

# The Construction of Balzac as a Classic Writer: Serialization, Education, Publishing, and Adaptation

From his Beginnings to the Present

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## Table of Contents

<b>Abbreviations .....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Short Abstract .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Long Abstract.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>12</b>
Canon, Canonization and the Competing Principles of Legitimacy .....	12
‘Classic’ as Greatness: Institutionalizing Greatness via Canonization Models .....	15
‘Classic’ as Erudition: <i>Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes</i> .....	19
‘Classic’ as ‘Popular’: Fragmentation, Illustration and Edition.....	24
‘Classic’ as Adaptation: <i>Patrimoine</i> , Canonicity and Culture-Texts.....	29
Balzac: An Ancient and Modern Writer .....	33
<b>Chapter 1 – ‘[Q]uelques mystères de notre double nature’: Trials and Tribulations, Theatre and Novel, Commercial and Academic (1818-1835) .....</b>	<b>40</b>
1.1. The Art of the Possible: Publishing Aspirations and Realities (1818-29) .....	43
1.2. Actualizing History: <i>Le Dernier Chouan</i> , <i>Désenchantement</i> and the Beginnings of <i>La Comédie humaine</i> (1829) .....	50
1.3.1. <i>Rire</i> and <i>déraison</i> : <i>Physiologie du mariage</i> and the <i>École du désenchantement</i> (1829-31).....	52
1.3.2. Monetizing <i>Désenchantement</i> : <i>La Peau de chagrin</i> (1831).....	55
1.4. Prefaces, Personality and Provocation: <i>La Peau de chagrin</i> , <i>Eugénie Grandet</i> and <i>Le Père Goriot</i> (1831-35).....	58
1.5. Foundational Classics: <i>Eugénie Grandet</i> and <i>Le Père Goriot</i> (1833-35).....	64
1.6. Adapting a Reputation on Stage: <i>L’Ami Grandet</i> , <i>La Fille de l’avare</i> and <i>Le Père Goriot</i> (1834-35) .....	66
<b>Chapter 2 – Canonisation via Popularisation: Censorship and Newspaper, Stage and Illustration, Collaboration and Conflict (1836-55) .....</b>	<b>75</b>
2.1. A Baptism of Scandal: <i>La Vieille Fille</i> , <i>Illusions perdues</i> and <i>Une fille d’Ève</i> (1836- 39) .....	78
2.2. Balzac and the <i>Bibliothèque Charpentier</i> : The Rise of Pocket Editions (1838-51) .....	85
2.3. Fame and Infamy: <i>Vautrin</i> and the <i>Physiologies</i> Series (1840-41) .....	88
2.4. Branding <i>La Comédie humaine</i> : Print, Image and Commercial Posters (1841-46).....	94

2.5. From Conflict to Coronation: <i>La Cousine Bette</i> , <i>Le Cousin Pons</i> , and <i>La Dernière Incarnation de Vautrin</i> (1843-47) .....	103
2.6. Prestige, Popularity and Provocation in Print: <i>La Comédie humaine</i> and <i>Les Contes drolatiques</i> (1852-55).....	107
<b>Chapter 3 – Classics, Canons, Circulation: Balzac’s Widening Presence from the Bibliothèque des chemins de fer to the 1960s.....</b>	<b>114</b>
3.1. Networking Balzac: <i>La Bibliothèque des chemins de fer</i> (1853-54) .....	117
3.2. Balzac Before the Curriculum: Posthumous Legacy and Critical Reinvention (1851-79) .....	119
3.3. Making a <i>Classique scolaire</i> : The Institutionalisation of <i>Eugénie Grandet</i> , <i>Le Père Goriot</i> , and <i>Le Cousin Pons</i> (1888-1910) .....	122
3.4. Eclecticism, Realism, and Sensationalism: Hatier’s <i>Classiques pour tous</i> and Silent Film Adaptations .....	125
3.5. The <i>Petits classiques</i> and Adaptations: Covers, Visuals and Impact.....	133
3.6. The Balzac Publishing Boom: Literature, Classics and Cinema (1930-60).....	141
<b>Chapter 4 – Classics, Classrooms and Cinema: Pocket Editions, Parascolaires, Baccalauréat, Séquences, Dossiers pédagogiques (1958-2024) .....</b>	<b>155</b>
4.1. Disseminating Balzac via Pocket Editions: <i>Classiques de poche</i> .....	157
4.2. Balzac in Print and on Air: Pocket Editions, the ORTF, and Media Shifts from the 1960s to the 1980s.....	160
4.3. Selling Balzac: Book Covers, Film Posters, Heritage Cinema, and Television in the 1990s .....	168
4.4. Balzac as a Cultural Icon and a Curriculum Staple: TV-Films, Baccalauréat, <i>Parascolaires</i> , and <i>Séquences</i> (2001-23).....	173
4.5. The Balzac Canon Reframed: Teaching the Classics Through Film in <i>Zéro de conduite</i> Educational Kits (2012-23).....	182
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>191</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>200</b>
Appendix A – Chapter Three Publishing Data .....	201
Appendix B – Chapter Four Publishing Data .....	228
<b>Select Bibliography .....</b>	<b>236</b>



## Abbreviations

To ensure consistency and clarity across references to Balzac's works, I adopt the standard abbreviations employed by Balzac scholars. The specific list of abbreviations used here is drawn from *The Cambridge Companion to Balzac* (2017), edited by Owen Heathcote and Andrew Watts.<sup>1</sup>

AB	<i>L'Année balzacienne</i>
CH	Honoré de Balzac, <i>La Comédie humaine</i> , eds Pierre-Georges Castex et al., 12 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 'Bibliothèque de la Pléiade', 1976-81).
Corr.	Honoré de Balzac, <i>Correspondance</i> , eds Roger Pierrot and Hervé Yon, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 'Bibliothèque de la Pléiade', 2006–)
LH	Honoré de Balzac, <i>Lettres à Madame Hanska</i> , ed. Roger Pierrot, 2 vols (Paris: Laffont, 'Bouquins', 1990).
OD	Honoré de Balzac, <i>Œuvres diverses</i> , eds Pierre-Georges Castex, Roland Chollet and René Guise, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 'Bibliothèque de la Pléiade', 1990–).

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<sup>1</sup> *The Cambridge Companion to Balzac*, eds Owen Heathcote and Andrew Watts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. xxiii.

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## Short Abstract

This thesis examines Balzac's trajectory toward recognition as an established classic writer. It argues that his consecration as a 'classic' is the result of a dynamic interplay between overlapping models of canonization—serialization, publication, education, and on-screen adaptation—whose convergence produces a recognisable yet mutable Balzac canon, continually reshaped by shifting cultural, sociopolitical, and pedagogic imperatives.

Chapter One traces the evolution of Balzac's authorial identity from his early career to 1835. It highlights how his fusion of classic theatrical genres, particularly comedy and tragedy, with popular motifs drawn from the sensationalism of melodrama contributed to the accumulation of symbolic capital prior to formal institutional recognition.

Chapter Two examines the late 1830s to early 1850s, during which the *roman-feuilleton*, illustrated editions, and commercial bookshop posters significantly increased Balzac's visibility in the press. This played a key role in the widespread circulation of his work and established both his popularity and scandalous works such as *La Vieille fille* as defining aspects of his canonical status.

Chapter Three analyses the texts included in the *Petits classiques* series in the first half of the twentieth century, examining their dissemination alongside the rise of silent-film adaptations. It also explores notable peaks in Balzac's publication history, particularly between the 1930s and 1960s.

Chapter Four examines the selection of works published in the *Classiques de poche* and *Folio classique* editions in the second half of the twentieth century, the Baccalauréat curricula, *parascolaire* materials, and the *Zéro de conduite* teaching kits. It demonstrates how these editions and multimedia resources work in concert to reinvent the writer's literary image for contemporary audiences.

Balzac's canonization as a classic writer is thus predicated on intersecting modes of dissemination that enabled him to construct multiple authorial identities, publish prolifically in different formats, and make the 'classic' 'popular' and the 'popular' 'classic'.

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## Long Abstract

‘Balzac fut très tôt un auteur à succès’,<sup>1</sup> writes Nicole Billot, referring to the writer’s commercial triumphs in the press between 1839 and 1840. This statement invites further scrutiny, for Balzac’s ascent to recognition, both as a best-selling author and as a figure of literary prestige, was anything but linear. His trajectory was shaped by persistent financial instability, shifting market conditions, and a tireless effort to position himself alongside the literary giants he revered, notably Dante, Rabelais, Molière, and Scott. Alain Viala argues that becoming a canonical author, a process he terms ‘classicisation’,<sup>2</sup> goes beyond retrospective acclaim. It involves ongoing negotiation between cultural legitimacy, historical context, public reception, changing political and educational demands, and various forms of circulation and dissemination.

This thesis traces how four key modes, namely serialization, publication, education, and on-screen adaptation, functioned not merely as diverse means of dissemination, but as

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<sup>1</sup> Nicole Billot, ‘Balzac vu par la critique (1839-1840)’, *L’Année balzacienne*, 1(1983), 229-267, p. 229.

<sup>2</sup> Viala defines ‘classicisation’ as ‘le résultat d’un processus de réception par l’institution littéraire.’ Alain Viala, ‘Qu’est-ce qu’un classique’, *Littératures classiques*, 19 (1993), 11-31, p. 24. While Viala does not explicitly define the scope of the ‘institution littéraire,’ his work implies that it encompasses the school curricula and national exams such as the Agrégation.

critical arenas in which Balzac's consecration as a classic writer was actively constructed. Far from operating in isolation, they worked together to consolidate a complex authorial persona marked by intellectual gravitas, popular reach, and cultural endurance. They did not simply mirror Balzac's dual position as both an esteemed thinker and a widely read novelist; rather, they amplified the enduring tension between literary authority and mass appeal, canonical permanence and the fluid adaptability required for ongoing relevance.

A central aim of this thesis is to interrogate the concept of the 'classic'<sup>3</sup> in relation to the 'popular',<sup>4</sup> and to examine how this interplay reshapes established models of canonization, particularly those articulated by Jean Barré, as will be discussed in the introduction.<sup>5</sup> Rather than viewing canon formation as a linear or uniform progression, this study approaches it as a contradictory field of antinomies, shaped by competing cultural authorities and evolving institutional practices.

These tensions are perhaps most succinctly expressed in Jacques Duron's observation on Balzac: '[i]l est devenu classique sans cesser d'être populaire'.<sup>6</sup> Far from presenting canonization and popularity as opposites, Duron's formulation foregrounds their entanglement. Balzac did not become a classic writer by relinquishing his popularity or distancing himself from commercial circuits. On the contrary, his elevation to canonical status was shaped by and continually reaffirmed through the very mechanisms that sustained his widespread dissemination. His legacy thus unsettles assumptions that equate cultural legitimacy with a retreat from mass appeal, demonstrating instead that the consolidation of literary authority emerges through the infrastructure of popularity itself.

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<sup>3</sup> The word 'classic' is used in quotation marks when used as a noun to denote the 'classic' as a social construct. When used as an adjective, it is written without quotation marks to designate the status of a writer and a literary work.

<sup>4</sup> The word 'popular' will appear in quotation marks when used as a noun, but without them when used as an adjective to describe a writer or literary work.

<sup>5</sup> See Jean Barré et al. 'Operationalizing Canonicity: A Quantitative Study of French 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Literature', *Journal of Cultural Analytics*, 8 (2023), 88-113.

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Duron, 'Centenaire d'un génie', in *Balzac. Le livre du centenaire*, ed. Jacques Duron (Paris: Flammarion, 1952), 5-10, p. 6.

This study examines the dialectic between the ‘classic’ and the ‘popular’ through José-Luis Diaz’s notion of the author as an ‘objet de reconstruction’<sup>7</sup>—a figure continually redefined by evolving readerships and ‘saisi au moyen d’antithèses simples qui opposent anciens et modernes, classiques et romantiques, poètes et romanciers, jeunes et vieux, etc.’<sup>8</sup> It considers a broad network of mediating agents (including but not limited to publishers, editors, illustrators, educators, broadcasters, and policymakers) whose interventions construct and impact these antinomies, playing a decisive role in recognizing and legitimizing Balzac’s work across the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. School syllabi, diverse editorial formats, illustrated editions, audiovisual adaptations, and multimedia resources do more than simply transmit or market literature; they actively reinterpret its meaning, regulate access, redefine cultural authority, and adapt it to various readerships. Accordingly, this thesis presents canon formation as a fluid and collective process shaped by the evolving relationships among educational and cultural institutions.

Balzac’s work occupies a distinct position at the intersection of academic consecration and broad cultural dissemination, suspended between the institutional importance of *La Comédie humaine* and the popular appeal of the *roman-feuilleton*, theatrical adaptations, and cinematic reinterpretations. These competing forces give rise to a series of paradoxes: between critical legitimacy and commercial visibility; between the prestige of *in-8*<sup>9</sup> editions and the fragmented, ephemeral nature of serialized publication; between canonical prestige and mass accessibility. Balzac’s trajectory thus offers a valuable case study for examining the interplay between consecration and popularization, inviting a reconsideration of the extent to which canonical status is not merely compatible with popularity, but actively reinforced and in many ways, made possible by it.

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<sup>7</sup> José-Luis Diaz, *Devenir Balzac: l’invention de l’écrivain par lui-même* (Saint-Cyr sur Loire: Christian Pirot, 2007), p. 188.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>9</sup> Book sizes will be indicated using their original French designations and presented in italics.

Although Balzac's aesthetics, narrative structure, authorial personae, and political vision have been extensively studied, the intersection of his canonical authority with his enduring popular appeal remains comparatively underexplored. The originality of this thesis lies in its reconceptualization of canon formation as historically contingent and multifaceted, shaped by the evolving processes of adaptation, ideological agendas, and pedagogic practices. In dialogue with the works of Anne-Marie Baron, Alain Viala, Daniel Milo, David Bellos, Linda Hutcheon, Lissette Lopez Szwydky, José-Luis Diaz, Jean Barré, Julie Sanders, Nathalie Denizot, Pierre Bourdieu, and Stéphane Vachon, this study argues that adaptations—whether fragmented *roman-feuilletons*, theatrical productions, cinematic reinterpretations, or abridged educational editions—not only preserve a work's cultural and commercial visibility but also reevaluate the criteria by which texts are elevated to and entrenched within the status of 'classic'.

This thesis adopts an interdisciplinary approach that combines archival research, paratextual analyses, and interviews with editors-in-chief at leading French publishing houses, including *Folio* and the *Livre de Poche*. Rather than focusing solely on Balzac's prolific output, it draws on a wide range of materials, including educational editions of the writer's work, school curricula, illustrated editions, screen adaptations and commercial bookshop posters, to offer a comprehensive account of the processes through which canonical value is established, negotiated, and continually rearticulated.

Within this broader investigation, close attention is given to the tension between Balzac's aspiration to be recognized as a classic writer and his simultaneous pursuit of public acclaim and personal wealth. The former is expressed through his use of comedy, irony, sarcasm, and moral instruction, which are anchored in the rhetorical models of the Grand Siècle, while the latter aligns with the approaches of more commercially oriented contemporaries such as Eugène Sue. These dual paradigms shaped not only his literary goals

but also his strategies for navigating the competing demands of critical authority and popular appeal. As part of this investigation, this thesis also traces the emergence and persistence of a critical and editorial lexicon. Terms such as *grand auteur*, *chef-d'œuvre*, *auteur populaire*, *littérature populaire* and *paralittérature* continue to frame how literary value is legitimized and institutionalized within the French cultural landscape. Although critics used these hierarchal categories to classify writers and measure their works' varying degrees of success, Balzac's magnum opus ultimately transcends such labels. Rather than being mutually exclusive, these terms operate in tandem to create a more nuanced image of his canonical status.

In addition to qualitative analysis, this thesis includes quantitative data on the publication history of Balzac's work, utilizing Vachon's distinction between reprints and new editions. This statistical mapping sheds light on the dynamics of textual persistence and disappearance, demonstrating how certain works have maintained cultural visibility while others have progressively waned in prominence. The differentiation between types of publication—mass-market reprints, scholarly editions, classroom anthologies—proves especially revealing, highlighting the stratified and often uneven processes through which canonical value is recognized and legitimized. This data also helps identify key moments, most notably in the 1930s, 1960s, and 1990s, during which Balzac's oeuvre saw renewed publishing prominence, each period coinciding with broader national upheavals, media transformations, and educational reforms. In these contexts, Balzac emerges as an emblematic figure through whom literary tradition, cultural prestige, and pedagogic authority are both reaffirmed and redefined in response to shifting historical imperatives.

A central contribution of this study lies in uncovering a convergence between the Balzac texts most frequently incorporated into school curricula, republished in pocket editions, and adapted for the screen. This recurring corpus includes: *La Physiologie du mariage*, *Les*

*Chouans*,<sup>10</sup> *La Peau de chagrin*, *Le Colonel Chabert*, *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*, *Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan*, *Eugénie Grandet*, *Le Père Goriot*, *La Duchesse de Langeais*, *Le Lys dans la vallée*, *Illusions perdues*, *La Cousine Bette*, and *Le Cousin Pons*. These works constitute Balzac's most canonically reputable texts, with each chapter analysing a select subset that achieved both critical and commercial success within its respective mode of dissemination.

Chapter One begins by examining the early challenges Balzac encountered as he pursued wealth and fame while striving for intellectual distinction and lasting influence for his prolific oeuvre. Although his theatrical works, intended to secure classical prestige, were met with limited success, he sought commercial recognition and financial stability through potboiler novels published under the pseudonyms Horace de Saint-Aubin and the anagrammatic alias, Lord R'hoone. Driven by economic necessity and an ambition to join the ranks of the literary giants he revered, Balzac crafted multiple authorial identities that evoked both the majesty of the Grand Siècle and the demands of a contemporary, mass-reading public. Indeed, the mechanisms of disseminating his works to the public, through serialized publications, pocket editions, abridged scholarly editions, illustrated editions, and novel-to-stage adaptations were integral to Balzac's literary endeavour.

Chapter Two turns to the later stages of Balzac's career, tracing the evolution of his literary ambitions and public persona in tandem with his increasing notoriety in the press. It examines the 1839 Affaire Peytel, which garnered significant media attention and coincided with Balzac's growing frustration with fragmented publication formats, which he believed

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<sup>10</sup> Originally entitled *Le Dernier Chouan ou la Bretagne en 1800*, a title reminiscent of and an homage to Scott's novels, the work was first introduced under the heading *L'Avertissement du Gars*. As Roland Chollet and Stéphane Vachon explain in *L'Avertissement du Gars*, Balzac 'présente les objectifs de l'Histoire de France pittoresque en annonçant la publication imminente de deux œuvres; l'une, *Le Capitaine des Boutefeux*, située sous Charles VI, au xv<sup>e</sup> siècle, racontant la querelle des Armagnacs et des Bourguignons, l'autre, presque contemporaine, *Le Gars*, racontant l'insoumission des Chouans en 1800. Or c'est le second de ces romans, dont il n'était rien dit dans *L'Avertissement*, qui paraît en premier, en 1829, sous le titre *Le Dernier Chouan* (devenu en 1834 *Les Chouans*).' Roland Chollet, Stéphane Vachon, *À l'écoute du jeune Balzac* (Paris: Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 2012), p. 262. In this thesis, the novel will be referred to as *Le Dernier Chouan* when discussing the period prior to its retitling in 1834. For events after that date, it will be referred to as *Les Chouans*.

compromised literary integrity. This period also witnessed works that sparked controversy, including *La Vieille fille* (1836), the second part of *Illusions perdues*, *Un grand homme de province à Paris* (1839), and *Vautrin* (1840), the latter of which faced censorship. The themes explored in these works, coupled with the public performance of *Vautrin*, attracted heightened scrutiny and critical attention.

Chapter Two also examines the visual and commercial aspects of Balzac's literary enterprise, focusing on his engagement with illustrated editions and promotional materials such as bookshop posters, many of which featured the work of renowned artists including Grandville, Gavarni, and Daumier. These media reveal a striking paradox: while eye-catching commercial posters were used to advertise his work, the 1842 Furne edition of *La Comédie humaine* was designed to elevate his oeuvre within the canon of classic literature. This juxtaposition emphasizes the complex relationship between Balzac's desire for lasting critical recognition and his strategic engagement with commercial modes of dissemination. It further analyses his challenging and often strained collaborations with editors and illustrators, as well as his inflated conception of his own success, frequently articulated in his correspondence with Madame Hanska. While these strategies amplified his visibility, Balzac's path to enduring recognition remained marked by tensions between competing artistic ideals and the constraints of the literary marketplace.

Chapter Three then turns to the consolidation of Balzac's posthumous status as a *classique scolaire*, a concept developed by Milo. It analyses the institutional processes through which his works became firmly embedded within the French educational system. His inclusion in high-stakes examinations such as the Agrégation, coupled with the widespread circulation of his texts in collections such as the *Petits classiques* established Balzac as a central figure in literary instruction, particularly in relation to nineteenth-century French realism. These vectors of dissemination not only secured his presence in the national curriculum but also helped shape

a collective cultural imagination in which Balzac came to embody the values and ideals of France's classic literary heritage.

This chapter also offers an in-depth analysis of the editorial and paratextual features of the *Petits classiques* editions, such as their cover designs, critical prefaces, and scholarly annotations. Far from being neutral supplements, these apparatuses reinforce Balzac's label as a 'classic', designed to reaffirm the writer's institutional legitimacy and advance nationalist agendas, particularly in the context of Vichy-era adaptations.

Chapter Four explores the ongoing reconfiguration of Balzac's status as a classic author through contemporary publishing practices, audiovisual adaptations, and evolving pedagogic methodologies. Mass-market formats, including pocket editions, continue to sustain his visibility among specialists and general readers alike. Meanwhile, screen adaptations, spanning from stylised television productions of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s to heritage films emerging in the 1980s and beyond, have introduced Balzac's narratives to increasingly diverse audiences, notably but not exclusively student audiences. Noteworthy among these is Yves Angelo's 1994 film *Le Colonel Chabert*, which has been incorporated into the French school curriculum. Such reinterpretations serve not merely as instruments of popularization, but as meaningful sites of engagement shaped by evolving cultural norms and pedagogic approaches that emphasize accessibility and digital literacy.

This study contributes to the broader sociology of the 'classic' by conceptualizing it as a social construct. It illuminates the ongoing processes through which Balzac sustains, redefines, and revitalizes his enduring authority as both a canonical figure and a cultural icon. Indeed, it demonstrates that different canonization models intersect to reveal a Balzac canon that makes the 'classic' 'popular' and the 'popular' 'classic'.



## Introduction

### Canon, Canonization and the Competing Principles of Legitimacy

Rhetoricians first used the word *kanōn* in Alexandrian Greece to ‘refer to a body of superior texts, specifically models of stylistic excellence’.<sup>1</sup> According to Robert J. Aston, it was in medieval Latin that the term ‘canon’ acquired a theological dimension, granting texts a divine, holy quality. This shift occurred because of the institutionalization of the Roman Catholic Church, which needed a term to ‘distinguish the accepted or sacred writings from all others’.<sup>2</sup> This elevation to sacred status gave rise to the verb ‘canonize’ (or *canonizare*), meaning ‘to inscribe in the list of saints’.<sup>3</sup> This practice ensured that this group of names was memorialized in calendars and passed down through generations, imbuing them with the ‘highest meaning and value’.<sup>4</sup> Defined by their ‘selection, value, and duration’,<sup>5</sup> canonical authors thus play a central role as secular saints in preserving France’s cultural heritage, or *patrimoine*.

As a centralized nation shaped by Roman traditions, France preserves its canonical authors through a structured educational framework, formal ceremonies, and the continued adaptation of their work in television and cinema. Moreover, their work is safeguarded by public institutions such as libraries, museums, and national archives, each contributing to what Aleida Assmann and Astrid Erll describe as the nation’s ‘cultural memory’.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, canonical texts are regarded as ‘incontestables, c’est-à-dire reconnus, transmis, connus, et

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<sup>1</sup> Robert J. Aston, *The Role of the Literary Canon in the Teaching of Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> ‘Canonize’– c380, Definition 1, *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], <[https://www.oed.com/dictionary/canonize\\_v?tab=meaning\\_and\\_use](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/canonize_v?tab=meaning_and_use)> [accessed 26 January 2025].

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> See Aleida Assmann, ‘Canon and Archive’ in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, eds Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, and Aleida Assmann (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2010), p. 97-107. Assmann’s work will be further explored in Chapter 4.

consensuels–sans que l’on s’interroge sur ce consensus–voire sacrés’.<sup>7</sup> In modern-day France, canonized writers are revered for their exceptional contributions, with their works attaining a sacred, quasi-biblical stature:

Or, toujours pour revenir au terme (voire à la notion) de ‘canon’, on voit très bien, en France tout au moins, s’opérer un glissement inconscient de l’idée de recueil ou de liste des textes autorisés et recommandés vers celle de ‘canonisation’, sorte de sanctification ou de béatification des auteurs de ces textes fondamentaux et, justement, consacrés. D’autant qu’en France, nation centralisée, de droit romain, où l’on affectionne les règlements, les programmes, les constitutions et les célébrations, cette ‘canonisation’ devient facilement ‘panthéonisation’ solennelle: le Panthéon national, le Panthéon scolaire. Ajoutons que ce mouvement de consécration du patrimoine littéraire, est très directement lié à celui de ‘classique’ et de classicisation. En dernière analyse, est classique ce qui est digne d’être étudié en classe, est étudié en classe ce qui est classique.<sup>8</sup>

According to Fraisse, the canonization process is a form of ‘panthéonisation’, with its prestige and authority closely tied to the very etymology of the term ‘classic’. The word is derived from the Latin *classicus*, meaning ‘[o]f the first class of the highest rank or importance; constituting an acknowledged standard or model; of enduring interest and value’.<sup>9</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary further defines the ‘classic’ as a ‘body of ancient Greek or Latin writers or texts traditionally considered as the model for all literary endeavour’.<sup>10</sup> It cultivates literacy in the classroom, where an author’s standing is consolidated through renewed presence and continued study.

Louis Petit de Julleville asserts that an ‘auteur classique est aujourd’hui un auteur excellent, étudié dans les classes parce qu’il est excellent’.<sup>11</sup> However, this notion of excellence, rooted in intellectual greatness and in this case, set forth in 1900, remains inherently subjective because what is deemed ‘excellent’ is ultimately contingent upon but not limited to shifting pedagogic priorities, evolving perceptions of literary merit, and varying degrees of

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>8</sup> Emmanuel Fraisse, ‘Enseignements littéraires et œuvres de référence: entre l’ancien et le nouveau’, *Le français aujourd’hui*, 172 (2001), 11-24, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Classic’– c1604, 1.2.a, *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], [https://www.oed.com/dictionary/classic\\_adj?tab=meaning\\_and\\_use#9305429](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/classic_adj?tab=meaning_and_use#9305429) [accessed 26 January 2025].

<sup>10</sup> ‘Classic’–c1684, 2.a., *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Louis Petit de Julleville, ‘Les classiques français’ in *La revue pédagogique*, vol. I (Paris: Librairie Ch. Delagrave, 1900), p. 325.

success. The notion of ‘success’ further encompasses different forms of recognition, such as multiple print runs (suggesting popular demand) or inclusion in school curricula (signifying institutional endorsement).

The socially constructed nature of the canon aligns with Bourdieu’s competing principles of legitimacy, which aim to recognize, popularize, and consecrate an individual’s reputation within it:

Dans la deuxième moitié du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, moment où le champ littéraire parvient à un degré d’autonomie qu’il n’a jamais dépassé depuis, on a ainsi une première hiérarchie selon le degré de dépendance réelle ou supposée à l’égard du public, du succès, de l’économie. Cette hiérarchie principale se trouve elle-même recoupée par une autre, qui s’établit (dans la deuxième dimension verticale de l’espace) selon la qualité sociale et ‘culturelle’ du public touché (mesurée à sa distance supposée au foyer des valeurs spécifiques) et selon le capital symbolique qu’il assure aux producteurs en leur accordant sa reconnaissance. C’est ainsi que, au sein du sous-champ de production restreinte qui, étant voué de manière exclusive à la production pour producteurs, ne reconnaît que le principe de légitimité spécifique, ceux qui sont assurés de la reconnaissance de leurs pairs, indice présumé d’une consécration durable (l’avant-garde consacrée), s’opposent à ceux qui ne sont pas parvenus au même degré de reconnaissance du point de vue des critères spécifiques. Cette position inférieure rassemble des artistes ou des écrivains d’âge et de génération artistique différents qui peuvent contester l’avant-garde consacrée soit au nom d’un principe de légitimation nouveau, selon le modèle de l’hérésie[...].<sup>12</sup>

Balzac’s career provides a clear illustration of how these principles of legitimacy intersect. His work engages ceaselessly with the sphere of producers who write for the bourgeoisie, while simultaneously navigating the contrasting principle of legitimacy granted by ordinary readers: the mass audience. The enduring global influence and continual circulation of his work reveal a dynamic interplay between the ‘classic’ and the ‘popular’, demonstrating how literary prestige and widespread appeal can mutually inform and reinforce one another. His numerous obstacles, repeated failures, and the internal tensions reflected in his complex personality and work reveal a series of antinomies that align with Bourdieu’s framework. For example, the persistent tension between Balzac’s commercial success and his pursuit of academic recognition, most notably in his repeated attempts to join the Académie française, illustrate his

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<sup>12</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l’art: Genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1992), p. 223.

conflicting desires for popularity, widespread appeal and serious recognition. Similarly, the growing prestige of the *roman* during Balzac's career, by dint of, and thereafter, together with the commercial appeal of its pendant, the *roman-feuilleton*, are for contemporaries such as Sainte-Beuve, a key factor in the emergence of high- and lowbrow literature. The former can be understood as an aesthetic that makes use of 'figurative language, literary tropes (allegory and metaphor, among others), elaborate character studies, and extensive historical or metaphysical theme',<sup>13</sup> whereas the latter relies on 'predictable, plot-driven stories, one-dimensional characters and simplistic moral lessons'.<sup>14</sup> Balzac was poised on the cusp of such developments, seeking greatness but often finding venality or commerce thrust upon him, as he confided to his sister in 1820: '[j]'ai l'espoir de devenir riche à coups de romans'.<sup>15</sup> Despite these challenges, he ultimately transcended such dichotomies to secure recognition across diverse formats, most notably in volumes and as complete works within *La Comédie humaine*, and later through school syllabi, scholarly editions, and adaptations for theatre, cinema, and television.

### **'Classic' as Greatness: Institutionalizing Greatness via Canonization Models**

Understanding Balzac's place within the pantheon of classic writers involves reading beyond the term's etymology to reveal its broader sociological and cultural implications.<sup>16</sup> In

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<sup>13</sup> Anne O'Neil-Henry in *Mastering the Marketplace: Popular Literature in Nineteenth-Century France* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Corr.*, vol. I, Letter to Laure Surville, August 1820, p. 70.

<sup>16</sup> The thesis uses the English term 'classic' for linguistic consistency, aligning with the thesis title and the works of David Bellos, Christopher Prendergast, and Frank Kermode. Both 'classic' and 'classique' derive from the Latin *classicus*, originally referring to texts deemed worthy of study in the classroom. While my thesis examines Balzac's construction as a classic writer within Metropolitan France, I have chosen to use the term 'classic' rather than 'classique.' This choice reflects the broader, interdisciplinary scope of my research, encompassing Balzac's classic status as shaped by the rise of serialized novels, educational editions, and various forms of cinematic and television adaptations.

her study of Viala's work, Cécile Rabot argues that the 'classic' is a multifaceted object of analysis, with its authoritative status exerting a lasting sociological influence:

Les classiques ne sont donc pas tant des objets littéraires que l'on pourrait tenter de définir en soi que des objets sociaux de pratiques (lectorales, discursives, pédagogiques, classificatoires, évaluatives), dont les enjeux sont multiples (cognitifs, esthétiques, émotionnels, distinctifs, politiques, etc.). C'est vrai aussi des autres textes, mais, par leur autorité socialement reconnue, leur inscription massive dans les institutions et dans les discours, leurs usages multiples, les classiques apparaissent comme des textes éminemment sociaux.<sup>17</sup>

The 'classic' is therefore defined by its polysemous nature and is influenced by a wide range of institutions involving diverse modes of dissemination, appraisal and legitimacy. This is reflected in designations such as *classique*, *grand auteur*, *génie littéraire* and *best-seller*, all of which have been used to describe Balzac, whether by himself, his contemporaries or subsequent generations of critics, authors and filmmakers. The diversity of terms used to describe literary prominence, each reflecting distinct yet overlapping forms of critical acclaim and commercial success, can help explain why Bourdieu calls for a departure from a singular, institutionally anchored model of canonization, long dominated by educational establishments:

On ne peut sortir du cercle enchanté des *legenda* produisant le *modus legendi* qui les reproduit comme tels, c'est-à-dire comme objets méritant d'être lus, et lus en tant qu'objets intemporels d'une délectation purement esthétique, qu'à condition de le prendre comme objet dans deux ensembles de recherches: d'une part, une histoire de l'invention progressive de la lecture pure, mode d'appréhension des œuvres qui a partie liée avec l'autonomisation du champ de production littéraire et l'apparition corrélative d'œuvres demandant à être lues (et relues) en elles-mêmes et pour elles-mêmes; d'autre part, une histoire du processus de canonisation qui a conduit à la constitution d'un corpus d'œuvres canoniques dont le système scolaire tend à reproduire continûment la valeur en produisant des consommateurs avertis, c'est-à-dire convertis, et des commentaires sacralisants.<sup>18</sup>

The canonization process is thus determined by a variety of factors that grant access to multiple yet often overlapping and mutually reinforcing forms of literary greatness.

The recognition of Balzac's greatness can largely be attributed to Taine. His 1858 essay, later included in his *Nouveaux essais de critique et d'histoire*, was considered by Michael Tilby

<sup>17</sup> Cécile Rabot, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?', *Littéraire: pour Alain Viala*, vol. I (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 2018), p. 106.

<sup>18</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art: Genèse et structure du champ littéraire*, p. 306.

as ‘the most influential study of Balzac published in the nineteenth century’.<sup>19</sup> Taine was struck by Balzac’s boundless imagination, which he regarded as a defining marker of the writer’s grandeur. He frequently likened Balzac to Shakespeare, elevating him to the status of a literary monument.<sup>20</sup> He praised the ‘abondance de pensées’<sup>21</sup> in Balzac’s writing, a feature that highlighted his immense intellect and gave life to his ‘grands personnages’<sup>22</sup> such as Grandet, Goriot, and Hulot. For Taine, what set Balzac apart from other writers was not merely the breadth of his oeuvre, but his ambition to create a rigorous and systematic coherence within it. It was a defining feature of his greatness as it allowed him to ‘saisir la vérité parce qu’il a saisi les ensembles; sa puissance systématique a donné à ses peintures l’unité avec la force, avec l’intérêt la fidélité’.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, Taine portrayed Balzac as deeply immersed in the world of commerce and the pursuit of money, which Balzac saw as ‘le grand ressort de la vie moderne’.<sup>24</sup> Despite this preoccupation with wealth, he also argued that the writer possessed the rare ability to ‘rendre les affaires poétiques’.<sup>25</sup> This tension encapsulates the contradictions within Balzac’s character, where his drive for financial success paradoxically nourished his grandiose ambitions and the lasting significance of his work. This interplay is reflected in the shifting dynamics of Balzac’s recognition, illustrating how an author who initially met with limited acclaim can ultimately achieve classic status.<sup>26</sup> This occurred as his work reached a broader audience, was (re)published in various pocket and paperback editions, and (re)adapted

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<sup>19</sup> Michael Tilby, *Balzac*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 70.

<sup>20</sup> For a more detailed analysis of what has been described as ‘la grandeur shakespearienne de Balzac’, see Tim Farrant, ‘Balzac et la critique britannique, miroir de la création 1830-2023: 1<sup>re</sup> partie: 1830-1891’, *AB*, 24 (2023), 177-213, p. 200-201.

<sup>21</sup> Hippolyte Taine, ‘*Balzac*’, *Essais de critique et d’histoire*, vol. I, (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2020), 589-668, p. 656.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 592.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 613.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 597.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.*

<sup>26</sup> René Guise examines the evolving reception of Balzac’s serialized works, highlighting how their critical reception improved over time. See René Guise, ‘Balzac et le roman feuilleton’, *L’Année balzacienne*, 1(1964), p. 283-338.

into various media forms. Accordingly, these evolving forces were driven by a network of institutions that acted as catalysts for his canonization.

Jean Barré identifies five canonization models in France: the school institution represented by school curricula; the academic canon, embodied in the ENS and Agrégation lists; the publishers' canon, epitomized by the Pléiade series; the canon of criticism, a central focus of Bellos's analysis of the making of Balzac's reputation between 1850 and 1900; and the political canon, which examines the political dimensions of canon formation, notably the role canonized texts play in the cultural construction of national identity.<sup>27</sup> My research aims to expand Barré's framework by introducing a sixth model that aligns more closely with the objectives of my study: the visual media canon. This model encompasses the commercial posters used to promote Balzac's work, particularly between 1842 and 1846,<sup>28</sup> during the publication of the first and second Furne editions of *La Comédie humaine*,<sup>29</sup> and the theatrical, televisual, and cinematic adaptations that have permeated France's cultural landscape from the nineteenth century to the present day.

Balzac's personality found expression not only through illustrated editions, but perhaps even more vividly through his correspondence, where he frequently reflects on his legacy, his financial earnings, and the intellectual gravitas of his oeuvre. In 1845, he wrote to Madame Hanska: 'Hier, j'ai vu Furne, toute la *Comédie humaine* sera finie en 8<sup>bre</sup>. Il est très content, il va exploiter cela, tout le monde lui dit qu'il n'y a encore que moi dont on puisse dire avec assurance, dans cette époque que je serai dans les classiques'.<sup>30</sup> Despite this confidence, his integration into various canon-formation processes was far from straightforward. For example,

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<sup>27</sup> Jean Barré et al. 'Operationalizing Canonicity: A Quantitative Study of French 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Literature', *Journal of Cultural Analytics*, 8 (2023), 88-113. p. 100.

