: thus of Jacques, Félix remarks: 'le regard laissait échapper trop de pensées.'<sup>3</sup> Just as the eye emits both light and ideas so may it react to light and mental or moral states: 'De même que les yeux habitués à ne voir que des couleurs douces sont blessés par le grand jour, de même il est certains esprits auxquels déplaisent les violents contrastes.'<sup>4</sup> Ideas may also open the inward eye and reveal new perspectives: 'Il s'éveillait en moi des idées qui glissaient comme des fantômes en enlevant les crêpes qui jusqu'alors m'avaient dérobé mon bel avenir.'<sup>5</sup> Thus Louis Lambert does, perhaps, speak for Félix as for all poets and visionaries in the Comédie humaine when he exclaims: 'Penser, c'est voir!'<sup>6</sup>

The presence of such analogies in le Lys endows some of Félix's apparently innocent remarks with a perhaps unexpected relevance to his vision and to his narrative as a whole: 'je trouvais en ce moment la vallée au ton de mes idées.'<sup>7</sup> Similarly, his mention of '[les] plus riantes idées',<sup>8</sup> already an example of the materialist-spiritualist analogy, is given added significance by being placed alongside such remarks as 'il est des sourires dans le ciel'.<sup>9</sup> For just as the light

1: Facino Cane, VI, p.69.  
 2: Gaudissart II, VI, p.857.  
 3: Y. p.243.  
 4: Y. p.224.  
 5: Y. pp.64-65.  
 6: Louis Lambert, X, p.379.  
 7: Y. p.154.  
 8: Y. p.272.  
 9: Y. p.90. Cf. Y. pp.124, 315.

of the heavens smiles so are ideas smiling and happy. As Félix observes elsewhere: 'Le bonheur a sa lumière aussi.'<sup>1</sup> It is, therefore, particularly appropriate that Félix should relate the different moods of Henriette's character to variations in the sky: 'tous ces tournoisements de la vie où le caractère se déploie, tiennent comme les effets du ciel à des circonstances inattendues et fugitives qui ne se ressemblent entre elles que par le fond d'où elles se détachent, [...]'.<sup>2</sup> Unity is again expressed through both through unity in duality - of spiritual and material worlds - and unity in variety - the 'effets' of both ultimately form a coherent whole. Once again, too, the image is the illustration of the idea both in the sense that the image contains a material/spiritual analogy and the sense that the image itself is the materialisation of an idea. By going on to say that the 'effets' of Henriette's character will be portrayed through '[les] événements de cette histoire', Félix does moreover indicate that the work of art he is writing is itself a coherent whole with its variety of 'effets'.<sup>3</sup> The unity of light or skies, ideas, Henriette and the narrative is one and the same.

Other light-idea analogies are even more directly suggestive of the final unity of all creation. Thus the participants of the prayer scene form

'un tableau dont les couleurs répétaient en quelque sorte à l'esprit les idées réveillées par les mélodies de la prière; enfin, pour satisfaire aux conditions de l'unité qui marque le sublime, cette assemblée recueillie était enveloppée par la lumière adoucie du couchant dont les teintes rouges coloraient la salle, en laissant croire ainsi aux âmes, ou poétiques, ou superstitieuses, que les feux du ciel visitaient ces fidèles serviteurs de Dieu agenouillés là sans distinction de rang, dans l'égalité voulue par l'Eglise.'<sup>4</sup>

1: Y. p.171. Cf. above p.224(n.5).

2: Y. pp.43-44.

3: Y. p.44. It is, of course, interesting that Frenhofer should use the same word (IX, p.394).

4: Y. p.181. Cf. below p.419(n.2) - and above p.314.



The unity evoked by the multiple synesthesias is, of course, as in the previously quoted reference to Henriette's funeral,<sup>1</sup> reinforced by the union of a communal prayer shared not only by one's fellows but with God. Furthermore, this sense of unity is related to that of the painting: the figures are harmoniously grouped in a 'tableau' whose frame circumscribes the microcosm which is the work of art.<sup>2</sup> In the poetic as in the mystic vision, man, God and nature are seen as one.

The intimate relationship between the eye, light and ideas, here in the form of the understanding, is crystallised in Félix's description of his bouquets: 'je pensai que les couleurs et les feuillages avaient une harmonie, une poésie qui se faisait jour dans l'entendement en charmant le regard, comme les phrases musicales réveillent mille souvenirs au fond des coeurs aimants et aimés.'<sup>3</sup> It is also notable that the complex of analogies is, as above, related to art - not only to 'poésie' mentioned above, but through that to Félix's whole floral poem.

The association established in the prayer scene between ideas and colours, together with the above association of colours and plants, shows that ideas and plants may be associated in the same way as ideas and light. Hence, when speaking of Henriette, Félix refers to 'la fleur de sa pensée'.<sup>4</sup> Félix's description of Henriette does, moreover, confirm the analogy: 'Son front arrondi [...] paraissait plein d'idées inexprimées, [...], de fleurs noyées dans des eaux amères'<sup>5</sup> as does his description of her influence: 'La plupart de mes idées, [...], sont nées là, comme les parfums émanent des fleurs;'.<sup>6</sup> Thus,

1: Cf. above p.269.

2: Cf. above p.383 etc.

3: Y. p.115.

4: Y. p.283.

5: Y. p.41.

6: Y. p.44.

like its colours, a flower's perfume is identified with an idea: 'tout ce que je puis avoir de bon émane de cette tombe, comme d'un lys les parfums qui embaument l'atmosphère.'<sup>1</sup> Once again Félix's words can be seen to illustrate those of Louis Lambert: 'Peut-être les mots matérialisme et spiritualisme expriment-ils les deux côtés d'un seul et même fait.'<sup>2</sup> It is also Louis Lambert who develops and explains precisely this flower-perfume-colour-ideas analogy:

'Les idées sont en nous un système complet, semblable à l'un des règnes de la nature, une sorte de floraison dont l'iconographie sera retracée par un homme de génie qui passera pour fou peut-être. Oui, tout, en nous et au dehors, atteste la vie de ces créations ravissantes que je compare à des fleurs, en obéissant à je ne sais quelle révélation de leur nature! Leur production comme fin de l'homme n'est d'ailleurs pas plus étonnante que celle des parfums et des couleurs dans la plante. Les parfums sont des idées peut-être!' 3

It is this analogy between flowers and ideas which both justifies and confirms the significance so freely attributed to the flower and flowers in le Lys dans la vallée. It is because flowers are identified, both through light and independently, with ideas that Félix's bouquets can be impregnated with meaning.<sup>4</sup>

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1: Y. p.322.

2: Louis Lambert, X, p.379. Cf. above p.374(n.5).

3: Ibid. p.396. Cf. Aventures administratives d'une idée heureuse, X, p.1164.

4: Underlying this fact is, as will be seen in the section on the bouquets below, a long and powerful tradition of floral symbolism (cf. for example the list of flower-meanings in J. Sanelier's Un amour inconnu de Gérard de Nerval, Minard, 1966). It would be perfectly normal for Balzac and his contemporaries, readers as well as writers or artists, to endow flowers with meaning. This is, after all, done in present-day pocket calendars for 'fêtes'. The difference, of course, is in how Balzac does so.

(v) Sound, plants and ideas

Although there is no direct reference in le Lys dans la vallée to the mandrake, either for its narcotic qualities or because of the groan it is supposed to emit on being plucked, Félix does make one curious allusion to such a sound-producing plant: 'M'eût-elle demandé la fleur qui chante ou les richesses enfouies par les compagnons de Morgan l'exterminateur, je les lui aurais apportées afin d'obtenir les richesses certaines et la fleur muette que je souhaitais!'<sup>1</sup>

Even if this passage is unique in le Lys, apart, perhaps, from Félix's mention of 'des mousses ardentes et sonores',<sup>2</sup> the presence of a breeze<sup>3</sup> or bird-song<sup>4</sup> occasionally gives a voice to plants and trees. A certain intimacy between trees and sounds is, moreover, suggested by the confidential conversations of which they are the witness: 'Nous eûmes alors sous cette mobile voûte de feuillages frémissants une longue conversation pleine de parenthèses interminables, prise, quittée et reprise, où je la mis au fait de ma vie, de mes occupations;'.<sup>5</sup> Hence Félix refers to a tree as 'cet arbre confident de mes pensées'.<sup>6</sup> Hence, too, he later exclaims: '- Vous avez crié, là-haut, sous ce noyer; je viens de crier, moi, sous ces aulnes, voilà tout.'<sup>7</sup> Too harsh a voice is compared to the felling of trees: 'Ma voix retentit comme la hache des bûcherons dans une forêt. [..].'<sup>8</sup> and without the happy chatter of the children the vineyards are desolate: 'Quoique l'on vendangeât les clos, l'on entendait ni bruit ni babil.

1: Y. pp.45-46. Cf. the relevant note on p.45.

2: Y. p.118.

3: Cf. Y. p.306 and the quotation from Hugo above p.371(n.3).

4: Cf. Y. p.118 (quoted above p.371).

5: Y. p.192. These words, spoken by Félix as he and Henriette were seen walking by the trees, made a memorable moment in Marcel Cravenne's television production of le Lys dans la vallée (shown on May 5, 1970).

6: Y. p.29.

7: Y. p.220. Cf. the relevant note.

8: Y. p.83. Cf. above p.361 and n.3.

Les vignes semblaient inhabitées, tant le silence était profond.<sup>1</sup>

Like the rustle of the wind and the murmur of the river, the sounds of human activity seem to be a natural and integral part of the natural environment.<sup>2</sup>

If trees and plants are almost the accomplices of the divulging of secrets, leaves and flowers can in their turn communicate to man: 'En retournant à Clochegourde, le printemps, les premières feuilles, le parfum des fleurs, [..], tout me parlait un langage jusqu'alors incompris'.<sup>3</sup> Hence Félix remarks: 'Il est dans la nature des effets dont les significances sont sans bornes, [..]'.<sup>4</sup>

Félix is, therefore, merely exploiting one of the natural properties of plants when he uses them to communicate with Henriette. It is because flowers are the natural vehicle for the expression of messages that Félix can use them as a 'discours' to express his ideas to Henriette: 'Elle y revenait sans cesse, elle s'en nourrissait, elle y reprenait toutes les pensées que j'y avais mises'.<sup>5</sup> The bouquets are, therefore, a poem - and a poem may be sung as well as read: 'Henriette était l'oiseau chantant ses poèmes orientaux dans son bocage au bord du Gange'.<sup>6</sup> Even more explicitly, the bouquets are a symphony: 'Aucune déclaration, [..] n'eut de contagion plus violente que ces symphonies de fleurs, où mon désir trompé ne faisait déployer les efforts que Beethoven exprimait avec ses notes;'.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, 'un des plus puissants principes de cette harmonie voilée' is the 'flouve odorante', one of the effects of whose perfume is that 'vos pensées reverdissent

1: Y. p.295.

2: Cf. the Conclusion to Chapter 4.

3: Y. p.317.

4: Y. p.117.

5: Y. p.119. The bouquets are described as a 'discours' Y. p.122.

6: Y. p.214.

7: Y. p.119.

comme les touffes forestières'.<sup>1</sup> Just as the bouquet-'discours' conveys Félix's thoughts, so do the thoughts it prompts grow and bloom like plants: 'Voir une idée qui point dans le champ des abstractions [...]'.<sup>2</sup>

It can be seen from the above that sounds, plants and ideas are as tightly linked as light, plants and ideas. It is also notable that, once again, it is in Félix's descriptions of his bouquets that some of the most complete and at the same time condensed examples of the synesthesias are to be found.

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1: *Y.* p.119.

2: *La Peau de chagrin*, IX, p.91. The quotation also recalls the 'Penser, c'est voir!' theme.



(vi) Light and sound; light, sound and perfumes; the lily

Light and sound in le Lys dans la vallée are, as might be expected, most frequently juxtaposed, if not explicitly identified in synesthesia, in Félix's descriptions of Henriette's eyes and voice: 'elle éclaira les ténèbres par un regard, elle anima les mondes terrestres et divins par un seul mot.'<sup>1</sup> Although it would be tedious to list all such associations of light and sound, it is important to realise that their effectiveness is cumulative rather than individual: it is themes like light and sound which, by permeating Félix's narrative and reappearing even in apparently banal and innocent expressions, give his text and vision their unity and coherence.

The unity of sound and light is perhaps best illustrated by those expressions directly linking sight and hearing. Thus Félix speaks of 'le langage de ses yeux'<sup>2</sup> and remarks elsewhere: 'Ses yeux parlaient; mais sa bouche, [..], se serait fermée à un désir.'<sup>3</sup> It is, of course, natural in a novel of forbidden love that looks and glances should replace the explicit declaration. Reference to luminous voices is, however, less obviously dictated by plot than references to eloquent glances. Apart from the allusions to Henriette's 'voix d'or',<sup>4</sup> which is also 'cette lumière parlée',<sup>5</sup> Félix's own words are on one occasion 'des paroles ardentes'<sup>6</sup> and he cherishes 'les vertus talismaniques des paroles constellées en usage dans les évocations'.<sup>7</sup> It is not surprising, then, that it is to a star that he should make his first

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1: Y. p.83.

2: Y. p.71.

3: Y. p.203.

4: Cf. Y. p.37 and p.68.

5: Y. p.40.

6: Y. p.83. A cliché. Cf. however Y. p.23: 'Les cuivres ardents et les éclats bourboniens de la musique militaire' and Y. p.118: 'des mousses ardentes et sonores'.

7: Y. p.130. If the combination of light and sound has a magical power, it is because it enables Félix to abolish both time and space. Cf. above p.273.

confidences<sup>1</sup> nor that the angels presiding over Henriette's death should speak with the light of her soul.<sup>2</sup> This persistent linking of sight and hearing both in Félix and Henriette betrays not only the ultimate unity of the individual but a similar unity existing between him and a natural environment where similar links can be detected.<sup>3</sup>

Both sight and hearing are linked to a third sense, that of smell, in a number of references to light, sound and perfumes in the novel. If sound is both illuminated and perfumed - 'Dans mes rêves, sa voix devint je ne sais quoi de palpable, une atmosphère qui m'enveloppa de lumière et de parfums, une mélodie qui me caressa l'esprit'<sup>4</sup> - then light is perfumed and melodious: 'certaines femmes partagent ici-bas les privilèges des Esprits Angéliques, et répandent comme eux cette lumière que Saint-Martin, le Philosophe Inconnu, disait être intelligente, mélodieuse et parfumée.'<sup>5</sup> The idea that, as the mention of Saint-Martin would suggest, synesthesias evoke a semi-mystical, semi-religious cosmic unity, is supported by Félix's identification of light, sound and perfumes with Henriette's visible and palpable soul in his exalted letter to her.<sup>6</sup> The same synesthesias also contribute to the unity and harmony of the natural environment,<sup>7</sup> - a harmony elsewhere more closely identified with that of plants,<sup>8</sup> and, in the sining Henriette, with flowers: 'La faiblesse indifférente de cette voix, [..], la pâleur mate du son [..] exhalaient je ne sais quelle odeur de fleurs coupées sans retour.'<sup>9</sup> In the description of the

1: Y. p.8. Octave also talks to a star (Honorine, II, p.262).

2: Cf. Y. p.305.

3: Cf. the passage (Y. p.115): 'je pensai [..] ont le leur?'

4: Y. p.76. This quotation also illustrates the materialism/spiritualism analogy.

5: Y. p.214. For further reference to Saint-Martin in connection with this remark, see above p.57. The mention of 'lumière [..] intelligente' recalls the light-ideas theme discussed above.

6: Cf. Y. pp.144-145.

7: Cf. Y. pp.216-217.

8: Cf. Y. p.256: 'de même, les feuillages [..] la volonté.'

9: Y. p.236.

bouquets, both the mystical and floral unity associated with light-sound-perfume are themselves united:

'Que donne-t-on à Dieu? des parfums, de la lumière et des chants, les expressions les plus épurées de notre nature. Eh! bien, tout ce qu'on offre à Dieu n'était-il pas offert à l'amour dans ce poème de fleurs lumineuses qui bourdonnait incessamment ses mélodies au coeur, en y caressant des voluptés cachées, [...].' 1

Whether flowers are, through being associated with the synesthesias, identified with a similarly described mystic unity, or whether mystic unity, evoked through the synesthesias, is identified with similarly described flowers, the effect is the same: 'Félix's floral poem is the expression of cosmic unity and harmony.

It is because Henriette is, like the flower, identified with light, sound and perfumes - 'Aussitôt je sentis un parfum de femme qui brilla dans mon âme comme y brilla depuis la poésie orientale,<sup>2</sup> - that her attributes are epitomised in the lily. The two most obvious qualities for which the lily is noted are its whiteness and its perfume: 'Ô mon lys! [...] toujours blanc, fier, parfumé, solitaire!'<sup>3</sup> Just as the lily's brightness associates it with the light of eternity,<sup>4</sup> so does its perfume express its ubiquity and its immortality.<sup>5</sup> Less obvious, but equally important, is the affinity which may be argued between the lily and sound or the poem. One of the most celebrated literary appearances of the lily is, as has already been noted by Borel and Le Yaouanc in connection with le Lys,<sup>6</sup> in the Cantique des Cantiques, which is, of course, mentioned in the narrative.<sup>7</sup> The Cantique des

1: Y. p.122.

2: Y. p.25. The oral qualities of the poem, mentioned in the preceding section, are confirmed in the above description of the bouquets.

3: Y. p.192.

4: For the whiteness of the lily, see Y. pp. 115,152,262,266; for its eternity, cf. I. p.299.

5: For the perfume of the lily, see Y. pp. 29,192,322. Cf. also Chapter 1, p.36 esp. n.3.

6: Cf. J. Borel: 'Le Lys dans la vallée et les sources [...]', p.96 and Y. Intro. p. XL n.3.

7: Y. p.72.

Cantiques is, as part of the Bible, one of the 'poèmes Orientaux' which - according to Louis Lambert, are the Old and New Testaments.<sup>1</sup> Thus the lily may be seen to be linked not only to a poem-song, but a poem-song which is both oriental and mystical.<sup>2</sup> By its nature and its associations the lily, and through the lily, Henriette, may, then, be seen to bridge the previously mentioned mystic and floral unities, just as its equally Orientally evocative perfume bridges Heaven and Earth. The lily is, therefore, at the centre of the synesthesias linking Henriette, the flower, Nature and the cosmos. Thus, whatever the reasons for giving le Lys dans la vallée its title,<sup>3</sup> the lily can be seen to justify the importance and prestige with which it is endowed in the narrative.<sup>4</sup>

1: Louis Lambert, X, p.353 and cf. above Chapter 6, pp.328-329, and, for references to the lily in the Bible, Chapter 1, p.37 n.l.

2: Again it must be remembered that it is also a love-song.

3: The possible influence of the title of an English novel, The Lily of the Valley, mentioned by Arrigon in Balzac et la "Contessa" (Paris, 1932, p.52) and again by P.Citron in A.B. 1964, p.371, is examined by Le Yaouanc in his introduction (Y. p.XL n.3). Borel notes (op.cit. p.23) that the title of le Lys dans la vallée never changed throughout its creation. As the character of lady Dudley shows, the English and the Oriental are by no means incompatible for Balzac!

4: These remarks may explain why nearly all the flowers not in Felix's bouquets are of Oriental origin. From the acacia (eg Y. pp.34,66,113,256) to the camelia (Y. p.41), from the jasmin (Y. p.45 and p.121; cf. above p.349) to the magnolia (Y. p.298) and the 'verniss du Japon' (Y. p.34 etc.) the Orient seems to guide Felix's choice of flowers. (The acacias and 'verniss du Japon' may of course have been taken from Villeparisis). Even in one of Felix's bouquets it is the opium-giving poppy which predominates. His references to roses are also primarily Oriental in association (cf. Y. pp.114,120,176,215,243) - or Biblical (Y. p.292).