<sup>28</sup> Copies of these posters are provided in the Additional Documents section of the thesis. A total of seven posters has been included. Permission to reproduce them was granted by Paris Musées. The citations for the posters follow the referencing protocol established by Paris Musées.

<sup>29</sup> See Tim Farrant 'La vue d'en face? Balzac et l'illustration', *L'Année balzacienne*, 12 (2011), 249-271. It explores how caricature, as much as illustration or painterly references, reflects Balzac's creative vision.

<sup>30</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *LH*, vol. II, 6 September 1845 (Paris: Robert Laffont 1990), p. 67.

his inclusion in the academic canon proved to be extremely time-consuming, as it took more than thirty years after his death in 1850 for *Eugénie Grandet* to be added to the Agrégation reading list in 1888.<sup>31</sup>

### ‘Classic’ as Erudition: *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*

The Académie Française defines classic texts within two temporal frameworks: the era of ancient civilization and seventeenth-century French society. In both contexts, classic works are presented as enduring masterpieces that transcend generations and embody artistic excellence. Accordingly, classic works are revered for their capacity to cultivate intellectual curiosity:

Qui est étudié dans les classes parce que tenu pour un modèle d’excellence. *Homère, Platon, Virgile, Molière, Chateaubriand* sont des auteurs classiques. Subst. *Connaître ses classiques*. Par extension. *Un ouvrage classique* et, ellipt., *un classique*, qui a soutenu l’épreuve du temps, qui est généralement connu, étudié et qui sert de référence. *La thèse de ce juriste, de ce médecin est un classique. Les livres classiques*. Par métonymie. Vieilli. *Une librairie classique*, qui vend des manuels scolaires.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to their enduring relevance, classic works are distinguished by their stylistic rigour, reflecting the writing principles championed by seventeenth-century French authors. These stylistic attributes sought to refine the disciplined structure of poetic expression, exemplified

<sup>31</sup> Michel Lichtlé writes: ‘Balzac entre par *Eugénie Grandet* d’abord en 1888 au programme de l’agrégation de l’enseignement secondaire spécial réservée aux non-latinistes, puis en 1897 à celui de l’agrégation pour l’enseignement secondaire de jeunes filles; par le début du *Père Goriot* en 1905 à l’agrégation de grammaire; par *Le Cousin Pons* en 1910 à l’agrégation des lettres. ‘Balzac: une référence pour le XX<sup>e</sup> siècle’, *AB*, 16 (2015), 41-46. p. 44. It is also worth noting that the noun *Balzacien* was first used in 1888, in Anatole France’s *La Vie littéraire*, as a qualifying noun to designate a Balzac specialist: ‘Ce répertoire [de *La Comédie humaine*] a été dressé soigneusement par deux balzacien enthousiastes.’ See Anatole France, *La Vie littéraire*, vol. I (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1888), p. 150.

<sup>32</sup> ‘Classique’, Definition 1, in *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. [online], <<https://www.dictionnaire-academie.fr/article/A9C2532>> [accessed 26 January 2025]. Although this definition lists authors from different centuries as examples of *auteurs classiques*, it is meant to illustrate the Académie’s institutional understanding of the *classique*, not to imply a shared historical period or to misdate Chateaubriand. The category remains linked etymologically to ancient Greek and Latin writers and, in France, to authors of the Grand Siècle. Chateaubriand is likely included to reflect the expanding use of the term to encompass eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authors increasingly taught in schools.

by the French alexandrine, and to uphold the three Aristotelian unities that are fundamental to classical theatre:

Dans un sens plus récent. Qui suit les règles de composition et de style instaurées par la tradition antique, en parlant particulièrement des écrivains et des artistes du règne de Louis XIV, *Boileau, La Bruyère, Fénelon sont des écrivains classiques. Bossuet est un illustre orateur classique. Subst. Les grands classiques du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle.* Par extension. *La tragédie classique de Corneille et de Racine. Les trois unités du théâtre classique. Le style et la langue classiques. L'art classique. L'architecture classique. Le goût, l'esprit classique.*<sup>33</sup>

Seventeenth-century authors such as Molière and La Fontaine adhered to these principles, writing classic texts that encapsulated the triad of purposes: ‘*docere, movere, placer*’.<sup>34</sup> Their works evoked profound emotional responses, notably through catharsis, and imparted moral values to both readers and audiences:

[L]’idéal esthétique qui a inspiré les principaux écrivains et artistes français du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle : imitation des Anciens, culte du vrai, du beau, recherche de l’ordre, de la clarté, d’un équilibre fondé sur la perfection de la forme et l’économie des moyens. *Corneille, Molière, Racine, La Fontaine, Boileau sont les principaux représentants du classicisme en littérature. La colonnade du Louvre, le château de Versailles constituent des exemples du classicisme en architecture.*<sup>35</sup>

To fulfil these artistic ideals, authors crafted their works as vivid *mises en scène* that reflected life with precision and artistry. They organized their texts with a ‘montage rigoureux, organisé, dirons-nous pour faire simple, autour de deux pôles: celui de l’objet (la nature imitée) et celui du sujet (le poète inspiré)’.<sup>36</sup> Writers sought to reflect reality, encouraging readers and spectators to apply the lessons conveyed in the text to their moral beliefs. Seventeenth-century writers employed this technique to depict the world with clear sightedness, the forerunner of Balzac’s realism, both as lack of illusion on human nature and motivation, and as the aesthetic

<sup>33</sup> ‘Classique’, Definition 2, *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Arlette Michel, ‘Balzac et l’idée de progrès en littérature’, *Romantisme*, 108 (2000), 53-64, p. 62. Michel argues that Balzac adapted the principles of the classic ‘au roman et à la modernité’ in three different ways: the exploration of the *mœurs*, the analytical approach to his writing style and the ‘foisonnement du réel’, thereby actualizing the modern practices of the nineteenth century ‘en une présence immédiatement signifiante.’ Arlette Michel ‘Balzac et la rhétorique: modernité et tradition’, *AB*, 9 (1988), 245-269, p. 257.

<sup>35</sup> ‘Classicisme’, Definition 1, in *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. [online], < <https://www.dictionnaire-academie.fr/article/A9C2527> > [accessed 26 January 2025].

<sup>36</sup> Patrick Dandrey, ‘Les deux esthétiques du classicisme français’, *Littératures classiques*, 19 (1993), 145–170, p. 150.

mode that sprang from it.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, they also incorporated verisimilitude, hyperbole, and dynamic staging to satirize contemporary life.<sup>38</sup> The interplay of stylistic clarity, moral instruction, and dramatic presentation formed the foundation for the literary movement known as *classicisme*.<sup>39</sup>

The term *classicisme* was first used in 1817 by Stendhal, who defined it in opposition to *romanticisme*: ‘[l]e romantisme est l’art de présenter aux peuples des œuvres littéraires qui, dans l’état actuel de leurs habitudes et de leurs croyances, sont susceptibles de leur donner le plus de plaisir possible. Le classicisme, au contraire, leur présente la littérature qui donnait le plus grand plaisir à leurs arrière-grands-pères’.<sup>40</sup> Works aligned with the aesthetic of *classicisme* can be understood as ‘les œuvres qui prennent pour modèle l’art antique par opposition aux œuvres romantiques’.<sup>41</sup> The opposition between *classicisme* and *romanticisme* is a reaction to the infamous *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, which occurred between the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. According to Prendergast, the nationalists were associated with the *modernes*, as they were ‘anxious to weaken the prestige accorded by the “anciens” to Greek and Roman antiquity as the enduring benchmark of what is admirable and worthy of emulation’.<sup>42</sup> This Quarrel anticipated the ‘second great quarrel of French literary politics: the early nineteenth-century dispute between romantics and classicists’.<sup>43</sup> In this division, the classicists aligned themselves with the *anciens*, upholding the principles of classical antiquity, while the romantics, known as the *modernes*, rejected the rigid standards

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<sup>37</sup> This term ‘realism’ will be explored in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4, which examine how the realism in Balzac’s work is represented within school curricula, particularly through the *Petits classiques* series and the *sequences pédagogiques*.

<sup>38</sup> See Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Thought*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>39</sup> The French term *classicisme* will be used in the thesis. It refers strictly to the literary movement which sought to establish ‘l’honnête homme’ in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The term should not be confused with the English term ‘Classicism’ which refers to the art, literature and architectural aesthetic of the period.

<sup>40</sup> Stendhal, *Racine et Shakespeare* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 1994), p. 36.

<sup>41</sup> Alexandra Pion, ‘Stendhal et l’idéalisme romantique’, *Recherches & Travaux*, 79 (2011), 149-162, p. 162.

<sup>42</sup> Christopher Prendergast, ‘Classic and Nation’, *The Classic: Sainte-Beuve and the Nineteenth-Century Culture Wars* (Oxford: Oxford Printing Press, 2007), 1-47, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> *Id.*

and perceived limitations of seventeenth-century classic texts. Indeed, despite the seemingly stark differences Lousteau evokes in *Illusions perdues*,<sup>44</sup> the more pivotal intervention arguably lies in Hugo's preface to *Cromwell* in 1827. He identifies the 'grotesque' as a crucial characteristic in Romantic literature, challenging the traditions of seventeenth-century classic literature which had largely confined itself to the rigid binaries of tragedy and comedy:

Aussi voilà un principe étranger à l'antiquité, un type nouveau introduit dans la poésie; et comme une condition de plus dans l'être modifie l'être tout entier, voilà une forme nouvelle qui se développe dans l'art. Ce type, c'est le grotesque. Cette forme, c'est la comédie. Et ici, qu'il nous soit permis d'insister; car nous venons d'indiquer le trait caractéristique, la différence fondamentale qui sépare, à notre avis, l'art moderne de l'art antique, la forme actuelle de la forme morte, ou pour nous servir de mots plus vagues, mais plus accrédités, la littérature romantique, de la littérature classique.<sup>45</sup>

His statement presages a transcending of limits which would also be found in his later declarations on Balzac as well as in Baudelaire's and Wilde's work.

Balzac's stance on the Quarrel was both nuanced and laden with paradoxes. Although he is credited with being one of the first writers to use the term 'modernité'<sup>46</sup> in both its

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<sup>44</sup> In *Illusions perdues*, Lousteau asks Lucien whether he is a 'classique' or a 'romantique', however, his question alludes to the latter's political views. For Balzac, this Quarrel was not only one of literary aesthetics, but also of political ideologies. The Classics were considered Liberals whereas the Romantics were supporters of the Royalist regime. As Lousteau passionately says to Lucien: 'Mon cher, vous arrivez au milieu d'une bataille acharnée, il faut vous décider promptement. La littérature est partagée d'abord en plusieurs zones; mais nos grands hommes sont divisés en deux camps. Les Royalistes sont romantiques, les Libéraux sont classiques. La divergence des opinions littéraires se joint à la divergence des opinions politiques, et il s'ensuit une guerre à toutes armes, encre à torrents, bons mots à fer aiguisé, calomnies pointues, sobriquets à outrance, entre les gloires naissantes et les gloires déchues. Par une singulière bizarrerie, les Royalistes romantiques demandent la liberté littéraire et la révocation des lois qui donnent des formes convenues à notre littérature; tandis que les Libéraux veulent maintenir les unités, l'allure de l'alexandrin et le thème classique'. Honoré de Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, CH V (Paris: Éditions Gallimard-Pléiade, 1977), p. 337.

<sup>45</sup> Victor Hugo, *Cromwell* (Paris: Charpentier, 1844), p. 12-13. See Yoshimi Hamano, 'L'ombre imaginaire dans la Préface de Cromwell', *Gallia* 45 (2006), 23-29.

<sup>46</sup> Roland Chollet and Stéphane Vachon reveal that Balzac used the word 'modernité' several times throughout his early writing career, notably in works such as *La Dernière fête* (1823), written under one of his early pseudonyms, Horace de Saint-Aubin. However, the term does not appear in *La Comédie humaine*, nor in *La Correspondance* or *Les Lettres à Madame Hanska*. Nonetheless, Chollet and Vachon argue that the neologism is indeed Balzac's: 'Oserons-nous dire, à la suite du journaliste anonyme des Annales françaises des arts, des sciences et des lettres dans lequel il nous plaît de reconnaître Balzac lui-même, que la modernité a inventé le roman? Certes oui, et il nous plaît d'ajouter que Balzac a inventé la modernité. Peut-on inventer le mot sans inventer la chose? N'invente-on pas la chose lorsque l'on invente le mot? Reconnaissons qu'en l'état de nos connaissances, Honoré de Balzac est le premier écrivain de langue française à avoir couché le mot 'modernité' sur le papier et ce, à sept reprises entre novembre 1822 et mai 1823, et que, chez lui, ce néologisme de forme et ce néologisme de sens a deux significations, l'une historique, l'autre esthétique, et deux valeurs, l'une positive,

historical and aesthetic contexts, this did not prevent him from rejecting the rigid structure and pedagogic value of classic texts. Indeed, he held these principles in high regard,<sup>47</sup> striving to incorporate them into *Eugénie Grandet*, *Le Père Goriot*, and *Le Cousin Pons*, the first three novels included on the prescribed Agrégation reading lists.

While Balzac valued elements of both *classicisme* and *romanticisme*, he refused to align himself strictly with either. His admiration for great authors was instead reflected in his exploration of France's turbulent history, its evolving socioeconomic and political ideologies, and, most notably, its social mores which became a defining feature of his work. However, while works admitted into the academic canon were expected to possess 'une valeur supérieure'<sup>48</sup> and 'une portée universelle, donc pouvoir être lus par tous avec profit',<sup>49</sup> Balzac's work did not always meet these criteria. Although he set extremely ambitious writing goals for himself, aiming 'dès ses premières œuvres d'élaborer une œuvre qui soit l'équivalent, pour son époque, à la fois de la Bible et des *Métamorphoses* d'Ovide',<sup>50</sup> his writing was subject to immense criticism. He was especially targeted during his growing visibility in the press following the release of *La Vieille Fille* in 1836. In subsequent serialized works, critics attacked his protracted prose, immorality, satirical portrayals of journalism, unorthodox treatment of marriage, and sexually explicit themes, notably prostitution, rape and homosexuality. However, it was precisely these fragmented formats and successive illustrated editions, notably the 1842 Furne edition that enabled him to publish prolifically, attract newspaper subscribers, and secure his commercial success and notoriety.

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l'autre négative.' Rolland Chollet, Stéphane Vachon, *À l'écoute du jeune Balzac: L'écho des premières œuvres publiées (1822-1829)*, p. 588.

<sup>47</sup> See Geneviève Delattre, *Les Opinions littéraires de Balzac* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1961).

<sup>48</sup> Cécile Rabot, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?', in *Littéraire. Pour Alain Viala. Tome I*, 2018, 97-107, p. 98.

<sup>49</sup> *Id.*

<sup>50</sup> Anne-Marie Baron, *Balzac et la Bible: une herméneutique du romanesque* (Paris: Champion, 2007), p. 13.

## ‘Classic’ as ‘Popular’: Fragmentation, Illustration and Edition

Despite Balzac’s setbacks in his early theatrical ventures, particularly *Cromwell* in 1820,<sup>51</sup> key institutions, such as the Cabinets de lecture, the nineteenth-century press, the theatre, and the expanding network of independent publishers, notably Charpentier, were instrumental in reshaping the institutional authority of the ‘classic’. These shifts are reflected in another of the Oxford English Dictionary’s definitions of the ‘classic’: ‘a work of literature, music, or art of acknowledged quality and enduring significance or popularity’,<sup>52</sup> highlighting ‘popularity’ as a key criterion. Yves Martin argues that the *roman populaire* catered to the public’s growing interest in simplified characters, dramatic events, and heightened emotions, traits often associated with lowbrow literature.<sup>53</sup> Popular works were thus ‘intended for or suited to the understanding or taste of ordinary people, esp. as opposed to specialists in a field; *spec.* (of literature, etc.) intended for and directed at a general readership’.<sup>54</sup> This broader circulation of literature enabled authors such as Sue, Sand, Paul de Kock, Pixérécourt, Dumas, and even Balzac, to gain legitimacy.<sup>55</sup>

Indeed, novelists turned to melodrama as a ‘source of inspiration for both subject matter and technique’.<sup>56</sup> This democratization of writing, however, sparked unsurprising criticism from Sainte-Beuve, who regarded literature intended for the masses as debasing and at odds

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<sup>51</sup> He writes: ‘Je dévore nos 4 auteurs tragiques: Crébillon me rassure, Voltaire m’épouvante, Corneille me transporte, Racine me fait quitter la plume.’ Honoré de Balzac, *Corr.*, vol. I, September 1819, p. 25. He continues: ‘La Fontaine pour ami, Boileau pour juge, Racine pour exemple et le Père-Lachaise pour me promener.’ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Classic’—c1763, 1.b., in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], <[https://www.oed.com/dictionary/classic\\_adj?tab=meaning\\_and\\_use#9305429](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/classic_adj?tab=meaning_and_use#9305429)> [accessed 26 January 2025].

<sup>53</sup> ‘Le genre est populaire par son destinataire, le peuple, masse encore informe et inculte au début du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, ce peuple qui a un goût naturel pour les personnages simplifiés et les événements compliqués, pour les émotions violentes, les caractères extrêmes, les couleurs crues et les drames effroyables. Le roman populaire se doit donc de frapper le plus fort possible l’imagination, à la sensibilité, et surtout aux nerfs.’ Yves Olivier-Martin, *Histoire du roman populaire en France de 1840 à 1980* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1980), p. 13.

<sup>54</sup> ‘Popular’—c1573, 4.a., in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], <[https://www.oed.com/dictionary/popular\\_adj?tab=meaning\\_and\\_use#29255157](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/popular_adj?tab=meaning_and_use#29255157)> [accessed 26 January 2025].

<sup>55</sup> As will be shown in the following chapters, Balzac rejected the idea of writing for a wider audience, despite his conflicting financial ambitions.

<sup>56</sup> Christopher Prendergast, *Balzac: Fiction and Melodrama* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978), p. 5.

with the highbrow traditions that formed the foundation of the nation's literary heritage. He lamented that 'la littérature industrielle est arrivée à supprimer la critique et à occuper la place à peu près sans contradiction et comme si elle existait seule'.<sup>57</sup> Despite Sainte-Beuve's objections, melodrama had firmly established itself as a key feature of serialized fiction by the 1840s:

The *roman-feuilleton* becomes a symbol, representing and crystallizing in extreme form many of the dominant forces and tendencies at work in the emergence of Sainte-Beuve's *démocratie littéraire*, and the whole question of popularity and relations with the reading public, of standards and values in 'popular' culture, will be debated time and time again against the background of this particularly symptomatic phenomenon.<sup>58</sup>

The rise of popular literature had a significant impact on Balzac's status as a writer, especially as he began to embrace commercial strategies to promote his work, publishing prolifically via serialization and collaborating with artists such as Grandville, Gavarni, and Daumier. However, unlike Sue's rapid success with *Les Mystères de Paris*, Balzac struggled fully to embrace this fragmented form, revealing yet another disparity between his creative ambitions and the shifting commercial dynamics of the literary marketplace:

Balzac est ainsi de ceux qui savent que désormais le destin d'une œuvre et le destin de son auteur dépendent de cette 'prostitution de la pensée qu'on nomme: la publication'. Il sait que l'auteur n'existe plus que dans la circulation littéraire. Ce qui tend à déplacer l'axe de l'Empire littéraire du centre vers la périphérie: de l'auteur-maître vers l'auteur imaginé par ce despote tout-puissant qu'est le lecteur. Un despote dont les nouvelles conditions économiques du livre font une ombre menaçante, et auquel elles donnent des pouvoirs accrus.<sup>59</sup>

Balzac's serialized work elicited two primary objections. Critics such as Sainte-Beuve and Jules Janin condemned it as immoral, highlighting its engagement with sexual themes, its treatment of Catholicism, and, to some extent, its nuanced and contradictory portrayal of Legitimist ideology. Consequently, Balzac's writing was often dismissed as frivolous and

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<sup>57</sup> Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, 'De la littérature industrielle', *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 19 (1839), 675-691, p. 679.

<sup>58</sup> Christopher Prendergast, *Balzac: Fiction and Melodrama*, p. 20.

<sup>59</sup> José-Luis Diaz, *Devenir Balzac: l'invention de l'écrivain par lui-même*, p. 205.

detrimental to the moral and educational values of the readership, particularly female readers. Second, his texts faced criticism for being excessively verbose and difficult to read. What many failed to appreciate, however, was Balzac's innovative use of the *roman-feuilleton* as a medium to reinvent traditional characteristics associated with melodrama, including 'antithesis, hyperbole, stereotype, mystery, coincidence and poetic justice'.<sup>60</sup> This was achieved through the use of theatrical metaphors, which, as Frappier-Mazur suggests, highlights the breadth of Balzac's encyclopaedic knowledge and merges theatricality with reality.<sup>61</sup> In other words, Balzac used melodrama to stage life as a theatrical spectacle and dismantle idealized illusions. Through his dramatized *mises en scène* and larger-than-life characters, whose fates often end in tragic denouements, Balzac exposes the vices and illusions constructed by the real world, even as those very illusions paradoxically nourished his creative imagination. These include the rapid industrialization of society, significant advancements in medical technology, the instability of the political regime, and the financial limitations of book production and publishing mechanisms.<sup>62</sup>

Ironically, rather like his adversary Sainte-Beuve, Balzac's initially fraught relationship with the broader reading public led him to perceive the expansion of the reading audience as indicative of a 'dramatic erosion of the important values in favour of the cheap and the ephemeral'.<sup>63</sup> In an article Balzac wrote for *La Quotidienne* on 22 August 1833, he sharply

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<sup>60</sup> Anne O'Neil-Henry, *Mastering the Marketplace: Popular Literature*, p. 6.

<sup>61</sup> Frappier-Mazur argues that Balzac's use of theatrical representation contrasts with that of Dante's as he focuses on the real rather than the divine. Drawing on the topos 'le théâtre du monde' (inspired by La Bruyère and Diderot), Balzac dramatizes reality to illustrate that 'la vie imite le théâtre.' Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, 'La métaphore théâtrale dans *La Comédie humaine*', *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, 1 (1970), 64-89, p. 83. The Balzac citation used by Frappier-Mazur can be found in Honoré de Balzac, *Avertissement du gars*, ed. Maurice Regard (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014), 409-426, p. 410.

<sup>62</sup> The *mise en abyme* in *Illusions perdues* reflects the challenges that arise not only in the physical mechanisms of publishing, but also in the quasi-impossibility of becoming a great author; one who puts themselves at the mercy of the realities of the novel, which, between 1820 and 1837 (when the novel was first published by Werdet), were not so different.

<sup>63</sup> Christopher Prendergast, *Balzac: Fiction and Melodrama* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1978), p. 35.

criticizes and even condescends ‘l’accroissement de la masse lisante’,<sup>64</sup> arguing that ‘le mal que causent ces essais littéraires est un mal purement commercial’.<sup>65</sup> However, it was precisely these serialized works that helped bolster an author’s visibility and financial gain, especially Balzac’s.<sup>66</sup>

Unlike his contemporaries, notably Sue, Balzac did not simply aim to entertain readers with easily consumable ‘essais littéraires’. Instead, he sought to use his work as a means of educating the public, wishing to establish himself as a leading writer within an increasingly commercialized literary landscape:

[J]e ne peux pas, je ne dois pas, je ne veux pas subir la dépréciation qui pèse sur moi par les marchés de Sue, et par le tapage que font ses deux ouvrages, je dois faire voir, par des succès littéraires, par des chefs-d’œuvre, en un mot que ses œuvres en détrempe sont les devants de la cheminée, et exposer des Raphaël à côté de ses Dubufe. Vous me connaissez assez pour savoir que je n’ai ni jalousie ni aigreur contre lui, ni contre le public. Dieu merci, mes rivaux sont Molière et Walter Scott, Lesage et Voltaire, et non Paul de Kock en satin et à paillettes; mais *mio tesoro*, il s’agit de payer 120,000 fr. de dettes, d’avoir sa case et une vie décente, ce qui, pour un homme comme moi, à 45 ans, est une nécessité, et si je n’envie rien de ce triomphateur à mirliton, vous me permettrez de déplorer qu’on lui paye ses volumes 10,000 fr. tandis que je n’obtiens que 3000 des miens. Or, en frappant deux grand coups, en étant *littéraire*, de *grand style* et plus *intéressant*, en étant vrai, si j’êteins à mon profit cette *furia francese*, qui se porte aux *Mystères* comme à la polka, comme à la *Grace de Dieu*, je puis trouver 200,000 fr. pour 10 volumes des *Scènes de la vie militaire*, et j’ai du pain.<sup>67</sup>

Although Balzac criticized the mechanisms of commercialization, he nonetheless relied on many of them, most notably illustrations, to promote his work. This tension appears in the contrast between the popular visual culture of self-promotion, exemplified by the serialized illustrations of the *Physiologies* series,<sup>68</sup> commercial bookshop posters, and the elevated aesthetic of the 1842 Furne edition. While bold visuals, fragmented narratives, and cost-effective paperback editions aimed to attract a wider readership, the Furne edition’s typographic refinement, luxurious binding, and carefully conceived paratexts represented a

<sup>64</sup> Honoré de Balzac, ‘De l’état actuel de la littérature’, *OD*, vol. II (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1990), p. 1221-1223.

<sup>65</sup> *Id.*

<sup>66</sup> See Alain Vaillant, *La civilisation du journal: Histoire culturelle et littéraire de la presse au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Nouveau monde éditions, 2011).

<sup>67</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Lettres à Mme Hanska*, vol. I, 17 September 1844, p. 910-911.

<sup>68</sup> See Nathalie Preiss, *De la poire au parapluie: Physiologies politiques* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000).

calculated gesture of literary consecration. The juxtaposition between these two publishing formats, one privileging commercial visibility, the other cultural prestige, highlights the complex positioning of Balzac as both a widely circulated author and a figure of canonical authority:

Assurément, l'illustration chez Balzac n'est ni la 'femme d'à côté' ni la femme à abandonner, mais celle qui, visible ou invisible, touche au fondement de *La Comédie humaine* et en fait un théâtre à multiples dessous. Par la mise en lumière de la 'maladie de la pierre' à la Terreur-Méduse attachée, qui de son rire blagueur met à plat toute relation dialectique entre un ici-bas et un au-delà, entre la réalité de l'Idée et celle de l'image, elle révèle un malaise dans la civilisation et dans la représentation, d'ordre politique – plus d'hommes illustres mais des illustrations, plus d'assise sacrée de la Cité –, comme d'ordre poétique: mimesis et sémiosis n'ont plus à quoi faire référence ni signe. Instrument d'intellection, elle est aussi moyen de constitution et de reconstitution de la figure menacée d'un *auctor* en quête de personnage. Par elle, il trouve son ethos dans un Éros-Schéhérazade à l'arabesque qui relie et par quoi Honoré se fait enfin Désiré. Le Livre des 400 auteurs l'a bien saisi, qui figure l'*auctor* Balzac en presse-papier, véritable sceau qui imprime et scelle son autorité.<sup>69</sup>

Indeed, these seemingly disparate formats converge through the power of illustration, a vital component in animating Balzac's fictional world, and constructing his public persona both as an intellectual and as a caricature. Accordingly, illustration plays a far more integral role in Balzac's literary project than is often assumed, enabling the ongoing (re)construction of the *auctor*.<sup>70</sup>

While these visual accompaniments reinforced his authorial identity as a great writer and secured his financially lucrative ambitions, Balzac used illustration as one of the strategies to navigate the demands of publishers and readers, grappling with what Prendergast calls 'cultural fragmentation',<sup>71</sup> a dissonance between aesthetic aspiration and the commercialized mechanisms of literary production. This explains the writer's paradoxical yearning for both 'public and popular acclaim of genius in a commercially oriented world'.<sup>72</sup> Balzac's continual balancing act, between catering to popular demand and safeguarding his artistic integrity, transformed his writing into a monumental platform for engaging with a wide range of social,

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63-64.

<sup>70</sup> See Nathalie Preiss 'Balzac illustre (é)' *Littera* 3 (2018), 37-65.

<sup>71</sup> Christopher Prendergast, *Balzac: Fiction and Melodrama*, p. 37.

<sup>72</sup> *Id.*

moral, political, economic, mystical, scientific, and theatrical themes. It is precisely this capaciousness that has enabled generations of critics, educators, publishers, illustrators and cinematographers to legitimize Balzac's status within the nation's *patrimoine*.

### **'Classic' as Adaptation: *Patrimoine*, Canonicity and Culture-Texts**

The term *patrimoine* designates 'tous les trésors du passé',<sup>73</sup> something that is 'connu, passé et qui se transmet'.<sup>74</sup> In other words, the *patrimoine* is intrinsically tied to the relics of the past, much in the same way that the French *classique* is etymologically rooted in antiquity and, by extension, seventeenth-century literature. As Brigitte Louichon argues, an *œuvre patrimoniale* should not be solely understood as a distant, transgenerational object, but rather as a meaningful symbol of a 'passé pertinent, c'est-à-dire du passé présent, dont la présence est attestée par les objets discursifs secondaires contemporains qu'elle génère'.<sup>75</sup> One of the principal disseminators of these secondary discursive objects is the educational institution: 'l'école est une grande productrice de patrimoine puisqu'elle rend, quotidiennement, le passé présent'.<sup>76</sup> These discursive objects reanimate the past through educational, artistic, theatrical, and digital media, such as graphic novels, animated films, musical comedies, newspapers, television programmes, and blogs. The *œuvre patrimoniale*,<sup>77</sup> akin to the *œuvre classique*,

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<sup>73</sup> Marie-Françoise Melmoux-Montaubin, 'Patrimonialisation et territorialisation de la littérature: causes, enjeux et effets', *Recherches & Travaux*, 96 (2020), 1-14, p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> Brigitte Louichon, 'Définir la littérature patrimoniale', in *Enseigner les « classiques » aujourd'hui. Approches critiques et didactiques*, eds Isabelle de Peretti and Béatrice Ferrier (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2012), 37-49, p. 39.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45-46.

<sup>77</sup> While there are slight differences between the *œuvre patrimoniale* and the *œuvre classique*, such as their target readerships, they share important similarities in their continual transformation. The *œuvre patrimoniale* typically encompasses contemporary European and Francophone texts intended for younger students, particularly at the collège level, as an introduction to classic literature. Louichon lists some of the most common *œuvres patrimoniales*, including: Daniel Pennac's *L'œil du loup* (1984), Anthony Browne's *Histoire à quatre voix* (1998), and Jean-Claude Mourlevat's *L'Enfant-océan* (1999). By contrast, the *œuvre classique* refers to a more established canon, including Latin and Ancient Greek texts as well as works from seventeenth-century France, originally aimed at a more mature and pedagogically oriented readership. Over time, however, the *œuvre classique* has also reached broader audiences through collections such as the *Petits Classiques* and film adaptations. This wider dissemination shows that both categories are dynamic rather than fixed, continually reimagined and renewed through evolving curricula, editorial formats, cinematic reinterpretations, and other mechanisms that sustain their cultural relevance across periods and media.

exists in a state of continual transformation; it remains anchored in the past while being continually recontextualized through these contemporary media.

Among these secondary discursive objects, theatrical and cinematic adaptations occupy an important position, particularly as they are increasingly incorporated into the curriculum. In French literary discourse, where canonical works are often treated with a quasi-sacred status, the relationship between an original text and its adaptations has generally been understood as ‘fixed, hierarchical, and unidirectional’.<sup>78</sup> However, for scholars such as Hutcheon, Sanders and Szwydky, canonicity is just as essential for adaptation as adaptation is for canonicity because the latter can also be a catalyst for canon formation. Assessing the literary canon is a process of adaptation in and of itself, as it is consistently reabsorbed, reworked, and reapplied to the cultural zeitgeist. Accordingly, adaptations underline the importance of the canon while the latter serves as inexhaustible source material for adaptations:

Canonicity, it has been posited, is almost a required feature of the raw material for adaptation and appropriation. If the implied pleasure involved in the action of assessing the similarities and differences between texts, between source and imitation, which we have elsewhere argued for as fundamental to the reading and spectating experience of adaptation, is to be possible it requires prior knowledge of the text(s) being assimilated, absorbed, reworked, and refashioned by the adaptive process.<sup>79</sup>

The term ‘adaptation’, much like ‘classic’, is inherently complex, polysemous, and continually evolving via intertextuality and reinvention, which carry implicit expectations that vary depending on the medium. Each form, whether theatre, film, or literature, employs distinct techniques, such as dialogue and performance, editing, or *mise-en-scène*, to reinterpret the source material for its target audience. These techniques not only influence the audience’s perception of the work but also shape how they understand its author, either reinforcing or

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<sup>78</sup> Ann Lewis, Silke Arnold-de Simine, *Adapting the canon: mediation, visualisation, interpretation* (Oxford: Legenda, 2020), p. 5. See also Lissette Lopez Szwydky, ‘Adaptations, Culture-Texts and the Literary Canon: On the making of nineteenth-century “classics”’ in *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*, eds Dennis Cutchins, Katja Krebs and Eckart Voigts, 128-42. Szwydky focuses primarily on nineteenth-century classic English literature and theatrical adaptations.

<sup>79</sup> Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 120.

challenging preconceived judgments. Adaptation is therefore multifunctional; it is not merely a reproduction but a fluid and ongoing negotiation between preservation and transformation, tradition and innovation:

Adaptation can be a transpositional practice, casting a specific genre into another generic mode, an act of re-vision in itself. It can parallel editorial practice in some respects, indulging in the exercise of trim and pruning; yet it can also be an amplificatory procedure engaged in addition, expansion, accretion, and interpolation [...]. Adaptation is frequently involved in offering commentary on a source text. This is achieved most often by offering a revised point of view from the 'original', adding hypothetical motivation, or voicing the silenced and marginalized. Yet adaptation can also constitute a simpler attempt to make texts 'relevant' or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the processes of proximation and updating. This can be seen as an artistic drive in many adaptations of so-called 'classic' novels or drama for television and cinema. Shakespeare has been a particular focus, a beneficiary even, of these 'proximations' or datings.<sup>80</sup>

For Sanders and Hutcheon, the dynamism of adaptation serves to contextualize classic texts for broader audiences, ensuring their sustained relevance and comprehensibility. If literary canons are defined by their lasting cultural impact, adaptations become a key mechanism through which such works remain relevant and widely disseminated. Rather than solely prioritizing the canon's elevated status, adaptation scholars such as Silke Arnold de Simine and Ann Lewis argue for a more collaborative relationship between adaptation and canonicity. Through consistent dissemination and readaptations, the canon is perpetually reconfigured because each reinterpretation represents a new culture-text that explores a different facet of the writer's work. This is especially true for Balzac as his prolific corpus has been a continual source of inspiration for filmmakers since the inception of the seventh art.

The notion of the culture-text was first introduced by Paul Davis in his analyses of the literary, theatrical, and cinematic adaptations inspired by Dickens's 1843 novella, *A Christmas Carol*. Subsequent adaptations of the same work add new layers of meaning that 'exist beyond the scope of the respective original',<sup>81</sup> reconsidering the past through contemporary practices

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18-19.

<sup>81</sup> Lissette Lopez Szwydky, 'Adaptations, Culture-Texts and the Literary Canon: On the making of nineteenth-century "classics"', p. 131.

and recognizing ‘all versions of the tale as manifestations of a myth in the consciousness of the industrial era’.<sup>82</sup> Readers’ and viewers’ responses to each culture-text are thus culturally influenced. The considerable number of adaptations inspired by Balzac’s work is no exception to this phenomenon. His magnum opus has generated hundreds of culture-texts that have contributed to mythologizing him as an integral figure in France’s collective consciousness—a *lieu de mémoire*, which Pierre Nora defines as an ‘unité significative, d’ordre matériel ou idéal, dont la volonté des hommes ou le travail du temps a fait un élément symbolique d’une quelconque communauté’.<sup>83</sup> In Nora’s framework, such sites of memory crystallize meaning through repeated cultural engagement, allowing individuals to deepen their understanding and critical appreciation of a celebrated work. Accordingly, these ‘unités significatives’ become objects of remembrance that secure a lasting place in the ‘cultural working memory of a society’.<sup>84</sup>

Adaptations represent key objects of remembrance because they keep ‘narratives, characters, and themes alive through ongoing re-interpretations, transferring them from the potentiality of the archive into active memory through public circulation’.<sup>85</sup> In other words, adaptations consistently engage with the nation’s collective memory, forging strong links between the past and the present. Through their ability to reshape Balzac’s oeuvre across different historical moments and media forms, adaptations reaffirm his position as a ‘lieu de mémoire fondateur’.<sup>86</sup> For Nora, the names of classic authors such as Balzac or Hugo have become part of a ‘mémoire inconsciente d’elle-même, organisatrice et toute-puissante, spontanément actualisatrice, une mémoire sans passé qui reconduit éternellement l’héritage,

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<sup>82</sup> Paul Davis, ‘Retelling a Christmas Carol: Text and Culture-Text’, *The American Scholar*, 1 (1990), 109-115, p. 111.

<sup>83</sup> Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire*, vol. I (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), p. 1004.

<sup>84</sup> Aleida Assmann, ‘Canon and Archive’, p. 100.

<sup>85</sup> Ann Lewis, Silke Arnold-de Simine, *Adapting the canon: mediation, visualisation, interpretation*, p. 3.

<sup>86</sup> Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire*, vol. I, p. 1004.

renvoyant l'autrefois des ancêtres au temps indifférencié des héros, des origines et du mythe'.<sup>87</sup>

What endures is not only Balzac's monumental body of work, but also the myth surrounding his name, continually reinterpreted and reappropriated across generations.