(vii) The bouquets

As both Borel and Le Yaouanc have pointed out, Félix de Vandenesse was not the first or the only literary hero to study the language of flowers.<sup>1</sup> If Saint-Preux composes bouquets for the two cousins, the young Indian in Saint-Pierre's Chaumière indienne leaves poppies, a tulip and a rose-bud 'avec ses épines, comme le symbole de  $\sqrt{s}$ /es espérances, mêlées de beaucoup de craintes' for the young widow with whom he has fallen in love.<sup>2</sup> Almost at the end of his narrative, Oberman also endows certain flowers with symbolic significance, emphasising their perfume and their colours: 'Les couleurs aussi doivent avoir leur éloquence: tout peut être symbole.'<sup>3</sup> Edouard, in the novel of that name, gathers jasmin for his beloved Madame de Nevers.<sup>4</sup> Although Amaury in Volupté never describes an actual bouquet, he refers to a number of flowers apart from the lily: lilac, acacias and jasmin.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, despite these affiliations, no literary bouquets seem to have been gathered and arranged with such care and such detail as those of Félix. As Le Yaouanc says of Balzac: 'Mais pour composer le message le plus ardent de Félix, véritable symphonie colorée du désir, il s'est livré, au moment de corriger les épreuves, à un travail d'invention très personnel et à une sérieuse enquête sur les graminées et la flore des champs.'<sup>6</sup> Thus if Félix is not the only literary

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- 1: Cf. J. Borel: 'Le Lys dans la vallée' et les sources  $\sqrt{\dots}$ , pp.106-107 and Y. intro. pp.LXXXVII-LXXXVIII. Cf. also the passages in Fourier cited in Chapter 1 and above p.390 n.4.
- 2: Bernadin de Saint-Pierre: La Chaumière indienne, Librairie des bibliophiles, 1875, pp.66-67.
- 3: Senancour: Oberman, Bibliothèque 10/18, pp.435-436. (Cf. Y. intro. p. LXXXVII n.3). This is the 2nd edition of 1833. Cf. also Les Réveries (1787) and the first edition of Oberman for the references to 'la jonquille'.
- 4: Cf. the Conclusion to Chapter 6.
- 5: For reference to lilac see Sainte-Beuve: Volupté, Vol. II, p.52; to acacias, Vol. II, p.54; to jasmin, which the children identify with their grandmother, Vol. II, p.78. Cf. also Y. intro. p.LXXXVII n.2.
- 6: Y. intro. p.LXXXVII. Le Yaouanc is of the opinion that Balzac consulted a true naturalist on this subject. (Y. intro. p.LXXXVIII). Cf. Mary Givens: Balzac and the 'roman personnel'  $\sqrt{\dots}$ , pp.275-278. Givens also points out that Mme d'Abrantès expressed her thoughts to Metternich through flowers and that Balzac himself sent an occasional flower, a camellia, a rose-petal, with his letters to Mme Hanska.



composer of bouquets, he can be regarded as the one who has elaborated their most complete and coherent literary expression. If stylistic criticism of le Lys has, moreover, tended to centre on Félix's bouquets, it is precisely because the luxuriant detail of the descriptions  
 5/ epitomise/for such critics the eminently Balzacian style - whether they find this luxuriance exaggerated and confused, like Faguet, or unique and exotic, like Taine.<sup>1</sup> The fame and the typically Balzacian character of Félix's bouquets is perhaps indicated by Proust who speaks of 'le sédum dont est fait le bouquet de dilection de la flore balzacienne.'<sup>2</sup>

Félix is, however, if the most famous, not the only Balzacian character to compose bouquets. For example, Gabrielle Beauvouloir who, like Henriette, lives 'au fond d'une grasse et plantureuse vallée',<sup>3</sup> and whose father appreciates 'l'amour exprimé par les entrelacements des plantes grimpantes',<sup>4</sup> composes bouquets for similar - if unconscious - motives to those of Félix: they express her as yet unwitting desire and readiness for love:

'Gabrielle se promenait dans le jardin où elle choisissait des fleurs pour garnir les vases de l'illustre potier [...]. Gabrielle avait mis ce vase, [...], sur une table, au milieu de la salle, et le remplissait de fleurs pour égayer sa grand'mère, et peut-être aussi pour donner une forme à ses propres pensées. [She shows them to her father.] Gabrielle voulut que le vaillard admirât le bouquet; mais après l'avoir regardé, Beauvouloir plongea sur sa fille un regard profond qui la fit rougir.

- Il est temps, se dit-il en comprenant le langage de ces fleurs dont chacune avait été sans doute étudiée et dans sa forme et dans sa couleur, tant chacune était bien mise à sa place, où elle produisait un effet magique dans le bouquet.'<sup>5</sup>

1: Cf. the Introduction to the thesis, p.xii.

2: A la recherche du temps perdu, Pléiade, Vol.I, p.126.

3: L'Enfant maudit, IX, p.718. Cf. Alain: Avec Balzac, pp.28-29.

4: L'Enfant maudit, IX, p.718.

5: Ibid. p.720.

If 'ces vivaces poésies avaient leur langage, plutôt entendu que compris de Gabrielle',<sup>1</sup> it is not surprising that they should have the same effect on her as the harmony of church singing accompanied by the organ.<sup>2</sup> There is, therefore, considerable similarity between Gabrielle's bouquet, 'où les couleurs sont nuancées comme sur une tapisserie, où le rouge mord le blanc, [...]',<sup>3</sup> and Félix's floral poem-symphony.

Somewhat similarly, Honorine, another delicate 'femme-fleur',<sup>4</sup> creates for herself

'comme un musée de fleurs et d'arbustes, où le soleil seul pénétrait, dont l'arrangement était dicté par un génie artiste [...]. Les masses de fleurs, étagées avec une science de fleuriste ou disposées en bouquets, produisaient des effets doux à l'âme. Ce jardin recueilli, solitaire, exhalait des baumes consolateurs et n'inspirait que de douces pensées, des images gracieuses, voluptueuses mêmes. On y reconnaissait cette ineffaçable signature que notre vrai caractère imprime en toutes choses [...].'<sup>5</sup>

1: L'Enfant maudit, IX, p.718.

2: Cf. ibid. p.723. Cf. above pp.370-371.

3: Ibid.

4: For analogies between Gabrielle and the flower, see L'Enfant maudit, IX, p. 715. Cf. Honorine, II, p.303. Other 'femmes-fleurs' in the Comédie humaine are Modeste Mignon (I, p.369) and Julie d'Aiglemont (La Femme de trente ans, II, p.708 and p.721). Cf. also the description of La Fosseuse in le Médecin de campagne, VIII, pp.409ff. In a remarkable article entitled 'Sur une image de Balzac' (A.B. 1973, pp.301-326) P. Larthomas shows how Balzac's use of such clichés as the 'fleur-femme' (p.323) and 'ange-femme' identifications are endowed with new meaning. In the case of la princesse de Cadignan, the identification 'ange-femme' occurs with sufficient frequency and insistency as to influence the course of the narrative, and mould other characters' and the reader's opinion of her. The image does, therefore, represent a vision rather than an analogy (p.324; cf. Chapter 1, pp.36-38). At the same time, Balzac can make considerable literary capital from the discrepancy between Diane's admirers' belief in this vision and the reader's relative detachment from it. The parallel between Félix's involvement in, and Natalie's - and the reader's - detachment from, the vision which is le Lys is, therefore, striking.

5: Honorine, II, p.286.

Honorine does, moreover, spend her days making her own artificial flowers, a pastime which can be seen as half-way between Félix's bouquets and Henriette's tapestry:

"Cet art, me disait-elle, est dans l'enfance. Si les Parisiennes avaient un peu du génie que l'esclavage du harem exige chez les femmes de l'Orient, elles donneraient tout un langage aux fleurs posées sur leur tête. [...] Combien de choses une femme ne pourrait-elle pas dire avec sa coiffure? N'y a-t-il pas des fleurs pour les bacchantes ivres, des fleurs pour les sombres et rigides dévotes, des fleurs soucieuses pour les femmes ennuyées? La botanique exprime, je crois, toutes les sensations et les pensées de l'âme, même les plus délicates!"<sup>1</sup>

If Véronique Graslin has less of the delicacy of the 'femme-fleur' which is Gabrielle and Honorine, she, too, leads '[une] vie obscure et pleine, semblable à ces endroits touffus, fleuris et ignorés' which Félix admires while gathering his bouquets.<sup>2</sup> Thus Véronique writes to Grossetête:

"Les fleurs que vous m'avez envoyées pour le bal étaient charmantes, mais elles m'ont suggéré de cruelles réflexions. Ces jolies créatures cueillies par vous et destinées à nourrir sur mon sein et dans mes cheveux en ornant une fête, m'ont fait songer à celles qui naissent et qui meurent dans vos bois sans avoir été vues, et dont les parfums n'ont été respirés par personne."<sup>3</sup>

Véronique does, moreover, after reading Paul et Virginie,<sup>4</sup> appreciate the symbolic qualities of the flower: 'La petite vierge enfouie dans la belle fille trouve le lendemain ses fleurs plus belles qu'elles ne l'étaient la veille, elle entendit leur langage symbolique, [...].'<sup>5</sup>

It can be seen from the above that the theme of bouquets and that of the language of flowers is, if not a common, at least a persistent

1: Honorine, II, p.290.

2: Y. p.223.

3: Le Curé de village, VIII, p.566. For other similar references, see above p.133, p.174, p.280, p.286, p.299 and below p.405 n.3.

4: Although plants, trees, fruit and seeds do, of course, figure in Paul et Virginie, there is no reference to bouquets. J. Borel ('Le Lys dans la vallée' et les sources [...], p.106) finds that Balzac's 'technique du paysage sentimental' owes very little to this novel.

5: Le Curé de village, VIII, p.549.

one in the Comédie humaine. Other references to flowers and plants and other flower and plant images are particularly common in such novels as Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées, Modeste Mignon, and Béatrix. The above examples do, however, suffice to show that the flowers and bouquets of le Lys dans la vallée are but one example of a vast complex of related images and themes pervading Balzac's works.

It is evident from the above sections on the correspondances that Félix's bouquets form a focal point in the network of synesthesias in the narrative. In other words, the bouquets form one of 'ces noeuds et [...] ces carrefours où la texture se concentre ou se déploie.'<sup>1</sup> Hence, for example, light and water are united in

'une source de fleurs sortant des deux vases par un bouillonnement, retombant en vagues frangées, et du sein de laquelle s'élançaient mes vœux en roses blanches, en lys à la coupe d'argent.'<sup>2</sup>

Fire asserts its hitherto discreet presence in the poppy and the penetrating power of perfume does, as has been seen, unite these disparate and rival elements in poetic harmony.<sup>3</sup>

However, not only light, sound, water and fire are united in the bouquets, but also movement and form. The flowers are also, like the arrow for example, mobile form or materialised movement:

'Au-dessus, voyez les fibrilles déliées, fleuries, sans cesse agitées de l'amourette purpurine qui verse à flots ses anthères presque jaunes; les pyramides neigeuses du paturin des champs et des eaux, les verte chevelure des bromes stériles, les panaches effilés de ces agrostis nommés les épis du vent;'.<sup>4</sup>

1: Cf. above p.45(n.5).

2: Y. p.115.

3: Cf. above pp.365-369. It is, however, interesting to note that fire plays a relatively minor role in the correspondances.

4: Y. p.120.

The bouquets do, therefore, unite all the themes treated in preceding chapters: journeys, substances and forms, water, air and fire.

It can, moreover, be said that the links already noted in the first four sections of this Chapter between plants and substances, water, light and fire, are reflected not only in the synesthesias associated with the bouquets, but themselves reflect the actual nature of the flower, needing and resuming, like the grape, soil, water, light and heat.<sup>1</sup> The synesthesias associated with the bouquets are, therefore, not mere verbal extravaganza, nor do they indicate an excursion into hallucination or the world of the supernatural as often, for example, in Hoffmann. The imagery reflects the familiar needs of the familiar plant in a familiar world.

One of the attributes of the familiar plant is not only that it grows in familiar earth but that, however fragile and ethereal in appearance, it is still a physical object. For Balzac, for whom 'il s'agit de forcer la réalité à découvrir l'idée qu'elle contient',<sup>2</sup> the physical object is the most obvious yet the most telling manifestation of the hieroglyph:

'Pourquoi la toilette serait-elle donc toujours le plus éloquent des styles, si elle n'était pas réellement tout l'homme, l'homme avec ses opinions politiques, l'homme avec avec le texte de son existence, l'homme hiéroglyphié?'<sup>3</sup>

As Roger Kempf remarks: 'Dans le système de Balzac, l'imprimé désigne aussi bien les corps que les livres. Ainsi le tailleur fait-il oeuvre de typographe qui met en valeur le texte corporel.'<sup>4</sup> It is, as a result, perhaps less surprising that, according to Félix, the physical objects

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1: Cf. the Introduction to this Chapter.

2: P. Laubriet: L'Intelligence de l'art [...], p.296.

3: Traité de la vie élégante, O.D. II, p.180; cf. above p.372 esp.n.4,n.7.

4: R. Kempf: Sur le corps romanesque, p.7.



which are his flowers are also a text, a poem. As Kempf again remarks: 'De cette copulation du corps avec le livre naît le corps du livre, le corps romanesque.'<sup>1</sup> Or as Borel puts it: 'Il n'y a pas de vision qui soit faite de rien, pas de rêve qui n'emprunte à la réalité, d'intuition qui sorte du vide.'<sup>2</sup> It is, of course, equally true that there is no art without form and this Félix finds in his flowers.

It is, however, not only the ability of the bouquets to materialise ideas, nor indeed only the unity in variety of the synesthesias, which makes them the emblem of unity. The bouquets also, as has been seen, combine both internal and external movement - 'toutes s'avancent prosternées'<sup>3</sup> - a characteristic epitomised in the fibrous coils of the intertwined plants. They also offer a combination of masculines and feminines: 'Les ornements masculins viennent aux fleurs féminines et réciproquement.'<sup>4</sup> They do, in addition, express both sexual purity and flagrant eroticism, just as the bouquets may be either exhilarating or debilitating or indeed both: hence Henriette's 'lassitude énervante'.<sup>5</sup> Just so is the flower either a positive force - as in Henriette the lily growing steadily towards Heaven - or a temptation to descend, a threat.<sup>6</sup> The flower is, therefore, like the 'abîme' itself both stimulating and dangerous, a symbol of achievement or a 'fleur du mal', both a 'palme promise' and 'cette ortie'.<sup>7</sup>

It follows that, as was indicated by Honorine, the flower is itself a symbol of unity, a microcosm.<sup>8</sup> Hence Nykrog refers to the 'Urpflanze'

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1: R. Kempf: Sur le corps romanesque, p.7. For other recent and interesting studies of the physical appearance of Balzac's characters, see B. Vannier: L'Inscription du corps. Pour une sémiotique du portrait balzacien. Klincksieck, 1972; T. Yücel: Figures et messages dans 'la Comédie humaine', Mame, 1972.

2: J. Borel: 'Séraphita' et le mysticisme balzacien, p.209.

3: Y. p.120. Cf. above p.114.

4: G. Bachelard: La Poétique de la rêverie, p.37.

5: Y. pp.122-123. Cf. Chapter 2, pp.114ff.

6: Cf. Y. p.274, quoted above p.356.

7: Cf. Y. pp.12,90. For other references to the 'abîme' in this thesis, see above p.94, 156, 356.

8: Cf. above p.401(n.1) and l'Enfant maudit, IX, pp.693-694.

theme in the projected Monographie de la vertu, of which Balzac writes: 'son titre indique assez son importance, en montrant la vertu assimilée à une plante qui compte beaucoup d'espèces, et soumise aux formules botaniques de Linné.'<sup>1</sup> As Nykrog comments: 'Ce programme est peut-être un des meilleurs exemples de l'analogie entre biologie et phénomènes de Pensée.'<sup>2</sup> Just as there is only one animal, so is there only one plant.

The ultimate unity of the plant does, moreover, relate to the ultimate unity of the natural environment. Whereas the flowers in, for example, la Chaumière indienne, are explicitly abstract symbols, those of Félix neither resemble the predominantly Oriental flowers described elsewhere in his narrative, nor, even, are they evidence of Henriette the cultivator. They are solely and explicitly part of the natural and indigenous flora of Touraine. They are, therefore, primarily grasses, and wild, not cultivated flowers.<sup>3</sup> If Balzac chooses a Touraine theosopher to colour Henriette's mysticism, he chooses Touraine flowers to compose Félix's bouquets. In this way, the unity and harmony of the characters, the natural environment, and the cosmos is maintained.

This also enables the composition of Félix's bouquets to be described in full - and meaningful - detail. The scenes which Félix admires during his search for flowers are themselves evidence of the unity of which his flowers are a representative part. This unity of

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1: In the preface to the Physiologie du mariage, XI, pp.161-162; quoted by P. Nykrog: La Pensée de Balzac, p.133. For further information on the Swedish naturalist (1707-1778), see Nykrog: ibid.

2: P. Nykrog: op.cit. p.133.

3: A further claim of the lily to universality is that it not only has Oriental associations but grows unassumingly in the Indre valley: 'toute la campagne disait adieu au plus beau lys de la vallée, à sa vie simple et champêtre.' (Y. p.306). Thus in this way, too, the lily bridges natural and mystical worlds.

nature is further emphasised by the repetition of 'Soit [...]'] introducing the scenes described: each scene is an alternative representation of ultimate unity.<sup>1</sup> These scenes are also noted for their distance from Clochegourde and their relative inaccessibility.<sup>2</sup> This not only relates to the theme of mystery and inaccessibility already noted in Le Lys but also to the theme of the effort required to create a work of art:

'Deux fois par semaine, pendant le reste de mon séjour, je recommençai le long travail de cette oeuvre poétique à l'accomplissement de laquelle étaient nécessaires toutes les variétés des graminées desquelles je fis une étude approfondie, moins en botaniste qu'en poète.'<sup>3</sup>

These words inevitably recall 'le travail que nécessitent les idées pour être exprimées'<sup>4</sup> required by the creation of the narrative itself. For just as Félix's effort first of careful selection then of careful arrangement produces the artistic unity of the floral poem, so does a similar process of selection and arrangement govern the creation of the greater unity which is the whole narrative. The poem within the poem which is the bouquets does, therefore, illustrate aspects of the process of artistic creation and at the same time show to what extent Balzac has endowed Félix with the qualities of a self-conscious - and autonomous - artist: the creation is, like the creator, in the process of creation.<sup>5</sup> It is, moreover, particularly appropriate that the creation's creation should assume the form of bouquets, since those will, in turn, with their flamboyant fertility, burgeon into new life.

1: For some of these 'Soit [...]'] passages, see above pp.371, 382-383.

2: Cf. Y. p.223 (quoted above p.401) and Y. p.117: 'Pour trouver une fleur là où elle venait, j'allais souvent à d'énormes distances, [...]']'. Since Félix covers some twenty odd kilometers from Tours to Clochegourde on his first walk, the distance he covered for flowers may be considerable.

3: Y. p.117. The reference to 'cette oeuvre poétique' could not be more explicit.

4: Y. p.4. Cf. above p.33(n.3).

5: Cf. Chapter 1, p.12 n.3, Chapter 6, p.324 and below pp.418-423. This is an important point since it shows that the work of art is 'un monde ouvert' as well as 'un monde clos'. Here, as elsewhere, resistance was, perhaps, in danger of stifling movement. The thematic critic's emphasis on unity and coherence need not, therefore, completely eliminate all possibility of dynamism and change. Cf. however Chapter 1p.46 n.1 and the articles entitled 'Force et signification' and 'La Structure, le signe et le jeu' in J. Derrida's l'Écriture et la différence, Seuil, 1967.

(viii) Unity in variety and conclusion

Although the themes of unity in variety and unity in duality find their most complete and concentrated expression in the bouquets, these are not, of course, their only manifestation in le Lys dans la vallée. The themes examined in previous chapters express the same unity, whether the unity in duality of internal and external journeys, accessible and inaccessible substances and forms, and deep or effervescent liquids, or the unity in eternity of light, sound and fire.

The unity in duality of these themes may also be seen from another angle: each may be either sexually aggressive or sexually acquiescent, erotic or pure. Hence the obvious sexual connotations of internal and external journeys, of pointed and mobile or open but walled substances and forms, of deep and penetrable or explosive liquids. Light and fire, while often expressing sexual opposites, are also inextricably linked, demonstrating the ultimate unity of the different forms. Perfumes, too, may be both 'chaste et sauvage'.<sup>1</sup> Between the extremes of the poppy and the lily, plants offer a whole spectrum of sexual nuances.

To the duality of these themes does, of course, correspond the duality of man himself, both body and soul. The unity of these is shown by the fact that if the body has a soul, then the soul has a body. Thus Félix can speak of 'une convalescence d'âme',<sup>2</sup> of 'des âmes affectées par la même maladie'<sup>3</sup> and, exploiting perhaps the metonymic use of 'âme', of 'des âmes souffrantes et malades'.<sup>4</sup> Hence Henriette's soul is on occasion 'visible et palpable'.<sup>5</sup> The soul, too, is sexualised: 'J'osais lui dire qu'à mon âge, si les sens étaient tout âme, l'âme aussi avait un sexe;'.<sup>6</sup>

1: Y. p.42.

2: Y. p.63. Cf. the association of the soul with the different elements in Chapter 2, pp.74-75.

3: Y. p.72.

4: Y. p.329.

5: Y. p.145. Cf. Y. p.305 and p.322.

6: Y. p.114. Cf. of course the theme of unity in duality above p.375.

These themes are in their turn closely associated to the unity already noted of spiritual and material phenomena. As Félix writes to Natalie:

'Vous comprenez déjà le problème. L'homme est composé de matière et d'esprit; l'animalité vient aboutir en lui, et l'ange commence à lui. De là cette lutte que nous éprouvons tous entre une destinée future que nous pressentons et les souvenirs de nos instincts antérieurs dont nous ne sommes pas entièrement détachés: un amour charnel et un amour divin.' 1

Although this body-soul conflict is one of the most obvious themes in Le Lys, less obvious perhaps are the number and coherence of its manifestations. If Henriette's moral and physical well-being is destroyed in her vain attempt to make her 'soul' dominate her body, then Mortsauf, whose prime malady seemed a physical one, syphilis, also suffers from a moral illness which is described in physical terms.<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to say, therefore, of Mortsauf as of Henriette, whether the physical or the moral illness predominates:

'et peut-être aujourd'hui le manque d'occupations mettait-il sa maladie aux prises avec elle-même; ne s'exerçant plus au dehors, elle se produisait par des idées fixes, le moi moral s'était emparé du moi physique.' 3

The children not only inherit their father's physical debility but the parental tendency to let soul devour body, to let moral destroy physical being. Thus Madeleine reminds Félix of 'les enfants chez lesquels le corps succombe sous les étreintes de l'âme'<sup>4</sup> and of Jacques he remarks: 'C'était l'intelligence, l'âme, le coeur d'Henriette dévorant de leur flamme rapide un corps sans consistance;'.<sup>5</sup> Heredity is an illustration

1: Y. p.232. A common theme in Balzac.