### **Balzac: An Ancient and Modern Writer**

Both dictionary definitions and critics such as Italo Calvino, Frank Kermode, and Alain Viala specify that 'timelessness' is a fundamental characteristic of a classic work. For example, Kermode describes a classic text as something that is read long after its inception, with the addendum that 'one might want to qualify this by adding "without institutional constraint" "by the competent" and perhaps other rules'.<sup>88</sup> Balzac's oeuvre not only withstands and embraces the emergence of literary and cinematic movements such as Realism, Naturalism, Symbolism, Modernism, and the Nouvelle Vague, but also exerts a significant influence on key figures within these movements, including Zola, Baudelaire, Proust, Rivette, and Truffaut. Engaging with a diverse range of genres, his work invites continuous reinterpretation, thereby remaining a dynamic force in literature, television and film: 'l'œuvre classique comme l'est celle de Balzac semble toujours contemporaine du lecteur qui s'en empare, par les virtualités qu'elle recèle comme par les interprétations de tous bords qui la réactualisent'.<sup>89</sup>

In his renowned funeral eulogy for Balzac in 1850, Hugo lauds the writer's monumental achievements, emphasizing the intellectual significance of his work and the writer's genius.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1005.

<sup>88</sup> Frank Kermode, 'A Modern Way with the Classic', *New Literary History*, 5 (1974), 415-434, p. 416. For Balzac, this is particularly true as his critical acclaim was initially forged outside of these educational constraints.

<sup>89</sup> Robert Tranchida, 'L'œuvre littéraire, ses lectures, sa diffusion: le cas de Balzac', *Littérature et censure*, 3 (2007), 11-12, p. 12.

<sup>90</sup> 'Dans une page dure et sombre, eau-forte à la Rembrandt, Victor Hugo a conté comment il vit Balzac agoniser seul, abandonné, râlant entre deux bougies, dans sa chambre rouge vainement fastueuse; puis, comment il mena ses obsèques avec Alexandre Dumas. À l'église, il se trouvait assis devant le catafalque, près du ministre de l'Intérieur, Baroche. Écoutons-le: "Il me dit: - C'était un homme distingué. "Je lui dis: - C'était un génie." Cited by Maurice Levailant in 'Balzac visionnaire de la réalité' in *Balzac: le livre du centenaire*, 33-36, p. 33. Ann Jefferson adds that Balzac aspired to be a genius and viewed himself as such: 'Balzac is certainly more than an objective observer of genius since he also aspires to being the genius he declared himself to be just three years

Hugo refers to Balzac's oeuvre as 'un livre,' a term that transcends the conventional limits of the novel:

M. de Balzac était un des premiers parmi les plus grands, un des plus hauts parmi les meilleurs. Ce n'est pas le lieu de dire ici tout ce qu'était cette splendide et souveraine intelligence. Tous ses livres ne forment qu'un livre, livre vivant, lumineux, profond, où l'on voit aller et venir et marcher et se mouvoir, avec je ne sais quoi d'effaré et de terrible mêlé au réel, toute notre civilisation contemporaine; livre merveilleux que le poète a intitulé comédie et qu'il aurait pu intituler histoire, qui prend toutes les formes et tous les styles, qui dépasse Tacite et qui va jusqu'à Suétone, qui traverse Beaumarchais et qui va jusqu'à Rabelais; livre qui est l'observation et qui est l'imagination; qui prodigue le vrai, l'intime, le bourgeois, le trivial, le matériel, et qui par moments, à travers toutes les réalités brusquement et largement déchirées, laisse tout à coup entrevoir le plus sombre et le plus tragique idéal.<sup>91</sup>

Describing Balzac's work as 'vivant', Hugo accentuates its capacity to resonate with readers across the various phases of France's evolving and revolutionary history. Balzac draws on and merges literary styles from the past to create something innovative and distinctly modern, thereby laying the foundation for future *loci classici*. In this context, Alain problematizes Balzac's role as an 'ancien', viewing him not simply as a follower but as an inventor; an architect of compelling myths, whose origins become sources of inspiration rather than of mere imitation:

Balzac n'imite nullement les anciens; il n'y pense jamais. C'est, je suppose, qu'il est ancien lui-même, et aussi naïf qu'Homère. C'est pourquoi il invente des mythes, comme cette peau de chagrin que son jardinier retire du puits; cela est aussi grand que l'anneau de Polycrate, et d'ailleurs sans trace d'imitation. L'écrasante fiction ne le fatigue pas un seul moment. Il conduit comme si c'était vrai, et je la lis comme si c'était vrai.<sup>92</sup>

Alain emphasizes Balzac's ability to create life rather than merely replicate it. His simultaneous pursuit of wealth and fame, coupled with the rigorous composition and portentousness of his magnum opus, reveal a paradox: while his work draws on classical traditions and narratives of

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later when he thought of the principle of reappearing characters as the basis for the creation the *Comédie humaine*, and ran halfway across Paris to announce it to his sister and her husband. As a realist novelist, Balzac is historian and scientist, but he is also an artist.' Ann Jefferson, *Genius in France: an idea and its uses* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), p. 138.

<sup>91</sup> Victor Hugo, 'Les obsèques d'Honoré de Balzac', in *Le "Moment" de la Comédie humaine* (Paris: Presse universitaires de Vincennes, 1993), 321-325, p. 322. Apart from a discussion of *Les Contes drolatiques* in Chapter Two, this thesis centers on texts within *La Comédie humaine*, which, following Hugo's usage of the term 'livre', will be collectively referred to as Balzac's singular work.

<sup>92</sup> Alain, *Avec Balzac* (Paris: Gallimard, 1937), p. 17.

the past, it is also strikingly relevant and resonant with contemporary sensibilities. Characterized by an abundance of neologisms, over 2,000 characters, and a focus on contemporary issues, most notably socioeconomic class disparities and the precarious future of writers and artists, his work never ceases to engage with the complexities, injustices and upheavals of the modern world.

The intricate relationship between Balzac and antiquity contrasts with Wilde's portrayal of the author: '[t]he nineteenth century, as we know it, is largely an invention of Balzac's. Our Luciens de Rubempré, our Rastignacs, and De Marsays made their first appearance on the stage of the *Comédie Humaine*. We are merely carrying out, with footnotes and unnecessary additions, the whim or fancy or creative vision of a great novelist'.<sup>94</sup> While Alain situates Balzac within a continuum of ancient writers, Wilde highlights the striking modernity of his oeuvre, portraying him as a visionary architect who helped shape the very identity of the nineteenth century. Wilde's homage to emblematic characters such as Lucien de Rubempré, Rastignac, and De Marsay, referring to them with the possessive 'our', further blurs the boundary between Balzac's fictional universe and the real world. This rhetorical gesture suggests that these figures assume a vivid, almost mythic presence that endures far beyond the page. This prophetic quality had already been recognized by Baudelaire, who, in 1859, famously described Balzac as a 'visionnaire passionné'.<sup>95</sup> Such designation conveys more than enduring literary merit; it reflects Balzac's detailed examination of both the insipid and intriguing aspects of life, offering insights into both 'micro- and macrosociology'<sup>96</sup> and inspiring generations of writers, playwrights, directors, economists, and even less revered

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<sup>94</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Decay of Lying – An Observation* (New York: Brentano's, 1905), p. 10.

<sup>95</sup> Charles Baudelaire, 'Théophile Gautier', *L'Art romantique, Œuvres complètes*, vol. II (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1997), p. 120. As Claude Pichois notes, Philarète Chasles was the first to describe Balzac in these terms, in the obituary he wrote for the *Journal des débats* on August 24, 1850. The idea of Balzac as a *voyant* or a *roi des voyants* was later taken up by Gautier and then by Rimbaud.

<sup>96</sup> Allan H. Pasco, *Balzac as Literary Sociologist* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 25.

political figures such as Sarkozy<sup>97</sup> across the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. This aligns with Champfleury's views on Balzac's greatness and multifaceted personality as 'un savant, un inventeur et un observateur; un naturaliste qui connaît également la loi de génération des idées et des êtres visibles'.<sup>98</sup> His ability to engage with a wide range of subjects and construct a vast, intricate world elevates him to the status of 'un grand homme dans toute la force du terme; c'est un créateur de méthode et le seul dont la méthode vaille la peine d'être étudiée'.<sup>99</sup>

Expanding and reading beyond Champfleury's work, this thesis examines what Balzac's status as a *grand homme* has meant in practice, tracing how this stature has been pursued and constructed through his reception in Metropolitan France over the past two centuries. Such a vast scope has made it possible to explore the tensions between the 'classic' and the 'popular', while necessarily setting aside other fruitful avenues, such as Balzac's reception outside France or the perspectives of teachers and students.<sup>100</sup> Likewise, other formats such as comic books, radio plays, and international films have been excluded: although they might have yielded additional perspectives, it would have risked shifting the focus too much towards the 'popular' and away from the tension between the 'classic' and the 'popular',

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<sup>97</sup> See Sarkozy's interview where he declares Balzac as the first feminist. 'Nicolas Sarkozy: 'For me, Balzac is the first feminist'', interview with Nicolas Sarkozy, Public Sénat, 9 February 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaCeV1JJmPw> [accessed on 6 August 2025].

<sup>98</sup> Champfleury, 'Les Contes de Champfleury: Chien-Caillou, Pauvre Trompette, Feu Miette', *Le Corsaire*, 18 January 1848.

<sup>99</sup> *Id.*

<sup>100</sup> An additional constraint lay in the difficulty of obtaining certain archival materials, alongside the limited responses to requests for documentation from the Ministry of Education concerning Balzac's inclusion in the Agrégation. These obstacles point to the opacity and selectivity inherent in the curation of institutional memory: several formal requests went unanswered, while others were restricted by administrative or legal barriers. A further avenue that could not be pursued was empirical research through surveys and interviews with secondary school students and teachers in France, intended to explore contemporary perceptions of Balzac's relevance in the classroom. While such data would have enriched the analyses of the final chapter, this line of inquiry proved impracticable given time constraints, logistical complexities, and the stringent ethical requirements governing research with minors and school settings outside the UK. These limitations, however, redirected the research productively. Access to the *Petits Classiques* editions permitted a detailed examination of their paratextual framework, particularly the discussion questions, which construct a vision of Balzac as a quintessential realist writer. This analysis not only illuminated the curricular priorities shaping French education in the first half of the twentieth century but also revealed an intriguing connection between the pedagogical framing of Balzac's work and early cinema.

which is central to this thesis. Moreover, these formats are only rarely used in formal educational settings and thus fall outside the pedagogic circuits through which Balzac's status as a 'classic' continues to be shaped. Since this thesis examines not only how Balzac has been popularised but also how he has been taught, transmitted, and institutionally promoted, it remains necessary to focus on media that both circulate widely and retain a visible presence within the school and academic canons.

Balzac's paradoxical status as both a classic and popular author, at once ancient and modern, foundational and forward-looking, rests in his capacity to invent and to inspire invention. His oeuvre draws inspiration from the established traditions of classic literature, incorporating philosophical inquiry, moral instruction, archetypal figures, and rich intertextuality. It also engages with the emerging dynamics of popular culture: melodramatic tensions, serialized cliffhangers, and sensationalist plotlines that ensured commercial success and a broader readership. This duality allows Balzac to occupy a unique position in the literary landscape, at the intersection of enduring cultural authority and widespread accessibility. This interplay is precisely what Blanche Cerquiglini identifies as central to the nature of the 'classic': a dynamic negotiation between tradition and modernity:

Les classiques sont au cœur de la dialectique de l'ancien et du nouveau, de la tradition et de la modernité, de l'histoire et de l'actualité: il s'agit de concilier ancrage dans une tradition et inscription dans l'air du temps. Au plan symbolique, le classique renforce le moderne : il lui donne de la profondeur, du champ historique, et ce dans tous les domaines. Dans le discours de la communication, le retour aux classiques est ainsi orchestré comme un retour aux fondamentaux, une volonté d'authenticité. Utilisés par la publicité, les classiques s'inscrivent dans la mode du 'vintage', du 'revival': c'est le retour à un style des générations précédant la nôtre, associé à la notion de savoir-faire. On le voit dans le retour sur le devant de la scène de marques traditionnelles qui ont pu tomber dans l'oubli mais continuent d'incarner une qualité, une histoire, des valeurs – et notamment le 'made in France'. Que ce soit en art ou dans la mode ou le design, le classique est une valeur sûre.<sup>101</sup>

Just as the 'classic' mediates between tradition and innovation, Balzac's work, while firmly rooted in the prestige heritage of French literature and culture, continues to engage with the

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<sup>101</sup> Blanche Cerquiglini, 'De quoi les classiques sont-ils le nom ? Marketing et patrimoine', *Littératures classiques*, 3 (2016), 45-57, p. 53.

tastes, concerns, and cultural sensibilities of the twenty-first century. This allows him to function simultaneously as a classic writer, a transmitter of cultural memory, an active participant in the literary marketplace, and a popular author whose work continues to inspire culture-texts. This capacity to harmonize the ancient with the modern explains the enduring vitality of his influence across generations, media, and disciplines.



## Chapter 1 – ‘[Q]uelques mystères de notre double nature’<sup>1</sup>: Trials and Tribulations, Theatre and Novel, Commercial and Academic (1818-1835)

From the outset of his career, Balzac stood at a crossroads. While he chased wealth and fame, envisioning a life of opulence sustained by his writing, he also sought intellectual distinction, striving to secure his prolific oeuvre’s lasting influence:

Me voici revenu du Père-Lachaise, où j’ai piffé de bonnes grosses réflexions. J’ai remarqué aujourd’hui qu’il n’y avait pas une seule bonne épitaphe (j’excepte celles-ci: Jacques Delille, J. La Fontaine, Molière, à Masséna) cela m’a prouvé que de toutes les affections de l’âme, la douleur est la plus difficile à peindre, que nous autres modernes, nous sommes les humbles valets des anciens là-dessus et cela redouble mes craintes pour le cinquième acte du Régicide.<sup>2</sup>

Balzac’s respect for his predecessors highlights his awareness of the challenge of matching their emotional and aesthetic depth. For that reason, he also understood that achieving recognition required more than intrinsic literary talent; it involved selling his work at an exponential rate and cultivating multiple authorial identities through his work, particularly via his prefaces, his correspondences, his dealings with publishers, and his portrayal in the press.

This interplay between self-fashioning and established recognition reflects a broader duality inherent in the figure of the ‘grand écrivain’. Laurent Demanze argues that ‘le grand écrivain se trouve au croisement entre rémanences aristocratiques et horizon démocratique: comme le rappelle Avner Ben-Amos à l’occasion des funérailles de Victor Hugo, le grand homme est profondément double’.<sup>3</sup> With the aspiration to join elite institutions such as the Académie française, Balzac crafted his identity as a man of letters, seeking to establish writerly authority through recognition and prolific publishing. However, his work was impacted by the democratization of literature, forcing him to navigate the demands of a growing readership and

<sup>1</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *La Peau de chagrin*, CH, X (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1979), p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Corr.*, vol. I (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 2006), Letter to Laure Surville, September 1819, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Laurent Demanze, ‘Mythe et réalité du grand écrivain’, in *Splendeurs et misères de la littérature*, ed. Olivier Bessard-Banquy (Paris: Armand Colin, 2022), p. 201-224, p. 207.

an increasingly commercialized literary market. Believing that his greatness and intellectual contributions could serve as a stabilizing force amid France's political upheavals, he sought to reaffirm the enduring value of literature in a rapidly changing society:

Je suis plus que jamais engoué de ma carrière, par une foule de raisons, dont je te dirai quelques mots. Notre révolution n'est pas encore terminée et de la manière dont les choses s'agissent je prévois des orages. Le système représentatif exige de grands talents, et la multitude électorale, ne se laisse pas attraper. Je remarque que les littérateurs sont les gens que l'on recherche le plus volontiers dans les crises politiques, parce qu'on sait qu'ils réunissent à la science aux connaissances l'esprit d'observation et qu'ils savent le cœur humain. Ainsi *si* je suis un *gaillard* (c'est ce que nous ne savons pas encore), je puis avoir encore autre chose que la gloire littéraire, il est beau d'être un grand homme et un grand citoyen [...].<sup>4</sup>

Balzac craved recognition, yet he was highly selective about whose admiration he deemed worthy. As Diaz observes, 'le jeune Balzac n'a pas bonne presse. Paradoxe: c'est Balzac en personne qui a contribué à cet état de choses, en faisant de lui deux parts absolument distinctes: le débutant pseudonyme, écrivain insuffisant et l'auteur de la grande *Comédie humaine*, seul digne de mémoire'.<sup>5</sup> While he sought widespread acclaim, he admired esteemed figures such as Lamartine, Mignet and Hugo who, unlike him, secured places in the Académie française during the 1830s and 1840s.<sup>6</sup> From Andrieux's scathing critique of *Cromwell* in 1820, it took nearly a decade before Balzac's literary ambitions came to fruition.

While his relentless drive for critical and commercial success undeniably emphasizes his duality as a 'grand écrivain', this chapter challenges the overly rigid opposition between Balzac's status as a serious writer and a commercial novelist. Rather than a schematic opposition, this tension gives rise to a network of antinomies that continually reshape the multifaceted process of his consecration as a classic writer. For example, his evolving writing style and prominence in the press played a crucial role in legitimizing his status. The eclectic

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<sup>4</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Corr.*, vol. I, Letter to Laure Surville, September 1819, p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> José-Luis Diaz, 'Devenir Balzac', in *Balzac avant Balzac*, eds Olivier Bara, Claire Barel-Moisson and José-Luis Diaz (Paris: Christian Pirot, 2006), 7-19, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Throughout the 1830s and 1840s, Balzac repeatedly sought a seat in the Académie, but his enormous debts were one of the primary reasons that damaged his reputation and led to his rejection. See Marcel Bouteron, 'Balzac et l'Institut de France', *Revue des deux Mondes*, 9 (1949), 98-117, p. 108. While Balzac was never accepted to the Académie, Lamartine was elected in 1829, Mignet in 1836 and Hugo in 1841.

fusion of classic theatrical genres, particularly comedy and tragedy, with popular motifs rooted in the sensationalism of melodrama, along with the profound ambiguity of his characters (many of whom reflect his own complex persona), further reinforced his growing prominence.<sup>7</sup>

This chapter will focus on *Les Chouans*, *Physiologie du mariage*,<sup>8</sup> *La Peau de chagrin*, *Eugénie Grandet*, and *Le Père Goriot*, seminal works that enabled Balzac to earn both widespread recognition and critical acclaim. Even one of the writer's harshest critics, Sainte-Beuve, acknowledged that the impact of *Les Chouans* and *La Peau de chagrin* was impossible to ignore:

Son *Dernier Chouan*, en 1829, l'avait fait remarquer pour la première fois, mais sans le tirer encore de la foule; sa *Physiologie du Mariage* lui avait acquis la réputation d'un homme d'esprit, observateur sans scrupules, un peu graveusement expert sur une matière plus scabreuse que celle dont avait traité Brillat-Savarin; mais c'est à partir de *La Peau de chagrin* seulement que M. de Balzac est entré à pleine verve dans le public, et qu'il l'a, sinon conquis tout entier, du moins remué, sillonné en tous sens, étonné, émerveillé, choqué ou chatouillé en mille manière.<sup>9</sup>

Moving beyond Sainte-Beuve's cursory overview, this chapter examines how these works constitute what I term the foundational Balzac canon, one that not only represent the pillars of his monumental literary project but also play a crucial role in shaping his fluid and multifaceted identity as a playwright, printer, publisher, historian, moralist, humourist, and novelist.

This chapter is divided into six sections. The first two sections analyse Balzac's early publishing struggles, including his failed attempt at *Cromwell* in 1820, before examining his hiatus from fiction in 1824 and his experiences as a printer and publisher between 1826-28. Sections three through five explore the impact of *Les Chouans*, *Physiologie*, *La Peau de chagrin*, *Eugénie Grandet*, and *Le Père Goriot*. The final section considers three theatrical

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<sup>7</sup> Balzac often draws parallels between his life and choices and that those of his characters, thereby creating a world whose inhabitants are not solely the author's creations, but also reimagined versions of Balzac himself. 'Chaque personnage balzacien est ainsi le double de son créateur: il triomphe ou il échoue, il succombe pour détourner le sort.' Gaëton Picon, *Balzac par lui-même* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1960), p. 109.

<sup>8</sup> From now on, the work will be referred to as *Physiologie*.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, 'Poètes et romanciers modernes de la France — XVI. M. de Balzac, *La Recherche de l'absolu*', *Revue des deux mondes*, t. 4 (Paris: *La Revue des deux mondes*, 1834), 440-458, p. 441.

adaptations of the latter two works: *L'Ami Grandet* (1834), *La Fille de l'avare* (1835) and *Le Père Goriot* (1835).<sup>10</sup> Through diverse modes of dissemination (books, newspapers, reviews, theatrical adaptations) and varying degrees of critical and commercial success, these works laid the foundation for the rich constellation of themes, genres, and reappearing characters that would come to define his magnum opus. In doing so, they provided the structural and thematic framework for the expanding architecture of his oeuvre and his eventual consecration as a classic writer.

### 1.1. The Art of the Possible: Publishing Aspirations and Realities (1818-29)

To understand Balzac's shift in focus from playwrighting to other literary forms including analytical essays, short stories and novels, it is essential to consider the setbacks that influenced his trajectory in the 1820s, including his failed attempts to position himself as the next Molière. His frustration with becoming a playwright was particularly evident in his struggles with *Cromwell*. In a letter he wrote to his sister, Laure, he expressed his despair:

Les idées principales du 1<sup>er</sup> acte sont sur le papier, il y a quelques vers qui gisent çà et là, mais je dois me manger au moins sept à huit fois les ongles, avant d'avoir élevé mon premier monument. (Ah si tu connaissais les difficultés qui règnent dans de pareils ouvrages.) Qu'il te suffise de savoir que LE GRAND RACINE a passé 2 ans à *polir* Phœdre! Le désespoir des poètes!<sup>11</sup>

His first encounter with François Andrieux, a professor at the Collège de France and a member of the Académie française,<sup>12</sup> occurred in 1818 when Balzac, then a clerk for Jean-Baptiste Guyonnet-Merville,<sup>13</sup> was tasked with investigating the correct pronunciation of the word

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<sup>10</sup> Balzac-inspired adaptations extended well beyond these two novels. See Sotirios Paraschas' *Reappearing Characters in Nineteenth-Century French Literature: Authorship, Originality, and Intellectual Property* (London: Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2018). Appendix A: List of the Stage Adaptations of Balzac's Works during His Lifetime, p. 247-50. The list includes over 25 adaptations produced between 1830 and 1849.

<sup>11</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Corr.*, vol. I, 6 September 1819, p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> Andrieux became an appointed member of the *Académie* in 1803. See Marcel Bouteron, 'Balzac et l'Institut de France', p. 100.

<sup>13</sup> To whom *Un épisode sous la Terreur* is dedicated.

*registre*.<sup>14</sup> Encouraged by Andrieux's positive response, Balzac sent him a copy of *Cromwell*, only to receive a discouraging reply in August 1820. In a letter Andrieux wrote to Balzac's mother, he strongly discouraged her son from pursuing a career in theatre,<sup>15</sup> a rejection that was one of many to come from other members of the Académie.<sup>16</sup> Despite his long-held aspirations to become a celebrated playwright, most of Balzac's plays failed to achieve either critical or commercial success during his lifetime.<sup>17</sup>

Mes essais de théâtre vont mal, il faut y renoncer pour le moment. Le drame historique exige de grands effets de scène que je ne connais pas et qu'on ne trouve peut-être que sur place, avec des acteurs intelligents. Quant à la comédie, Molière, que je veux suivre, est un maître désespérant, il faut des jours sur des jours pour arriver à quelque chose de bien en ce genre, et c'est toujours le temps qui me manque. Il y a d'ailleurs d'innombrables difficultés à vaincre pour aborder n'importe quelle scène, et je n'ai pas le loisir de jouer des jambes et des coudes; un chef-d'œuvre seul et mon nom m'en ouvriraient les portes, mais je n'en suis pas encore aux chefs-d'œuvre. Ne pouvant compromettre ma réputation, il faudrait trouver des prête-noms; c'est du temps à perdre, et le fâcheux, c'est que je n'ai pas le moyen d'en perdre!<sup>18</sup>

Consequently, he redirected his efforts toward writing novels, adopting the pseudonyms Horace de Saint-Aubin and the anagrammatic alias Lord R'Hoone. This allowed him to reinvent himself, both literally and metaphorically, produce a prolific output of titles to cover his mounting debts, and experiment with various genres that would prove essential for his productive writing career:

Dans peu, Lord R'Hoone sera l'homme à la mode, l'auteur le plus fécond, le plus aimable, et les dames l'aimeront comme la prune de leurs yeux et le reste; et alors le petit briquet d'Honoré arrivera en équipage, la tête haute, le regard fier et le gousset plein. À son approche on murmura de ce murmure flatteur, et l'on dira: C'est le frère de Mme Surville!... Alors, les hommes, les femmes, les enfants et les embryons sauteront comme des collines et j'aurai des bonnes fortunes en foule. C'est dans cette vue que j'économise pour user au besoin.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Marcel Bouteron, 'Balzac et l'Institut de France', p. 100.

<sup>15</sup> A career that many of Balzac's contemporaries, including Stendhal, Mérimée and Hugo were pursuing, as it was the default to write for the stage. See Owen Heathcote, 'La pensée politique de Balzac dans "Cromwell"', *AB*, 20 (2019), 89-101.

<sup>16</sup> In fact, he discouraged Balzac from writing altogether: 'Je suis loin de vouloir décourager M. votre fils, mais je pense qu'il pourrait mieux employer son temps qu'à composer des tragédies et des comédies.' Honoré de Balzac, *Corr.*, vol. I, Letter to Mme de Balzac, 16 August 1820, p. 84.

<sup>17</sup> With the exception of *Mercadet ou le faiseur* (written in 1840 but first staged in 1848), which was favourably received. See Yoshie Oshita, *Balzac, une création théâtrale 1839-1848* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2024).

<sup>18</sup> Cited by Laure Surville in *Balzac: sa vie et ses œuvres d'après sa correspondance* (Paris: Librairie nouvelle, 1858), p. 120.

<sup>19</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Corr.*, vol. I, Letter to Laure Surville, January or February 1822, p. 84.

In 1820, Balzac hoped to become ‘riche à coups de romans’.<sup>20</sup> Although this ambition might have seemed paradoxical, given how difficult it was for novelists to earn a stable living, the novel as a genre was undergoing a significant transformation throughout the 1820s. This was catalysed by the first French translation of Scott’s work,<sup>21</sup> notably the 1820 translation of *Ivanhoe* by Auguste-Jean-Baptiste Defauconpret.<sup>22</sup> The novel began to transcend its reputation as mere entertainment, emerging instead as a tool of cultural enrichment, intellectual engagement, and a lens through which to explore history and the present: ‘il en appelle à un nouveau public, un public instruit–souhaitant que ce genre de plus en plus ambitieux, de plus en plus complexe d’une difficulté d’exécution croissante, fasse enfin retour à ce qu’on nomme alors la “haute littérature”’.<sup>23</sup> Within the Académie, however, the novel was still perceived as ‘une menace inacceptable pour l’équilibre des genres et, de fait, son appétit se révélait central, envahissant et finalement sans partage dans la littérature’.<sup>24</sup>

Although membership of the Académie was one of Balzac’s ambitions in the 1840s, it was during the 1820s that he was still very much exploring and dealing with different kinds of stories: philosophical, spiritual, the real, the contemporary.<sup>25</sup> However, this ambition took time to materialize, as numerous obstacles remained: the lack of established media for widespread dissemination,<sup>26</sup> the constraints of censorship, and the immaturity of Balzac’s early writing

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Letter to Laure Surville, August 1820, p. 70.

<sup>21</sup> See Caroline Raulet-Marcel, ‘La légitimation de l’auteur de roman en France: le culte paradoxal de Walter Scott, “the Great Unknown”’, *Romantisme* 160.2 (2013), 27-40. See also Tim Farrant ‘Balzac, lecteur de Scott’, *AB*, 22 (2021), 43-74.

<sup>22</sup> It was also during this period, in 1822, that Balzac met Madame de Berny, one of his lovers, who fulfilled his deep-seated need for maternal affection. She also played a pivotal role in shaping his appreciation for the customs and traditions of the *Ancien Régime*. See André Lagarde, Laurent Michard, *XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle Les grands auteurs français du programme* (Paris: Bordas, 1964), p. 32.

<sup>23</sup> Roland Chollet, Stéphane Vachon, *À l’écoute du jeune Balzac*, p. 216.

<sup>24</sup> This was particularly true for the first half of the nineteenth century. Marc Fumaroli, ‘La coupole’, in *Les lieux de mémoire*, vol. II, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 321-388, p. 375.

<sup>25</sup> Marcel Bouteron notes that Balzac’s regard for the Académie remained unchanged between the 1820s and 1840, as he still viewed its members as ‘les plus hauts protecteurs, les protecteurs-nés, de la culture française.’ Marcel Bouteron, ‘Balzac et l’Institut de France’, p. 105.

<sup>26</sup> Due to the limited printing and editing mechanisms, novels were expensive to produce. In addition, there were still no *feuilletons* or literary reviews which could publicize and review texts.

style.<sup>27</sup> In pursuit of financial success, which was intrinsically tied to broader circulation, Balzac sought to adapt his style to align with the works commonly found in the Cabinets de lecture, particularly the *roman historique*. Popularized by Scott, whom Balzac greatly admired and frequently referenced in his prefaces, this genre served as a key influence on his writing.<sup>28</sup>

Françoise Parent-Lardeur argues that while the Cabinets de lecture undoubtedly broadened an author's readership, it remained primarily limited to the bourgeoisie. However, her argument overlooks the wider impact of these commercial institutions, which not only expanded access to a diverse array of authors and genres, but also, in doing so, helped establish a new form of popular culture. As Bellos declares, the rise of the Cabinets de lecture in Restoration France marked 'a vital stage in the development of a written popular culture, the stepping-stone between the restricted system of the Ancien régime and the extensive system of the later nineteenth century'.<sup>29</sup> However, Balzac was wary of the Cabinets de lecture's impact on authors' wages and rights: 'Quand le pauvre libraire français vend à grand-peine un de vos livres à un millier de misérables cabinets littéraires, qui tuent notre littérature, le Belge, lui, en vend deux milliers au rabais à la riche aristocratie européenne'.<sup>30</sup> However, he also acknowledged that, similar to press exposure, circulation within this market was essential for gaining greater visibility.

Prominent *libraires-éditeurs* such as Nicholas-Alexandre Pigoreau categorized their book selections into three main genres: the *roman d'intrigue sentimentale*, the *roman noir*, and

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<sup>27</sup> See Pierre Barbéris, *Aux sources de Balzac: les romans de jeunesse* (Paris: Les Bibliophiles, 1965) and André Lorant, *Honoré de Balzac: premiers romans 1822-1825* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1999).

<sup>28</sup> See Françoise Parent-Lardeur, 'Les cabinets de lecture', in *Histoire des bibliothèques françaises*, ed. Dominique Varry (Paris: Éditions du cercle de la librairie, 2009), 641-666.

<sup>29</sup> David Bellos, Review of *Lire à Paris au temps de Balzac. Les Cabinets de lecture à Paris, 1830-1850* by Françoise Parent-Lardeur, *The Modern Language Review*, 78 (1983), 453-455, p. 455.

<sup>30</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Lettre adressée aux écrivains français du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* in *OD*, vol. II (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1996), p. 1240.

the *roman gai*.<sup>31</sup> In 1822, Balzac published *Clotilde de Lusignan*,<sup>32</sup> *Le Centenaire*,<sup>33</sup> and *Le Vicaire des Ardennes*,<sup>34</sup> works that aimed to align with the genres popularized by authors such as Scott and Maturin. However, they ultimately failed to achieve widespread circulation. The limited presence of Balzac's earlier work in the Cabinets de lecture can be attributed to three main factors. First, the sales of his novels were underwhelming, which could explain why the *libraires-éditeurs* were hesitant to include them in their catalogues:

On dirait que plus les livres qu'il écrit lui tiennent à cœur, moins les cabinets de lecture leur font bon accueil. La Dernière Fée est un désastre éditorial et les éditeurs proposent au fécond Saint-Aubin des contrats moins rémunérateurs (à l'exception d'Annette) et ce jusqu'aux honteux 600 F pour Wann-Chlore. Balzac revient donc à son point de départ car on lui avait proposé 600 F pour Birague. Comme ce roman lui est finalement payé 800 F, le jeune écrivain a régressé plus que stagné. Pourquoi ? parce que ses romans qui, pourtant, ne cessent de s'améliorer, sont de débit difficile. Wann-Chlore ne se vend guère, à peine mieux que Charles Pintel qui, en dépit de quelques passages balzaciens, ne peut être comparé à cette œuvre admirable.<sup>35</sup>

Secondly, his work did not fit into the more sought-after titles of the time. The most widely circulated works were those of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophers, notably Rousseau, novels deemed 'suspects de philosophisme et de libertinage'<sup>36</sup> such as *Les Bijoux indiscrets* and *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, and contemporary works classified as 'la littérature divertissante'.<sup>37</sup> Among these, Paul de Kock's novels, many of which depict the *petite bourgeoisie* through comical social gatherings, were particularly popular. Lastly, Balzac was

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<sup>31</sup> Initially depicted as a 'genre mineur' by the Académie, the nineteenth-century novel began to 'régner dans la vie littéraire une vie qui s'est laissé façonner par son esthétique et qui, de plus en plus, dépend économiquement de son succès.' Marthe Robert, *Roman des origines et origines du roman* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1972), p. 13.

<sup>32</sup> Heavily inspired by Scott's work, this novel sought to imitate the *roman historique*.

<sup>33</sup> Inspired by Maturin's Gothic prose, this novel sought to emulate both the *roman noir* and the *roman philosophique*. It is also here that Napoleon makes his first appearance as a character. In doing so, Balzac introduces 'pour la première fois la thèse sur laquelle est fondée *La Comédie humaine*: être doué de volonté, d'énergie, permet de dominer les hommes; être doué d'imagination permet de s'appropriier des mondes inconnus.' Saint-Paulien, *Napoléon, Balzac et l'empire de la Comédie humaine* (Paris: Michel, 1979), p. 51.

<sup>34</sup> Drawing from the sentimental novel, this work centers on French bourgeois society. Balzac developed the plot in the 1824 sequel *Annette et le Criminel* and later published *Wann-Chlore* in 1825, where the father-daughter relationship foreshadows the dramatic family dynamic in *Eugénie Grandet*. Similarly, *Argow le pirate* (1837) highlights the crucial role of the criminal character, anticipating the emergence of Vautrin in *1840*, whose criminal intrigue becomes central to Balzac's oeuvre.

<sup>35</sup> Marie-Bénédicte Diethelm, 'R'hoone, Saint-Aubin et Viellerglé à l'aune des cabinets de lecture', *AB*, 4 (2003), 179-194, p. 189.

<sup>36</sup> Françoise Parent-Lardeur, 'Les cabinets de lecture', p. 656.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 657.

still very much a marginal figure in the literary world; his status as a ‘grand écrivain’ had yet to crystalize: ‘les grands auteurs de ce premier XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle n’y figuraient pas. Seul Balzac y faisait une timide apparition avec le *Vicaire des Ardennes* qui comptait, il est vrai, parmi les ouvrages à retirer des cabinets de lecture’.<sup>38</sup> It is surprising, however, that *Le Vicaire des Ardennes*, the only one of Balzac’s earlier novels to have a sequel, *Annette et le criminel*, was reportedly set to be removed from the catalogue. Bardèche argues that its reception may have been hindered by its provocative opening lines, which, given the novel’s unconventional premise—a marquise’s passionate infatuation with the young vicar, l’abbé de Saint-André—may have skirted the boundaries of censorship.<sup>39</sup>

Balzac grew increasingly weary of relentless rejections, limited recognition, and outstanding debt. His struggles as a dramatist, compounded by the disappointment of his early novels, drove him to despair. In 1824, a disastrous year for Balzac’s literary career, he experienced what Vachon describes as a ‘crise religieuse’<sup>40</sup> and ‘l’abandon de la littérature’.<sup>41</sup> Withdrawing from society, he temporarily abandoned the novel altogether: ‘[q]u’il s’agisse d’adieux ou de mort, avec Wann-Chlore, Horace de Saint-Aubin abat sa dernière carte et quitte la scène, comme Lord R’Hoone en 1822. Honoré en a terminé avec la “littérature marchande”’.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 658.

<sup>39</sup> See Maurice Bardèche, *Balzac romancier* (Paris: Plon, 1940), p. 75. It also echoes his 1839 novel, *Le Curé de village* which was subsequently adapted into a TV-film in 1969, starring Alice Sapritch, a Balzac star whose work will be discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>40</sup> Stéphane Vachon, *Les travaux et les jours d’Honoré de Balzac: chronologie de la création balzacienne* (Paris: Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 1992), p. 75.

<sup>41</sup> *Id.* Vachon notes that on 1 November 1824, in the afterword to *Wann-Chlore*, Balzac declared: ‘Je crois avoir terminé ma carrière de romancier.’ This afterword was later published by Barbéris in ‘Les adieux du bachelier Horace de Saint-Aubin’, *L’Année balzacienne*, 1963, p. 7-30 and subsequently in *Aux sources de Balzac: les romans de jeunesse*, p. 289-291. Moreover, two letters from his friend Thomassy prove that the writer was going through a difficult period: ‘La vie, dites-vous, vous pèse [...]’ Honoré de Balzac, *Corr.*, vol. I, Jean Thomassy to Balzac, 2 June 1824, p. 162.

<sup>42</sup> Stéphane Vachon, *Les travaux et les jours d’Honoré de Balzac*, p. 75. In 1835, Balzac wrote to his mother, assuring her that his debts would be settled with the proceeds from the third and as it would turn out to be final instalment of *Contes drolatiques*, which was eventually published by Gosselin and Werdet in 1837: ‘On est arrivé jusqu’à 6000 fr. Offerts pour la reimpression de mes Ières ordures littéraires, j’attends; je veux 10 000 fr. Pour nettoyer mon courant. Honoré de Balzac, *Corr.*, vol. II (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 2006), 30 October 1835, p. 1143.