2: Cf. Y. p.79.

3: Y. p.194. Cf. Chapter 6, p.310 n.2 etc.

4: Y. p.106. The theme of 'âme' killing 'corps' is not uncommon in the Comédie humaine, and is not necessarily in a sexual context. Cf. l'Enfant maudit, IX, pp.702, 713, 717, 718. Of La Fosseuse Balzac remarks: 'Chez elle, l'âme tue le corps.' (VIII, p.409). Cf. also La Bourse, I, p.345. Nor is the theme peculiar to Balzac: Nodier, for example, wrote at length on the subject. Cf. also Lélia, Sténio, and Chatterton.

5: Y. p.243.



of unity.<sup>1</sup> Such is the contagiousness of this disease that Félix fears infection:

'Privé de la nourriture qui le doit alimenter, le coeur se dévore lui-même, et sent un épuisement qui n'est pas la mort, mais qui la précède. La nature ne peut pas être longtemps trompé; au moindre accident, elle se réveille avec une énergie qui ressemble à la folie.' 2

The victory of 'âme' over 'corps' in the Mortsauf family is, of course, balanced by the reverse tendency in lady Dudley, who lives in a luxury where 'l'âme expire sous la jouissance',<sup>3</sup> and, during their liaison, in Félix himself: 'ce lien est l'anneau du forçat, il laisse dans l'âme une ineffaçable empreinte'.<sup>4</sup> It follows from the above that aspects of le Lys which have hitherto been considered primarily for their moral, religious <sup>or</sup> medical - implications, can in addition be seen to contribute to the unity and harmony of Félix's narrative.

The same unity and harmony may, moreover, be conveyed by the characters of Henriette de Mortsauf and lady Dudley who not only form a symmetrical opposition but also, as Henriette herself suggests, offer 'climactic' variations of the same principle: 'Sans doute, les sentiments, qui tiennent à la loi générale par la masse, ne contrastent que dans l'expression seulement.'<sup>5</sup> Thus, as if aware of their incompleteness without the other, sexual and pure loves try to assume the characteristics of their opposite and, in doing so, become more

1: It would be logical, too, that Henriette should also suffer from syphilis - since that illness seems to have been communicated to the children. In any case, she must have been infected by Mortsauf. This could provide an excellent but hidden reason for her to refuse herself to Félix. J. Borel, however, remarks: 'Cette hérédité, conçue comme une sorte de principe qui atteignait les enfants sans la contagion de la mère, fut, on le sait, une grande erreur médicale qui se prolongea jusqu'au premier tiers du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle;'. (Médecine et psychiatrie balzaciennes, p.143). Whatever the reasons for Balzac apparently excluding Henriette from this disease, it obviously suits the consistency of her character. For other references to illnesses in this thesis, see above p.xiv n.2, p.86 n.4, p.138(n.2), p.262.

2: Y. p.249. It is not impossible that sexual frustration exacerbates Mortsauf's condition. Cf. his outburst Y. p.141 ('Elle est vierge à mes dépens') and Y. p.199.

3: Y. p.231.

4: Y. p.234.

5: Y. p.266. Cf. above p.378 n.1.

alike. Thus, if Félix's sensual love proceeds by an imitation of Arabelle's 'divinisation de la matière',<sup>1</sup> one of the summits of his intimacy with Henriette is when he perceives her soul as 'visible et palpable'.<sup>2</sup> This similarity is epitomised in the association of the bouquets with both types of love. They render one love more tangible, the other more conceptual, and in doing so idealise or poeticise both. Thus Félix remarks of lady Dudley's love:

'C'était des folies comparables aux fantaisies les plus exorbitantes de nos rêves; tantôt des créations semblables à celles de mes bouquets: [...] tantôt les gradations les plus savantes de la musique appliquées au concert de nos voluptés; [...] enfin, les plus caressants discours ornés des plus riantes idées, tout ce que l'esprit peut ajouter de poésie aux plaisirs des sens.' 3

In endowing one love with 'forme' and the other with 'fond' the bouquets endow each with what it lacks to become a work of art. Hence, just as Henriette's presence has the brilliance of 'la poésie orientale',<sup>4</sup> sensual pleasure reveals 'la poésie des sens'.<sup>5</sup> Just as Félix savours with lady Dudley 'les voluptés que je rêvais sans les connaître, que j'avais exprimées dans mes selam',<sup>6</sup> so does he savour with Henriette 'cette rêverie de nos bouquets embaumés, des romans de nos désirs'.<sup>7</sup> As Balzac writes in la Peau de chagrin: 'la débauche est sans doute au corps ce que sont à l'âme les plaisirs mystiques'.<sup>8</sup> Henriette and lady Dudley are indeed sisters,<sup>9</sup> sisters whose dual loves are both expressed

1: Y. p.231. Cf. Y. p.235: 'Souvent lorsque [...] vol sublime.'

2: Y. p.145.

3: Y. p.272. The ultimate unity of the two kinds of poetry is also suggested Y. p.203 where 'le voluptueux balancement d'une barque' combines with 'les pensées qui flottent dans l'âme' to form 'l'engourdissement influence de cette double poésie.'

4: Y. p.25. This has already been examined in Chapter 6, pp.328-329.

5: Y. p.234. Cf. Chapter 5, p.301.

6: Y. p.235. Cf. the relevant note to 'selam'.

7: Y. p.250.

8: IX, p.151. Cf. above p.375 n.2.

9: Cf. Y. p.248. Cf. Lélia and Pulchérie, and above p.27.

in the unity of the floral poem within the greater poem which is Félix's narrative.

Just as Henriette and lady Dudley are both different and yet similar so is Henriette herself both two and one: 'Blanche et Henriette, ces deux sublimes faces de la même femme'.<sup>1</sup> It is, moreover, appropriate that Henriette, '[qui] se ressemblait toujours à elle-même',<sup>2</sup> should see consistency of character as the prime virtue; she who spends her life trying to reconcile the conflicts of her own divided allegiances tries to ensure that there is no such conflict between inner thoughts and outer appearances in Félix:

'Mais, et je veux que vous soyez ainsi, Félix, la vraie politesse implique une pensée chrétienne; elle est comme la fleur de la charité, et consiste à s'oublier réellement. En souvenir d'Henriette, ne soyez donc pas une fontaine sans eau, ayez l'esprit et la forme!' 3

Thus, form is once again seen to be the materialisation of ideas and once again the union of the two is epitomised in the flower. It is, therefore, indeed fitting that this consistency of character should constitute 'une poésie physique'.<sup>4</sup>

Henriette's emphasis on consistency and harmony of character is, moreover, reflected in and reinforced by her concept of society. By her emphasis on 'noblesse oblige' and on reciprocated debts - 'vous vous devez les uns aux autres sous mille formes diverses',<sup>5</sup> - she shows society to depend on the harmonious integration of individuals into an equilibrium of counterbalancing forces. This principle of unity in

1: Y. p.305. Cf. Henriette's own remark: 'Moi! reprit-elle, de quel moi parlez-vous? Je sens bien des moi en moi! Ces deux enfants, [..], sont des moi.' (Y. p.219).

2: Y. p.283.

3: Y. p.160.

4: Y. p.159.

5: Y. p.158. Cf. the concept of love in the novel, illustrated by Félix's remark: 'tous les sentiments doux reposent sur l'égalité des âmes.' (Y. p.170). Cf. also Y. p.314.

reciprocity is, significantly, also associated with the unity of the plant:

'Quelque simple que puisse vous paraître ce principe, il est difficile en ses applications; il est comme une sève qui doit s'infiltrer dans les moindres tuyaux capillaires pour vivifier l'arbre, lui conserver sa verdure, développer ses fleurs, et bonifier ses fruits si magnifiquement qu'il excite une admiration générale.' 1

This admiration is, of course, appropriate enough for the 'chef-d'oeuvre', for the work of art to which the principle is also compared: 'autrefois, la Noblesse comme l'Art avait ses apprentis'.<sup>2</sup> Thus, by adapting her letter to what she terms Félix's 'esprit poétique'<sup>3</sup> Henriette not only gives additional internal confirmation of Félix's poetic vocation but helps confirm him in that vocation. This is in turn confirmed by Félix himself when he says of Clochegourde: 'La plupart de mes idées, et même les plus audacieuses en science ou en politique, sont nées là, comme les parfums émanent des fleurs;'.<sup>4</sup> The perhaps unexpected presence of 'même' suggests that the influence of 'la femme qui devait aiguillonner sans cesse /s/es ambitieux désirs'<sup>5</sup> extends to the poetry with which she is immediately associated.<sup>6</sup>

Since plants and flowers are consistently associated with unity and harmony, it is fitting that they should also bridge animate and inanimate worlds. For if the woman is a flower, then the flower is a woman. Thus Félix sees in the 'sédum des vignes' '[la] vague image des formes souhaitées, roulées comme celles d'une esclave soumise.'<sup>7</sup> The association of animate and inanimate worlds is, of course, also

1: Y. p.157.

2: Y. p.162. For Henriette's reference to the 'chef d'oeuvre', see above p.357.

3: Y. p.161.

4: Y. p.44.

5: Y. p.24. Cf. p.122(n.3).

6: Cf. Y. p.25.

7: Y. p.120. Cf. (Ibid) '[leg] lames luisantes et rayées comme une robe à filets blancs et verts' of the 'flouve'. The 'femme-fleur' theme has been mentioned above p.400.

reflected in the multitude of correspondances between man and nature: 'La nature était le manteau sous lequel s'abritaient ses pensées.'<sup>1</sup> The description of Félix's first departure from Clochegourde provides a typical and obvious but nevertheless striking example of the use of the 'paysage état d'âme' in le Lys: 'Toujours en harmonie avec mes pensées, la vallée où se mouraient les rayons jaunes d'un soleil tiède, me présentait encore une vivante image de mon âme.'<sup>2</sup> If, as Borel shows, Balzac's contribution to 'la grande question du paysage en littérature' is by no means original, its consistency with the materialism-spiritualism and unity in variety themes again demonstrates, as Borel also shows, the unity and harmony of Félix's narrative.<sup>3</sup>

Equally unoriginal but equally consistent are the evocations of the weather and the seasons: 'Si vous voulez voir la nature belle et vierge comme une fiancée, allez là par un jour de printemps; si vous voulez calmer les plaies saignantes de votre coeur, revenez-y par les derniers jours de l'automne;'.<sup>4</sup> It is notable that, as the examination of for example Spring and sunsets has shown, extremes of temperature and climate are unfavoured in le Lys: 'Le Groënlandais mourrait en Italie!';<sup>5</sup> 'le bengali transporté dans la froide Europe' also languishes away.<sup>6</sup> Extremes of heat are avoided because they exacerbate tempers<sup>7</sup> or

1: Y. p.180.