Balzac redirected his energy towards the tangible production of literature. In 1825, he entered the book trade as a printer and publisher. This new venture provided him with the opportunity to engage with both classic and popular texts, while also gaining insight into the financial and technical intricacies of publishing.<sup>43</sup> Between 1826 and 1828, he assumed control of Jean-Joseph Laurens' printing establishment,<sup>44</sup> a period during which he revisited and reprinted the works of La Fontaine, Molière, and La Harpe:

L'homme qui négocie avec des écrivains la commercialisation de leurs œuvres est en effet en passe de devenir la plaque tournante du système. Toutefois, en privilégiant les auteurs tombés dans le domaine public, Molière et La Fontaine, le néophyte cède à la facilité qui consiste à rééditer les classiques préférés du public, quitte à innover dans leur présentation en jouant sur le format, la typographie, l'illustration, et en décidant de les publier en livraisons avant de réunir les fascicules en un livre proprement dit.<sup>45</sup>

Republishing classic works for a wider readership marked a turning point in Balzac's career, as it allowed him to serve as a tangible link between the past and the present.<sup>46</sup> This experience reignited his passion for literature and inspired his return to writing. Although his career in the printing trade lasted only two years, it was in 1828 that Balzac took a decisive step toward stardom. That year, he began writing *Le Dernier Chouan*, a novel which by 1834, had been reissued as *Les Chouans* and already bore his slightly modified name, Honoré de Balzac.<sup>47</sup> It has since been regarded as 'le dernier roman de Saint-Aubin et le premier roman de Balzac'.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Despite his preference for classic authors, Balzac published a diverse range of texts, including dictionaries and judicial factums. He also used it to promote his own work, such as *L'art de mettre sa cravate* (1827). See Roger Pierrot, 'Balzac éditeur de ses œuvres', in *Balzac imprimeur et défenseur du livre*, ed. Judith Meyer-Petit (Paris: Paris-Musées, 1995), 55-66.

<sup>44</sup> Balzac became partners with André Barbier and Jean-François Laurent. See Jean-Yves Mollier, 'L'imprimerie et la librairie en France dans les années 1825-1830', in *Balzac imprimeur et défenseur du livre*, 17-38.

<sup>45</sup> *Id.*

<sup>46</sup> See Stephen Bann, *Paul Delaroche: History Painted* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997).

<sup>47</sup> In the Pléiade edition, it states: 'Balzac n'ayant jamais avoué ses romans de jeunesse, *Le Dernier Chouan* fut bien son premier livre, et il le signa effectivement de son nom, "Honoré Balzac." Lorsque parut l'édition Vimont, en 1834, il avait déjà publié de nombreux ouvrages sous la signature "de Balzac". Honoré de Balzac, *CH*, VIII, Notes et variantes, p. 1685. Balzac added the 'de' to his name to feign nobility and appeal to readers from the higher echelons of society. The slight alteration also established a spurious connection with seventeenth-century writer, Guez de Balzac.

<sup>48</sup> Roland Chollet, Stéphane Vachon, *À l'écoute du jeune Balzac*, p. 262. Bardèche also writes: 'C'était ce livre d'amour que chaque grand écrivain porte en lui et qui ouvre son œuvre d'homme par le premier et le dernier poème à la jeunesse et à la passion. Shakespeare écrit alors Roméo et Juliette; Corneille avant d'être le poète de la force pendant un instant celui de la tendresse et il écrit le *Cid*. Comme eux, avant de placer le pied sur l'aire

## 1.2. Actualizing History: *Le Dernier Chouan*, *Désenchantement* and the Beginnings of *La Comédie humaine* (1829)

Throughout the 1820s, books were typically published *in-12*. In 1829, before gaining recognition as a novelist under his own name, Balzac wrote to his close friend and publisher, Henri de Latouche, regarding the format of *Le Dernier Chouan*: ‘Je souscris à l’in-12, mais je voudrais être in-8’.<sup>49</sup> This was because volumes published *in-8* were traditionally associated with ‘la littérature sérieuse’,<sup>50</sup> a distinction further reinforced by the fact that works such as the Bible, were also published in this format. It was only after the publication of *Le Dernier Chouan* that ‘une évolution se produisit au début de la monarchie de Juillet, et la plupart des romans de Balzac postérieurs au *Dernier Chouan* seront publiés dans le format *in-8*, généralement en deux volumes’.<sup>51</sup> Several exceptions, however, include Brillat-Savarin’s 1826 *Physiologie du goût*, published *in-8* and the 1829 *Physiologie*, published by Levavasseur et Urbain Canel in two volumes *in-8*. This initiative prompted other publishers, including Louis Mame, to adopt the format for the first edition of the *Scènes de la vie privée* in 1830.

Characterized by a more nuanced engagement with France’s historical past, the integration of diverse genres, and a heightened commitment to serious literary production, the period following the publication of *Le Dernier Chouan* heralded both Balzac’s maturation as a writer and ascension to greater celebrity: ‘[à] dater de cette publication [du *Dernier Chouan*],

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du labeur, Balzac connaît aussi ce moment unique de l’invention où tout est fraîcheur et génie, et qui est comme l’adolescence d’une grande œuvre.’ Maurice Bardèche, *Balzac romancier*, p. 172.

<sup>49</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Corr.*, vol. I, 9 January 1829, p. 242. Throughout the 1820s, Balzac was very close to Henri de Latouche, both in a platonic and, allegedly, a romantic sense. He admired Latouche’s active engagement with the arts and regarded his novel *Fragoletta, Naples et Paris en 1799* as a masterpiece. See Henri de Latouche, *Fragoletta, Naples et Paris en 1799* (Paris: Levavasseur & Urbain Canel, 1829).

Balzac ‘presented the work as a virtual recipe for the creation of a historical fiction and linked it to the most powerfully emotive effects of painting, specifically Lethière’s theatrical *Brutus Witnessing the Execution of Sons*.’ Thomas Crow, *Emulation: making artists for revolutionary France* (London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 276.

<sup>50</sup> See Roger Pierrot, ‘Balzac éditeur de ses œuvres’, p. 56. During the Restoration, most novels were published in duodecimo, most often in four volumes ‘de typographie aérée. L’in-8 était réservé aux genres plus nobles: philosophie et histoire’ Honoré de Balzac, *Notes in Corr.*, vol. I, p. 1256.

<sup>51</sup> *Id.*

la renommée sembla le porter sur ses ailes, et emboucher sa mythologique trompette tout exprès pour proclamer son nom dans toutes les régions littéraires du globe. Lorsque éclata la révolution de 1830, Balzac avait déjà reçu un premier baptême de célébrité'.<sup>52</sup>

The novel establishes a dynamic interplay between France's revolutionary past and the turbulent political climate of its post-revolutionary era. His portrayal of the ongoing conflict between the Chouans and the *révolutionnaires*, culminating in the tragic deaths of Marie de Verneuil and the Marquis de Montauran, serves as a cautionary tale that exposes the consequences of a nation left uneducated and uncivilized: 'les Chouans sont restés comme un mémorable exemple du danger de remuer les masses peu civilisées d'un pays'.<sup>53</sup> In other words, Balzac's depiction of traumatic past events serves as a metaphor for the disillusionment of his own time, seamlessly intertwining the *roman historique* with the *roman contemporain*: 'le roman historique touche en quelque façon à l'époque contemporaine; et inversement, le roman contemporain est souvent un roman historique du présent'.<sup>54</sup>

Through his exploration of political disillusionment and recurring dramatic motifs, most notably the use of farce and tragic denouements,<sup>55</sup> Balzac creates a series of striking juxtapositions: the hostility between the Chouans and the Bleus, the tension between the *roman d'amour*, the *roman historique* and the *roman contemporain*, and the opposition between Hulot and Le Gars, who symbolize the uprising of the French Revolution and the institution of the monarchy. This blend of historical references and theatrical motifs formed the foundation for Balzac's vivid portrayal of society as an interconnected web of political turmoil, human ambition, and dramatic conflict.

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<sup>52</sup> Jean-Mamert Cayla, *Célébrités européennes: Balzac* (Paris: H.Boisgard, 1854), p. 3-4.

<sup>53</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Les Chouans*, CH VII (Paris: Gallimard-Pléaide, 1977), p. 919.

<sup>54</sup> Maurice Bardèche, *Balzac romancier*, p. 160.

<sup>55</sup> This was the recurring trope of the period, most notably used by Scott in *Ivanhoe*. In Balzac's work, the lovers' tragic downfall is also strongly reminiscent of Romeo and Juliet's doomed fates. He foreshadows his characters' impending deaths when he writes: 'la tragédie a bien promptement commencé.' *Ibid.*, p. 1007. Alongside the story's tragic undertones, Balzac also uses farce and comic relief when he describes the ridiculous appearances of Pille-Miche, Marche-à-Terre and Galope-Chopine.

His evolving writing style, at times more portentous and perhaps even conformist in its adaptation of Scott's and Cooper's techniques, reflects his effort to reconcile his literary ambitions with the expectations of a broader readership, cultivating one of his defining stylistic traits: 'le don de voir, de ressusciter dans sa pensée des ensembles, des groupes humains, presque des sociétés organisées, avec les actions et réactions des membres qui les composent les uns sur les autres'.<sup>56</sup> This maturation was also evident in his full assumption of authorship and identity.<sup>57</sup>

### 1.3.1. *Rire and déraison: Physiologie du mariage and the École du désenchantement (1829-31)*

The critical acclaim of *Le Dernier Chouan* coincided with the commercial success of the *Physiologie du mariage*. Brimming with scandalous intimacy and provocative observations, this eclectic treatise blurred the boundaries between the public and private spheres. The 1826 pre-original and 1829 original edition of the *Physiologie* sat at the crossroads of Balzac's early experiences as a writer of *romans gais*, his brief foray into the printing trade, and his emergence as the author of *Le Dernier Chouan*. The *Physiologie* allowed him to refine both his theoretical and practical approaches to didactic writing, as seen in his *Codes et Arts*, while also experimenting with a new form of moral literature. Yet this morality, while drawing from characteristics inherent to works of the Grand Siècle, does not merely reproduce its traditions. Instead, it subverts them, cultivating a sense of humour, an 'écriture drolatique'<sup>58</sup> and an ambiguity reminiscent of Rabelaisian laughter and Socratic irony:

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<sup>56</sup> Stéphanie Dast, 'At Once Drama and Epic: The Historical Novel in 1830s France', in *Novel and Stage in Nineteenth-Century France*, eds Pratima Prasad and Susan McCreedy (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), 70-91, p. 75.

<sup>57</sup> As Pierre Barbéris writes: "[I]l assumait enfin son œuvre. Il émergeait." Pierre Barbéris, *Balzac et le mal du siècle*, vol. I (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p. 755.

<sup>58</sup> Maria Beliaeva Solomon, 'Constructions critiques d'un "Balzac 1830"', *AB*, 24 (2023), 261-274, p. 266. Solomon analyzes Chollet's discussion of Balzac's literary trajectory in 1830, highlighting how works such as *L'Avertissement du gars* and *Physiologie du mariage* simultaneously contribute to the development of Balzac's 'écriture drolatique' ('L'Archevêque' formant le canevas du premier des *Contes drolatiques*) comme d'une

Il se trouve que Balzac est à la fois ‘sérieux’ et ennemi de ‘l’esprit de sérieux’. Le tragique, le dramatique, le pathétique de ses histoires, loin d’exclure le comique, font souvent corps avec lui: Balzac donne à son lecteur la possibilité de prendre ses distances par rapport à des aventures qui l’empoignent [...] Tel est le paradoxe: pour que parle à notre Oreille la langue subtile, mobile et variée du jeu et de l’ironie qui anime le texte balzacien, il a fallu découvrir l’importance du *fait comique*, son omniprésence aveuglante. Le rire est partout dans la vie de Balzac, à en juger par les témoignages. Le jugement comique est constamment asséné dans le discours du narrateur.<sup>59</sup>

In this vein, *Physiologie* can be read as an ironic *anti-Code*, through which Balzac satirizes the ‘tyrannie conjugale’<sup>60</sup> imposed by husbands, while also adopting a tone imbued with Rabelaisian wit: ‘le Rabelais de l’œuvre balzacienne apparaît comme le champion de cette gaité franche, heureuse, joyeuse, dilatée, naturelle, incarnation du génie national’.<sup>61</sup> The tension between satire and philosophical depth, already present in Scott and central to Rabelais and Molière, would become a key tenet of Balzac’s magnum opus. In light of its sarcastic and darkly comical tone, Balzac classified the text within the *École du désenchantement*, which he consecrated in 1831.<sup>62</sup>

The four foundational texts of the *École du désenchantement*—*Physiologie*, *La Confession*, *Le Rouge et le Noir*, and *L’Histoire du roi de Bohême*—are characterized as ‘des poignantes moqueries’.<sup>63</sup> They evoke ‘le rire du démon’<sup>64</sup> and expose ‘un abîme de personnalité où vont se perdre tous les bienfaits’.<sup>65</sup> What unites Balzac, Nodier, Stendhal, and later Flaubert, is their unwavering commitment to explore the unspoken and challenge ‘l’expression d’un idéal, d’une certaine idée de la beauté, qui ne peut se réaliser que contre ce que dénonce et

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fresque de mœurs contemporaines (‘Les Voisins’ étant par la suite intégrés aux *Petites misères de la vie conjugale*).’ *Id.*

<sup>59</sup> Maurice Ménard, *Balzac et le comique dans La Comédie humaine* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1983), p. 13-14.

<sup>60</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Physiologie du mariage*, CH, XI (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1980), p. 1102.

<sup>61</sup> Maurice Ménard, *Balzac et le comique dans La Comédie humaine*, p. 39.

<sup>62</sup> Lettres sur Paris, XI, À M \*\*\*, à Tours,” *Le Voleur*, Jan. 10, 1831, reprinted in *OD*, vol. II, p. 937. The significance of the *École du désenchantement* lies in both its form and subject matter, aspects that Balzac sought to reveal and further examine. It was through Flaubert’s *L’Éducation sentimentale* and Bénichou’s *L’École du désenchantement: Sainte-Beuve, Nodier, Musset, Nerval, Gautier* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992) that *désenchantement* came to be recognized as a critical category in literary discourse.

<sup>63</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Lettre XI*, *OD*, vol. II, p. 937.

<sup>64</sup> *Id.*

<sup>65</sup> *Id.*

attaque le vif de l'œuvre'.<sup>66</sup> Balzac's work shines a harsh light on the realities of nineteenth-century France, positioning him as 'une sorte d'Homère nocturne qui éclaire d'une flamme infernale les cryptes et les galeries d'une cité fiévreuse où se déroule une épopée sinistre'.<sup>67</sup> This sinister quality, as Arlette Michel argues, represents 'un autre type de sublime dont la lumière ne rayonne plus que dans les ténèbres: il s'agit du sublime noir, sublime de la terreur'.<sup>68</sup> Balzac's engagement with darkness and *terreur*—as both adjective and political phenomenon—is integral to his literary vision. It anticipates a new form of Romanticism, one that focuses on disillusionment to offer a more haunting and cynical portrayal of reality:

Balzac, en inventant l'expression d'«école du désenchantement», a voulu faire entendre quelque chose de capital qui, semble-t-il, a échappé. Le mot «école», en effet, était compromise par le romantisme ; il suggérait chapelle, camaraderie, formulation de principes abstraits, impuissance à la vraie création, trop d'importance donnée aux manifestes et aux éclats. Bref, les «écoles» exprimaient tout sauf le réel; elles n'étaient que constructions factices, entreprises de l'amour-propre ou de l'illusion. Et voici que quatre hommes, sans s'être consultés, sans avoir publié aucun texte théorique, se retrouvaient, allaient dans le même sens. Voici qu'apparaissait un nouveau romantisme, porté, nourri, par l'époque elle-même, authentique, puisqu'il venait du fond, non de la forme.<sup>69</sup>

In other words, Balzac associates the term *école* with disillusionment, bleakness, and scepticism, emphasizing the pedagogic function of the tenebrous.<sup>70</sup> Within this framework, he unveils 'la vérité de l'illusion perdue',<sup>71</sup> which represents a classic hallmark of 'la pédagogie balzacienne'.<sup>72</sup> Far from being a mere thematic device, the tenebrous serves as both an outlet for Balzac's own anxieties, which he projects onto his characters,<sup>73</sup> and as a powerful catalyst for his creative energy, fuelling the colossal scope of his oeuvre.

<sup>66</sup> Pierre Barbéris, *Balzac et le mal du siècle*, vol. II (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), p. 1419.

<sup>67</sup> Georges Pradalié, *Balzac historien* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1955), p. 292.

<sup>68</sup> Arlette Michel, 'Balzac et la rhétorique: modernité et tradition', *AB*, 9 (1988), 245-278, p. 260-261.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

<sup>70</sup> Jean-Louis Bory sees Balzac's exploration of the tenebrous as central to his role as both 'enseignant' and a 'voyant' whose 'don de seconde vue' fosters a deep connection with 'l'univers extérieur.' Jean-Louis Bory, *Pour Balzac et quelques autres* (Paris: Julliard, 1960), p. 67.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>72</sup> Balzac's approach to unveiling the truth involves rendering it 'ambiguë, obscure, voire même hors d'atteinte.' *Id.*

<sup>73</sup> Growing up amid chaos, political violence, and financial instability, Balzac turned to writing to reflect on these upheavals and explore the nation's political state and the artist's place within such turmoil. In novellas such as *Un épisode sous la Terreur* (1830), *L'Elixir de longue vie* (1830), and *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* (1831),

### 1.3.2. Monetizing *Désenchantement*: *La Peau de chagrin* (1831)

The year Balzac defined the *École du désenchantement* also marked the publication of *La Peau de chagrin*, a novel which blurred the boundaries between reality and fiction, forging a deeper parallel between Raphaël's aspirations and Balzac's ambitions.<sup>74</sup> He foregrounds the novel's philosophical foundations as he probes the limits of free will and its relationship to human agency. Though he engaged with elements of the *conte fantastique*, he refused to be confined to the role of a mere *contier*. In 1832, he wrote to Amédée Pichot, editor of the *Revue de Paris*: '[q]uant à ne faire que des contes, quoique ce soit à mon avis, autre hérésie, peut être, l'expression la plus rare de la littérature, je ne veux pas être exclusivement un contier. Autre est ma destinée'.<sup>75</sup> This other fate Balzac envisions for himself emphasizes his broader literary vision; his work was not only intended to captivate, but also to challenge and teach readers, urging them to engage with the deeper sociopolitical and economic structures that shaped their reality. In other words, he believed his efforts warranted a higher, more dignified status. Nevertheless, the novel's intricate plot, filled with tension and suspense, undeniably enhances its sensationalism, entertainment and pseudoscientific value. In this regard, *La Peau de chagrin* also becomes 'un livre de camarades et, très exactement, un livre de la boutique de Girardin',<sup>76</sup> reinforcing its dual identity as both a serious work and a best-seller that resonates with the literary marketplace of its time.

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he weaves his own anxieties, including decapitation, financial ruin, and the fear of artistic misinterpretation into the downfalls of his characters.

<sup>74</sup> Balzac's desire for wealth finds expression in the antiquarian's declaration: 'Là, dit-il en se frappant le front, là sont les vrais millions.' Honoré de Balzac, *La Peau de chagrin*, p. 86. Additionally, Maugrédie—modeled after the real-life doctor Magendie (1786–1855)—embodies both the voice of Pyrrhonism and the spirit of a young Balzac, whose insatiable curiosity and ambition foreshadow the writer's future greatness. Just as Maugrédie meticulously examines the shagreen, Balzac relentlessly refines his magnum opus: 'Il trouvait du bon dans toutes les théories, n'en adoptait aucune, prétendait que le meilleur système médical était de n'en point avoir, et de s'en tenir aux faits. Panurge de l'école, roi de l'observation, ce grand explorateur, ce grand railleur, l'homme des tentatives désespérées, examinait la Peau de chagrin.' Honoré de Balzac, *La Peau de chagrin*, p. 258.

<sup>75</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Corr.*, vol. I, 3 December 1832, p. 690.

<sup>76</sup> Pierre Barbéris, *Balzac et le mal du siècle*, vol. II, p. 1444.

Confident in the novel's impact, the writer carefully orchestrated its release, staking its success on the days leading up to publication. In a letter to Charles Gosselin, he boldly wrote:

Votre neveu a dû vous dire que je me suis renfermé et que je ne quitte pas la *Peau de chagrin* qu'elle ne soit finie. J'ai bien préparé le succès. Madame Récamier a réclamé une lecture; en sorte que nous aurons encore une immense quantité de preneurs dans le faubourg Saint-Germain. Vous ferez bien de mettre dans les journaux un avis pour les libraires de province, afin qu'ils vous envoient à l'avance leurs demandes, parce que je sais, par plusieurs personnes que cela sera d'un bon effet.<sup>77</sup>

The novel's commercial success was undeniable, with the first edition swiftly selling out after its reprint in 1832.<sup>78</sup> In his 1831 collection *Romans et contes philosophiques*, Philarète Chasles, writing most likely under Balzac's dictation, or perhaps merely signing a text written by Balzac himself,<sup>79</sup> praises the writer's determination to, 'comme feu Rabelais, formuler la vie humaine et résumer son époque dans un livre fantaisie, épopée, satire, roman, conte, histoire, drame, folie aux mille couleurs'.<sup>80</sup> It also affirms Chasles's argument that '[d]ans ce livre, il y a toute une époque'<sup>81</sup> and further echoes what Balzac wrote in *L'Artiste* in 1831: 'c'est les misères, c'est le luxe, c'est la foi, c'est la moquerie, c'est la poitrine sans cœur et le crâne sans cervelle du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle'.<sup>82</sup> From the historical drama of *Le Dernier Chouan* to the bleak yet ironically comical portrayal of matrimonial alliance in *Physiologie, La Peau de chagrin* combines reality, theatrical drama, terror, and the supernatural with philosophical

<sup>77</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Corr.*, vol. I, Letter to Charles Gosselin, July 1831, p. 370.

<sup>78</sup> Among the nineteenth-century titles Martyn Lyons identifies as bestsellers between 1815 and 1850, *La Peau de chagrin* and *Physiologie du mariage* stood out as Balzac's most commercially successful works. Martyn Lyons, *Reading Culture and Writing Practices in Nineteenth-Century France* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), p. 33.

<sup>79</sup> See Pierre Citron's notice: 'Cette introduction précédait l'édition de septembre 1831 des *Romans et contes philosophiques*. Elle fut reproduite telle quelle dans l'édition de 1832 et reçut quelques très légères corrections en 1833, puis disparut des *Études philosophiques*. Elle était signée P. en 1831-1832 et P. Ch. en 1833, ce qui désignait Philarète Chasles, camarade de Balzac depuis 1825, comme l'a montré Claude Pichois. Peut-être Chasles n'a-t-il fait que signer un texte de Balzac. Plus probablement, il l'a rédigé sur les indications du romancier, celui-ci le revoyant et le corrigeant ensuite.' Honoré de Balzac, Introduction par Philarète Chasles aux *Romans et contes philosophiques*, *CH*, vol. X, p. 1185.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1190.

<sup>81</sup> Philarète Chasles, *Contes philosophiques de M. de Balzac* (Paris: Charles Gosselin, 1832), p. xvi.

<sup>82</sup> Honoré de Balzac, 'Romans et contes philosophiques', *L'Artiste*, Oct. 2, 1831, p. 96. Reprinted in *OD*, vol. II, p. 1194.

reflection. In doing so, he transformed the prevailing sense of *désenchantement* into a legitimate literary form, which would ultimately secure its place as a ‘classic’.<sup>83</sup>

Less than a year after finishing *La Peau de chagrin* in 1831, Balzac confided to his sister that he believed himself to be ‘à la tête des intelligences de l’Europe’.<sup>84</sup> The early 1830s thus marked a period of renewed exuberance and intellectual ambition for Balzac. Although his earnings increased, so did his spendings.<sup>85</sup> Despite his financial missteps and extravagant lifestyle, which hardly conferred respectability,<sup>86</sup> his relentless dedication and prolific output commanded attention. Paradoxically, his indulgence in ‘all the vices of vanity, self-glorification, self-deprecation, exaggeration and fantasy’<sup>87</sup> only heightened his charisma, making him as captivating and charming as hypocritical. Therefore, his reputation was built not only on his expanding body of work but also on his tireless energy and ravenous appetite for life.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Barbéris describes *La Peau de chagrin* as ‘l’œuvre la plus haute, la plus forte, la plus complète de l’école du désenchantement.’ Pierre Barbéris, *Balzac et le mal du siècle*, vol. II, p. 1420. It is Raphaël who confidently declares to his friends: ‘Vierges du fait, nous étions hardis en paroles; mais marqués maintenant par le fer chaud de la politique, nous allons entrer dans ce grand bain et y perdre nos illusions.’ Honoré de Balzac, *CH*, vol. X, p. 92. Given the disastrous consequences of Raphaël’s choices, this passage serves as a striking example of Balzacian irony.

<sup>84</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Corr.*, vol. I, Letter to Laure de Surville, 20 July 1832, p. 589. This echoes a letter he wrote to Madame Hanska in 1833: ‘Je veux gouverner le monde intellectuel en Europe.’ Honoré de Balzac, *LH*, vol. I, 13 September 1833, p. 57.

<sup>85</sup> Maurois neatly encapsulates the chaotic state of Balzac’s finances, from his fluctuating earnings to his persistent struggles with debt and extravagant spending: ‘Balzac a gagné 1125 francs pour *La Peau de chagrin*, 3750 francs pour les *Scenes de la Vie privée*, 5250 francs pour les *Romans philosophiques* et les *Contes drolatiques*, 4166 francs pour collaborations aux revues et journaux; soit au total: 14291 francs, beaucoup plus qu’il ne faut à un célibataire pour vivre largement. Or son endettement s’accroît de 6000 francs. À la fin de l’année (sans compter les 45 000 francs dus à sa mère), il a 15000 francs de dettes.’ André Maurois, *Prométhée ou la vie de Balzac*, p. 189.

<sup>86</sup> For David Bellos, respectability is a defining trait of a classic writer: ‘The establishment of Balzac’s respectability, though it did not cause the notion of classicism to arise, predated its appearance in criticism by over ten years. It was without a doubt necessary preliminary to the institutionalization of the *Comédie humaine* as part of the classical literary tradition of France.’ David Bellos, *Balzac Criticism in France 1850-1900: The Making of a Reputation*, p. 143.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>88</sup> Bellos argues that Balzac’s sincerity emerges most clearly through his correspondence. However, his letters, often melodramatic and notoriously exaggerated, complicate this perception, as they blur the line between genuine confession and self-mythologizing. While they do reveal his fervent ambitions and struggles, they also serve as rhetorical devices, shaping the image of a writer relentlessly pursuing wealth and esteemed recognition.

Balzac remained extremely committed in his pursuit of both literary prestige and financial success. In an 1832 letter to Louis Mame, he outlined his goals for *Le Médecin de campagne*,<sup>89</sup> deliberately crafting the novel with a wider readership in mind and with the hope of earning the Prix Montyon, a series of annual prizes awarded by the French academy of sciences and the Académie française:

Ma mère va recevoir, si déjà, elle n'a reçu, UN MANUSCRIT COMPLET!...de moi intitulé *le Médecin de campagne*, lequel vous est destiné. Redoublez d'attention, maître Marne. J'ai été, depuis longtemps, frappé et désireux de la gloire populaire qui consiste à faire vendre à des milliers considérables d'exemplaires un petit volume in-dix-huit comme *Atala*, *Paul et Virginie*, *Le Vicaire de Wakefield*, *Manon Lescaut*, *Perrault*, etc., etc. La multiplicité des éditions compense le défaut du nombre de volumes; mais il faut que le livre puisse aller en *toutes* les mains, celles de la jeune fille, celles de l'enfant, celles du vieillard et même celles de la dévote. Alors, une fois le livre connu - ce qui est long ou bref, selon le talent de l'auteur et celui du libraire—ce livre devient une affaire importante, exemple, les *Méditations* de Lamartine, à 40 000 ex. et *Les Ruines* de Volney, etc. Mon livre est donc un livre conçu dans cet esprit, un livre que la portière et la grande dame puissent lire.<sup>90</sup>

For Balzac, the idea of 'gloire populaire' entailed more than the pursuit of fame; it was a categorical engagement that echoed the paradox of his continuous negotiation between mass appeal and intellectual prestige. He not only sought to make his work accessible to readers across all social strata but also to secure the validation of a discerning intellectual audience. Though he claimed to write for everyone, from the 'portière' to the 'grande dame', his ambition was always twofold: to captivate the masses while commanding the respect of the elite.

#### **1.4. Prefaces, Personality and Provocation: *La Peau de chagrin*, *Eugénie Grandet* and *Le Père Goriot* (1831-35)**

A book's success in reaching a wide readership relies on its being printed in substantial quantities, thereby expanding its circulation. However, for this to occur, both the author and publisher must collaborate to emphasize the text's importance and commercial viability. In

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<sup>89</sup> In 1834, *Le Médecin de campagne* was a contender for the Prix Montyon, a subject Balzac used to impress Madame Hanska, but he ultimately did not win. See Geoff Woollen, 'Balzac et le prix Montyon', *AB*, 4 (1983), 179-200.

<sup>90</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Corr.*, vol. I, Letter to Louis Mame, 30 September 1832, p. 657.

Balzac's case, this process was complicated by the relatively small print runs of his work. Nevertheless, this limitation was mitigated by his growing fame, particularly through *Le Dernier Chouan*, *Physiologie*, and *La Peau de chagrin*. The latter's preface served three key purposes: it provided Balzac with a space to justify his role as a writer, to champion the authorial rights of his contemporaries, especially when it came to intellectual property, and to defend himself against the backlash his work had received, particularly the *Physiologie* series.

Balzac's prefaces function as a double-edged sword; while they articulate the analytical framework, moral values, and philosophical concepts underpinning his work, they also reveal the inherent contradictions in his thinking, particularly in the questionable principles of virtue and morality he uses to classify his female characters.<sup>91</sup> In his prefaces and epilogues, Balzac presents himself as an 'historien',<sup>92</sup> 'conteur'<sup>93</sup> and 'amuseur de gens [...], un homme de pensée et de philosophie',<sup>94</sup> while simultaneously resisting rigid classification. According to Diaz, prefaces serve as 'le lieu de l'auteur',<sup>95</sup> a privileged space where the writer freely asserts intellectual authority and directly engages with readers. Balzac's prefaces create a tension between Balzac the man and Balzac the author, offering him the opportunity to shape, revise, and, at times, challenge or resist how his work was received. His approach was influenced by Scott's prefaces to the *Waverley* novels, which Balzac praises in the preface to the 1838 edition of *Les Employés*, at that time entitled *La Femme supérieure*: '[c]es ingénieuses préfaces, sans fiel et malicieuses, ironiques avec bonhomie, où brille la raison comme savait la faire resplendir Molière, ces préfaces sont des chefs-d'œuvre pour les esprits studieux qui ont conservé le goût de l'atticisme'.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> These include some of the female characters from the *Étude de mœurs* and the *Études philosophiques*.

<sup>92</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Préface d'Histoire des Treize*, CH, vol. V (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1977), p. 789.

<sup>93</sup> Philarète Chasles, *Introduction aux Romans et contes philosophiques*, p. 1187.

<sup>94</sup> *Id.*

<sup>95</sup> José-Luis Diaz, *Devenir Balzac: L'invention de l'écrivain par lui-même*, p. 194.

<sup>96</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Préface de la première édition* (1838), CH, VII (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1977), p. 880.

In the preface to *La Peau de chagrin*, Balzac reflects on the writer's fluid role as both observer and visionary. For him, the author possesses 'une sorte de seconde vue qui lui permet de deviner la vérité dans toutes les situations possibles; ou mieux encore, je ne sais quelle puissance qui le transporte là où il doit, où il veut être'.<sup>97</sup> Essential to his literary project, this 'seconde vue' allows him to reconstruct past realities while simultaneously engaging with the present and anticipating the future. Aware of the attention his work would attract, he embraced criticism as both a challenge and a testament to his ambition.

His reflections on the reception of his work are evident in his responses to the moral scrutiny of his fiction. In them, he condemns the tendency of readers to conflate an author's life with the characters and themes of their writing:

Il est cependant bien difficile de persuader au public qu'un auteur peut concevoir le crime sans être criminel!... Aussi, l'auteur, après avoir été jadis accusé de cynisme, ne serait pas étonné de passer maintenant pour un joueur, pour un viveur, lui, dont les nombreux travaux décèlent une vie solitaire, accusant une sobriété sans laquelle la fécondité de l'esprit n'existe point.<sup>98</sup>

Balzac dismantled the notion that an author's moral compass must align with the content of his fiction, exposing the flawed logic behind such critical assessments. Readers seeking to impose a fixed identity upon him instead encountered his deliberate resistance to such categorization. This resistance is exemplified through his use of irony, allowing him to assert his agency in the evolving dialogue between author, text, and reader. For him, irony was both a rhetorical strategy and a form of self-defence: 'Nous ne pouvons aujourd'hui que nous moquer. La raillerie est toute la littérature des sociétés expirantes... Aussi l'auteur de ce livre, soumis à toutes les chances de son entreprise littéraire, s'attend-il à de nouvelles accusations'.<sup>99</sup> Some of these criticisms were directed at the *Physiologie*, to which Balzac responded that it

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<sup>97</sup> José-Luis Díaz, *Devenir Balzac: L'invention de l'écrivain par lui-même*, p. 222.

<sup>98</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *CH*, X, p. 50.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

was ‘une tentative faite pour retourner à la littérature fine, vive, railleuse et gaie du dix-huitième siècle’.<sup>100</sup>

Another preface that engages with the moral dimensions of Balzac’s work is that of *Eugénie Grandet*. In it, Balzac calls for a new perspective on writing about the provinces. Beneath their seemingly monotonous surface, he observes ‘quelques têtes dignes d’une étude sérieuse, des caractères pleins d’originalité,’<sup>101</sup> within an ‘atmosphère provinciale, qui détend les plus fiers courages, relâche les fibres, et désarme les passions de leurs acutesses’.<sup>102</sup> Balzac offers a deeper and more nuanced exploration of provincial life, a subject that according to Nicole Mozet, remained relatively uncommon in the 1830s.<sup>103</sup> He presents the provinces as a space of dualities: on the one hand, a place of healing marked by natural beauty and rustic simplicity; on the other hand, they represent a site of monotony, confinement, and limited prospects. This ambivalence gives rise to further dichotomies that permeate his work: movement and stagnation, Paris and the provinces, praise and satire. According to Andrew Watts, Balzac preserves the provinces by creating a ‘literal bridge between the anti-provincial satires popularized by Molière and the revalorization of the provinces during the July Monarchy’.<sup>104</sup> However, Balzac also exposes the dangers of provincial life through his female protagonist. Her complex character traits function as a metaphor to read beyond both the idealized vision of the provinces and their long-standing satirical portrayal, towards a darker, more fatalistic and realistic understanding. In fact, Eugénie’s resilience, intelligence, and struggles reveal the provinces as a space of psychological exploration and moral ambiguity; a

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>101</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Préambule des premières éditions d’Eugénie Grandet (1833–1839)*, p. 1026.

<sup>102</sup> *Id.*

<sup>103</sup> See Nicole Mozet, *Introduction, CH, III*, (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1976), p. 1023. See also Nicole Mozet, *La ville de province dans l’œuvre de Balzac: l’espace romanesque: fantasme et idéologie* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1998).

<sup>104</sup> Andrew Watts, *Preserving the provinces: small town and countryside in the work of Honoré de Balzac* (Bern/Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 9.

place where the family unit is ensnared in cycles of generational trauma, illustrating the intricate and often painful repercussions of filial piety.

The stark contrast between entrenched provincial traditions and the modernizing forces of France's industrial and economic expansion mirrors Eugénie's dual characterization as both a *femme au foyer* and a *femme émancipée*. Through implicit references to classic folktales such as *La Barbe bleue* and *La Belle au bois dormant*, Balzac accentuates Eugénie's conventional role as a *femme au foyer*. This association is particularly pronounced in the novel's 'épilogue des premières éditions',<sup>105</sup> where he writes: 'Parmi les femmes, Eugénie Grandet sera peut-être un type, celui des dévouements jetés à travers les orages du monde et qui s'y engloutissant comme une noble statue enlevée à la Grèce et qui, pendant le transport, tombe à la mer où elle demeurera toujours ignorée'.<sup>106</sup>

Balzac's portrayal of Eugénie, much like his own authorial identity, is filled with paradoxes. On one hand, she embodies the traditional submissive female heroine, spending her final years within the confines of her home. On the other hand, she emerges as a woman of intellectual vigour, aligning with the writer's perspective on female strength. In the epilogue, he describes women as 'une création transitoire entre l'homme et l'ange',<sup>107</sup> possessing a unique blend of masculine strength and angelic sensitivity: 'Aussi la voyez-vous forte autant que l'homme est fort, et délicatement intelligent par le sentiment, comme est l'ange. Ne fallait-il pas unir en elle ces deux natures pour la charger de toujours porter l'espèce en son cœur?'<sup>108</sup> Rather than reinforcing the stereotype of women as passive and confined to domesticity, Balzac portrays them as having a dual nature: physically strong and emotionally insightful, with moral

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<sup>105</sup> 'Cet épilogue a été supprimé dans l'édition Furne en même temps que le préambule. Dans l'édition originale et dans l'édition Charpentier, il n'était séparé que par un blanc de la dernière phrase du roman.' Honoré de Balzac, *CH*, vol. III, *Indications bibliographiques*, p. 1747.

<sup>106</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Épilogue des premières éditions*, *CH*, vol. III, p. 1202.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 1201. By this time Balzac had already published his 1830 novella *Adieu* and was also envisaging the 1834 novel *Séraphîta*. Both works further delve into the fantastic, the spiritual and the supernatural, with Balzac often quoting the doctrines of Emanuel Swedenborg.

<sup>108</sup> *Id.*

and intuitive qualities that challenge traditional gender roles. Throughout the novel, Balzac repeatedly describes Eugénie as ‘grande’, reflected in her surname, and ‘forte’, emphasizing that her ‘suavité du sentiment chrétien purifie la femme et lui donne une distinction inconnue aux sculpteurs anciens’.<sup>109</sup> While her virginity and devout faith are central to her character, they do not solely define her. Instead, it is her ‘force’,<sup>110</sup> her ‘grandeur d’âme’,<sup>111</sup> and her intelligence that set her apart, transforming her into a multifaceted, albeit flawed heroine. Eugénie’s decision to follow her own judgment, despite the dire consequences of her actions, further asserts her emancipation from societal constraints. However, this choice also reveals her naivety, preventing her from being idealized as a paragon of virtue. This nuanced portrayal renders Eugénie a more relatable and realistic figure, encouraging readers, particularly female ones,<sup>112</sup> to see her as a woman defined by her strength and vulnerability. The novel also paved the way for the critical success of Balzac’s later works, notably *Pierrette*, which mirrors *Eugénie Grandet* in plot, character, and provincial setting: ‘combien de délicieux passages, quel intérêt intime et attachant, quelle supériorité de composition et de touche générale. Quels admirables caractères, quelles ravissantes peintures de mœurs provinciales, des côteries politiques, des menées et des intrigues de bas étage!’<sup>113</sup>

Balzac’s portrayal of other female characters was not always as nuanced as Eugénie’s personality, as evidenced in the preface to the 1835 Werdet edition of *Le Père Goriot*. In it, he categorizes his female characters into two distinct groups: virtuous and immoral women.<sup>114</sup> He

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<sup>109</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *CH*, III, p. 1075.

<sup>110</sup> These adjectives are chiefly employed to describe Eugénie’s physiognomy. For instance, Balzac characterizes her as ‘grande et forte, elle n’avait donc rien du joli qui plaît aux masses; mais elle était belle de cette beauté si facile à reconnaître, et dont s’éprennent seulement les artistes.’ *Ibid.*, p. 1076. However, Balzac also uses these adjectives to accentuate Eugénie’s strong moral compass, which he refers to as her ‘forte conscience.’ *Ibid.*, p. 1127.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1198.

<sup>112</sup> See Maren Lackner, ‘Donner une voix aux femmes: Balzac et ses lectrices’, *AB*, 9 (2008), 217-37, p. 221.

<sup>113</sup> *Cabinet de lecture*, 25 February 1840.

<sup>114</sup> This dichotomy, while useful for highlighting certain moral contrasts in Balzac’s work, must ultimately be deconstructed, as it oversimplifies the complexity of his characters. Nevertheless, the list reveals recurring traits often associated with ‘virtuous’ and ‘corrupt’ figures: characters such as Eugénie, Madame Grandet, and Nanon embody virtues including selflessness, moral integrity, and emotional restraint, while Mme de Langeais, Mme de

argues that out of the sixty female characters he lists, thirty-eight embody virtuous qualities, thereby constituting a majority. While his attempt to quantify morality may appear comical and methodologically flawed to modern readers, it emphasizes his deliberate, albeit peculiar effort to defend the ethical integrity of his work. However, it should not be overlooked that, given Balzac's inclination toward irony, this list could also serve as an attempt at self-deprecating humour or even as a form of provocation. The portrayal of women in Balzac's work often elicited strong reactions, one of the most notable being from Madame Hanska.<sup>115</sup> Accordingly, this strategy not only sparked discussion of his work but also amplified his visibility, consolidating his presence within the cultural discourse.

### 1.5. Foundational Classics: *Eugénie Grandet* and *Le Père Goriot* (1833-35)

Whether on account of its preface, depiction of the provinces, captivating characters or coherent story arc, Sainte-Beuve recognized *Eugénie Grandet* as a near masterpiece: 'il s'en faut de bien peu que cette charmante histoire ne soit un chef-d'œuvre, — oui, un chef-d'œuvre qui se classerait à côté de tout ce qu'il y a de mieux et de plus délicat parmi les romans en un volume'.<sup>116</sup> Félix Davin likewise celebrated the novel as a seminal work in Balzac's reinvention of the novel genre:

*Eugénie Grandet* a imprimé le cachet à la révolution que M. de Balzac a portée dans le roman. Là s'est accomplie la conquête de la vérité absolue dans l'art: là est le drame appliqué aux choses les plus simples de la vie privée. C'est une succession de petites causes qui produit des effets puissants, c'est la fusion terrible du trivial et du sublime, du pathétique et du grotesque; enfin c'est la vie telle qu'elle est, et le roman tel qu'il doit être.<sup>117</sup>

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Nucingen, and Pauline de Witchnau tend to reflect ambition, manipulation, and moral compromise. While these traits are not absolute, they provide insight into the broader moral framework Balzac weaves into his narratives.

<sup>115</sup> On 28 February 1832, she sent Balzac a letter from Odessa with no return address, in which she praised his work but chastised him for the negative portrayal of women in *La Peau de chagrin*. See Maren Lackner, 'Donner une voix aux femmes: Balzac et ses lectrices'.

<sup>116</sup> Charles-Augustin-Sainte-Beuve, 'Poètes et romanciers modernes de la France –XVI. M. de Balzac, *La Recherche de l'absolu*', p. 450.

<sup>117</sup> Félix Davin, 'Introduction aux *Études de mœurs au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*', *CHI* (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1976), p. 1166.

Davin also highlights the novel's structural sophistication, emphasizing that Balzac's realism, which could be understood as the writer's portrayal of both the simpler and more complicated aspects of life, goes beyond mere observation to accentuate life's inherent causality. The seemingly insignificant events that occur throughout the narrative are the very forces that not only shape the characters' fates but also pay homage to the novel as 'il doit être'.

When it came to *Le Père Goriot*, Balzac believed he had become 'un être incomparable, un être pétri d'esprit, de talent où vous êtes type et type admirablement désespérant'.<sup>118</sup> He boasted to high-society figures such as the Marquise de Castries that the work had been 'vendu même avant les annonces'.<sup>119</sup> However, despite Balzac's claims that 'il n'y a pas de succès comparable à celui de *Goriot*',<sup>120</sup> his work still faced criticism and even accusations of plagiarism.<sup>121</sup> Balzac viewed the negative reviews as a challenge to 'sortir grandi de cette suite d'épreuves'<sup>122</sup> and to create 'une œuvre majeure'<sup>123</sup> that would not only serve as a cornerstone for his reappearing characters but also elevate 'la totalité balzacienne aux élans shakespeariens'.<sup>124</sup> Ultimately, it was the press that celebrated Balzac's literary prowess, with *Le Père Goriot* receiving acclaim in newspapers such as *Le Courrier Français*, *L'Echo français*, and *Le Constitutionnel*:

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<sup>118</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Corr.*, vol. I, Letter to the Duchesse d'Abrantès, 1 March 1835, p. 1061.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, Letter to the Marquise de Castries, 10 March 1835, p. 1070.

<sup>120</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Lettres à Mme Hanska*, vol. I (Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont, 1990), 11 March 1835, p. 234.

<sup>121</sup> While the novel was well received by critics, some accused Balzac of plagiarizing Shakespeare's *King Lear*. While certain similarities between the two works are apparent, it would be misguided to label his approach as plagiarism, especially since other classic authors and playwrights such as Scott and Molière also drew inspiration from Shakespeare. For example, Molière's *Le Misanthrope* recalls the disillusioned figure of *Timon of Athens*, and comedies such as *Amphitryon* and *George Dandin* draw on Shakespearean motifs of mistaken identities and comic misunderstandings. Furthermore, Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819) echoes *Romeo and Juliet* in its portrayal of star-crossed lovers.

<sup>122</sup> Nicole Billot, 'Le Père Goriot devant la critique (1835)', *AB*, 8 (1987), 101-129, p. 128.

<sup>123</sup> *Id.*

<sup>124</sup> *Id.* Balzac drew inspiration from Shakespeare's works, incorporating them into his own texts while simultaneously using them ironically. For example, in the *Physiologie du mariage*, he adapts Hamlet's famous soliloquy: 'L'être ou ne pas l'être, voilà toute la question.' Honoré de Balzac, *CH*, vol. XI (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1980), p. 1008.

À quoi tient donc l'immense succès du *Père Goriot*? A quelle cause attribuer sa popularité subite? À la grande renommée de son auteur et au rare talent dont il a donné dans cet ouvrage même d'incontestables preuves. Désormais, la position de M. de Balzac, comme romancier est prise et bien prise: il l'a glorieusement emporté à la tête d'un état-major composé de plusieurs chefs-d'œuvre et d'une multitude de productions remarquables lui servant de corps d'armée. De nos jours, pour s'emparer de l'opinion publique, pour se l'assujettir comme tributaire, il faut frapper fort et frapper souvent. M. de Balzac réunit toutes ces conditions.<sup>125</sup>

Balzac was hailed in the press as 'un adversaire digne du grand classique',<sup>126</sup> a designation that likely reflects his ability to achieve a sense of completeness and comprehensiveness in *Eugénie Grandet* and *Le Père Goriot*. It is therefore unsurprising that he described the former text as 'un roman qui peint si bien la vie de province et qui doit contenir *toutes* les figures et *toutes* les positions sociales'.<sup>127</sup> This idea of omnipresence in both scope and detail is central to the vision of his growing magnum opus and to his consecration and permanence as a classic writer.

### 1.6. Adapting a Reputation on Stage: *L'Ami Grandet*, *La Fille de l'avare* and *Le Père Goriot* (1834-35)

Balzac's growing recognition was not solely confined to the press; his work was extensively adapted for the stage throughout the 1830s:

Très tôt, Balzac vit ses romans adaptés à la scène: dès 1831, le théâtre des Nouveautés créait *Les Chouans* adapté par Anicet Bourgeois et F. Cornu. Cette version marqua si peu l'histoire du théâtre, qu'à la fin du siècle une nouvelle mouture scénique sembla avoir plus de succès, puisqu'elle connut plus de 100 représentations, chiffre énorme à l'époque, au Théâtre de l'Ambigu avant de faire la fortune des salles périphériques avec un obscur pensionnaire de la Comédie Française 'en représentation' Philippe Garnier.<sup>128</sup>

These early adaptations were instrumental in expanding Balzac's reach and visibility. While they helped to promote his work, however, Watts argues that the 'inadequacy of early nineteenth-century copyright law meant that these plays were usually staged without his

<sup>125</sup> *Le Courrier français*, 13 April 1835.

<sup>126</sup> *Le Constitutionnel*, 8 March 1835.

<sup>127</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Corr.*, vol. I, Letter to Zulma Carraud, 21 September 1833, p. 876. Italics have been added for emphasis.

<sup>128</sup> Jacques Crépineau, 'Balzac: tricard au theatre, vedette à l'écran', in *Happy Few*, 2001, [https://www.ddo.fr/regietheatrale\\_240126/httpdocs/index/index/thematiques/crepineau/jacques-crepineau-balzac.html](https://www.ddo.fr/regietheatrale_240126/httpdocs/index/index/thematiques/crepineau/jacques-crepineau-balzac.html)

permission, and he earned no money from them'.<sup>129</sup> This lack of financial remuneration was undoubtedly frustrating, especially given Balzac's persistent struggles with debt, but it also galvanized him into becoming a staunch advocate of intellectual property rights.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, Balzac was not entirely without influence in the theatrical realm; he had a hand in the staging and cast selection of certain productions, most notably the controversial 1840 play *Vautrin*, which will be examined in Chapter Two.

Early adaptations of Balzac's work emphasized the irony and humour that characterize his writing, elements that align with the traditions of seventeenth-century classic literature. As these adaptations proliferated, they reinforced what Szwydky describes as the inevitable interdependence between texts and adaptations 'in the formation of cultural literacy and popular entertainment'.<sup>131</sup> By bringing Balzac's narratives to audiences who might not have encountered his work in print, these adaptations not only expanded his reach but also shaped public perceptions of his literary persona. They contributed to a broader cultural engagement with his oeuvre, demonstrating how adaptations served as both a vehicle for preserving a writer's legacy and a means of reinterpreting it for new audiences.

Adaptations not only reinforce a text's canonical status but can also interrogate its meaning, revealing that a work's place within the canon is neither fixed nor immutable, but instead subject to ongoing negotiation and reinterpretation. Adaptations therefore act as an 'equal player in the process of canonization',<sup>132</sup> thereby bolstering cultural literacy within an expanding commercial market. They also have the potential for renewal, breathing new life

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<sup>129</sup> Andrew Watts, 'Adapting Balzac', in *The Cambridge Companion to Balzac*, eds Owen Heathcote and Andrew Watts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 157-174, p. 157.

<sup>130</sup> Not only was the function of Balzac's reappearing characters to create a more cohesive, systematic oeuvre, but also to 'safeguard the originality of a work threatened by unauthorised appropriations' Sotirios Paraschas, *Reappearing Characters in Nineteenth-Century French Literature: Authorship, Originality, and Intellectual Property*, p. 68-69.

<sup>131</sup> Lissette Lopez Szwydky, 'Adaptations, Culture-Texts and the Literary Canon: On the making of nineteenth-century 'classics'', in *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*, ed. Dennis Cutchins, Katja Krebs and Eckart Voigts (London/New York: Routledge, 2020), 128-142, p. 138.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

into texts that might have otherwise been forgotten. For instance, Balzac lamented the challenges of publishing *La Recherche de l'absolu* compared to the greater popularity of *Eugénie Grandet* and *Le Père Goriot*. However, its adaptation into the 1837 play *De l'or ou le Rêve d'un savant* by Bayard and Biéville helped to rekindle interest in the work.

Nineteenth-century playwrights often emphasized and even exaggerated the performative aspects of classical genres, notably comedy and tragedy. For Boulard-Bezât, this approach helped them secure 'quelques lettres de noblesse littéraire'.<sup>133</sup> Popular adaptations, however, complicate the categorical implications of this 'noblesse littéraire'. Indeed, they combine elements of seventeenth-century theatre, such as character archetypes, moral instruction, and the use of catharsis, with techniques common to the *comédie-vaudeville*, including *quiproquos* and melodramatic plot twists.

Novel-to-stage adaptations often followed the conventions of the *mélodrame classique*<sup>134</sup> and the *mélodrame romantique*.<sup>135</sup> Playwrights were particularly drawn to *Eugénie Grandet* and *Le Père Goriot* because they were already renowned for their critical success and lent themselves easily to theatrical adaptation. Their richly detailed settings, tragic storylines, and dynamic cast of characters (each with a distinct idiolect) engage in compelling dialogues and navigate a series of obstacles marked by an 'accumulation of improbable dramatic turns of events'.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Sylvie Boulard-Bezât, 'Les adaptations du *Père Goriot*', *AB*, 8 (1987), 167-178, p. 175.

<sup>134</sup> The 'mélodrame classique' consisted of three acts 'consacrés respectivement à l'amour, au malheur et enfin au triomphe de la vertu et au châtement du crime. Quatre personnages essentiels sont en scène: le traître, l'héroïne qui est aux prises avec le traître, le niais et le héros imprégné des valeurs de l'idéal chrétien qui se porte au secours de l'héroïne. Le traître s'ingénie à faire parler un personnage quelque peu idiot et bavard qui lui fournit les renseignements indispensables à la poursuite de son projet criminel.' Yoshie Oshita, 'L'imaginaire mélodramatique dans l'œuvre de Balzac', *AB*, 1 (2000), 315-329, p. 316.

<sup>135</sup> The 'mélodrame romantique' gained its popularity notably throughout the Restoration. As Oshita notes, 'la mentalité collective change, et engendre une nouvelle forme d'écriture et de perception des intrigues théâtrales. Ainsi les asociaux, les marginaux et autres bandits, autrefois exclus et châtiés au troisième acte, se retrouvent dans la peau du héros, du triomphateur.' *Ibid.*, p. 317. Although the working class was extremely fond of this increasingly entertaining and popular genre, 'l'élite aristocratique se détourne du Boulevard avec mépris'. *Id.*

<sup>136</sup> Stéphanie Dast, 'At Once Drama and Epic: The Historical Novel in 1830s France', p. 75.

On 24 October 1834, *L'Ami Grandet* premiered at Le Théâtre du Vaudeville. Written by Decomberousse and Ancelot, the adaptation heightened the work's melodramatic elements, intensifying suspense through dialogue designed to amplify 'les effets les plus saisissants, l'adapter aux circonstances dramatiques, en susciter par lui des nouvelles, en commenter les conséquences sous une forme légère ou grave, conforme aux situations'.<sup>137</sup> The play enjoyed both critical and commercial success, attracting audiences for the next forty years.<sup>138</sup> However, its title proved misleading as it was not based on *Eugénie Grandet* but on *La Duchesse de Langeais*:

The playwrights' choice of title may be seen as an attempt to capitalize on Balzac's growing reputation, while concealing, or pretending to conceal, their true source. Unless, that is, it was adopted in mockery of the novelist, who at this time was quick to denounce the widespread, unacknowledged and still less recompensed theft of literary property, especially by writers for the lucrative popular stage. Whatever the authors' intention, it might be thought to have made difficult the use of the name Grandet in a title by any subsequent playwright who wished to produce a theatrical version of *Eugénie Grandet* itself.<sup>139</sup>

This strategic yet deceptive title choice reveals how Balzac's work was both a source of inspiration and commercial exploitation. Whether a deliberate provocation or a pragmatic attempt to attract audiences familiar with *Eugénie Grandet*, this title not only monopolized the Grandet name but also explicitly showcased the internal hierarchy within Balzac's oeuvre.

However, it would not be long before *Eugénie Grandet* was adapted for the stage. In early 1835, Bayard and Duport transformed it into *La Fille de l'avare: Comédie-Vaudeville en deux actes*.<sup>140</sup> Premiering at the Théâtre du Gymnase on 7 January 1835, the play featured a

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<sup>137</sup> Philippe Bertault, *Balzac: l'homme et l'œuvre* (Paris: Hatier, 1972), p. 207.

<sup>138</sup> See Michael Tilby, 'A Miser's Daughter: Awareness of Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet* in Nineteenth-Century England', *Revue de littérature comparée*, 343 (2012), 273-282.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274-275.

<sup>140</sup> It was Delestre-Poirson, theatre director at Gymnase, who invited Balzac to attend a performance of *La Fille de l'avare*, a two-act play by Jean-François Alfred Bayard and Paul Duport. The play, very loosely based on *Eugénie Grandet*, ended with Eugénie and Charles marrying. It was Bouffé who portrayed Grandet, delivering a performance that was met with resounding success. According to an article in *Le Vert Vert* on 8 January, 'M. de Balzac assistait à cette représentation dans la loge réservée qui, il y a cinq ans, était celle de la duchesse de Berry'. Honoré de Balzac, *Notes in Corr.*, vol. I, p. 1470.

simplified storyline, comedic undertones, and a decidedly ‘un-Balzacian ending’.<sup>141</sup> The play was well received, earning praise for its talented cast, dramatic plot twists, and skilful use of suspense:

Hier, le succès le plus complet, un de ces succès qui forcent le public de Paris à se précipiter soixante fois de suite dans une salle de spectacle, qui veut ensuite alimenter tous les théâtres de la province, a été obtenu au Gymnase-Dramatique par MM. Bayard et Paul Duport. Leur pièce, composée de deux actes pleins d'intérêt, de situations aussi heureuses que dramatiques, est intitulée *La Fille de l'Avare*. M. Bouffé a joué le rôle de l'avare d'une manière on ne peut plus remarquable. Mme Léontine-Volnys remplit celui de l'héroïne; elle y a été aussi touchante que vraie; de nombreux applaudissements lui ont prouvé la satisfaction du public qui la retrouvera bientôt à la Comédie-Française.<sup>142</sup>

Bayard and Duport also accentuated the melodramatic qualities of Balzac's work, enhancing certain scenes with orchestral music, particularly the final moment of the first act when Charles reads his father's despondent letter. The young man's cries of desperation, fainting spell, and sentimental temperament harmonized with Eugénie's fervent expressions of love and affection. The heightened emotions, plot twists,<sup>143</sup> and rapid-fire dialogue not only intensified suspense,<sup>144</sup> but also elicited laughter, especially through Nanon's remarks, which provided moments of comic relief.<sup>145</sup> While the playwrights retained the characters' distinctive traits, they made significant changes to the plot and ending. Tragedy gave way to comedy, dramatic

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<sup>141</sup> Michael Tilby, 'A Miser's Daughter: Awareness of Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet* in Nineteenth-Century England', *Ibid.*, p. 276. The play concludes with Eugénie's joyful marriage to Charles, and with Grandet's content with the union and its financial benefits. This aligns with the convention of the happy-ending motif typical in nineteenth-century melodramatic plays. *La Fille de l'avare* ends with Charles professing his undying love for Eugénie: 'Eugénie, ah! Reviens à toi...ne doute pas de mon cœur...il est à toi...à toi seule...ce mariage que je ne renouerai pas, ne me donnait que du luxe, de la vanité, de l'ambition...ce que je veux, c'est de l'amour, c'est du bonheur... Eugénie, me le refuseras-tu? (Tombant à ses genoux.) Je t'aime'. Jean-François Bayard, Paul Duport, *La Fille de l'avare: Comédie-Vaudeville en deux actes* (Paris: Imprimerie de Dondey-Dufré, 1835), p. 28.

<sup>142</sup> *Gazette des théâtres*, 8 January 1835.

<sup>143</sup> Eugénie gave her father's gold to Isidore so that it could be delivered to Charles's father in Paris. These moments are emblematic of the *coups de théâtre* which were highly popular in plays of the time.

<sup>144</sup> Bayard and Duport employ numerous dramatic cliffhangers to maintain the audience's intrigue. This is especially evident at the end of the first act and in the finale, where the audience is left in suspense, unsure whether Charles will marry Eugénie or Mlle Élisabeth.

<sup>145</sup> Such as when she boisterously says to Eugénie: 'Bonté divine!...ah! mamzelle, que je voudrais avoir ce père-là [Charles's father]...pour changer avec vous!' MM. Bayard and Paul Duport, *La Fille de l'avare: Comédie-Vaudeville en deux actes*, p. 7.

silences to rhyming couplets, and serious characters to exaggerated archetypes, reshaping the writer's work into a cheerful and captivating performance.

Balzac was pleased with the adaptation and conveyed his gratitude in a letter to the theatre director, Charles Delestre-Poirson:

Croyez que je suis très sensible à l'attention dont je suis l'objet de votre part et quoique j'aie récemment attaqué, au nom de tous les écrivains, des questions qui regardant les imitations des œuvres d'un auteur vivant, j'irai volontiers ce soir applaudir l'œuvre de M. Bayard qui ne peut être de son chef que très spirituelle, et ce sans croire être illogique en faisant honneur à votre politesse.<sup>146</sup>

The play's buoyant tone exemplifies 'an act of reception in which the viewing of that work is actively adapted as a specific form of enjoyment and understanding'.<sup>147</sup> The transformation of a serious, tragic narrative into a *comédie-vaudeville* speaks to the versatility and adaptability of Balzac's work. His writing is not simply bound to a sombre or foreboding interpretation but can just as seamlessly embrace light-hearted comedy and melodramatic suspense.

*Le Père Goriot* also captured the imagination of the *vaudevillistes*. Just two months after the novel's publication, two adaptations premiered on the night of 6 April 1835.<sup>148</sup> At Le Théâtre des Variétés, Théaulon and Comberousse staged a successful three-act *comédie-vaudeville*, while at Le Théâtre du Vaudeville, Ancelot and Paulin presented a two-act version. While the former enjoyed commercial success, the latter was a complete failure, met with 'les sifflements du public, sur la médiocrité des acteurs'.<sup>149</sup>

Thanks to its well-structured plot, credible characters, particularly Goriot, who was played by the renowned Charles-Edme Vernet, and effective use of *coups de théâtre*, Théaulon and Comberousse's adaptation enjoyed critical acclaim. Performed 53 times, a significant run

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<sup>146</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Corr.*, vol. I, Letter to Charles Delestre-Poirson, 7 January 1835, p. 1043.

<sup>147</sup> Timothy Corrigan, 'Defining Adaptation', in *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, ed. Thomas Leitch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 23-35, p. 23.

<sup>148</sup> The titles of the plays were identical to the novel.

<sup>149</sup> Sylvie Boulard-Bezart, 'Les adaptations du *Père Goriot*', p. 171.

for the period,<sup>150</sup> the play boosted Balzac's standing in the theatrical world.<sup>151</sup> As in *La Fille de l'avare*, the conclusion is both uplifting and morally instructive; the wicked characters, among them Goriot's daughters, face retribution, while the virtuous find redemption, reflecting the simplified moral binary Balzac outlines in the novel's preface. Through this reimagining, the work is no longer framed as 'une fresque sociale satirique et puissante',<sup>152</sup> but reimagined as 'un mélodrame bourgeois et intimiste'.<sup>153</sup> Rather than undermining his status as a serious writer, these adaptations demonstrated the sheer breadth and potential of his work, challenging the notion that novel-to-stage adaptations were considered a 'mauvais genre'.<sup>154</sup>

Si Balzac a tant aimé le mélodrame, c'est qu'il y a vu la première tentative de réaliser un spectacle complet, l'avènement irréversible du règne de l'illusion. En utilisant conjointement les ressources du mélodrame, du roman populaire, mais aussi les techniques descriptives nées du panorama, de la lanterne magique et de toutes les fantasmagories dont son époque était si friande, Balzac a eu conscience de s'approcher encore davantage d'un genre total qui réussisse à donner, selon le mot d'Umberto Eco 'la vraie mesure de la réalité'.<sup>155</sup>

Balzac appeared less interested in adaptations of his work, partly due to concerns over copyright, his desire to write directly for the stage, and his selective, patronizing, and contradictory views on popular genres. Yet his writing, together with the various modes of dissemination it underwent, reveals a symbiotic relationship between the novel, the stage, and, later, the screen. His writing possesses a versatility that invites multiple interpretations, allowing readers, playwrights, and spectators alike to analyse it from various perspectives. This enduring relevance may stem from the distinctive combination of classical subject-matters and a contemporary sensibility that defines his style:

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>151</sup> Boulard-Bezart writes that in 1835, 'le Théâtre des Variétés 'est à la mode: le succès que remportent la plupart des pièces qui y sont représentées fait pâlir de jalousie les autres théâtres parisiens. Balzac lui-même s'y rendait très souvent et envisagea de donner à ce théâtre plusieurs de ces pièces.' *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>153</sup> *Id.*

<sup>154</sup> Isabelle Michelot, 'L'adaptation de Balzac au théâtre: la quadrature du "four"?' , *AB*, 12 (2011), 383-399, p. 387.

<sup>155</sup> Anne-Marie Baron, *Balzac cinéaste* (Paris: Meridiens Klincksieck, 1990), p. 181-182.

Les genres littéraires que Balzac a pratiqués dans sa jeunesse, loin de le desservir, l'auraient donc plutôt aidé à se maintenir proche d'un public dont il a longuement testé les exigences. Mélodrame, roman noir, roman historique sont le terreau sur lequel a poussé son génie. Il a su évoluer dans leur cadre et ne les a jamais reniés ni complètement abandonnés. C'est sans doute ce qui explique le caractère profondément populaire et spectaculaire de son œuvre. Mais surtout, Balzac a su transcender ces genres à succès par une vision du monde qui leur a redonné une nouvelle vie. Il a en effet apporté au roman un souffle épique et donné un sens symbolique plus moderne à la lutte éternelle du héros-sujet contre le milieu-objet d'une société qui ne cesse de chercher à l'écraser. Ce faisant, il répondait à un besoin tout à fait actuel. Toute l'industrie Culturelle ne fera par la suite que continuer cet effort pour satisfaire les aspirations d'un public petit-bourgeois en manque d'épopée.<sup>156</sup>

Balzac encountered many challenges in his early writing career as he transcended the divide between classic and popular literature. Initially driven by financial necessity and later by his adaptability and persistence, Balzac endlessly constructed and deconstructed multiple versions of his authorial identity, both aligning with and reinventing his work in relation to the established literary traditions of the Grand Siècle and the growing demand for mass appeal. The mechanisms of book publishing, novel-to-stage adaptations and the growing democratization of literature compelled Balzac to experiment with style, genre and literary forms, playing with strokes of irony, humour, drama, and tragedy. By 1835, these characteristics had become central to the critical and commercial success of *Les Chouans*, *Physiologie*, *La Peau de chagrin*, *Eugénie Grandet*, and *Le Père Goriot*. It was through these modes of dissemination, combined with his prolific writing and prefaces, that played a decisive role in constructing and securing his lasting status as a 'classic'.

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<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58-59.



## Chapter 2 – Canonisation via Popularisation: Censorship and Newspaper, Stage and Illustration, Collaboration and Conflict (1836-55)

Assessments of Balzac's work in the press were undoubtedly influenced by the various political biases of newspapers, including *La Quotidienne* and *L'Univers*. His involvement in legal disputes, notably the 1839 Affaire Peytel, further complicated his reception in the press.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, critical judgments were not purely based on literary merit but were entangled with journalists' ideological stances and personal views influenced by Balzac's charismatic, contradictory and status-conscious personality.

Nonetheless, the writer's extensive publications in the press during the 1830s and 1840s provide a substantial body of material for examining his evolving status as a writer seeking what Bourdieu terms economic, symbolic, and cultural capital—monetary recompense, intellectual prestige, honour, and celebrity. Whereas economic capital refers to possessing economic resources such as money and properties, symbolic capital refers to the 'degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration or honour and is founded on a dialectic of knowledge (*connaissance*) and recognition (*reconnaissance*)'.<sup>2</sup> In analysing how Balzac navigated and balanced these realms, this chapter will reveal how his pursuit of various forms of capital reconciled his identities as an *auteur littéraire* and an *auteur populaire*:

En fait, le but principal de l'auteur "populaire" est de rechercher la plus grande faveur du public, de vouloir la fortune en se calquant sur les désirs, les préoccupations de ses lecteurs; alors que l'auteur 'littéraire' fait surtout grand cas d'une expérience personnelle, et non d'une expérience collective, et que chez lui, le fait de tirer de l'argent, au maximum, de son œuvre, est moins prépondérant.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Balzac's uncle had been unjustly guillotined for murder, and he held Peytel, whom he knew personally, in high regard. By publicly engaging with the case, Balzac used his literary influence to champion his causes, but this involvement also drew severe criticism, with detractors accusing him of immorality and disparaging his work. See Patricia Baudouin, 'Justice, presse et politique: L'engagement de Balzac dans l'affaire Peytel', *Revue d'histoire du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 26/27 (2003), 331-348.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Yves Olivier-Martin, *Histoire du roman populaire en France de 1840 à 1980* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1980), p. 36.

While Balzac sought public favour and financial gain by addressing publishers' demands, he placed equal, if not greater value on his artistic vision, often prioritizing it over external expectations. This tension hindered his ability to cater to public tastes or secure a stable income. Paradoxically, the financial pressure only intensified his work ethic, creating a perpetual cycle; the more he published, the more fixated he became on monetary gain, as reflected in many of his letters to Madame Hanska:

Après la liberté de la plume, viendra la liberté financière. Et le jour où ma plume me permettra de faire *notre* fortune, *notre* fortune?... Elle sera bien rapide, je l'espère, surtout en restant dans les conditions modestes et très sordides de mon existence actuelle. Lecou (à qui j'ai rendu 92 000 fr.), estime que *La Comédie humaine* me rapportera 700 000 francs dans dix ans, à compter du jour où elle sera terminée. Mais si la contrefaçon belge est éteinte, cette somme peut se tripler. Avant tout, soyons quitte avec tout le monde! Encore 15 000 ducats, pour parler monnaie polonaise, et cette grande œuvre sera terminée.<sup>4</sup>

Although Balzac was notorious for having little to no economic capital, he had an extremely strong sense of social capital, allowing him to liaise with influential members of society both within and outside of France, and gain varying sources of revenue. Thanks to these diverse streams of income, Balzac was determined to publish his work for which he sought praise, admiration, and cultural capital, a 'form of knowledge, an internalized code or a cognitive acquisition which equips the social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artefacts'.<sup>5</sup> His evolving reception in the press, alongside his diverse publishing and commercial strategies, particularly his prominence in the *roman-feuilleton*, illustrated editions, and bookshop posters, effectively reconciled these seemingly conflicting forms of capital.

The chapter is divided into six sections, each following a chronological sequence to illustrate Balzac's growing list of publications. The first section examines his decision to republish his *romans de jeunesse* with Souverain, alongside the divided reception of several

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<sup>4</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *LH*, vol. I, 1 May 1843, p. 678.

<sup>5</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, p. 7.

scandalous works from the same period: *La Vieille Fille* (1836); *Une fille d'Ève* (1838-1839); the second instalment of *Illusions perdues*, *Un grand homme de province à Paris* (1839); *La Torpille*, which would become the opening of *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (1843); and finally, *La Dernière Incarnation de Vautrin*, published in 1847 as the concluding instalment of *Splendeurs*. The second section examines the complex yet ultimately productive relationship Balzac shared with publishers, notably Girardin and Charpentier. The third section focuses on his efforts to write for the stage, particularly regarding the controversial 1840 production of *Vautrin*. Despite the public backlash, the writer made a notable recovery with his *Physiologie* works, specifically *Philosophie de la vie conjugale*, which garnered significant attention and commercial success in 1841. The fourth section explores the 1842 release and promotion of the *Avant-propos*, examining Balzac's vision of unifying his body of work. It also analyses the writer's commercial strategies beyond the press, particularly the series of bookshop posters released between 1842 and 1846, promoting titles including: *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, *La Comédie humaine*, *Scènes de la vie privée et publique des animaux*, and *Philosophie de la vie conjugale*. The release of these posters coincided with the publication of the 1842 Furne edition of *La Comédie humaine*. Moreover, it occurred alongside the publication of *La Cousine Bette* in 1846 and *Le Cousin Pons* in 1847, as discussed in the fifth section. These events reflect the build-up in tension between Balzac's serious literary ambitions and the commercial strategies employed to broaden his readership. The sixth section compares the ribald subject matter of the *Contes drolatiques* with Doré's distinguished illustrations in Armand Dutacq's 1855 edition. While illustrations in the nineteenth-century French press were often used for satirical purposes, they also played a key role in increasing the visibility and literary stature of an author's work. This corpus is essential for tracing the evolution of Balzac's reception during the latter half of his career. It identifies the key titles that shaped his public image, revealing how his involvement with popular media influenced his relationship with

publishers, illustrators, wider readerships, and his own ambivalent views on the commercialization of literature.

### 2.1. A Baptism of Scandal: *La Vieille Fille*, *Illusions perdues* and *Une fille d'Ève* (1836-39)

The press capitalized on the increasing popularity of the novel genre by promoting it through the serialized *roman-feuilleton*. By 1836, Balzac's literary achievements had already garnered critical acclaim and publicity. This growing recognition likely prompted him to republish his *romans de jeunesse* under the title *Œuvres complètes d'Horace de Saint-Aubin*. Issued by Souverain in eight instalments, each consisting of two *in-8* volumes, six of Balzac's texts were republished between 1836 and 1837: *Jane la Pâle* (t. IX-X, April 1836), *La Dernière fée* (t. I-II, September 1836), *Le Vicaire des Ardennes* (t. V-VI, October 1836), *Argow le Pirate* (t. VII-VIII, December 1836), *Le Sorcier* (t. III-IV, March 1837) and *L'Excommunié* (t. XV-XVI, June 1837). Two additional works would be later published in 1839 and 1840: *L'Israélite* (*Clothilde de Lusignan*) and *Dom Gigadas*.<sup>6</sup> Three factors may explain why Balzac decided to republish his earlier texts. First, there was the obvious prospect of financial gain. Second, it allowed him to reintroduce and reframe the unfavourable reception of his earlier work under the now-recognised name of Balzac. Third, it helped him reclaim ownership of his earlier work, which had been susceptible to plagiarism:

M. Horace de Saint-Aubin [...] marchant alors dans l'ombre inaperçu à travers les romanciers de l'époque. Ignoré du grand monde et accueilli froidement par les éditeurs s'est agrandi tout à coup sous le nom célèbre de Balzac, et, dès l'apparition de la *Physionomie du mariage*, a quitté son modeste pseudonyme pour nous livrer les productions les plus piquantes de notre littérature actuelle.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The correspondence between Balzac and Souverain during this period was strictly business-oriented, centring on negotiating deadlines and payments, with Souverain frequently reprimanding Balzac for missing his deadlines. On 3 September 1839, Souverain wrote to Balzac: '[J]'ai besoin de finir l'affaire St-Aubin qui dure depuis trop longtemps—il me revient un ouvrage, donnez-le-moi, mais je ne veux plus avoir de rapports pour cela avec personne qu'avec vous ou M. Re[g]nault. Je suis las de toutes les promenades faites à ce sujet chez M. de Gram[m]ont qui me dit toujours qu'il eût fait gratis un travail qui vous a été payé. Livrez-moi gratis mon 6<sup>e</sup> ouvrage ou rendez-moi l'argent que vous avez reçu pour son prix.' The work he is referring to is *Dom Gigadas*. Honoré de Balzac, *Corr.*, vol. II, 3 September 1839, p. 557.

<sup>7</sup> *Petit Courrier des dames*, 10 June 1836, under the section, *Littérature*.

Unlike his *romans de jeunesse*, however, Balzac's newer titles from the late 1830s were increasingly dependent on the press, often appearing in serialized form before being published as complete volumes. This reliance was facilitated by publishers such as Girardin, whose efforts to depoliticize the press, particularly through *La Presse*, attracted a broader readership and consequently increased subscriptions. Alongside its competitor, *Le Siècle*, these two enterprises 'doubled their print runs between 1836 and 1845 from an average of 73,000 to 148,000 copies'.<sup>8</sup> Girardin reduced subscription rates from 80 francs to 40, an initiative that expanded his readership, attracted substantial advertising revenue, and increased the fierce competition between newspapers. In promoting Balzac's extensive selection of titles, distinguished by their intricate storylines and philosophical underpinnings, Girardin endeavoured to elevate the standard of works issued in the press.