2: Y. p.154. In one of the most interesting chapters of his book 'Le Lys dans la vallée' et les sources de la création balzacienne, entitled Un paysage idéalisé (pp.83-121), J. Borel places the theme of the 'paysage état d'âme' in its historical context and examines its role and character in the novel. Cf. also Chapter 1, p.69.

3: Cf. the Historique du procès, Y. p.347, quoted by Le Yaouanc in his introduction (Y. p.LXXXIII) and by Borel (op.cit. p.85). Le Yaouanc also notes (Y. p.445) that Balzac emphasises the harmony between man and the landscape in successive versions of the novel.

4: Y. p.30. Cf. Y. p.315: 'Nous partons /.../ cendres', and p.326. If Balzac's evocations of autumn in le Lys are conventional enough (Cf. Borel: op.cit. p.91) they not only suit the elegiac mood of a man reflecting on his past, but also the mood and themes of the whole Scènes de la vie de campagne: cf. the Avant-Propos to the Comédie humaine (I, pp.14-15) and the Introduction by Félix Davin to the Etudes de moeurs au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, XI, pp.226-227. For other references to seasons and climates in the thesis, see p.378 n.1.

5: Y. p.146.

6: Y. p.214.

7: Cf. the references to Mortsau Y. p.81 and p.113.



passions.<sup>1</sup> Hence the climax of the summer for Félix and Henriette is the September wine-harvest when 'le soleil, moins chaud que durant la moisson, permet de demeurer aux champs sans avoir à craindre ni le hâle ni la fatigue.'<sup>2</sup> Extremes of cold are similarly avoided as they intensify hostility,<sup>3</sup> or stultify energy.<sup>4</sup> Félix's distaste for both extremes is reflected in 'des haines latentes qui glacent lentement le coeur et sèchent les larmes au jour des adieux éternels.'<sup>5</sup> Such extremes are too dissimilar for their ultimate unity to be detected: 'elle se ressemblait toujours à elle-même; elle ne scindait pas son âme en deux atmosphères, l'une ardente et l'autre glacée;'.<sup>6</sup> Hence Henriette and Félix prefer the intermediary seasons of spring and autumn whose subdued or awakening tones blend opposites through either anticipation or regret and thereby offer a harmonisation of the whole.<sup>7</sup>

Despite Félix's predilection for seasons expressing potentiality or decline, summer is by no means completely eschewed in the narrative and he does, for example, spend the summer of 1814 at Clochegourde, leaving as has been seen in the autumn.<sup>8</sup> Each of his subsequent journeys to Clochegourde would also seem to take place in spring or summer, except

1: Cf. above p.336.

2: Y. p.124. Cf. the reference to 'la plus belle nuit du mois d'août finissant' (Y. pp.79-80).

3: Cf. Y. p.71 ('Quelle anxiété [̄...̄] front neigeux!')

4: Cf. above p.163.

5: Y. p. 108.

6: Y. p.283.

7: Cf. G. David: 'L'idée de bonheur dans la "Comédie humaine"', A.B. 1966, p.340: 'En affirmant qu'il n'y a que le dernier amour d'une femme qui satisfasse le premier amour d'un homme, Balzac est revenu souvent sur les attraits que présente l'amour d'un homme jeune avec une femme qui l'est moins et que l'on a coutume d'appeler d'une manière symbolique et générique la femme de trente ans. Cette heureuse alliance des deux plus belles saisons de la nature et de la vie, le printemps et l'automne, peut seule offrir à qui par chance la savoure le charme incomparable de la passion unique et authentique.' Cf. also the analysis of sunsets in Chapter 6.

8: Cf. Y. p.154.

for his predictably autumnal fifth and last visit to Clochegourde 'par une humide matinée d'octobre'.<sup>1</sup> Whatever the imprecision of Félix's temporal and seasonal indications,<sup>2</sup> what is certain is that Félix is never at Clochegourde during the winter. He arrives when it is over: 'Comme notre vallée d'amour, Henriette avait eu son hiver, elle renaissait comme elle au printemps.'<sup>3</sup> On the few occasions winter is mentioned, it is seen as a period of inertia, if not of stagnation.<sup>4</sup> Although this almost total omission may be quite unrealistic, it contributes to the unity of the emotional and visual tone of the novel.

This tripartite division of the year can, perhaps, be seen to be paralleled in the tripartite division of the novel into three sections,<sup>5</sup> and also into a letter-narrative with letters at the opening, centre, and conclusion.<sup>6</sup> It is also not implausible to see Félix's narrative as a five-movement symphony in which each movement is opened by a visit to Clochegourde - an analogy which is all the more tempting since the bouquets are a symphonic poem.<sup>7</sup>

The parallels, symmetries and harmonies which can be seen to pervade le Lys dans la vallée not only reflect the theme of unity in the Comédie humaine but have their own internal justification in the protagonists' mystical leanings. These are seen to originate in Félix's virtual exclusion from family life and refuge in communings with nature.

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1: Y. p.291. It is, however, not too late for the wine-harvest. (Y. p.295).

2: Cf. Chapter 1, p.17.

3: Y. p.175.

4: Cf. Y. pp.49,83. That this is by no means necessarily the case in Balzac is, of course, shown by the descriptions of Norway in Séraphita.

5: In the Verdier edition (cf. Y. p.433).

6: Cf. above

7: In Balzac's day, however, symphonies had only 4 movements - except Berlioz's Symphonie fantastique ('La Vie et la mort de l'artiste') of 1830. Although the 1843 edition of Ferragus is dedicated to Berlioz, the composer receives but a passing mention in the Comédie humaine (IV, p. 91) and the Symphonie fantastique, surprisingly, no mention at all (cf. P. Laubriet: L'Intelligence /.../, p.421, n.395). Balzac's Correspondence is equally unhelpful here.

He later throws himself into 'les mystérieuses profondeurs de la prière' and links this awakening mystical fervour to the already anticipatory 'intelligence sentimentale' with which he used to admire his star: 'A cinq ans je m'envolais dans une étoile, à douze ans j'allais frapper aux portes du Sanctuaire.'<sup>1</sup> In thus uniting external vision - of the star - and internal vision - of 'l'esprit intime des choses'<sup>2</sup> - Félix has made a first and most important step towards writing a narrative in which external reality merges with the subjective vision. It is for this reason that Félix the child-mystic is also the child-poet with his ready-made text: 'elles [les visions] ont écrit dans ma tête un livre où j'ai pu lire ce que je devais exprimer, [..].'<sup>3</sup> By endowing the twelve year-old Félix with the sensitivity of a poet, the psychological motivation for writing poetry - as a compensation for his childhood suffering - and the experiences which awaken and crystallize the poetic vision, Balzac has contributed not a little to his character's creative autonomy.<sup>4</sup>

It is, therefore, singularly appropriate that this very star should be identified with the object of his mystical adoration and the subject of his artistic effort: Henriette de Mortsauf.<sup>5</sup> The fact that the two experiences are linked shows that what they have in common is that they are both potential objects of poetic mysticism or of

1: Y. p.12. Félix's religious fervour coincides with his first communion. As Borel notes: 'La première communion est un moment particulièrement fécond pour l'éclosion d'un mysticisme plus ou moins durable; toute la spontanéité, la sensibilité de l'enfant passe dans son jeune sentiment religieux, [..].' ('Séraphita' et le mysticisme balzacien, p.105. Cf. ibid. p.20).

2: Y. p.12.

3: Y. pp.12-13.

4: For other references in this thesis to Félix the poet-artist, see above p.21 n.1, p.27 n.5, p.63, p.72 n.5, p.89 n.3, p.102 n.4, p.145 and n.2, p.154, p.170 and n.6, p.202, p.281 and n.1, p.286 and n.9, p.320 and n.2, p.341 n.2. For other references to the theme of the vision of "spécialité", see above p.60 n.2, p.99 n.3, p.101 n.4; p.146 n.4, p.383 and n.2.

5: A fashionable theme of the period: cf. Chapter 1, p.69 and also Chapter 4, p.202.

mystical poetry. However, even more important, the link itself - 'Tombée des steppes bleus [...] ma chère étoile s'était donc faite femme [...].'<sup>1</sup> - is itself an example of that poetic mysticism or mystical poetry. The coherence - and the genius - of le Lys dans la vallée is that, here as elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> it is the unavowed illustration of its avowed intention. It is, as it were, the subject of its own discourse.

As a result, it does not come as a surprise that one of Félix's most complete and concentrated uses of nature imagery and synesthesias is characterised as 'le langage mystique auquel notre éducation religieuse nous avait habitués.'<sup>3</sup> The language which Félix uses seems to be attributed to the influence of childhood experience the significance of which itself derives from description by that language.

The above remarks do, moreover, affect an attitude towards the vocabulary of erotic mysticism in le Lys, of which Ernest Seillière notes:

'On a rarement exprimé avec plus de fougue les convictions du platonisme érotique devenu le mysticisme passionnel, à travers l'évolution romanesque et romantique. Peut-être même Balzac a-t-il voulu caricaturer ici, jusqu'à un certain point, les héroïnes des premiers romans de Sand; mais, à cette date, ses lectrices ne sentaient nullement l'ironie en de tels accents.' 4

This 'mysticisme passionnel', which belongs to a tradition older than the earliest troubadours, Seillière defines as

'cette tendance, commune à la plupart des disciples de Rousseau qui les conduit à considérer et à présenter, plus ou moins ouvertement, la passion - qu'elle soit d'ailleurs ou ne soit pas conforme aux disciplines sociales, - comme la voix d'un Dieu allié dans le cœur de l'homme, et, par suite, comme une sorte d'impératif catégorique du sentiment, auquel on ne saurait refuser d'obéir.' 5

1: Y. p.26. Hence, of course, the poet-'mage' theme in le Lys.

Cf. Chapter 5, pp.239-241. Cf. also Lélia again.

2: Cf. above p.34.

3: Y. p.91. For previous references in this thesis to Félix's 'langage mystique' see above p.13 n.2, p.32(n.7), p.60(n.1), p.89 n.3, p.131 and notes 1,7; p.136 and n.2, p.240 n.5, p.285 n.2. Cf. also above pp.37ff.