Balzac was one of the editor's foremost authors, valued not only for his prolific output but also for his esteemed status. Balzac had 'la plus grande renommée: Balzac, l'auteur de *La Peau de chagrin*, d'*Eugénie Grandet*, du *Père Goriot*, du *Lys dans la vallée*... Cette réputation lui assure déjà un excellent argument publicitaire'.<sup>9</sup> Collaborating with Balzac attracted new subscribers, as his lengthy serialized texts, spanning months or even years, aimed to convert readers into long-term subscribers. During his first year working with Girardin, Balzac produced *La Vieille Fille*, *La Torpille*, and *La Femme Supérieure*. The six-month publication of *La Vieille Fille* alone garnered more than 11,000 new subscribers for *La Presse*.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Claude Bellanger, et al., *Histoire générale de la presse française*, vol. II (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1969), p. 120. For a more recent analysis on the synthesis of the 'literary-cultural turn' in recent French press historiography, see Alain Vaillant et al., *La civilisation du journal: Histoire culturelle et littéraire de la presse au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Nouveau monde éditions, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> René Guise, 'Balzac et le roman feuilleton', *AB*, 1(1964), 283-338, p. 287.

<sup>10</sup> See Martyn Lyons, *Le Triomphe du livre: une histoire sociologique de la lecture dans la France du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Promodis, 1987), p. 50.

Although *La Vieille Fille* increased the newspaper's subscribership, critics quickly reproached the text for its immorality<sup>11</sup> and scandalous content. Derived from the 12<sup>th</sup> century Latin *scandalum*, the term *scandale* is defined as 'proprement "ce sur quoi on trébuche"', puis "abomination", du grec *skandalon*, "piège placé sur le chemin pour faire trébucher", puis "incitation à pécher"<sup>12</sup>. This etymological trajectory, from a cause for moral or social stumbling to abomination, captures the term's 'caractère impénétrable, incompréhensible qui choque la raison ou peut ébranler la foi'.<sup>13</sup> The scandalous nature of Balzac's work was conveyed through his 'réalisme jugé choquant ou puéril, de sa verve, réputée vulgaire ou indécente, de son obscurité enfin'.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to the youthful and noble Eugénie, whose story ends in tragic yet virtuous solitude, Rose-Marie Cormon is a forty-year-old unmarried woman primarily motivated by sexual and financial considerations. Echoing his satirical views on marriage in *Physiologie*, Balzac uses *La Vieille Fille* to dismantle illusions about provincial life, including its politics and its people, notably its female characters. Girardin capitalized on the scandalous content of *La Vieille Fille* to attract attention and boost subscriptions, demonstrating that transgression carries a high transactional value:

En choisissant Balzac pour inaugurer la 'littérature en tranches', Girardin avait en plus fourni à ses adversaires une pâture riche, qu'ils ne devaient pas tarder à exploiter. Peut-être en habile publiciste prévoyant de telles réactions, avait-il par ce choix compté justement faire d'une pierre deux coups: susciter le maximum d'intérêt de la part du public et emporter un succès de scandale, aidé par la publicité-adverse mais gratuite et étendue, que consacraient infailliblement au romancier tous les critiques qui l'avaient déjà traité fort rudement pendant le cours de l'année? C'était, de toute façon, un espoir qu'il s'était bien retenu de communiquer au malheureux romancier!<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Alfred Nettement argued that the *roman-feuilleton* was 'la source des poisons' because it promoted crime and immoral behaviour. Alfred Nettement, *Études critiques sur le feuilleton-roman* (Paris, Librairie de Perrodil, 1845), p. 374.

<sup>12</sup> 'Scandale', Definition 1 in *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. [online], <<https://www.dictionnaire-academie.fr/article/A9S0700>> [accessed 23 August 2025].

<sup>13</sup> 'Scandale', Definition 2 in *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. [online], <<https://www.dictionnaire-academie.fr/article/A9S0700>> [accessed 23 August 2025].

<sup>14</sup> Pierre-George Castex, Introduction to *La Vieille Fille*, (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2024), p. XXXVI.

<sup>15</sup> Patricia Kinder, 'Un directeur de journal, ses auteurs et ses lecteurs en 1836: Autour de *La Vieille Fille*', *AB*, 1972, 173-200, p. 192.

In 1837, critics in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* dismissed Balzac as a ‘cynique et grossier sans train. Il ne dérive point de Rabelais mais de Paul de Kock’.<sup>16</sup> Balzac, who often scoffed at such comparisons in his correspondence, chose to craft a plot of major scandal set in the very antithesis of scandal: the provinces. This deliberate inversion represents one of the work’s key novelties. In defying readers’ expectations, particularly in his portrayal of a rather unlikeable heroine, he showcases his ability to create a wide spectrum of female characters. Defined by her ignorance, opportunism and naïveté, Rose-Marie Cormon stands as a caricature of the middle-aged provincial women. Lacking any moral or personal transformation, her story concludes in a deliberately unconventional and anticlimactic way, reflecting life’s callousness and its resistance to neat or consoling resolutions.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the work’s unorthodox views on female deception, editors still leveraged Balzac’s name to increase their newspaper subscription rates, notably *Le Figaro*, ‘qui ose dire un mot en faveur du roman universellement condamné’.<sup>18</sup>

*La Presse* nous a donné ces jours-ci, y lit-on dès le 9 novembre, tout un roman de M. de Balzac qui est assurément l’un des meilleurs qu’il ait contés. On retrouve là tout son immense talent de détails et d’observation. *La Vieille Fille* est un tableau achevé que nous mettons presque à la hauteur et qui se rapproche d’ailleurs par plus d’un côté d’UN GÉNIE GRAND ET son chef d’œuvre...Somme toute *La Vieille Fille* est la production capitale de ces jours-ci.<sup>19</sup>

The term ‘production capitale’ implies the work’s financial success, reflected in its profitability, as well as its shock value and novelty within the literary landscape of the period, illustrating the press’s capacity to influence and redirect readers’ tastes.

Although Balzac was aware of the stringent demands of the fragmented newspaper format, he found it difficult to adapt his writing style: ‘ses interminables descriptions ennuient,

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<sup>16</sup> *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, vol. III, August 1837, Signed: Y.

<sup>17</sup> See Michael Tilby, ‘Balzac and the Poetics of Ignorance: *La Vieille Fille*’, *Modern Language Review*, 100 (2005), 954-970.

<sup>18</sup> Patricia Kinder ‘Un Directeur de journal, ses auteurs et ses lecteurs en 1836: Autour de *La Vieille Fille*’, p. 198.

<sup>19</sup> Alphonse Karr, *Le Figaro*, 9 November 1836.

il n'a pas l'art de tenir le lecteur en haleine. L'abonné proteste. Les tirages languissent'.<sup>20</sup> When *La Femme supérieure* was first published in *La Presse* in 1837, he lamented to Madame Hanska: 'les soixante-quinze colonnes de *La Presse* n'ont fourni qu'un petit volume. Vous ne sauriez imaginer comme ces raccommodages, ces replâtrages m'ennuient; je suis excédé par ces travaux après coup'.<sup>21</sup> He further expressed his frustration with the relentless demands of satisfying both editors and readers, while satirically critiquing 'the chain of command from reader to editor to author'.<sup>22</sup>

Les fragments de l'œuvre entreprise par l'auteur subissent alors les lois capricieuses du goût et de la convenance des marchands. Tel journal a demandé un morceau qui ne soit ni trop long, ni trop court, qui puisse entrer dans tant de colonnes et de tel prix. L'auteur va dans son magasin, dit : J'ai *La Maison Nucingen*! Il se trouve que *La Maison Nucingen*, qui convient pour la longueur, pour la largeur, pour le prix, parle de choses trop épineuses qui ne cadrent point avec la politique du journal. *La Maison Nucingen* demeure sur les bras de l'auteur. Eh bien, prenez *La Torpille*? '*La Torpille* est une grisette, et l'on a déjà crié pour *La Vieille Fille*. Nos lecteurs, qui lisent les horreurs de *La Gazette* des tribunaux et les infamies des annonces, ont hurlé pour les seins trop volumineux de Mlle Cormon et pour la comique fraude d'une grisette normande qui se dit grosse afin de se faire donner, par des âmes pieuses et par un vieux libertin, la somme nécessaire pour un petit voyage à Paris.' Donnez-nous quelque chose entre le sermon et la littérature, quelque chose qui fasse des colonnes et pas de scandale, qui soit dramatique sans péril, comique sans drôlerie; guillotine un homme, ne peignez ni fournisseur impuissant, ni banquier trop hardi, cela n'existe pas.<sup>23</sup>

This sharp and sardonic outlook reemerges in the first instalment of *Illusions perdues*, particularly through the *mise en abyme* of the publishing world and Balzac's unremitting struggles within it. Published by Werdet in 1837, it marked the start of the writer's ambitious three-part series.<sup>24</sup> It takes on an even more provocative dimension with the release of its second instalment, *Un grand homme de province à Paris*. Published by Souverain in 1839, it

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<sup>20</sup> Lise Dumasy-Queffélec, *Le roman-feuilleton français au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1989), p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *LH*, vol. I, 12 October 1837, p. 412.

<sup>22</sup> Keri Ann Berg, *Fight for the page Fighting for the page: Balzac, Grandville and the power of images, 1830–1848* (Austin: The University of Texas, 2003), p. 20.

<sup>23</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Les Employés*, *CH VII*, p. 890-91.

<sup>24</sup> The title *Illusions perdues* was first mentioned in the autumn of 1833 as part of *Scènes de la vie de province*. It was included in the broader editorial collection *Études de mœurs au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* purchased by Madame Béchet on 20 October 1833. See Roland Chollet, Introduction to *Illusions perdues*, *CH V* (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1977).

amplified the controversy surrounding Balzac's impassioned defence of Peytel and drew heightened public attention to the author:

L'hostilité de la presse s'aggrave peu avant 'l'affaire', avec la publication en juin du *Grand homme de province à Paris*, dont le mordant chapitre 'Comment se font les petits journaux' et surtout la préface, véritable déclaration de guerre au journalisme, 'ce cancer qui dévorera peut-être le pays', suscitent une levée de boucliers. La presse se déchaîne, ulcérée de se voir si laide dans le miroir que lui tend le romancier: dès lors, il n'est pas un quotidien, pas une revue qui ne consacre au moins une de ses pages à un portrait-charge de Balzac.<sup>25</sup>

In the same year, he also contemplated a bid for a seat in the Académie française but withdrew on 2 December in favour of Hugo, who was not elected.<sup>26</sup> These intertwined events, together with the scandal surrounding the subject matter of *La Vieille Fille* followed shortly by *Un grand homme de province à Paris*, in which Balzac expressed his views against the commercialization and erosion of journalistic integrity, collectively intensified the harsher criticism he faced that year. This sequence of scandalous events, described as an 'instrument extrêmement efficace pour devenir célèbre ou le rester, mais aussi conséquence presque inhérente de la célébrité',<sup>27</sup> contributed to Balzac's career oscillating between praise and criticism, reinforcing his reputation as a prominent and notorious celebrity. Far from offering the comforts of escapism, his fiction, fraught with transgressive themes, confronts readers with an unyielding reflection of life's harsher truths. This is precisely what made his work ironic, contradictory and controversial: although readers of serialized fiction may have preferred to avoid such content, its originality positioned Balzac's writing ahead of its time, a distinction often associated with classic authors.<sup>28</sup> Despite the hostility towards his work, Balzac remained steadfast in his endeavours, as exemplified in a letter he later wrote to Madame Hanska in 1843, where he confidently asserted: 'En France, il n'y a de grand que ce qui est nié. Rousseau, Voltaire,

<sup>25</sup> Patricia Baudouin, 'Justice, presse et politique: L'engagement de Balzac dans l'affaire Peytel', p. 333.

<sup>26</sup> See Roger Pierrot, *Honoré de Balzac* (Paris: Fayard, 1994), p. 350.

<sup>27</sup> See Antoine Lilti, *Figures publiques: l'invention de la célébrité (1750-1850)* (Paris: Fayard, 2014), p. 39.

<sup>28</sup> See Italo Calvino, *Pourquoi lire les classiques*, trans. Christophe Mileschi & Jean-Paul Manganaro (Paris: Gallimard, 2018).

Montesquieu, La Fontaine, Racine et Molière même, tous ont été niés, discutés, combattus'.<sup>29</sup>

This assertion implies that greatness inevitably attracts criticism, suggesting that only works of substantial significance endure rigorous scrutiny.

In contrast to the controversy and scandal surrounding *La Vieille Fille* and *Un grand homme de province à Paris*, *Une fille d'Ève* aligned more closely with the characteristics of the fragmented genre; it is shorter, set against the vibrant backdrop of Paris, and focuses on the discontented marriages of two young women in high society. Published in thirteen instalments from 31 December 1838 to 14 January 1839, *Une fille d'Ève* remains crucial for its reappearing characters such as Rastignac, Bixiou, Blondet, Finot, and Couture, who also resurface in *Le Père Goriot* as well as in *La Maison Nucingen* published in September 1838.<sup>30</sup> These multiple cross-references anticipate the coherence and emergence of Balzac's unifying oeuvre.

Even before the release of the *Avant-Propos* in 1842, Balzac wanted his readers to perceive his titles as components of a unified whole. This intent is evident in the preface of *Une fille d'Ève*, first published in the 1839 Souverain edition. It accentuates the difficulties Balzac faced in balancing his artistic vision with the public's demand for excitement and sensationalism. Furthermore, it emphasizes his struggle to steer readers' focus on the coherence and systematic vision of his work:

Quand l'auteur publia cette œuvre dans un journal, beaucoup de lecteurs s'attendaient à des catastrophes émouvantes, à des pages dramatiques, comme on dit, et le dénouement vrai, quoique brusque, fit paraître cette scène innocente, et partant un peu fade. Comment l'auteur pouvait-il exiger que le public, de nos jours, si distrait, si peu soucieux de la littérature, fit attention au titre de *Scène de la vie privée*, qui ne permet aucune des violences ou des condiments épicés que souffre une *Scène de la vie parisienne*.<sup>31</sup>

He also used the preface to advocate the moral and social responsibility of authors. This was closely linked to his role as president of the Société des gens de lettres, a position he held from

<sup>29</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *LH*, vol. I, 11 May 1843, p. 682.

<sup>30</sup> See Anthony R. Pugh, 'The Autonomy of Balzac's *Une fille d'Ève*', *Romantic Review*, 69 (1978), 186-195.

<sup>31</sup> Honoré de Balzac, Preface to *Une fille d'Ève*, *CH II*, p. 261.

1839 until 9 January 1840 when Hugo assumed presidency.<sup>32</sup> In contrast to the scandal his work stirred in the press, Balzac's leadership in the Société reflected a commitment to elevating the literary profession and safeguarding the intellectual property of authors' works. During his presidency, several of his proposals gained traction: 'projet de création de l'Annuaire littéraire, préfiguration de l'actuel Bulletin; projet d'établissement d'une banque au profit des membres de la Société, laquelle escompterait le papier des sociétaires et consentirait des avances sur les manuscrits et les articles'.<sup>33</sup> In response to ongoing disputes surrounding copyright and unauthorized stage adaptations, the Société served as a vital 'forum for authors who wanted to submit complaints against the playwrights who were appropriating their works'.<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, his presidency offered him an opportunity to redeem himself of earlier criticisms and to present himself as a defender of authors, even if his efforts were directed primarily toward a small, elite group of writers.

## 2.2. Balzac and the *Bibliothèque Charpentier*: The Rise of Pocket Editions (1838-51)

Even amid the challenges of 1839, Balzac persisted in his literary endeavours and maintained regular correspondence with publishers, particularly Charpentier. Thanks to the latter's support, Balzac was able to continue producing a substantial body of work and to publish it in smaller formats that anticipated major developments in the publishing industry—from the *Bibliothèque des chemins de fer* to the modern paperback. In 1838, Charpentier launched the *Bibliothèque Charpentier* collection, which published a diverse range of books

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<sup>32</sup> Roger Pierrot, 'Balzac et Hugo d'après leur correspondance' *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de La France*, 4 (1953), 467-83, p. 473.

<sup>33</sup> Louis Gabriel-Robinet, 'Balzac, la *Revue des Deux Mondes* et la Société des gens de lettres', *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1974, 570-577, p. 576.

<sup>34</sup> Sotirios Paraschas, *Reappearing Characters in Nineteenth-Century French Literature: Authorship, Originality, and Intellectual Property*, p. 59.

available at reduced prices. Charpentier's innovation lay in combining reduced production costs with high-quality editions, charging 3,50 francs for an *in-18* sized book.<sup>35</sup> His collection was essential for the rise of the 'collection moderne'<sup>36</sup> because it promoted nineteenth-century French writers and established 'pour les hommes de goût de notre époque une bibliothèque vraiment choisie'.<sup>37</sup> It focused on 'toutes les grandes plumes Musset, Sand, Balzac, Vigny, Hugo'.<sup>38</sup> The decorative yellow covers and high-quality paper enhanced the editions' visual appeal, conferring a greater level of prestige upon writers. These aesthetic elements are essential to what Genette identifies as a work's 'paratexte éditorial',<sup>39</sup> which recognizes and legitimizes both the market value and intellectual rigour of texts: 'la couverture et son illustration, le choix des couleurs, le choix du format et du papier, la composition typographique, bref, tout ce qui contribue à la réalisation matérielle du livre et qui relève de la décision ou de la responsabilité de l'éditeur'.<sup>40</sup>

Balzac was prominently featured in Charpentier's collection; most of his titles were published *in-18*.<sup>41</sup>

De nombreux romans de Balzac sont également réédités dans le format Charpentier, petit livre compact (jésus) dont le coût est la moitié d'un in-octavo et qui a amorcé une phase essentielle de baisse du prix des livres en 1838. Gervais Charpentier avait signé dès 1838 avec Balzac un traité lui permettant d'imprimer 36 500 volumes de son œuvre. Or, dans cette édition à 3 F 50, paraît en 1846 la seconde édition dans la collection de *La Peau de chagrin*, éditée par Charpentier une première fois en 1839; signe de succès attendu auprès d'un large public puisque les tirages, de 5 000 exemplaires, sont nettement supérieurs aux tirages courants (de mille exemplaires environ).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> See Yves Olivier-Martin, *Histoire du roman populaire en France de 1840 à 1980*, p. 27. By point of comparison, Olivero writes that 'the average wage of a Parisian worker for one working day in the 1840s was between 1.50 and 2 francs – the price had been reduced from approximately ten working days to slightly over two working days for those earning the most meagre salaries.' Isabelle Olivero, 'The Paperback Revolution in France 1850–1950', in *The Culture of the Publisher's Series Volume One: Authors, Publishers and the Shaping of Taste*, ed. John Spiers (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 72-87, p. 75. This was Charpentier's attempt at targeting the middle-class reading public.

<sup>36</sup> Isabelle Olivero, 'Le paratexte et l'identité des collections littéraires, 1830-1860', *Histoire et civilisation du livre*, 6 (2010), 161-75, p. 162.

<sup>37</sup> Gervais Charpentier, *Journal des débats*, 5 November 1841.

<sup>38</sup> Marianne Duflot, 'La Bibliothèque Charpentier' in *Les bibliothèques imaginaires et réalités*, ed. Claudine Nédelec (Artois: Artois Presses Université, 2009), 47-58, p. 52.

<sup>39</sup> See Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2002).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>41</sup> Some were also published *in-2*, *in-12*, and *in-16*.

<sup>42</sup> Joëlle Gleize, 'Balzac et la totalisation des intelligences', *AB*, 11 (2010), 97-109, p. 105.

Between 1838 and 1851, at the height of the *Bibliothèque Charpentier* collection,<sup>43</sup> thirteen of his titles were published.<sup>44</sup> Five of these were republished into new editions: *Physiologie du mariage* (1838, 1840, 1847), *La Peau de chagrin* (1839, 1845), *Eugénie Grandet* (1839, 1841, 1850, 1851), *Le Lys dans la vallée* (1839, 1846, 1851), and *César Birotteau* (1839, 1847).

Despite Balzac's extensive publishing efforts, he was not considered a best-selling author like Pigault-Lebrun, Sue, or Dumas. Martyn Lyons asserts that evaluating authors' best-selling works not only involves 'actual sale figures but also production metrics including print runs and re-editions of individual titles'.<sup>45</sup> Lyons's analysis of best-selling French authors from 1815 to 1850 often overlooks Balzac, attributing this omission to the extensive serialization of his work in the press. Nevertheless, he identifies *La Peau de chagrin* (which saw eight editions before 1850)<sup>46</sup> and *La Physiologie du mariage* (with seven editions before 1850) as the writer's best-selling titles of the period. Despite numerous editions, their combined print run did not exceed 20,000 copies, a modest figure compared to the 750,000 copies of editions of La Fontaine's work, the century's most widely read French author.<sup>47</sup> What distinguished Balzac from his contemporaries, however, was his innovative approach to publishing, which encompassed a wide range of genres, formats and newspapers with varying political leanings.

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<sup>43</sup> In 1852, Charpentier's net worth was estimated to be 600 000 francs, making him 'l'un des libraires les plus importants de France. Il aborde alors, en 1846, après la naissance de son fils Georges, les débuts du second Empire en position solide. La concurrence qu'il dit organisée contre ses publications affaiblit pourtant bien vite son capital et l'assise de sa maison. En 1855, son fonds n'est plus évalué qu'à 166 000 francs. Mais il réussit à redresser parfaitement sa situation et, en juillet 1869, l'inventaire fait ressortir un fonds social de 900 000 francs et un bénéfice annuel de 75 000 francs. Certes, ce fonds reste modeste par rapport aux sociétés Hachette et Cie ou Michel Lévy frères et Garnier frères, mais sa maison est solide. [...] Marianne Dufлот, 'La Bibliothèque Charpentier', p. 57.

<sup>44</sup> *Physiologie du mariage, La recherche de l'absolu, Eugénie Grandet, César Birotteau, Le Lys dans la vallée, Le médecin de campagne, La Peau de chagrin, Le Père Goriot, Scènes de la vie de province* (2 vols.), *Scènes de la vie parisienne* (2 vols.), *Scènes de la vie privée* (2 vols.), *Histoire des Treize* (Ferragus & La Duchesse de Langeais), *Louis Lambert* and *Séraphita* (1 vol.). See BnF database and Stéphane Vachon, *Les travaux et les jours d'Honoré de Balzac: chronologie de la création balzacienne* (Paris: Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 1992).

<sup>45</sup> Martyn Lyons, *Reading Culture and Writing Practices in Nineteenth-Century France* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), p. 15.

<sup>46</sup> See Joël Zufferey 'La réécriture de *La Peau de chagrin*: arrêt sur un moment grammatical', in *Balzac et la langue*, ed. Éric Bordas (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2019), 65-80.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

As he wrote to Zulma Carraud in August 1838: ‘Je mène de front à la fois le théâtre et la librairie, le drame et le livre’.<sup>48</sup> His frequent engagement with the press kept his name in the public eye, fostering both acclaim and controversy, and formed part of a deliberate strategy to self-canonize, ensuring that his authorial persona and major works secured lasting recognition. This was especially evident with the release of his 1840 play *Vautrin*.

### 2.3. Fame and Infamy: *Vautrin* and the *Physiologies* Series (1840-41)

Balzac’s feelings about *Vautrin* were ambivalent. While he was exhilarated by the potential for a theatrical breakthrough and the prospect of financial gain, he was concerned that his play would fail to meet his demanding standards. A month before its premiere, Balzac confided his anxieties to Madame Hanska:

On monte *Vautrin* à force, j’ai une répétition tous les jours. Quand vous tiendrez cette lettre, cette grande question sera décidée. Hélas, il est presque sûr qu’on représentera *Vautrin*, dans la soirée ou vous la tiendrez, car ce sera entre le 28 février et le 5 mars. C’est toute une fortune d’argent, et une fortune littéraire jouée dans une soirée. Frédérick Lemaître répond du succès. Moi j’en ai désespéré; il y a dix jours, je trouvais ma pièce stupide, et j’avais raison, je l’ai recommencée en entier et je la trouve passable. Mais ce sera toujours une méchante pièce. J’ai cédé au désir de jeter sur la scène un personnage romanesque et j’ai eu tort.<sup>49</sup>

His apprehension proved justified, as the play was censored one day after its initial release on 14 March 1840. The censorship stemmed primarily from two factors. Firstly, the wig worn by

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<sup>48</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Corr.*, vol. II (Paris: Gallimard-Pléaïde, 2011), p. 349.

<sup>49</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *LH*, vol. I, February 1840, p. 504. In the same letter, Balzac discusses with poignant intensity the depth of his anxiety and distress. Haunted by the memory of his earlier theatrical endeavours that failed to captivate audiences, this moment embodies a high-stakes wager, not merely on the commercial success of his work, but on his own creative identity and financial survival: ‘J’ai surmonté bien des misères, et si j’ai un succès, elles sont entièrement terminées, jugez qu’elles seront mes angoisses pendant la soirée ou *Vautrin* sera représenté. Dans 5 heures de temps, il sera décidé si je paie ou si je ne paie pas mes dettes. Or, je suis accablé de ce fardeau depuis 15 ans, il gêne l’expansion de ma vie, il ôte à mon cœur son allure, il étouffe ma pensée, il salit mon existence, il embrasse mes mouvements, il arrête mes inspirations, il pèse sur ma conscience, il empêche tout, il a enrayé ma course, il m’a brisé le dos, il m’a vieilli, mon Dieu! ai-je payé assez cher ma place au soleil!’

lead actor Frédérick Lemaître closely resembled Louis-Philippe's hairstyle, further evoking Charles Philippon's satirical depictions of the king's pear-shaped head.<sup>50</sup>

Mais on sait que le drame, repoussé deux fois par la censure avant d'être autorisé, fut finalement interdit après la première représentation, à cause de la 'malencontreuse' ressemblance entre la coiffure du personnage principal et celle de Louis-Philippe. Le duc d'Orléans, qui assistait à cette première, aurait quitté sa loge au milieu du spectacle, scandalisé que l'on suggérât aussi clairement une comparaison entre le roi et un forçat en rupture de ban.<sup>51</sup>

Secondly, the political and social implications of the play were accentuated by Lemaître's comical depiction of Vautrin, which mirrored his numerous portrayals as Robert Macaire.<sup>52</sup> Olivier Bara argues that Lemaître, 'en voyant le mortel ennui généré dans la salle par les trois premiers actes, les plus faibles dramatiquement, a joué au second degré, sur le mode macairien, parodique et bouffon, le troisième acte'.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, the actor's buffoonish interpretation trivialized the character's ambiguity, casting criminal acts as more light-hearted than morally reprehensible. Two days after its premiere, Jules Janin criticized it as 'une œuvre de désolation, de barbarie et d'ineptie'.<sup>54</sup> On the same day, critics of *Le Moniteur parisien* described *Vautrin* as having produced 'un effet fâcheux. L'immoralité du sujet, que des suppressions importantes avaient atténuée, a été aggravée par l'acteur principal. M. le ministre de l'Intérieur a prononcé l'interdiction de cet ouvrage'.<sup>55</sup> Though no stranger to criticism, Balzac struggled to accept the backlash, especially since it gravely affected his earnings:

<sup>50</sup> See Nathalie Preiss *De la poire au parapluie: Physiologies politiques* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000).

<sup>51</sup> Christine Bouillon-Mateos, 'Balzac et Frédérick Lemaître: histoire d'une collaboration heureuse', *AB*, 2 (2001), 69-80, p. 71.

<sup>52</sup> Balzac wrote to Madame Hanska on 26 March 1840: 'Vautrin a eu le malheur d'être défendu par L[ouis]-P[hilippe], qui y a vu une caricature de sa personne au 4<sup>me</sup> acte où Frédérick Lemaître faisait le personnage d'un envoyé du Mexique.' Honoré de Balzac, *LH*, vol. I, p. 507-508.

<sup>53</sup> Olivier Bara, 'Voir Vautrin: la vérité du type balzacien, entre roman et théâtre' in *La Relecture de l'œuvre par ses écrivains mêmes*, vol. III (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2012), 243-259, p. 251.

<sup>54</sup> Jules Janin, *Journal des Débats*, 16 March 1840.

<sup>55</sup> Cited in *Corr.*, vol. II (Paris: Gallimard-Pléaïde, 2011), p. 1212. In light of this critique, Balzac wrote a letter to the director of *La Presse* on 17 March 1840 with the intent of mitigating the play's harsh reviews and defending Lemaître's acting: 'Je vous prie, au nom de l'acteur, de publier un mot de réponse au *Moniteur parisien* qui accuse M. Frédérick Lemaître d'avoir aggravé l'immoralité d'une pièce par la censure. La censure pouvait-elle imaginer que M. Frédérick Lemaître jouerait Vautrin d'une façon innocente? N'a-t-elle pu venir aux répétitions, faites exprès pour elle afin d'examiner les costumes?' *Ibid.*, p. 710.

Je me suis attendu à quelque vive opposition, mais, malgré les efforts les plus hostiles, nous avons obtenu un grand succès d'argent, c'était tout ce que je voulais pour le théâtre et pour moi — lorsque la défense est venue. Me voici donc, le dimanche à la tête de 60 000 francs, le lundi, plus rien. Le journalisme a été infâme, ils ont dit que la pièce était d'une immoralité révoltante, je ne vous dis qu'une seule chose, vous la lirez! Elle peut n'être pas très bonne, mais elle est éminemment morale.<sup>56</sup>

Driven by a desperate desire to defend the integrity of his work and attribute its censorship to the merciless word of journalists, echoing Lucien's own struggles, Balzac came perilously close to abandoning his vocation:

Je suis au bout de ma résignation. Je crois que je quitterai la France et que j'irai porter mes os au Brésil dans une entreprise folle et que je choisis à cause de sa folie. Je ne veux plus supporter l'existence que je mène. Assez de travaux inutiles. Je vais brûler toutes mes lettres, tous mes papiers, ne laisser que mes meubles et les Jardies, et je partirai après avoir confié les petites choses auxquelles je tiens, à l'amitié de ma sœur. Elle sera le dragon le plus fidèle de mes trésors. Je donnerai ma procuration à quelqu'un, je laisserai mes œuvres à exploiter et j'irai chercher la fortune qui me manque, ou je reviendrai riche, ou personne ne pourra savoir ce que je serai devenu.<sup>57</sup>

*Vautrin* marked Balzac's first encounter with large-scale media attention, drawing widespread coverage in the press and provoking strong reactions among his peers.<sup>58</sup> Balzac anticipated the full significance of this moment, writing to Madame Hanska: 'c'est toute une fortune littéraire jouée dans une soirée'.<sup>59</sup> This remark emphasizes both the personal and professional stakes of the play's debut, while also drawing attention to the increasing commodification of literature. In many respects, *Vautrin* echoes what *Illusions perdues* dramatizes: an author's recognition and seriousness are shaped as much by the mechanisms of media and publicity as, if not more than, by talent alone.

Beyond the scandal, however, the play holds importance for Balzac's literary enterprise.<sup>60</sup> Much like the preface to *Une fille d'Ève*, it consolidates the writer's evolving

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<sup>56</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *LH*, vol. I, 15 May 1840, p. 508.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 July 1840, p. 515.

<sup>58</sup> Louis Desnoyers wrote to Balzac on 16 March 1840: 'Tout ce que je puis faire dans l'intérêt de votre pièce, jusqu'à ce que les esprits soient un peu calmés, c'est de garder le silence et de faire en sorte qu'on n'approuve pas la mesure ministérielle qui en supprime la représentation.' Honoré de Balzac, *Corr.*, vol. II, p. 709.

<sup>59</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *LH*, vol. I, February 1840, p. 504.

<sup>60</sup> The Marquis de Custine recognized the play's worth and *Vautrin*'s legacy: 'Que de talent il faut pour porter tant d'esprit! Vous avez vu la société d'un point de vue très poétique, et vous nous la présentez sous une forme originale et neuve: c'est un mérite immense. Le pathétique et le comique se disputent l'intérêt dans ce drame

narrative vision, linking the second part of *‘Illusions perdues à la troisième partie et de réunir le cycle d’Illusions perdues à celui de Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes’*.<sup>61</sup> It showcases a more unified, dialogue-driven dramatic structure, in contrast with the fragmentary nature of his earlier serialized works. Accordingly, it anticipates the stylistic evolution seen in later novels such as *La Cousine Bette*, where dialogue and theatricality play a central role. Balzac’s portrayal of Vautrin, marked by his sinister motives, charismatic demeanour, and homosexual tendencies, reflects the author’s open-mindedness and pioneering drive to move beyond one-dimensional character portrayals, thereby anticipating the character’s rich and nuanced interpretations later developed by scholars.<sup>62</sup> Although more than a century passed before the character of Vautrin began to attract sustained critical attention, his re-evaluation was notably catalysed by Pierre Billon’s 1943 film, *Vautrin*,<sup>63</sup> which drew inspiration from the figure of Vidocq, the notorious criminal and detective whose life informed Balzac’s creation. This connection to Vidocq helped to heighten the character’s aura of intrigue and cunning. A growing appreciation has since elevated him to the ranks of Balzac’s most mythologized and iconic characters.

While Balzac’s attempts to bring *Vautrin* to prominence fell short, his fortunes shifted in 1841, a year editors describe as ‘l’année de la physiologie’.<sup>64</sup> Between 1841 and 1843, ‘half

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singulier que l’on ne peut voir sans rire et pleurer à la fois. Il y a dans votre caractère principal un sens symbolique qui rappelle les types d’Aristophane et pour avoir encadré ce personnage merveilleux dans des tableaux réels il a fallu beaucoup d’art: Frédéric est admirable; mais les femmes ont nui à l’effet. Quelle dépendance que celle de l’auteur! Malgré les actrices cet ouvrage ira loin et tout considéré vous devez être satisfait.’ Honoré de Balzac, *Corr.*, vol. II, 14 or 15 March 1840, p. 706.

<sup>61</sup> Pierre Laforgue, ‘Jeter sur la scène un personnage romanesque: les avatars de Vautrin’ in *La Tentation théâtrale des romanciers*, ed. Philippe Chardin (Paris: Sedes, 2002), 11-17, p. 16.

<sup>62</sup> Some examples include: Pierre Vernière’s ‘Balzac et la genèse de Vautrin’, *Revue d’Histoire littéraire en France*, 1(1948), 53-68, Alfred Glauser’s ‘Balzac/Vautrin’, *Romantic Review*, 79(1988), 585-610, and more recently, Dominique Jullien’s ‘Vautrin: Génie balzacien’, *Francofonia*, 69 (2015), 83-104. See Graham Robb’s *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Picador, 2004).

<sup>63</sup> Due to the political and social climate of the time, particularly under the Vichy regime in France, the character’s homosexual inclinations were omitted. The film focused more on Vautrin’s criminal mastermind and complex personality rather than delving into his sexual orientation, reflecting the broader tendencies of mid-twentieth-century cinema.

<sup>64</sup> Martyn Lyons, *Le Triomphe du livre: une histoire sociologique de la lecture dans la France du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. 90.

a million copies of the *Physiologies* were bought during the few years of their vogue'.<sup>65</sup> Judith Wechsler notes that the *Physiologies* series, under the stewardship of Philippon, inundated bookstalls thanks to its humorous illustrations and engaging content. Each instalment in the series was presented in little 'paperbound monographs on Parisian occupational and avocational types'.<sup>66</sup> The bookseller Aubert (Philippon's brother-in-law) published 34 illustrated *Physiologies* and published them *in-32*.

Much like his criticism of the *roman-feuilleton*, Balzac denounced the rising popularity of the *Physiologies* series, likening the texts' monotonous and formulaic structure to a herd of sheep blindly following their shepherd.<sup>67</sup> However, Balzac's contributions to the genre were anything but trivial. The broad range of subjects examined 'sous le nom "physiologies", traitées sur un ton qui voulait être badin, pittoresque et plaisant'<sup>68</sup> reflects his ability to engage with, analyse, and dissect serious topics in an intellectually witty, sardonic and entertaining manner.

Alongside Brillat-Savarin, Balzac was one of the key figures in the development of the genre.<sup>69</sup> Thanks to his 'grille descriptive attentive aux moindres nuances de pose, d'habit, voire d'intonation, ouvrant à l'infini la gamme des types susceptibles d'être peints',<sup>70</sup> Balzac crafted character types that embodied a 'vérité morale transhistorique; il devient universel'.<sup>71</sup> In contrast to Molière's one-dimensional character archetypes, Balzac's characters 'quickly acquire qualities and complexity that give them the characteristics of human beings, thus

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<sup>65</sup> Judith Wechsler, *A Human Comedy: Physiognomy and Caricature in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Paris* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), p. 34.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>67</sup> 'Le XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle a eu la mode des carlins; aujourd'hui, nous avons celle des physiologies. Les physiologies sont comme les moutons de Panurge, elles courent les unes après les autres, Paris se les arrache et on vous y donne, pour vingt sous, plus d'esprit que n'en a dans son mois un homme d'esprit.' Honoré de Balzac, *Monographie de la presse parisienne* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2003), p. 90. This comparison echoes a passage from Rabelais's *Gargantua et Pantagruel*.

<sup>68</sup> Andrée Lhéritier, 'Les Physiologies', *Études de Presse*, 9 (1957), 1-38, p. 4.

<sup>69</sup> In addition to *Physiologie du mariage*, he also authored *Physiologie de l'employé* (1841), 'co-authored *Physiologie du Rentier de Paris et de Province* (1841), anonymously wrote *Physiologie du cigare* (1831)' and wrote several chapters for *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* (1840-42). Anne O'Neil Henry, '[Le] Besoin de définir' and 'le danger de s'embrouiller': Balzac's *Les Employés* and the *physiologies*', *Dix-Neuf*, 20 (2016), 162-175, p. 162.

<sup>70</sup> Jérôme David, 'Rebarbariser Balzac', *Stratégies du contexte* (2006), 45-60, p. 48.

<sup>71</sup> *Id.*

distinguishing them from the configurations of other writers'.<sup>72</sup> This richness stems from their psychological intricacies and varying social backgrounds, enabling them to express a wide range of human traits, particularly flaws and contradictions. Balzac's ability to combine individual quirks with broader social realities thus lends his characters a lifelike resonance that captures the nuances of both nineteenth-century French mores and the universal emotions and experiences that transcend eras.

The *Physiologies* thus offered Balzac a fertile space for literary experimentation, enabling him to develop character typologies while weaving together comedy, tragedy, caricature, and the visual into a dynamic and symbiotic whole. Although scholars describe the year 1841 as 'l'année de la physiologie', it was also a year of convergence in Balzac's career, when he brought together the diverse strands of literary practice into a coherent whole. This convergence is further exemplified in the figure of Vautrin, whose complex personality, motives and dramatic triumph synthesize the comedic, the tragic, and the caricatural, embodying both the psychological depth and social typology that Balzac had been perfecting in the *Physiologies*.<sup>73</sup> Following their initial vogue in the 1820s, the 1840s saw a second wave of popularity for the genre, which proved crucial for Balzac's artistic development. His sustained practice of creating character types and specific *scènes* sharpened his broader ambitions by integrating diverse elements, notably the visual, into a single, cohesive and symbiotic framework. In doing so, he anticipated the unifying and multifaceted title that would ultimately encompass his oeuvre: *La Comédie humaine*.

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<sup>72</sup> Allan H. Pasco, *Balzac as Literary Sociologist*, p. 235.

<sup>73</sup> In *Balzac* (1913), Faguet praises Balzac's characters and argues that the author's consecration as a classic writer is largely attributed to his characters' complexity and psychological depth. Faguet's work is further discussed in Chapter 3.

## 2.4. Branding *La Comédie humaine*: Print, Image and Commercial Posters (1841-46)

Following the commercial success of the *Physiologies* series, Balzac flourished in the literary market, establishing himself as one of the period's most prolific *feuilletonistes* with '100 feuilletons in 1841, 54 in 1842 and 109 in 1843'.<sup>74</sup> As his literary production increased, his ideas coalesced into a monumental body of work, 'conçu comme une suite de tableaux de genre, destinés à donner des idées, à enseigner, révélant pour la première fois Balzac sous Saint-Aubin'.<sup>75</sup> Through his expanding oeuvre, Balzac emulated the grandeur and legacy of Dante and Napoleon. These figures served as influential vectors in the writer's creative quest, motivating him to propose the title *La Comédie humaine* as early as January 1840.<sup>76</sup> The title became official in April 1841 when Balzac signed a contract with Furne. In April 1842, the Bibliographie de la France published an advertisement for the first Furne edition of *La Comédie humaine*: '*La Comédie humaine. Œuvres complètes de M. H. de Balzac. Édition de luxe à bon marché*'.<sup>77</sup> In July 1842, Furne published the *Avant-Propos*, justifying the intellectual, thematic, structural and quasi-scientific legitimacy of Balzac's work.<sup>78</sup> His references to Molière and Corneille further conferred 'une sorte de légitimité de sa propre entreprise'.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Keri Ann Berg, *Fighting for the page: Balzac, Grandville and the power of images, 1830–1848*, p. 20.

<sup>75</sup> Saint Paulien, *Balzac, Napoléon: l'empire de la Comédie humaine*, p. 77.

<sup>76</sup> The title first appeared in January in a proposal from the novelist to an unidentified publisher for the publication of his complete works. Stéphane Vachon writes that 'cette importante lettre a été soigneusement annotée par Roger Pierrot, selon qui cet éditeur pourrait être Armand Dutacq ou Léon Curmer.' Stéphane Vachon, *Les travaux et jours d'Honoré de Balzac: chronologie de la création balzacienne*, p. 197.

<sup>77</sup> See Figure 1 in Additional Documents. Between 1842 and 1848, the first edition of *La Comédie humaine* was published in 17 volumes by Furne, Dubochet, Hetzel and Paulin. Furne's associate, Hetzel was, along with and following Girardin, one of the major publishers of the century, as he would further demonstrate by his long association with Jules Verne.

<sup>78</sup> His detailed taxonomy of human characteristics draws comparisons to the animal kingdom, highlighting the instinctual, often primal, behaviour of his characters. Through these animalistic comparisons, Balzac sought to classify individuals in much the same way a naturalist would categorize species, reinforcing the idea that his study of society was as rigorous and methodical as scientific evidence.

<sup>79</sup> Maxime Perret, 'L'avant-propos de la *Comédie humaine* et le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle littéraire français', *AB*, 14 (2013), 285-308, p. 307.

En donnant à une œuvre entreprise depuis bientôt treize ans le titre de *La Comédie humaine*, il est nécessaire d'en dire la pensée, d'en raconter l'origine, d'en expliquer brièvement le plan, en essayant de parler de ces choses comme si je n'y étais pas intéressé. Ceci n'est pas aussi difficile que le public pourrait le penser. Peu d'œuvres donne beaucoup d'amour-propre, beaucoup de travail donne infiniment de modestie. Cette observation rend compte des examens que Corneille, Molière et autres grands auteurs faisaient de leurs ouvrages: s'il est impossible de les égaler dans leurs belles conceptions, on peut vouloir leur ressembler en ce sentiment.<sup>80</sup>

Balzac's desire for lavish editions showcased his taste for grandeur, while the lower pricing demonstrated his commercial savvy. The edition's higher quality is reflected in its illustrations by Johannot, Meissonier, H. Monnier, and Bertall. As Keri Ann Berg demonstrates, Balzac and his 'consortium of editors agreed to employ illustration to create a visual gallery of portraits that would correspond with the author's principal characters'.<sup>81</sup> In the 1842 Furne edition, Balzac exercised significant authority over the layout and style of the illustrations, positioning the editors and illustrators as his assistants who needed to thoroughly study his work before depicting its main characters. The typographic portrayal of Balzac's reappearing characters was instrumental in convincing editors to maintain the work's integral unity, offering 'au spectateur une galerie de ces personnages réapparaissants qui sont l'une des particularités de l'entreprise'.<sup>82</sup> However, this decision-making process was laborious and fraught with disagreements. For example, the editorial decisions to use isolated, full-page images as opposed to in-text illustrations reflects Balzac's intention to preserve narrative continuity and primacy of the text over the secondary role of illustrations. Prioritizing portraiture over scene depictions ensured that Balzac's detailed characterizations and complex plotlines remained uninterrupted by visual distractions, thereby maintaining the author's supremacy. However, the Furne edition was inconsistently illustrated, with some volumes lacking images altogether.<sup>83</sup> This variability likely resulted from economic constraints,

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<sup>80</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Avant-Propos de La Comédie humaine*, CHI, p. 7.

<sup>81</sup> Keri Ann Berg, *Fighting for the page: Balzac, Grandville and the power of images, 1830–1848*, p. 256.

<sup>82</sup> Ségolène Le Men, *La Comédie inachevée: Balzac et l'illustration* (Tours: Bibliothèque municipale, 1999), p. 13.

<sup>83</sup> Despite the inconsistencies in the illustrations, they remain notable for their variety and expressive intensity, Tim Farrant notes: 'des planches in octavo, comme les volumes eux-mêmes, toutes en face du texte (malgré leur

availability of artists, delivery delays, or editorial disagreements. Despite these shortcomings, the Furne edition's visual appeal, prestigious team of illustrators, strategic marketing, and broad audience reach cemented the legacy of *La Comédie humaine*, ensuring both its immediate popularity and lasting prominence. Furthermore, illustrations functioned as powerful marketing tools that provided protection against plagiarism, especially since many pirated editions of Balzac's work omitted the original illustrations.<sup>84</sup>

With the formal release of *La Comédie humaine* in 1842, Balzac was reinvigorated to seek greater critical acclaim and sustain his prolific output:

*La Comédie humaine* (grâce à la Russie qui en prend beaucoup) est devenue une bonne affaire. On vend de plus en plus. On a atteint le chiffre de 1800 exempl[aires]. Si l'on pouvait passer 2000, ce serait superbe. Mes éditeurs n'ont pas fait 2 sous d'annonces. Cela se vend par la force même de la chose, c'est un grand triomphe pour moi. Quand ils feront des annonces, si la vente se portait à 6000 exemplaires, *La Comédie humaine* payerait à elle seule mes dettes; et, comme elles seront payées, j'aurai là, dans ce cas, une centaine de mille francs.<sup>85</sup>

However, his claims of commercial success and debt resolution from the sales of *La Comédie humaine* appear more as an effort to convey an impending triumph rather than a truthful account of his precarious financial standing. In the early 1840's, he also faced difficulties in

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appellation de vignette sur la page de titre) – sont à la fois plus variées (du fait des différents artistes) et plus âpres.' The Furne edition features some of the most iconic portraits, including Daumier's depictions of Goriot and Vautrin. For a more comprehensive analysis of the illustrations in the corrected Furne edition, see Tim Farrant, 'La vue d'en face? Balzac et l'illustration', *AB*, 12 (2011), 249-271, p. 259.

<sup>84</sup> *Le Curé de village* was illegally published in Brussels in 1839 by Hauman. It was published 'en volume, sous la même forme qu'il l'avait été en feuilleton dans le quotidien *La Presse*, quelques mois auparavant. La première édition autorisée en volume ne parut que deux ans plus tard en France, par les bons soins d'Hippolyte Souverain, l'éditeur de Balzac; mais cette version en volume avait été totalement remaniée par l'auteur, de fond en comble, et même enrichie d'une partie qui n'était jamais parue en feuilleton.' Hélène Maurel-Indart, 'Balzac: militant des droits de l'auteur', *Mémoires de l'Académie des Sciences, Arts et Belles-Lettres de Touraine*, 32 (2019), 1-11, p. 5.

<sup>85</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *LH*, vol. I, 1 May 1843, p. 677. Balzac's reception in Russia was undeniably significant, influencing writers such as Dostoevsky and Tolstoy: 'L'impression, produite par les œuvres du romancier sur tous les jeunes écrivains russes de cette époque fut, en effet, prodigieuse. *Crime et Châtiment* de Dostoïevsky, a été écrit sous l'influence directe de *La Comédie humaine*, pour laquelle Tolstoï lui-même, avait une grande admiration. L'écrivain russe Gontcharov dit avoir appris son métier de romancier en lisant et relisant les pages de *La Peau de chagrin* et d'*Eugénie Grandet*; Gorki premier classique de la littérature prolétarienne, a attentivement étudié Balzac. Tout cela place l'autorité de celui-ci en Russie, bien au-dessus du niveau qu'il avait lui-même cherché à établir'. Leonid Grossman, *Balzac en Russie* (Paris: Presse française et étrangère, 1946), p. 3.

publishing the third and final instalment of *Illusions perdues*.<sup>86</sup> After repeatedly proposing it to several newspapers such as *Le Siècle* in December 1839, *Le Musée des familles* in October 1841 and *Le Messager* in August and October 1842, it was not until June 1843 that he was able to strike up a deal with *L'État*.<sup>87</sup> First serialized in *L'État* from 9 June to 19 June, *Illusions perdues* faced several publishing interruptions before resuming between 27 July and 14 August. Because of the tumultuous nature of his career and his fluctuating streams of income, Balzac still struggled to maintain a consistent readership. This difficulty was further compounded by the release of the final instalment of Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* in October 1843 in the *Journal des débats*. In 1844, he frustratedly wrote to Madame Hanska:

Mes ouvrages au lieu d'être humblement *demandés* sont *offerts* par moi. Il en résulte deux dommages : dommage d'argent, qui frappe la marchandise offerte, dommage de considération et perte de temps. On va chez E. Sue; on trouve un homme dans sa maison, on fait antichambre, on est frappé par son luxe, on subit ses conditions. Moi, je vais chez les consommateurs, j'attends leurs heures, je fais antichambre, on me marchande ; les rôles sont intervertis. J'estime cette perte à plus de douze mille francs par an et je ne suis pas dans la posture qui convient à ma valeur. Je perds mon temps en courses, en rendez-vous. On me sait gêné et besogneux.<sup>88</sup>

From Balzac's point of view, his difficulties with publishers stemmed from their failure to actively seek his work, forcing him to chase after sales rather than commanding them. He lamented the contrast with more popular authors like Sue, feeling that the lack of proactive engagement from publishers led to his financial losses and undermined his professional standing. In the same letter, Balzac dismissed the works of Sue and Paul de Kock to emphasize the superiority of his own titles. He asserted that his true rivals were in fact the greats of literature, such as Molière and Scott:

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<sup>86</sup> The title underwent multiple changes. *Les Souffrances de l'inventeur* was designated as the title in the preface of the second instalment in 1839. Then it became *David Séchard*, used for both the serial and the Dumont edition in 1843. The Furne edition introduced a new title, *Eve et David* in 1843 while the corrected Furne edition reverted to the earliest title, *Les Souffrances de l'inventeur* in 1846.

<sup>87</sup> See Françoise van Rossum-Guyon's *Balzac: Illusions perdues "l'œuvre capitale dans l'œuvre"* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2023).

<sup>88</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *LH*, vol. I, 17-20 September 1844, p. 909.

De plus, je ne peux pas, je ne dois pas, je ne veux pas subir la dépréciation qui pèse sur moi par les marches de Sue, et par le tapage que font ses 2 ouvrages, je dois faire voir, par des succès *littéraires*, par des chefs-d'œuvre, en un mot, que ses œuvres en détrempe sont des devants de cheminée, exposer des Raphael à côté de ses Dubufe. Vous me connaissez assez pour savoir que je n'ai ni jalousie ni aigreur contre lui, ni contre le public! Dieu merci, mes rivaux sont Molière et Walter Scott, Lesage et Voltaire, et non pas ce Paul de Kock en satin et à paillettes [...].<sup>89</sup>

This decline in sales contrasted with a surge in commercial bookshop posters promoting his work. The rise of lithography between 1830 and 1850 facilitated the growing popularity of illustrated books and commercial posters. According to Réjane Bargiel and Ségolène Le Men, these posters underwent several transformations: initially black and white and intended for indoor display, they gradually increased in size,<sup>90</sup> were placed outdoors, and evolved into a form that bridged the gap between 'l'affiche presque uniquement typographique encadrée d'un bois plus ou moins finement gravé, et l'affiche illustrée de Chéret, Toulouse-Lautrec, Steinlein et Mucha'.<sup>91</sup> Illustrations for posters were often repurposed as frontispieces, as exemplified by the 1845 commercial poster for *Diable à Paris*,<sup>92</sup> which mirrors the frontispiece of the 1845 J. Hetzel edition.<sup>93</sup>

Illustrators were also commissioned for commercial posters, experimenting with various sizes, colours, and fonts to captivate potential buyers. For Balzac's work, illustrators

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 910.

<sup>90</sup> The sizes of commercial posters varied considerably, ranging from as small as a leaflet to dimensions of 50 cm by 40 cm. Paris Musées distinguishes three sets of dimensions: *œuvre*, image, and montage. The term *œuvre* refers to the overall dimensions of the poster itself—the physical sheet of paper. The *image* dimension denotes the space occupied by the artwork, illustration, or text displayed on the poster. Finally, the *montage* dimension corresponds to the size of the frame or backing board to which the poster may be mounted. It is thanks to my correspondence with the museum specialists that I learned about the dimensions of the posters, as well as their respective illustrators.

<sup>91</sup> Réjane Bargiel, Ségolène Le Men, *L'affiche de librairie au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1987), p. 21.

<sup>92</sup> See Figure 2 in Additional Documents.

<sup>93</sup> The second volume of Hetzel's edition features Félix Leblanc and Ferdinand Clément's illustration, *Panthéon du diable à Paris: La Poésie, la Philosophie, la Littérature*, which is presented as an *hors-texte*. See Figure 3 in Additional Documents. The engraving depicts a procession of renowned writers, led along a winding path by Chateaubriand and Hugo. Among them, Balzac stands out as one of the few figures smiling broadly with his imposing stature and commanding presence. He is preceded by Dumas and Sue, while Soulié and Sand follow behind. This path emerges from an inkwell labeled *Encre roman-feuilleton*, a symbolic detail that emphasizes the inescapable bond between literary production and serialized fiction. The imagery carries a double irony; on the one hand, it reflects the commercial pressures shaping writers' careers, compelling them to cater to the demands of 'la littérature industrielle' for financial survival; on the other, it reveals that this very system, often dismissed as overly sensationalist, serves as the only viable path to literary fame, recognition, and authorial autonomy.

such as Grandville, Gavarni, and Daumier were employed to create these promotional materials:

Les plus grands illustrateurs accompagnent les plus grands écrivains, la diversité et le foisonnement sont frappants; les romantiques voisinent avec les prolixes auteurs de romans populaires. C'est l'amorce d'un mouvement qui va sans cesse croissant jusqu'à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. L'affiche se trouvera au confluent de toutes les manifestations du renouveau lié aux conceptions romantiques, aux romans sociaux, naturalistes, aux grandes découvertes scientifiques, à la naissance d'idéologies et de philosophies nouvelles, aux recherches plastiques et picturales.<sup>94</sup>

Between 1842 and 1846, posters for *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* (1840-42 Curmer ed.), *La Comédie humaine* (1842 Furne ed.), *Scènes de la vie privée et publique des animaux* (1842 Hetzel et Paulin ed.), and *Philosophie de la vie conjugale* (1846 Chlendowski ed.) were displayed.<sup>95</sup> This period saw a symbiotic relationship between illustrators and writers; illustrators depended on the release of new titles to showcase their art, while writers relied on these illustrations to broaden their readership and increase sales. Keenly aware of the power of visual marketing, Balzac understood the crucial role illustrations played in enhancing both his public profile and book sales.<sup>96</sup>

Each poster prominently highlighted the works' lower prices. For instance, *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* (30.2cm x 43.2 cm)<sup>97</sup> was priced at 20 centimes per copy. The poster's bold title in blue and red, is bordered by sixty Parisian character types in red, providing readers with a visual preview of the content and prompting them to discern the identities of caricatural figures such as the stockbroker, the courtesan or the spinster. The poster highlights the prestige of the illustrators, with their names prominently displayed in bold red and larger

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<sup>94</sup> Réjane Bargiel, Ségolène Le Men, *L'affiche de librairie au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. 21.

<sup>95</sup> All posters are available to view on the Paris Musées website.

<sup>96</sup> His awareness of the materialism and commercialization of French society is reflected in *Gaudissart II*, which denounces the manipulation and materialist tendencies of Parisian culture: 'Savoir vendre, pouvoir vendre, et vendre ! ... Il ne s'agit encore que de plaire à l'organe le plus avide et le plus blasé qui se soit développé chez l'homme depuis la société romaine, et dont l'exigence est devenue sans bornes, grâce aux efforts de la civilisation la plus raffinée. Cet organe, c'est l'œil des Parisiens ! ... Cet œil consomme des feux d'artifice de cent mille francs ... des encyclopédies de guenilles au carnaval, vingt ouvrages illustrés par an, mille caricatures, dix mille vignettes, lithographies et gravures.' Honoré de Balzac, *Gaudissart II*, CH VII, p. 847-48.

<sup>97</sup> See Figure 4 in Additional Documents.

font, while the illustrations offer a glimpse into the work's subject matter. The 1842 commercial poster for *La Comédie humaine* (48 cm x 31.7 cm) was released in the same year as Hetzel and Paulin's *Scènes de la vie privée et publique des animaux* (88 cm x 64 cm), illustrated by Grandville.<sup>98</sup> The poster for *La Comédie humaine* advertises a deluxe yet affordable 12-volume edition, each featuring illustrations by Jothannot, Gavarni, and Messonier.<sup>99</sup> It details that the collection would be released in ten instalments, each priced at 50 centimes, and includes a prominent call to action—'On souscrit ici'—urging immediate subscriptions. The visual elements of the poster, with its two vignettes depicting people in everyday attire engaged in routine activities, reflect the diverse characters and social roles of nineteenth-century French society. This emphasis on illustration as a respected art form is similarly showcased in Hetzel and Paulin's poster for *Scènes de la vie privée et publique des animaux*:

Dans l'œuvre que nous présentons au public, le dessinateur et les écrivains se sont unis d'une même pensée: pendant que Grandville crayonnait, le texte s'écrivait. Tout le monde connaît le genre créé par Grandville; chaque artiste a sa spécialité; la principale gloire de cet esprit observateur sera toujours d'avoir su saisir les curieuses analogies qui existent entre l'homme et l'animal; et c'est justement qu'on l'a nommé le La Bruyère des animaux et le La Fontaine des dessinateurs.<sup>100</sup>

The synergy between Balzac's fiction and Grandville's art helped to increase the prominence of both, despite the professional rivalry between them, which appeared to be rooted in their divergent artistic visions, with Balzac favouring detailed and realistic illustrations and Grandville championing a more caricatural and satirical approach. However, their visions were more closely aligned than one might expect, particularly in light of the acerbic and self-parodic elements of Balzac's fiction.<sup>101</sup> Both, in this respect, shared a critical perspective on the social

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<sup>98</sup> See Figure 5 in Additional Documents.

<sup>99</sup> See Figure 1 in Additional Documents.

<sup>100</sup> Cited by Jules Brivois, *Bibliographie des ouvrages illustrés du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Librairie L. Conquet, 1883), p. 365.

<sup>101</sup> See Tim Farrant, 'Balzac, Satire, and Subversion: The Private Life of the 'Avant-propos' to *La Comédie humaine*', in *Confrontations: Politics and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-Century France*, eds Kathryn M. Grossman et al., (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2001), 19-29.

and cultural dynamics of their time, scrutinizing ‘le monde moderne du même œil’.<sup>102</sup> Although these stories were signed for Hetzel’s *Scènes*, Balzac excluded them from *La Comédie humaine*. As Tim Farrant observes, this choice raises important questions about canon formation, and the boundaries of Balzac’s officially recognized oeuvre. Yet with an author as prolific, dynamic, and varied as Balzac, it is inevitable that his work gives rise to multiple, overlapping canons, each exerting a decisive influence on how his writing is circulated, interpreted, and ultimately consecrated in cultural and literary memory.

This fruitful collaboration between writers and illustrators catalysed a ‘process of change within the cultural field’<sup>103</sup> because it redefined book illustration as a legitimate art form. Advancements in production made images more accessible, elevating illustrations from mere marketing tools to integral components that enriched the reader’s engagement with the respective texts.<sup>104</sup> For example, the 1846 poster for *La Philosophie de la vie conjugale* (64 x 49 cm), illustrated by Gavarni, portrays marriage as a tangled web of human flaws, moral lapses, and infidelity.<sup>105</sup> The illustrator’s marketing strategy draws on dark humour and cautionary undertones to capture the work’s irony and mirror the satirical essence of its predecessor, *Physiologie du mariage*. These elements echo Gautier’s 1845 characterization of

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<sup>102</sup> Takao Kashiwagi, ‘Les Scènes de la vie privée et publique des animaux: exemple d’une collaboration éditoriale: Hetzel, Grandville et Balzac’, *AB*, 23 (2022), 53-64, p. 57. Balzac’s short stories included: *Peines de cœur d’une chatte anglaise*, *Voyage d’un moineau de Paris à la recherche du meilleur gouvernement*, *Guide-âne à l’usage des animaux qui veulent parvenir aux honneurs*, *Voyage d’un lion d’Afrique à Paris* and *Les Amours de deux bêtes*. Moreover, *Scènes de la vie privée et publique des animaux* was reissued in two new editions between 1840 and 1842, followed by a fifth edition in 1845, indicating a sustained demand and considerable interest in the work.

<sup>103</sup> Keri Yousif, *Balzac, Grandville, and the Rise of Book Illustration* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 2.

<sup>104</sup> It was also educational for schoolchildren when they began to represent the target consumers. Yousif writes that ‘publishers addressed them with numerous manuals and collections of children’s stories, many of which were illustrated as to encourage and assist reading. Balzac describes the new trend in his short story *L’illustré Gaudissart* (1833), which features a *commis-voyageur* who earns his living selling newspaper subscriptions.’ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>105</sup> See Figure 6 in Additional Documents. A man and woman are bound together with a rope and tethered to a tree stump. They stand in a defeated posture, symbolizing the duality of marriage as both a source of unity and confinement. Above them, a sign reads ‘M. et Mme Vol de Pomme,’ a playful reference to Adam and Eve and the original sin, while scattered apples on the ground hint at the inevitable shortcomings of their union. The couple’s discomfort is further amplified by the presence of an observing crowd, emphasizing the societal expectations and public scrutiny that marriage entails.

Balzac's *haute comédie*. In comparing *Physiologie* and the *Petites misères*, Gautier highlights the distinct registers of Balzacian humour. In his preface to the second part of the *Petites misères*, he describes *Physiologie* as 'un livre plein de finesse diabolique et d'une analyse à désespérer Leuwenhoek et Swammerdam',<sup>106</sup> likening Balzac's incisive scrutiny to that of the Dutch pioneers of microscopy. By contrast, he characterizes the *Petites misères* as 'un livre charmant, plein de malice gauloise et d'humour anglais, où Rabelais et Sterne se rencontrent et se donnent la main à chaque instant'.<sup>107</sup> While the *Physiologie* exemplifies Balzac's intellectually oriented comedy through its sharp, analytical wit and penetrating social commentary, the *Petites misères* embraces a more playful tone, blending the exuberant satire of Rabelais with the refined irony of Sterne. This contrast highlights Balzac's versatility as he moves between the theatricality of French comedic traditions and the subtler nuances of English humour.

These examples highlight the powerful symbiosis between Balzac's texts and their visual representations, where incisive social commentary, playful satire, and striking illustrations converge to create a uniquely dynamic experience. This interplay amplifies both the intellectual depth and the exuberant vitality of his work, ensuring its resonance beyond the page and across generations. It is precisely this energy, the constant movement between text and image, wit and critique, seriousness and play, that cements Balzac's status as a 'classic'. This is especially true since the appeal of commercial posters persisted beyond the writer's lifetime: 'il faut noter que la vogue de l'affiche de librairie ne décline pas, bien au contraire. Les collectionneurs recherchent et les marchands la proposent dans leurs catalogues dans la rubrique "Affiches anciennes"'.<sup>108</sup> The example of Sagot is particularly noteworthy.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Originally published in *La Presse* on 2 December 1845, CH XII, p. 876.

<sup>107</sup> *Id.*

<sup>108</sup> Réjane Bargiel, Ségolène Le Men, *L'affiche de librairie au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. 21.

<sup>109</sup> See Edmond Sagot, *Catalogue d'affiches illustrées...En vente aux prix marqués* (Paris: Librairie Ed. Sagot, 1891).

Specializing in poster sales, he included 301 book posters in his 1891 catalogue, among which were *Philosophie de la vie conjugale* and *Scènes de la vie privée et publique des animaux*.

## **2.5. From Conflict to Coronation: *La Cousine Bette*, *Le Cousin Pons*, and *La Dernière Incarnation de Vautrin* (1843-47)**

In the early to mid-1840s, Balzac's career continued to fluctuate between varying degrees of critical and commercial success. His increasing self-importance became a mode of self-defence, especially following the release of *Les Paysans*. Serialized in *La Presse* from 3 to 21 December 1844 in sixteen instalments, Balzac boasted that *La Presse* 'a gagné trois mille abonnés de plus avec les *Paysans*; c'est un grand succès, mais chez les gens qui n'applaudissent pas et qui n'achètent pas'.<sup>110</sup> Though *Les Paysans* later gained recognition in the *Petits classiques* editions of the early twentieth century, as will be discussed in Chapter Three, the work was a complete failure, largely due to its controversial portrayal of the aristocracy and the oppressed peasantry. Balzac's efforts to attain financial success and bolster his literary reputation were thus frequently thwarted by market conditions and public taste: 'c'est pour le moins inopportun pour un romancier qui cherche la fortune dans un succès populaire'.<sup>111</sup> However, this 'succès populaire' would soon materialize in 1846 following the publication of *La Cousine Bette*.

Serialized in forty instalments in *Le Constitutionnel* from October to December 1846, *La Cousine Bette* was praised in several newspapers including *La Presse* and *La Silhouette*. Critics recognized it as a significant contribution to nineteenth-century French literature, consolidating Balzac's place in the nation's literary heritage:

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<sup>110</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *LH*, vol. I, 28 December 1844, p. 939.

<sup>111</sup> René Guise, 'Balzac et le roman feuilleton', p. 323.

La publication de cette vivante histoire du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle est un évènement dans la littérature. Nous donnons à nos lecteurs la préface de M. de Balzac parce que lui seul peut faire comprendre la grandeur de son entreprise et la haute pensée philosophique qui a présidé à son œuvre. On verra par cette préface que chacun de ces admirables romans dont le moindre aurait suffi à la réputation d'un auteur, n'était qu'un chapitre d'une vaste histoire, qu'un tableau détaché d'un musée superbe et l'on reconnaîtra que si les nombreux romans de M. de Balzac, appréciés séparément, l'ont déjà placé parmi les écrivains habiles, les artistes consciencieux, l'idée générale de son œuvre le placera de même au premier rang parmi les penseurs et les philosophes de tous les âges.<sup>112</sup>

Furthermore, an anonymous critic for *La Silhouette* applauded Balzac's victory: 'il paraît avoir vaincu toutes les hostilités, muselé toutes les critiques: la louange est générale et absolue. Il s'est élevé par ce livre, jusqu'à cet éloge enivrant et si rare qui a consacré le talent de Musset: personne ne le conteste'.<sup>113</sup> Convinced that he had finally secured the recognition he deserved, Balzac triumphantly declared: 'il y a une immense réaction en ma faveur. J'ai vaincu!'<sup>114</sup>

The praise for *La Cousine Bette* was quickly succeeded by the publication of *Le Cousin Pons* in 1847. Energized by his achievements, Balzac wrote to Madame Hanska: 'Je reste seul, plus brillant, plus jeune, plus fécond que jamais'.<sup>115</sup> Published in thirty instalments from 18 March to 10 May, both titles, grouped under *Les Parents pauvres*, 'ont un succès formidable'.<sup>116</sup> For Balzac, this success intertwined the works' commercial appeal and critical acclaim; *La Cousine Bette* and *Le Cousin Pons* showcase the breadth of his repertoire, blending illicit financial scandals and a monstrous female protagonist with intricate dynamics of male camaraderie and allusions to seventeenth-century classic literature. They also explore the forces of creation and destruction that shape individual lives and society, with *Le Cousin Pons* serving as Balzac's final effort to counter the negative reception of his work. Accordingly, it

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<sup>112</sup> *La Presse*, 25 October 1846.

<sup>113</sup> *Le Constitutionnel*, 27 January 1847.

<sup>114</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Lettres à Mme Hanska*, vol. II, 18 October 1846, p. 377. In the same letter, he wrote: 'Au milieu de mon déjeuner était en haut le directeur du *Constitutionnel*, qui, descend m'a trouvé recol[li]ant les épreuves de *La Cousine Bette*, laquelle a un succès étourdissant.'

<sup>115</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Lettres à Mme Hanska*, vol. II, 11 November 1846, p. 415.

<sup>116</sup> *Id.* He continues: '*Les Paysans* vont venir, et puis aux Débats *Les Petits Bourgeois*. C'est à les étourdir tous. Les épreuves de *La Com[édie] hum[aine]* m'absorbent et me prennent tout mon temps. On va voir ce que je puis gagner par an, et ce que je puis faire.. Je compte donner aux Débats, *Une mère de famille* et à la *Presse* *Le Député d'Arcis*. En 1847. Et faire jouer, aux Français, *L'Éducation du prince*. Ce sera une année au bout de laquelle j'aurai 100 000 fr. à moi, mes dettes payées, ma maison payée, mon mobilier payé.'

reflects the writer's desire to 'exorciser sa crainte de la défaveur du public, de la vieillesse, de l'abandon et de la mort'.<sup>117</sup>

Balzac was concerned with capturing public interest in *Le Cousin Pons*: 'comment intéresser en grande partie populaire au sort pathétique certes, mais peu romanesque, de deux vieillards impitoyablement broyés par une machine sociale, qui "roule sur eux comme un tombereau sur un œuf?"'.<sup>118</sup> To address this, he incorporated elements of melodrama, terror, and narrative structures drawn from seventeenth-century fables, especially those of La Fontaine. Unlike classic fables where virtue triumphs, Pons's story subverts the traditional moral framework, offering a grim and cynical commentary on greed and the destructive forces of selfishness:

Pons se rattache à toute une lignée de héros balzaciens que la vie a meurtris, que la société rejette et que la solitude accable à un âge où ils commencent à voir approcher la mort. Qu'ils se nomment Chabert, Goriot ou François Birotteau, qu'ils subissent les effets des fatalités d'une époque ou des faiblesses de leur caractère, leur détresse est également poignante, comme est semblable la compassion que leur créateur en éprouve et qu'il communique à ses lecteurs.<sup>119</sup>

The caricatural depiction of Pons, especially in terms of his close friendship with Schmucke, enriches the narrative with parody, irony, and humour, revealing the tension between Balzac's intellectual aesthetic and 'la parodie du grand style académique du premier XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle'.<sup>120</sup> This parody sharply contrasts with Balzac's idealized vision of the Ancien Régime, vividly reflected in Pons's renowned art collection. The protagonist's gift of his cherished fan to Madame Cibot not only highlights his innocent generosity and 'la galanterie du dernier siècle maintenue par l'Empire',<sup>121</sup> but also reflects Balzac's intention to leave an impressive legacy.

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<sup>117</sup> André Lorant, Introduction to *Le Cousin Pons*, CH VII (Paris: Gallimard- Pléiade, 1977), p. 463.

<sup>118</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Le Cousin Pons*, CH VII, p. 639.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 456-57.

<sup>120</sup> Éléonore Reverzy, 'Le Cousin Pons: une histoire complète de la société française au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle', in *Relire le Cousin Pons*, eds Pierre Glaudes & Éléonore Reverzy (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2018), 139-156, p. 148.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

As Pons parts with his fan and exquisite art collection, the writer bequeaths his readers a rich tapestry of stories that collectively form a complex, unique, and highly ambitious work.

In 1847, Balzac also completed and published *La Dernière Incarnation de Vautrin*, the fourth and final instalment of *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*. As its title suggests, this instalment was among one of Balzac's final crowning achievements. Jonathan Paine argues that the work was composed at a time when the writer was elated by the positive reception of *La Cousine Bette* and encouraged by Madame Hanska's agreement to marry him, which would inevitably relieve him of his financial struggles.<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, he was confident in having 'finally found a literary formula that reconciled the competing demands of the newspaper and the novel'.<sup>123</sup> In other words, he united the ephemeral with the enduring. Through a penetrating meta-commentary on French society, encompassing the institutions of the broader literary market, the police, and journalism, *La Dernière Incarnation de Vautrin* represented Balzac's final endeavour to probe the boundaries of the readers' moral compass. It serves as a cautionary tale filled with irony, mockery and elusive hope, exposing the stark realities of the age and ascendancy of the anti-hero. For Balzac, this meant that writers seeking success had to assume the role of anti-heroes, becoming commercial artists who acknowledged the inevitable dependency between fiction and its transactional value.

Like *Illusions perdues*, its publication was protracted and complicated, spanning over ten years. The work appeared in *La Presse* from 13 April to 4 May and was published separately by Chlendorowski in July. When describing it to Madame Hanska, Balzac portrays himself as 'un grand maître',<sup>124</sup> implying: 'il est vrai que je persiste à croire que c'est une comédie de Molière écrite'.<sup>125</sup> By aligning his work with Molière's plays, Balzac seeks to self-legitimize

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<sup>122</sup> See Jonathan Paine, *Selling the Story: Transaction and Narrative Value in Balzac, Dostoevsky, and Zola* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019), p. 89.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>124</sup> Expression used by Yoshie Oshita in *Balzac, une création théâtrale 1839-1848* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2024), p. 350.

<sup>125</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *LH*, vol. I, 3 November 1844, p. 924.

the lasting impact and cultural significance he envisions for his writing. His steadfast dedication to expose human vice and hypocrisy, even when faced with criticism,<sup>126</sup> demonstrates his fearless resolve to observe, confront and critique society until his dying breath.

## 2.6. Prestige, Popularity and Provocation in Print: *La Comédie humaine* and *Les Contes drolatiques* (1852-55)

The years leading up to Balzac's declining health and premature death in 1850 may have sparked a surge in illustrated editions, particularly following Hugo's laudatory eulogy. From 1848 to 1851, the popularity of his work was driven by the widespread circulation of affordable illustrated editions, known as *les romans à 4 sous*, which were priced at twenty centimes. Published by editors such as Havard, Barba, Bry, and Marescq, these editions focused on 'les grands classiques aussi bien que les grands auteurs du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle: Balzac, Chateaubriand, Hugo, Dumas, Sue, Féval, Scribe, G. Sand, Soulié... et bien d'autres'.<sup>127</sup> In keeping with this trend, Marescq introduced the *Œuvres complètes illustrées de Balzac* in 1851, completing the series in 1856.<sup>128</sup> Each volume features a *bandeau* designed by Célestin Nanteuil. The *bandeau* is a decorative illustration placed either as a frontispiece or at the head of a title which serves both aesthetic and marketing purposes, showcasing the publisher's commitment to high-quality editions. The *bandeau* in Marescq's edition features several of Balzac's characters, notably Daumier's distinctive portrayal of Goriot. This central illustration is surrounded by smaller vignettes depicting other characters in various *scènes*, accentuating

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<sup>126</sup> Jules Janin accused the final instalment of *Splendeurs* of being 'l'éloge des huit péchés capitaux'. *L'Univers*, 2 September 1840.

<sup>127</sup> Lise Dumasy-Queffélec, *Le roman-feuilleton français au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. 18.