4: E. Seillière: Balzac et la morale romantique, Alcan, 1933, p.40.

5: Ibid. p.9. Cf. P. Bertault: Balzac et la religion, esp. pp.179-183.

However banal and conventional, then, Félix's tendency to idolise and worship Henriette, and Henriette's tendency to ascribe Félix's presence and influence at Clochegourde to divine or providential intervention, the banality and conventionality of Félix's language is at least in part redeemed by its internal justification. For this language is imbued with the religious mysticism appropriate to his background and education, to the 'martiniste' aunt he to some extent replaces, and to the description to his similarly imbued idol. If, moreover, it is partly Félix's indulgence in such language which accounts for Balzac writing: 'le caractère de Félix est sacrifié dans cette oeuvre;',<sup>1</sup> then the brisk and caustic tones of Natalie's reply introduce a sudden change of perspective on the events described, and show not only to what extent the narrative is Félix's own vision, but to what extent Félix is the prisoner and the victim of that vision.

If Felix's narrative both poses and proves his early leanings towards mysticism, then the narrative is even more obvious proof of his precocious self-appointment as an artist. Félix is not only a writer of elegies and composer of floral symphonies but a painter of 'tableaux', of which the initial description of the Indre valley - which Félix loves 'comme un artiste aime l'art',<sup>2</sup> - and of Henriette - 'Je puis vous crayonner les traits principaux qui partout eussent signalé la comtesse aux regards;',<sup>3</sup> - are salient examples. The importance of the painting for Balzac is not only that it is, as has been seen, a circumscribed and therefore concentrated miniature world,<sup>4</sup> but that it is the visual representation of an idea. As Olivier Bonard remarks of Balzac: 'Le plus souvent, il juge la peinture, non en

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1: L.H.I. p.479 (letter of the 15 January, 1837).

2: Y. p.30.

3: Y. p.40.

4: Cf. above p.146, p.383 and p.389.



fonction d'une idée ou d'un idéal de beauté, mais en fonction de toutes les idées qu'elle a fait naître ou simplement réveillées en lui.<sup>1</sup>

Hence the participants in the prayer scene 'composaient un tableau dont les couleurs répétaient en quelque sorte à l'esprit les idées réveillées par la prière;'.<sup>2</sup> Balzac's attitude to art does, therefore, rejoin the theme of light-ideas analogies and also that of the hieroglyph - both visual and verbal sign. Thus if Félix sees himself as an artist drawing Henriette and the valley, it is because these are for him privileged representations of the divine text.

This also explains why art and literature are almost inextricably linked in le Lys. As Henriette writes to Félix: 'votre écriture avait un charme, je regardais vos lettres comme on contemple un portrait.'<sup>3</sup> If the novel abounds in 'dramas', 'rôles', 'acteurs' and 'dénouements', then equally common are 'dessins', 'esquisses', and, more ambiguously, 'scènes' and 'spectacles'.<sup>4</sup> It also follows that painters and sculptors exist alongside writers and composers.<sup>5</sup> Hence, too, the literary quaintness of such expressions as 'châtelaine et bachelette',<sup>6</sup> of

- 1: Olivier Bonard: La Peinture dans la création balzacienne, p.57. Cf. J. Borel: 'Le Lys /.../ et les sources profondes /.../', pp.85-86. Cf. also Bonard's reference, in connection with La Maison du chat-qui-pelote, La Vexette, and La bourse, to 'Trois figures de peintres, qui prêtent leur regard au romancier et chez lesquels la première évidence de l'amour est en même temps une sorte d'évidence esthétique'. (op.cit. p. 11). Cf. above p.416 n.4 - and also p.320 n.2.
- 2: Y. p.181. Cf. above p.314, p.388.
- 3: Y. p.318.
- 4: The frequency of the theatrical image in le Lys, 'véritable épopée domestique' (Y. p.44) has been noted by Monica Crawley in her Etude stylistique of the novel (p.98). Cf. Y. p.148 ('drame', 'rideau de la scène sociale'), p.167 ('comédie'), p.179 ('acteurs'), p.192 and p.329 ('rôle'), p.328 ('héroïne') and p.320 ('dénouement' and 'tragédie'). For 'dessin' see Y. p.41; 'esquisse', p.43 and p.298; 'croquis', p.19 and 'tableau', p.190 and p.220. 'Scène' occurs on p.128, p.145 and p.224; 'spectacle' on p.118, p.145 and p.292. See also Lucienne Frappier-Mazur: 'La Métaphore théâtrale dans la "Comédie humaine"', R.H.L.F., 1970 (janvier-février), pp.64-89.
- 5: A complete list of such references can be found in Miss Crawley's thesis (pp.15-16). Among the artists named are, of course, Phidias (Y. p.41), Ingres (p.307) and Beethoven (p.119). Such allusions are extremely common in Balzac.
- 6: Y. p.43. The term 'bachelette' would, as Nicole Mozet has pointed out, be more at home in the Contes drolatiques. ('Les personnages anglais et la Touraine', A.B., 1970, p.138).

'castel',<sup>1</sup> of 'la Dame aux mains de laquelle reluit la couronne promise aux vainqueurs du tournoi.'<sup>2</sup> Such images often combine religious and literary aspirations: 'Ma passion, qui recommençait le Moyen-Âge et rappelait la chevalerie, fut connue je ne sais comment; [...] l'histoire à la fois romanesque et simple d'un jeune homme qui adorait pieusement une femme belle sans public, grande dans sa solitude, [...] se répandit sans doute [...].'<sup>3</sup> However trite and conventional such imagery, it does, therefore, illustrate both the unity and consistency of Félix's character and the unity and coherence of his vision. However, such imagery again demonstrates that Félix is also the victim of that vision. For if he is a child-mystic and a child-poet, he is also simply a child. As Borel remarks: 'Etat d'âme commun du primitif, de l'enfant, du poète'.<sup>4</sup> Hence, of course, Natalie's impatience with this 'confession d'un enfant du siècle'.<sup>5</sup>

It is, however, important to note another effect of the references to art and artists in le Lys dans la vallée: they reflect Félix's inability or unwillingness to forget that he is an artist in the act of creation. Even when he does not see himself as poet or painter, he fulfils a task closely resembling theirs. Hence his narrative opens with the words: 'A quel talent nourri de larmes devons-nous un jour la plus émouvante élogie, la peinture des tourments [...]?'<sup>6</sup> just as he closes with: 'Les artistes et les grands poètes ne sont pas les seuls

1: Cf. Y. p.36 and p.103. Henriette is also a weaver of tapestries. This theme also relates to that of magic and secrecy.

2: Y. p.83. This 'dame' is, of course, usually either Petrarch's Laure (eg. Y. p.92 and p.106) or Dante's Béatrix (Y. p.152). Cf. Félix's reference to Cervantes and the note on the 'blazon du beau corps' theme etc. above p.21. Cf. also above p.190 n.5, p.232 and below p.425 n.4.

3: Y. p.224.

4: J. Borel: 'Le Lys [...] et les sources [...]', p.104. It is, of course, a literary cliché that the child is a 'seer blest'.

5: Natalie's reproof recalls that of le Père Souël at the end of René. Both René and Félix are upbraided for their conceit, their selfishness and their self-pity - and, at least by implication, for their language: cf. the Conclusion to the thesis.

6: Y. p.5.

à souffrir.'<sup>1</sup> Closely connected to this is a similar unwillingness or inability to forget the motive and the destination for his work - even at its more intense and involved moments: 'Elle était, comme vous le savez déjà, sans rien en savoir encore, **LE LYS DE CETTE VALLEE**'.<sup>2</sup> The evocation of the past - 'Ici, Natalie, rien n'est romanesque: pour y découvrir l'infini des sentiments profonds, il faut dans sa jeunesse avoir jeté la sonde dans ces grands lacs au bord desquels on a vécu.'<sup>3</sup> is also an apology for the future: 'Lisez-moi, je vous en conjure, avec indulgence.'<sup>4</sup> It is also significant that references to art and to Natalie often coincide and thus combine to convey Félix's self-awareness as an artist. Hence, in his description of the valley, he remarks: 'Ne me demandez plus pourquoi j'aime la Touraine? [...] je l'aime comme un artiste aime l'art; je l'aime moins que je ne vous aime, mais sans la Touraine, peut-être ne vivrais-je plus.'<sup>5</sup> Hence, too, his description includes requests to Natalie to co-operate in the picture: 'Figurez-vous trois moulins [...]. Imaginez au-delà du pont [...] Encadrez le tout de noyers antiques [...].'<sup>6</sup> The description of Henriette is similarly permeated with references to art and apostrophes to Natalie:

'Son air exprimait une simplesse, jointe à je ne sais quoi d'interdit et de songeur qui ramenait à elle comme le peintre nous ramène à la figure où son génie a traduit un monde de sentiments. Ses qualités visibles ne peuvent d'ailleurs s'exprimer que par des comparaisons. Rappelez-vous le parfum chaste et sauvage de cette bruyère [...], cette fleur dont vous avez tant loué le noir et le rose, vous devinerez [...].' 7

1: Y. p.329. Cf. Lamartine, Hugo, Musset etc.

2: Y. p.29.

3: Y. p.127. It might not be 'romanesque' but it is certainly eminently 'romantique'!

4: Y. p.230.

5: Y. p.30.

6: Y. pp.30,31.

7: Y. pp.42-43.

It is partly because Félix is assured of at least one witness who will participate in his drama, at least one reader who will try to visualise his portraits and tableaux - 'Telle est l'imparfaite esquisse promise'<sup>1</sup> - that he makes such a conscious and sustained effort to exploit his artistic inclination and talent.

It follows from this that Félix is again the self-conscious creator, independently creating his work of art. It also follows that the narrative embodies Félix's vision of his past, and that the act of narration itself dictates and moulds the nature of that vision. For if Félix's vision has unity and harmony, this unity and harmony is indisassociable from the work of art he describes as he creates, or which he creates as he describes it. Thus Todorov's remark indeed fits le Lys: 'Toute oeuvre, tout roman raconte, à travers la trame événementielle, l'histoire de sa propre création, sa propre histoire.'<sup>2</sup> It is perhaps to escape from such mere self-referentiality that Balzac so readily delegates his creative powers and, like Vautrin, controls his creation by procuration. It is precisely this independence of the creation which guarantees its existence and its survival. For just as Félix's vision merges in its unity, so, for Félix as for Balzac, is the variety of creation in danger of merging with its creator. As Poulet says of Balzac:

'Lorsque Balzac arrive donc, comme il le fait parfois, au point extrême de son développement, qui consiste à tout réduire au principe central et causal, au point d'où toutes les lignes découlent, mais où toutes les lignes aussi disparaissent, il remplace le merveilleux développement circulaire de figures concrètes qui remplissent la Comédie Humaine, par l'inverse, c'est-à-dire par leur absorption dans un point où il n'y a plus rien et qui n'est rien.' 3

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1: Y. p.43.

2: T. Todorov: Littérature et signification, Larousse, 1967, p.49.

3: Les Métamorphoses du cercle, p.227. Cf. above p.255(n.3), p.272(n.2).  
Cf. also above p.146(n.3).

It is at this point that the paramount importance of Natalie's reply to Félix becomes apparent. For it is this reply which guarantees the independence and integrity of Félix's vision by creating a vacuum of distance and hostility around it. The umbilical cord has been cut. However, if Natalie's reply guarantees the integrity of Félix's vision, it also guarantees its specificity. The vision is peculiar to Félix and to Félix alone. The reader can no longer, as Bertault claimed, be 'comme emporté dans un tourbillon'.<sup>1</sup> The reader is no longer -/he ever if/ were, for the banality and conventionality of, for example, Félix's 'langage mystique', were clues enough - the 'fou' but the 'savant' of the parable. If the narrative is, as Bertault again claims, 'du subjectivisme pur',<sup>2</sup> then at least the reader cannot accuse Balzac of leaving him in any doubt about that fact. It is this genial combination of first-person narrative and letter-novel which enables the reader to reflect on the limitations while marvelling at the coherence of Félix de Vandenesse's 'paradis imaginaire'.

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1: P. Bertault: Balzac et la religion, p.175.  
 2: Ibid.



CONCLUSION.

### Conclusion

The aim of this thesis, indicated in the closing paragraphs of the Introduction, has, it is hoped, now been achieved: the various themes of Félix's narrative have been examined in turn and, in Chapter 7, the various pieces of the mosaic have been assembled. Félix's vision of his past can now be seen for what it is - a valiant and supremely coherent act of defiance against time<sup>1</sup> and an equally valiant bid for creativity despite the threat of 'résistance' and inertia.<sup>2</sup> Félix has prevented Henriette from being yet another of society's 'martyrs ignorés',<sup>3</sup> their love from being yet another 'chef d'oeuvre inconnu'.<sup>4</sup> He succeeds in rescuing himself and Henriette from 'les eaux dormantes de l'oubli'.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, however, Balzac shows the reader, partly through Félix's own comments on his language,<sup>6</sup> partly through lady Dudley's ironic debasement of some of that language,<sup>7</sup> and partly through Natalie de Manerville's all-important rejoinder,<sup>8</sup> that Félix falls victim to precisely those hostile forces his narrative so courageously seeks to resist.<sup>9</sup> He falls victim to time in that his vision of Henriette and the world belongs essentially to his childhood and retarded adolescence from which he never developed - hence his failures

1: Cf. above p.243.

2: For the theme of resistance, closely connected to that of movement, see above pp.119-120, p.125, p.132(n.6), p.253, p.299 and n.7.

3: Cf. above p.374 n.4 For other references in this thesis to Félix's premonitions of disaster, see above p.11 n.2, p.13 n.2, p.86 n.4, p.95, p.100(n.6), pp.106-107, p.127 n.1, pp.156-157, p.190, p.233, p.234, p.236, p.315 n.3.

4: Cf. above p.28.

5: Y. p.86. Cf. above p.209.

6: Cf. for example above pp.32-33.

7: Cf. above p.42, p.131, pp.150-151, pp.170-171, pp.198-199, p.224 n.8, p.256 n.4.

8: Cf. above p.xv and n.4, p.43, p.420, p.423. Cf. also above p.400 n.4.

9: The events of le Lys dans la vallée are seen with even greater detachment when a brief report of Henriette's death is read from a newspaper by a mildly interested monsieur de Listomère to a totally disinterested audience (Etude de femme, 1, p.1055).

with Madeleine and Natalie herself.<sup>1</sup> He falls victim to inertia in that he, unlike Henriette,<sup>2</sup> never escapes from the routine of repeated journeys, from the confines of the prison, whether in the guise of exasperating boarding-schools, reassuring valleys, or smooth and tranquil waters. The circles and cycles of Félix's narrative are as revelatory as its manifold repetitions, the necessary subject of this thesis: they all show Félix's inability to progress.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, if 'fond' and 'forme' merge, there would appear to be no outside world independent of Félix to which he can refer and thereby relate. He is, therefore, trapped in his own language, in his own rhetoric,<sup>4</sup> in the Ptolemaic universe of his clichés, fixations, and figures of speech,<sup>5</sup> not Prometheus but Sisyphus.<sup>6</sup>

It is here where lies the originality of le Lys dans la vallée and the genius of Balzac, the ambitious elaborator of 'paradis imaginaires' and ruthless recorder of 'illusions perdues'. For it is this combination of uncritical involvement and sardonic detachment that gives the novel a psychological subtlety which can only be appreciated at the end of the book<sup>7</sup> - a subtlety which, as a result, greatly surpasses that of less

1: For Félix victim of time, see above pp.91-92, pp.208-210, pp.254-261. Cf. also above pp.356-357.

2: For other references in this thesis to the theme of the 'palingénésie', followed by Henriette rather than by Félix, see above p.11 n.2, pp.62ff., p.147 n.2, p.312 and n.1, p.339 and n.4, p.358 n.4.

3: Cf. above p.26 and n.4.

4: Cf. above p.21 n.1, p.154, p.284 n.1, p.420 and n.2. For references to the different language levels in le Lys, see above p.90 n.2, p.140 n.6, p.190, p.250 n.2 and the Conclusions to Chapters 1, 2, etc.

5: He is, therefore, like Henriette, a victim of his own coherence. As Senancour writes in the opening 'Observations' to Oberman: 'Ne voyez-vous pas que celui qui est si exactement d'accord avec lui-même, vous trompe, ou se trompe?' Cf. perhaps the weakness of a critical method which takes coherence as one of its main criteria: see above p.406 n.5.

6: Like so many other 'chercheurs d'absolu' in the Comédie humaine. Cf. above pp.28-29.

7: For Henriette's revelations and Natalie's reply. Cf. above p.211.

complex works portraying what may be thought of as conventional Romantic heroes - the Obermans, the Renés, the Amaurys, the Chattertons.<sup>1</sup> It is, therefore, indeed the form of the novel which gives it its force and its originality. As Bersani has been seen to remark: 'The epistolary form conveniently makes possible a limitless complicity with character as well as limitless duplicity about character.'<sup>2</sup>

It is this particular combination of complicity and duplicity which makes le Lys unique. Although other novelists have exploited the first-person narrative to show the ambiguities and complexities in a character's account of his or her past,<sup>3</sup> and to show the enigmatic relationship between, or merger of, narrator and outside world,<sup>4</sup> no author seems to have shown these simultaneously while portraying the unfragmented and undisjointed coherence of that character's own 'Weltanschauung'. Although other authors have exposed the peculiar predicament of the artist - all-powerful yet infinitely fallible<sup>5</sup> - and although others have shown the work of art emerging from the work of art being written,<sup>6</sup> no author seems to have combined both and demonstrate both the fallibility and the infallibility of the artist with consummately equal success. The reader of le Lys is able to see Félix as both subject and object - as the subject-creator of the

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1: And, in this respect, even that of a Julien Sorel. As final comments on Volupté and le Lys it is interesting to note that Sainte-Beuve's habitual technique for denigrating Balzac's works was to claim their derivative nature (cf. J. Guillaume: 'Delrieu et la querelle Balzac-Sainte-Beuve', Etudes classiques, 1971 (janvier), pp.27-28) and that a recent commentator sees the two novels as 'as different as night and day', (R. Niess: 'Sainte-Beuve and Balzac: Volupté and Le Lys dans la vallée', Kentucky Romance Quarterly, Vol.XX, No.1, 1973, p.114).

2: Balzac to Beckett, p.75. Cf. above p.154.

3: An outstanding example is, of course, Marivaux. Cf. J. Rousset: Narcisse romancier, Corti, 1973, pp.103-113.

4: Cf. Jules Romains and Proust.

5: Cf. Diderot and Gide.

6: Cf. A la recherche du temps perdu.

narrative, and, through the eyes of Natalie, as an 'object' infinitely less worthy of his sympathy. The reader can see Félix with the eyes of both 'fou' and 'savant'.<sup>1</sup>

It is, however, at this point that the last and perhaps the most remarkable link between 'fond' and 'forme' can be forged. For Félix de Vandenesse is not merely subject-object in the sense that he is the subject-creator of the narrative at one moment, and, once his narrative is written and read, the 'object' of the critical eye of a Natalie de Maerville. He is both subject and object of the novel, both 'je' and 'Félix de Vandenesse', as the novel is being written - and read. As J. Rousset has written of the first-person narrative: 'on rend compte de soi, de son être le plus intime, mais d'un être qui ne peut devenir objet de compte rendu que s'il est éloigné dans le temps: tout ensemble proche et différent, sujet et objet du récit.'<sup>2</sup> The status of subject-object, hitherto assigned to Félix's vision of the world epitomised in his 'images matérielles',<sup>3</sup> may, therefore, be similarly assigned to this new and rather more complex narrator of the novel.

If the creator of le Lys dans la vallée, whether Félix or Balzac, is no longer found so distinct and different from his creation, then it follows that the creator need no longer occupy that unique and privileged central position which he has hitherto been accorded. If 'fond' and 'forme' thus so completely merge, it will be necessary to

1: Cf. above pp.29ff.

2: J. Rousset: Marcisse romancier, p.91. Cf. J. Starobinsky: 'Le Style de l'autobiographie', Poétique, 1970, 3, p.261: 'c'est parce que le moi révolu est différent du je actuel, que ce dernier peut vraiment s'affirmer dans toutes ses prérogatives. Il ne racontera pas seulement ce qui lui est advenu en un autre temps, mais surtout comment, d'autre qu'il était, il est devenu lui-même. /.../ L'écart qu'établit la réflexion autobiographique est donc double: c'est tout ensemble un écart temporel et un écart d'identité.' Cf. also B. Vannier: L'Inscription du corps, p.164, and Chapter 1, pp.29-34.

3: Cf. above p.40 etc.



re-examine the view that the first-person is indeed the sole focal point of the novel which is le Lys dans la vallée. With this change in perspectives, a whole different approach to the study of the style of le Lys becomes possible.<sup>1</sup> The final tribute to the work is, therefore, that the final perspective left with the critic on bringing a particular approach to its logical conclusion, is not one of a subject exhausted but of a subject to be treated. Not unlike Félix de Vandenesse, the critic is on the threshold of another journey.

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1: Hence the tendency, mentioned above Chapter 1, p.46 n.1, for some modern critics to emphasise syntactical relationships rather than the semantics of form. Cf. also above p.406 n.5 and p.425 n.5.

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