<sup>128</sup> Claude Witkowski provides a list of the texts in each volume in *Monographie des éditions populaires: les publications illustrées à 20 centimes; les romans à quatre sous: 1848-1870*, p. 43-45. These ten volumes were disseminated into 200 deliveries. Deliveries one through 151 were dedicated to works of *La Comédie humaine*, however *Les Paysans*, *L'initié* and *Les petites misères de la vie conjugale* are missing. Deliveries 152 through 153 consisted of *Physiologie de l'employé* as well as *L'épicier* which was one of Balzac's contributions in *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*. Deliveries 154 through 160 were dedicated to Balzac's plays, while deliveries 161 through 200 contained Balzac's 'œuvres de jeunesse'. Furthermore, the ninth and tenth volumes were dedicated to Balzac's earlier works.

the theatrical nature of Balzac's work and reinforcing his reputation as a 'dramatist of humanity'.<sup>129</sup> Another *bandeau* is placed above *Mercadet* featured in the eighth volume of Marescq's edition. Its design replicates the 1851 *bandeau* used in *Chefs-d'œuvre de la littérature et de l'illustration* which features Molière's work.<sup>130</sup> It highlights the title *Théâtre complet de Balzac*, positioning his work alongside Molière's and drawing renewed attention to his often-overlooked theatrical output.

While Balzac would have likely appreciated the *bandeau's* resemblance to the one promoting Molière's work, he would have objected to the in-text vignettes, which disrupted the flow of reading. Nevertheless, this printing technique was both cost-effective and provided readers with visual pauses. Additionally, the in-text vignettes 'se reconnaissent assez facilement, à leur gravure particulièrement soignée et à ce qu'ils sont, le plus souvent, imprimés dans la largeur d'une colonne du texte'.<sup>131</sup> This familiarity originated from the fact that many illustrations from Marescq's edition were identical to those from the 1842 Furne edition, showcasing the artistry of the edition's prominent illustrators. These illustrations thus ensured visual consistency across various editions of *La Comédie humaine* and reinforced the work's cohesive unity.

As Marescq continued to release new volumes of Balzac's work, Houssiaux issued a poster for *La Comédie humaine* in 1855. Measuring at 45.7 cm by 30.4 cm, the poster prominently featured an illustration by Bertall, one of the principal illustrators of the Furne edition.<sup>132</sup> It portrays Balzac's oeuvre as a literary pantheon, which suggests the writer's anticipated inclusion in France's literary canon. Balzac's name is framed by a curtain, further evoking the theatrical nature of his work. A female figure, reminiscent of a classical Greek

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<sup>129</sup> Harry Levin, *The Gates of Horn* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 213.

<sup>130</sup> Claude Witkowski, *Monographie des éditions populaires: les publications illustrées à 20 centimes; les romans à quatre sous: 1848-1870*, p. 41.

<sup>131</sup> *Id.*

<sup>132</sup> See Figure 7 in Additional Documents.

statue, draws back the curtain while holding a theatre mask, revealing the work's theatrical leitmotif. Beside her are two Grecian pedestals which showcase Balzac's major titles and characters, notably *Ferragus*, *Eugénie Grandet*, *Le Père Goriot*, *Le Lys dans la vallée*, *Les Contes drolatiques*, and *Vautrin*.

Produced in twenty volumes *in-8* on glazed vellum paper, Houssiaux's edition reflects a high standard of craftsmanship. It blends classical artistic motifs with images of Balzac's widely recognizable characters and celebrated titles, effectively bridging the divide between the 'édition populaire' and the 'édition de luxe', while also 'neutralizing the illustrator-writer rivalry'.<sup>133</sup> What began as a marginal form of popular expression gradually evolved into a respected medium, allowing prominent authors to expand their readership without compromising their literary prestige.

It was also in 1855 that Armand Dutacq published the first illustrated edition of *Les Contes drolatiques*, with Gustave Doré's illustrations propelling the work to widespread acclaim.<sup>134</sup> Despite the title's controversial subject matter and archaic language, this edition had the largest print run of any Balzac text, with 10,000 copies.<sup>135</sup> The appeal lay primarily in its illustrations, especially since the work's first edition, published by Gosselin and Werdet between 1832 and 1837, achieved little to no critical or commercial success.<sup>136</sup> Bellos attributes this disparity to the greater 'saleability of any book illustrated by Doré'.<sup>137</sup> One of the pioneers of the wood-engraving technique, Doré, along with his collaborators Héliodore Pisan and Henri Bouchot, produced illustrations brim with 'unctuous humour and headlong gaiety',<sup>138</sup> a style that had already gained recognition in his illustrations of Rabelais's work.

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<sup>133</sup> Keri Ann Berg, *Fighting for the page: Balzac, Grandville and the power of images, 1830–1848*, p. 405.

<sup>134</sup> For a more comprehensive overview of Doré's work, see Philippe Kaenel's *Doré: l'imaginaire au pouvoir* (Paris: Flammarion, 2014).

<sup>135</sup> David Bellos, *Balzac Criticism in France 1850–1900: The Making of a Reputation*, p. 87. It seems that the allure of sensuality effectively drove demand.

<sup>136</sup> This likely explains why an unillustrated edition issued a decade after Doré's edition in 1865 by the Michel Lévy frères had a modest print run of just 1,500 copies. *Id.*

<sup>137</sup> *Id.*

<sup>138</sup> Lucy H. Hooper, 'Contemporary French Artists', *The Art Journal*, 6 (1880), 26–28, p. 27.

Barbey D'Aurevilly was particularly fond of Doré's style, asserting that 'c'est par Rabelais que lui était venu son commencement de renommée. C'est par Balzac, fils de Rabelais, qu'il va achever'.<sup>139</sup> His style continued to receive critical acclaim, notably in the 1859 edition of *Les Contes drolatiques* published by A. Bourdilliat et Cie:

Si ce livre n'était pas une œuvre d'art dans toute l'acception de ce mot, peut-être un peu trop prodigué de nos jours, l'éditeur ne serait point hasardé à le publier; mais il a pensé que les critiques consciencieux et les lecteurs choisis entre les mains desquels doivent aller les Contes drolatiques se souviendront des illustres précédents qui autorisent cette hardie tentative, dont l'auteur ne s'est pas dissimulé la témérité, dont il a calculé tous les périls.<sup>140</sup>

Taking on the risqué subject matter of *Les Contes drolatiques* allowed Doré to explore new artistic territories and reinvent himself creatively, blending medieval imagery with the humorous and satirical essence of Balzac's work, including its erotic undertones. As D'Aurevilly observes: 'ses illustrations des *Contes drolatiques* sont un progrès dans sa manière et donnent un intérêt de plus à ce chef-d'œuvre, aux yeux de ceux pour qui la lutte d'un vigoureux talent avec un vigoureux génie est un spectacle digne d'attention, de sympathie et même de respect'.<sup>141</sup> In other words, Doré's illustrations reveal and amplify the intelligence, wit, and eroticism of Balzac's work, showing that its full impact can only be appreciated through the dynamic interplay of text and image. Without Doré's artistic contributions, *Les Contes drolatiques* might have been largely forgotten from the nation's collective memory, especially since the work is more closely tied to its illustrations than to the text itself. Accordingly, Nathalie Preiss characterizes illustration as an intermediary force that bridges seemingly opposing dynamics: text and image, universal and individual, *scènes* and portraits, to provide a more nuanced and comprehensive interpretation of Balzac's work:

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<sup>139</sup> Barbey D'Aurevilly, *Contes drôlatiques* [sic], *Le Pays*, 26 February 1856.

<sup>140</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Les contes drolatiques colligez ez abbayes de Touraine et mis en lumière par le sieur de Balzac pour l'esbattement des pantagruélistes et non aultres*, 5th ed. (Paris: Les bureaux de la Société générale de Librairie, 1855), p. 1.

<sup>141</sup> Barbey D'Aurevilly *Contes drôlatiques* [sic], *Le Pays*.

En effet, ce perpétuel aller-retour entre texte et image, entre universel et individuel, un et multiple, qui définit la lecture du livre illustré, c'est la définition même, selon le discours de Diotime dans *Le Banquet* de Platon, de la nature d'Éros, le Désir, véritable agent de liaison. Dépenaillé, il tient de sa mère Pauvreté, mais, rusé, il tient tout autant de son père Expédient, et fait ainsi figure de tiers, d'intermédiaire.<sup>142</sup>

This symbiosis between text and image thus illuminates the distinctive status of *Les Contes drolatiques* within Balzac's oeuvre. While the stories thrive on archaic language, historical pastiche and playful parody, it is Doré's illustrations, at once transgressive and provocative, that animate these qualities and transmit them to new audiences who may view the illustrations as forms of visual entertainment rather than objects of sustained study. The *va-et-vient* between Balzac's work and Doré's illustrations exemplifies the broader processes by which illustration binds together multiple facets of the writer's legacy and consolidates his 'popular status both aesthetically and commercially, as well his official canonization as a classic literary figure'.<sup>143</sup> For Balzac, illustration not only expanded his readership but also magnified the sheer breadth and depth of his magnum opus, paying tribute to the multitude of characters, *scènes* and heavily detailed settings that permeate his oeuvre.

From being celebrated as a 'grand héros de femmes'<sup>144</sup> to being labelled as an 'immoraliste', Balzac's reception in the press elicited divided responses, which were shaped by critics' professional agendas and personal relationships with the writer. These multifaceted shifts in his reception demonstrate that 'la vogue de l'auteur a triomphé de plus mauvais jours encore'.<sup>145</sup> The press played a decisive role in amplifying Balzac's visibility, while his collaboration with illustrators further reinforced his status as an esteemed writer. These cultural vectors contributed to his consecration as a *classique culturel*, a term coined by Milo to differentiate authors recognized through widespread cultural circulation from those primarily upheld by academic institutions. As Milo writes: 'on peut être enseigné sans être considéré

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<sup>142</sup> Nathalie Preiss, 'Balzac illustre (é)' *Littera* 3 (2018), 37-65, p. 56.

<sup>143</sup> Keri Ann Berg, *Fighting for the page: Balzac, Grandville and the power of images, 1830-1848*, p. 405.

<sup>144</sup> *Le Corsaire*, 5 January 1840.

<sup>145</sup> *Tam-Tam*, 31 March-6 April 1839.

comme un grand auteur; on peut être considéré comme un grand auteur sans être étudié'.<sup>146</sup> In this context, the press served as a powerful force of legitimization, helping to lay the foundation for Balzac's anticipated recognition as a *classique scolaire*, as will be explored in the next chapter. His reputation was thus influenced by a dynamic interplay of literary criticism, publishing strategies, media exposure, and illustrative practices, highlighting the interconnected mechanisms through which his status as an *auteur littéraire* and an *auteur populaire* were constructed.

Despite facing the challenge of gaining recognition through traditional avenues of consecration such as the Académie française, where he felt he was obliged 'd'entrer en littérature par le haut',<sup>147</sup> Balzac's wide-ranging oeuvre and unwavering determination ultimately enabled him to consolidate economic, symbolic, and cultural capital. His engagement with popular media and commercial strategies demonstrates that literary consecration stems not only from academic endorsement but also from cultural and market-driven recognition. Indeed, his commitment to critical acclaim and dreams of stardom reinvigorated his creativity, allowing him to explore sensational and transgressive themes in works such as *La Vieille Fille*, *Illusions perdues*, *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, and *Les Contes drolatiques*. These texts reveal a more provocative and fantastical Balzac, contrasting with the ostensibly more sober realism of *Eugénie Grandet* and *Le Père Goriot*.

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<sup>146</sup> Daniel Milo, 'Les classiques scolaires', in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, vol. II (Paris: Gallimard, 1984-92), 517-62, p. 518.

<sup>147</sup> José-Luis Diaz, 'Imaginaires littéraires du jeune Balzac', in *Balzac avant Balzac*, eds Claire Barel-Moisan and José-Luis Diaz (Saint-Cyr-sur-Loire: Christian-Pirot, 2006), p. 51.



### Chapter 3 – Classics, Canons, Circulation: Balzac’s Widening Presence from the *Bibliothèque des chemins de fer* to the 1960s

Balzac’s consecration as a classic writer, in the etymological sense of the term,<sup>1</sup> crystallized in the late 1860s, when excerpts of his work were first incorporated into the school curriculum.<sup>2</sup> Interest in his oeuvre grew significantly between the 1880s and 1900s, with demand rising from a ‘low point to an enormous peak in the early years of the twentieth century’.<sup>3</sup> This chapter explores how that momentum extended into both the educational and wider cultural spheres, examining the evolution of Balzac’s posthumous reputation as a *classique scolaire*. It focuses on his inclusion in France’s educational system through the Agrégation, the *Petits classiques* editions and the nation’s broader publishing and cinematic landscapes. The aim is thus to evaluate how different processes of institutional consecration, and the attribution of Balzac’s classic status may have intersected with, or influenced, other forms of cultural recognition.

The chapter is structured into six sections, each tracing a key phase in the evolving critical reception and dissemination of Balzac’s work. The first section investigates the publication of Balzac’s work within the *Bibliothèque des chemins de fer* series (1853-54), showing how this popular collection broadened his readership and foreshadowed the critical and commercial success of later pocket formats. The second section examines the juxtaposition between Balzac’s limited presence in the national curriculum from the 1850s to the 1880s, and his growing posthumous recognition established by major writers and thinkers of the period

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<sup>1</sup> As explained in the introduction, the Latin term *classicus* refers to a text traditionally taught in the classroom.

<sup>2</sup> In the archival collections of Rouen’s Musée National de l’Éducation (MUNAÉ), Balzac appears briefly in a primary school student’s workbook dated 1869. An inventory compiled by the museum documents his presence in student exercises, identifying *L’Usurier* as the first text studied, a title corresponding to the initial, partial pre-publication of *Gobseck* in *La Mode* on 6 March 1830. The full inventory is accessible upon request by contacting the documentation team at MUNAÉ ([munac-documentation@reseau-canope.fr](mailto:munac-documentation@reseau-canope.fr)). See also <https://rouen.fr/education>. Reference based on email correspondence dated 23 January 2023.

<sup>3</sup> David Bellos, *Balzac Criticism in France 1850–1900: The Making of a Reputation*, p. 83.

including Madame Hanska, Baudelaire, Champfleury, Taine, Faguet, and Zola. The third section explores Balzac's institutionalization as a *classique scolaire*, focusing on the inclusion of *Eugénie Grandet*, *Le Père Goriot*, and *Le Cousin Pons* on the Agrégation reading lists between the late 1880s and 1910. The fourth and fifth sections explore the connection between the rise of the *Petits classiques* editions and the emergence of silent-film adaptations, both of which played a significant role in increasing Balzac's cultural visibility. This analysis focuses on the distinct Balzac works promoted in three *Petits classiques* collections launched by Hatier (1920), Hachette (1921), and Larousse (1930). These publishing houses were selected for their longstanding influence in French educational establishments. Particular attention will be given to the editions' paratextual features, such as comprehension questions, editorial layout, and cover design. Furthermore, it explores how the widespread appeal of these abridged editions, alongside silent-film adaptations, reveals a shared ambition: to democratize classic literature by rendering it more popular. The overlap between the works selected for print and screen further highlight this objective.

The sixth section further delves into the relationship between Balzac's rising prominence in the *Petits classiques* collections and the broader publishing trajectory of eight texts: *La Peau de chagrin*, *Le Colonel Chabert*, *Eugénie Grandet*, *Le Père Goriot*, *Le Lys dans la vallée*, *Illusions perdues*, *La Cousine Bette*, and *Le Cousin Pons*. These texts were selected for their recurring appearance in educational curricula, their sustained prominence in the publishing market, and their multiple film adaptations. To determine the periods of highest publishing activity, I have compiled several tables using data from the BnF advanced research catalogue. While it provides valuable insight into the texts' publishing history, inconsistencies remain, including duplicate entries and discrepancies between the database's listed publication dates and the copyright years indicated in the editions themselves. Sorting and analysing the publishing frequency of these texts allows for both the refinement of existing data and a more

precise historical account of their publishing trajectories. Examining these publishing trends makes it possible to identify the most active periods of dissemination while also revealing key historical and cultural inflection points that may have impacted the circulation and reception of Balzac's work in France.

To analyse the publishing trends of these eight texts, the chapter considers both their reprints and new editions, aiming better to assess their varying degrees of success. However, Vachon demonstrates that second, third, or even fourth editions do not always reflect sequential printings, nor do they necessarily indicate that the previous edition was sold out.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, the existence of multiple 'editions' may be more indicative of publishing strategies rather than actual sales figures:

La pratique était courante chez les libraires romantiques de recomposer la couverture et la page de titre d'un volume afin d'en travestir l'adresse bibliographique pour relancer une publication. On rencontrera cette opération deux fois avec la seconde édition, parue en 1834, des *Chouans ou la Bretagne en 1799*, dont les invendus furent remis en circulation une première fois par Werdet en 1836 sous le titre abrégé *Les Chouans* avec la mention "3<sup>e</sup> édition revue, corrigée et entièrement refondue", puis par Levavasseur sous le titre *Le Chouan* en 1838.<sup>5</sup>

Rather than waiting for a first edition to sell out before releasing a new one, publishers reprinted the original and marketed it as a new edition, particularly when the initial release had struggled to sell. It is therefore essential to distinguish between a simple reprint—*tirage*—and a genuine new edition. A reprint involves no substantive editorial intervention; it simply reuses an existing typographic composition, even if the layout or cover page changes. As Vachon defines it, *tirage* refers to 'le réemploi d'une composition typographique ancienne (relativement), et inchangée (même si le mode d'imposition peut être différent)'.<sup>6</sup> By contrast,

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<sup>4</sup> For example, the 'fourth' edition 'soigneusement corrigée du *Médecin de campagne* et la "quatrième" édition revue et corrigée" du *Père Goriot*, distribuées en prime pour un trimestre d'abonnement par le journal *Figaro* en octobre 1837, sont les tirages en format in-12 d'éditions in-8 immédiatement antérieures, qui furent écoulées en librairie.' Stéphane Vachon, *Les travaux et les jours d'Honoré de Balzac: chronologie de la création balzacienne*, p. 48.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

a new edition entails a revised typographic composition—either in part or in whole—and is what Vachon calls an ‘édition réelle, c’est-à-dire celle qui a exigé une nouvelle composition typographique (totale ou partielle)’.<sup>7</sup> Distinguishing between reprints (*tirages*) and newly published editions (*éditions réelles*) provides further insight into which of Balzac’s texts were most circulated, both within educational institutions and among the general reading public.<sup>8</sup>

### 3.1. Networking Balzac: *La Bibliothèque des chemins de fer* (1853-54)

The launch of Hachette’s *Bibliothèque des chemins de fer* in 1853 marked a pivotal moment in the transformation of reading habits among the wider reading public. Aimed at entertaining travellers during their journey(s), the collection offered a diverse range of texts that encouraged reading as a form of leisure. Novels, with their longer formats and broad genre appeal, became particularly profitable and sought-after:

Les romans pour adultes comme ceux pour enfants sont d’ailleurs surtout des classiques, de *Paul et Virginie* aux *Contes* de Perrault, et des ouvrages qu’on n’hésite pas à épurer (parfois avec l’autorisation de l’auteur, ce sera le cas de George Sand) ou couper pour les raccourcir, mais dont la diffusion est un acteur essentiel de la création d’un canon littéraire et d’un imaginaire livresque commun à l’ensemble du territoire, qui définit entre autre la culture littéraire du Second Empire et de la III<sup>e</sup> République.<sup>9</sup>

Hachette was rather selective in his texts, aiming to ‘commander des livres qu’il vendait par le sujet et le titre, ce qui le dispensait d’avoir besoin d’hommes d’un nom, de talent’.<sup>10</sup> This elitist stance reflected his belief that an author’s talent was directly tied to their status and

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<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> The appendices highlight the duplicates identified in my archival research. Given the age of these editions and the absence of original or matching hardcover covers, it remains difficult to determine whether publishers intentionally used varied designs to boost the sales of Balzac’s work. However, there are documented cases in which the same text was republished by the same publisher within just one to two years—a relatively short interval for issuing a new edition. In most instances, these were simple reprints, involving minimal or no editorial changes.

<sup>9</sup> Elisabeth Parinet, ‘Les bibliothèques de gare, un nouveau réseau pour le livre’, *Romantisme*, 80 (1993), 95-106, p. 95.

<sup>10</sup> Pascal Fouché, ‘Les tentations hégémoniques de la Librairie Hachette’, *Esprit*, 295 (2003), 73-91, p. 79.

respectability in educational institutions. Although Balzac's work was not included in school curricula until the late 1860s, its widespread dissemination and influence on prominent authors such as Baudelaire and Zola elevated its historical and cultural significance. The *Chemins de fer* catalogue also included classic texts by authors of the Grand siècle, however, its selection was also 'édulcoré à l'intention d'un public que l'on present peu familier du livre'.<sup>11</sup> For example, its corpus emphasized shorter works with engaging, suspenseful plotlines, making them more accessible to casual readers. This approach is evident in the Balzac catalogue, which, from 1853 onward, remained unchanged. Between 1853 and 1854, five of Balzac's texts were published: *La Bourse* (1853), *Un Épisode sous la Terreur* (1853), *Le Réquisitionnaire* (1853), *Eugénie Grandet* (1854), and *Pierrette* (1854).

The selection of both shorter and longer narratives suggests a deliberate effort to highlight Balzac's wide range and versatility. Although the selection may appear somewhat arbitrary, the inclusion of *Eugénie Grandet*, a novel that enjoyed both critical acclaim and commercial success, likely functioned as a flagship work, intended to draw in readers who might have been less familiar with Balzac's shorter works.<sup>12</sup> The selected corpus explores themes of economic hardship, social mobility, periods of historical upheaval, and women's precarious position within society. It suggests a clear effort to resonate with contemporary readers, particularly through the realist aesthetic with which Balzac was increasingly associated. At the same time, the atmospheric intensity of the narratives and the prominent role of artists in *La Bourse* and *Un Épisode sous la Terreur* evoke a Romantic sensibility, one that for many readers may have seemed closer to fantasy than to lived reality.<sup>13</sup> The inclusion

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<sup>11</sup> Elisabeth Parinet, 'Les bibliothèques de gare, un nouveau réseau pour le livre', p. 104.

<sup>12</sup> This has long been the novel's reputation, one that reflects the hierarchy within Balzac's work, in which other titles are often measured against *Eugénie Grandet*. The latter has maintained a long-standing place in school curricula, has been published in a plethora of varied editions, and has inspired many adaptations both within and outside of France.

<sup>13</sup> A perception further shaped by works such as Murger's *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (1854). See Graham Robb, *An Adventure History of Paris* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011).

of submissive female protagonists, such as Eugénie and Pierrette, who are subject to exploitation by predominantly male figures, also reveals a more conservative strain in Balzac's work, one that perpetuates conventional notions of feminine vulnerability and obedience. The ideological tensions underlying his portrayals of gender are later echoed in the *Petits classiques* editions, particularly in the Larousse collection.<sup>14</sup>

### 3.2. Balzac Before the Curriculum: Posthumous Legacy and Critical Reinvention (1851-79)

Although Balzac was not officially included in the national examination lists until the late 1880s, the thirty-year period following his death in 1850 was far from devoid of critical engagement. This hiatus in institutional recognition was offset by a rich and evolving discourse that included posthumous publications, editorial initiatives, and the sustained efforts of influential literary figures and publishers.

Foremost among these efforts was the active role played by Madame Hanska in stewarding Balzac's unfinished manuscripts. Between 1851 and 1854, she maintained regular correspondence with the writer and critic Champfleury regarding the future of Balzac's oeuvre. She also collaborated with Charles Rabou, a journalist and former associate of Balzac's, to complete and publish several of his unfinished works, notably *Les Paysans*, *Le Député d'Arcis*, and *Les Petits Bourgeois*. As Takayuki Kamada demonstrates, Madame Hanska took part in finalising *Les Paysans*, while Rabou assumed responsibility for the remaining two titles.<sup>15</sup>

It was within this context of posthumous circulation that the critical discourse

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<sup>14</sup> It focuses on narratives featuring tragic female heroines defined by their moral integrity, emotional resilience, and subservience to male counterparts, notably Eugénie Grandet, Madame de Mortsauf, and Esther Gobseck.

<sup>15</sup> See Takayuki Kamada, 'Les interventions de Charles Rabou dans *Les Petits Bourgeois*', *AB*, 23 (2022), 209-22.

surrounding realism in both art and literature began to crystallize, with Balzac increasingly positioned as its foundational figure. Champfleury's anthology *Le Réalisme* (1857) marked a pivotal moment in this development.<sup>16</sup> The term *réalisme*, which initially carried negative connotations, emerged in opposition to *idéisme*,<sup>17</sup> defined as the 'conception d'après laquelle l'art doit chercher non à imiter le réel mais à créer des œuvres qui soient l'expression d'un idéal'.<sup>18</sup> In defending the realist aesthetics of Courbet, Champfleury also invoked literary figures such as Balzac, effectively situating him at the forefront of this newly legitimized artistic movement.

Balzac's literary stature was further reinforced through comparisons with later canonical authors, notably Flaubert and Zola. Flaubert famously disparaged Balzac's prose, remarking in 1852: '[q]uel homme eût été Balzac, s'il eût su écrire!'<sup>19</sup> However, he was often seen as Balzac's literary heir, particularly following the publication of *Madame Bovary* in 1856. Critics such as Charles de Mazade asserted that 'Flaubert imite Balzac dans son roman',<sup>20</sup> while Sand remarked that 'c'était encore du Balzac'.<sup>21</sup> Soon after the novel's release, Taine's 1858 essay paid further homage to Balzac's work, while in 1859, Baudelaire famously described him as a 'visionnaire passionné'.<sup>22</sup> By the late 1870s, Balzac's depiction

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<sup>16</sup> In 1853, Champfleury wrote a letter to Sand in which he defended Courbet's work. See Guy Trigalot, *Mauprat de George Sand, à la croisée du Romantisme et des courants littéraires de la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, *Traverse* (2011), 115-32. For a more critical examination of Champfleury's engagement with the popular arts, see Amal Asfour *Champfleury: Meaning in the Popular Arts in Nineteenth-century France* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> The term *réalisme* first appeared in 1829 in the *Mercur de France* and was reiterated in 1833 through Gustave Planche's writings in *La Revue des Deux Mondes*.

<sup>18</sup> 'Idéisme', Definition 2, in *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. [online], <<https://www.dictionnaire-academie.fr/article/A9I0047>> [accessed 17 April 2025].

<sup>19</sup> Gustave Flaubert, Letter to Louise Colet, 16 December 1852, *Corr.*, vol. II (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1980), p. 209. It is possible that Flaubert, a perfectionist in achieving aesthetic and stylistic balance between sentences, was alluding to Balzac's notoriously lengthy and verbose sentence structure.

<sup>20</sup> Charles de Mazade, *Revue des Deux mondes*, 1 May 1857.

<sup>21</sup> *Le Courrier de Paris*, 29 September 1857. Cited by Alain Raitt, 'Le Balzac de Flaubert', *L'Année Balzacienne*, 12 (1991), 335-361, p. 335.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Baudelaire, 'Théophile Gautier', *L'Art romantique, Œuvres complètes*, vol. II (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1997), p. 120. As Claude Pichois notes, Philarète Chasles was the first to describe Balzac in these terms, in the obituary he wrote for the *Journal des débats* on August 24, 1850. The idea of Balzac as a *voyant* or a *roi des voyants* was later taken up by Gautier and then by Rimbaud. See Henry F. Majewski, *Paradigm &*

as a great visionary was embraced by a new generation of writers, most notably Zola, who frequently cited him as a precursor to his *Rougon-Macquart* series.<sup>23</sup> This image was further reinforced by Champfleury's *Balzac, sa méthode de travail* (1879), which offered an intimate portrayal of the author's rigorous work ethic, relentless ambition, and literary genius.

While Balzac was acknowledged as a precursor to Flaubert and Zola, he was also reclaimed by Proust. In his unfinished collection of essays, *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, written between 1895 and 1900, Proust ardently defended Balzac against earlier criticism: 'c'est l'idée de génie de Balzac que Sainte-Beuve méconnaît'.<sup>24</sup> Similar to Baudelaire, Proust refers to the visionary nature of Balzac's work, whose power lay not in mere realism but in the unifying force of his painterly ideas:

Or, c'était cela la grandeur même de l'œuvre de Balzac. Sainte-Beuve a dit qu'il s'est jeté sur le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle comme sur son sujet, que la société est femme, qu'elle voulait son peintre, qu'il l'a été, qu'il n'a rien eu de la tradition en la peignant, qu'il a renouvelé les procédés et les artifices du pinceau à l'usage de cette ambitieuse et coquette société qui tenait à ne dater que d'elle-même et à ne ressembler qu'à elle. Or, Balzac ne s'est pas proposé cette simple peinture, au moins dans le simple sens de peindre des portraits fidèles. Ses livres résultaient de belles idées, d'idées de belles peintures si l'on veut (car il concevait souvent un art dans la forme d'un autre) mais alors d'un bel effet de peinture, d'une grande idée de peinture. Comme il voyait dans un effet de peinture une belle idée, de même il pouvait voir dans une idée de livre un bel effet. Il se représentait à lui-même un tableau où il y a quelque originalité saisissante et qui émerveillera.<sup>25</sup>

Through critical evaluation and editorial stewardship, Balzac's legacy was carefully constructed and continuously reinforced in the decades following his death. By the time he

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*Parody: Images of Creativity in French Romanticism--Vigny, Hugo, Balzac, Gautier, Musset.* (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1989).

<sup>23</sup> A caricature of Zola by André Gill, published in *Les Hommes d'aujourd'hui* in 1878, even depicts the novelist saluting a monument to Balzac, a powerful symbol of artistic inheritance and reverence. In 1891, Zola, then president of the Société des Gens de Lettres, chose Rodin to create a monument to Balzac. In 1898, after years of study and experimentation, Rodin unveiled a daringly unfaithful portrayal of Balzac, draped in a monumental dressing gown that conveyed creative vitality rather than physical resemblance. Initially mocked by critics and rejected by the Société, the statue was only cast in bronze and installed in Paris in 1939. The recent 2024-25 *Corps In-visibles* exhibition at the Musée Rodin revisited this daring work, exploring how Rodin's treatment of drapery and form challenged conventional representation and transformed the author's figure into a symbol of artistic force. See <https://www.musee-rodin.fr/musee/expositions/corps-invisibles>.

<sup>24</sup> Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), p. 99.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

entered the classroom, his status among France's literary giants was already assured.

### 3.3. Making a *Classique scolaire*: The Institutionalisation of *Eugénie Grandet*, *Le Père Goriot*, and *Le Cousin Pons* (1888-1910)

While Balzac was acknowledged as a precursor to Flaubert and Zola, Balzac's print runs in the 1880s were relatively modest compared to those of writers such as Dumas, a decrease in visibility which Bellos characterizes in his 'trough' metaphor.<sup>26</sup> However, applying this model to Balzac overlooks the broader publishing mechanisms that shaped his enduring presence in French cultural life. Rather than experiencing a dip into obscurity, Balzac's legacy was actively reinforced during this period through strategic re-editions, publishing initiatives, and collaborative editorial efforts that sustained, and even expanded, his readership. The apparent lull in print runs masks a period of institutional and pedagogic consolidation that secured his place within the national canon. For example, Lichtlé's study of 'la vie posthume du *Père Goriot*'<sup>27</sup> demonstrates that by the end of the nineteenth century, Balzac had become firmly embedded within the ideological and educational framework of the French Republic. The recurring appearance of Balzac's work in the school curriculum, pocket editions and the subsequent *Petits classiques* editions collectively reinforce the writer's greatness within the nation's educational agenda. Furthermore, his presence in national libraries, inclusion on the Agrégation reading lists, and incorporation in school textbooks reinforced his status as a classic writer, with critics describing him as 'une force de la nature'<sup>28</sup> and 'peut-être avec Molière, osons dire avec Shakespeare lui-même, le plus grand créateur d'âmes'.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> 'The market for his works was smaller at the time they were all in demand, but unlike his rivals, Balzac survived the trough of the 1880's to emerge as a classic.' David Bellos, *Balzac Criticism in France 1850–1900: The Making of a Reputation*, p. 88.

<sup>27</sup> Michel Lichtlé, 'La vie posthume du *Père Goriot* en France', *AB*, 8 (1987), 131-65.

<sup>28</sup> René Doumic, *Histoire de la littérature française* (Paris: Éditions Mellottée, 1947), p. 80

<sup>29</sup> Ch-M Des Granges, *Les Grands écrivains français* (Paris: Librairie Hatier, 1919), p. 866.

The selection of classic writers for the Agrégation saw significant expansion between 1890 and 1914: ‘58 auteurs différents sont cités au moins une fois au programme de l’Agrégation féminine, et 56 à celui de l’Agrégation masculine’.<sup>30</sup> This expansion was also reflected in the increasing number of railway bookshops, which had grown from 43 in 1853 to 1,179 by 1896.<sup>31</sup> Between 1888 and 1910, three of Balzac’s texts were included in the Agrégation: *Eugénie Grandet* (1888), *Le Père Goriot* (1905) and *Le Cousin Pons* (1910).<sup>32</sup> Their selection can be attributed, in part, to their thematic affinities with seventeenth-century canonical texts, notably Shakespeare’s *King Lear*,<sup>33</sup> Molière’s *L’Avare*, and La Fontaine’s *Les Deux Pigeons*:

La matière du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle peut servir de repoussoir à l’historien des mœurs du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle: elle lui permet alors de marquer la nécessité de repenser (au moins pour une part) les peintures classiques. Enfin la littérature classique remplit une fonction inspiratrice: le romancier (re)crée certaines parties de son œuvre à partir d’un canevas emprunté à des écrivains du Grand Siècle, que ce soit à La Fontaine pour *Le Cousin Pons*, ou à *La Princesse de Clèves* qui, si elle n’est jamais citée explicitement, offre un répertoire de situations qu’il réutilise librement dans la *Comédie Humaine*.<sup>34</sup>

Throughout the 1880s, school curricula in France began to incorporate a broader range of authors, genres, and works. As novels gained recognition as legitimate source texts and

<sup>30</sup> Anne-Marie Thiesse, Hélène Mathieu, ‘Le Déclin de l’âge classique et naissance des classiques: l’évolution des programmes littéraires de l’Agrégation depuis 1890’, *Littérature*, 42 (1981), 89-108, p. 97. From 1890, ‘les programmes de l’Agrégation cessent d’imiter le modèle classique de l’Agrégation masculine et substituent aux œuvres du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle des ouvrages du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Avec quelque retard et plus de régularité, les programmes masculins “s’alignent” sur les programmes féminins.’ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>31</sup> By the 1880’s, ‘le livre en petit format apparaît comme le moyen préféré de toutes les factions politiques pour diffuser leurs idées.’ Dragos Jipa, *La canonisation littéraire et l’avènement de la culture de masse* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2016), p. 81.

<sup>32</sup> Balzac enters the Agrégation reading list with ‘*Eugénie Grandet* d’abord en 1888 au programme de l’agrégation de l’enseignement secondaire spécial réservée aux non-latinistes, puis en 1897 à celui de l’agrégation pour l’enseignement secondaire de jeunes filles; par le début du *Père Goriot* en 1905 à l’agrégation de grammaire; par *Le Cousin Pons* en 1910 à l’agrégation des lettres.’ Michel Lichtlé, ‘Balzac: une référence pour le XX<sup>e</sup> siècle?’, *AB*, 16 (2015), 41-46, p. 46.

<sup>33</sup> The Shakespeare comparison was indeed commonplace. See Tim Farrant, ‘Balzac et la critique britannique, miroir de la création 1830-2023: 1re partie: 1830-1891’, *AB*, 24 (2023), 177-213.

<sup>34</sup> Maxime Perret, *Balzac et le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle: mémoire et création littéraire* (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle: 2015), p. 123. Zola did not hide his admiration for Balzac and other nineteenth-century classics: ‘Mais ce qu’on ne peut nier, ce sont les œuvres de Balzac, de George Sand, de Victor Hugo, d’Alfred de Musset, de Michelet, de Théophile Gautier, de Lamartine, de Stendhal, pour ne citer que ceux-là. Une époque qui a produit de tels hommes, doit rester dans l’histoire comme féconde et puissante entre toutes.’ Émile Zola, *Œuvres critiques*, vol. II (Paris: E. Fasquelle, 1906), p. 414.

became central to assessing students' literary and historical knowledge, Balzac's work was naturally integrated into the evolving school curriculum.<sup>35</sup> However, this curricular agenda was largely shaped by the aesthetic principles of nineteenth-century French realism, 'souvent réduit à quelques auteurs canoniques français du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, assimilé à l'usage de techniques illusionnistes visant à créer l'impression d'une transposition fidèle du réel'.<sup>36</sup> Although Balzac came to be firmly associated with nineteenth-century realism by the end of the nineteenth century, notably by dint of Champfleury, this label was not originally applied to him during his lifetime.<sup>37</sup>

The growing emphasis on nineteenth-century French literature, notably within the realm of the realist aesthetic, only deepened over time, elevating writers of that period to the status of canonical figures, celebrated for their literary merit and intellectual authority:

[L]es auteurs, les artistes et les philosophes du XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles sont lus et traités comme des modèles: on écrit encore des romans comme Balzac, Flaubert et Zola, Proust et Beckett, on suit Duchamp et Bonnard. Freud, Nietzsche et Marx peuvent être pris entièrement au sérieux. Les XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles sont devenus *de facto* des classiques, sans en avoir le titre, puisque le terme était pris et que ces siècles transmettent un idéal d'originalité et de nouveauté : la fidélité à l'héritage implique sa dénégation.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Because of the sheer magnitude of Balzac's work, there was an abundant number of texts to choose from, however, it was important to be selective in the choice of extracts. It was especially between '1882 and 1900 that Balzac was an undisputed master of the novelistic genre, but whose nature and intentions were hotly disputed by a wide variety of factions and schools.' David Bellos, *Balzac Criticism in France 1850-1900: The Making of a Reputation*, p. 191.

<sup>36</sup> Vincent Bertheliet., *et al. Approches matérialistes du réalisme en littérature* (Saint-Denis: Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 2021), p. 1-2.

<sup>37</sup> While much scholarship has since explored and deconstructed Balzac's role as a realist through his romantic, fantastic, and spiritualist texts, editors of the *Petits classiques* editions presented his work as a pioneering force in the realist genre. Frequently quoting Faguet, editors emphasized Balzac's detailed descriptions of both the positive and negative aspects of *la vérité* through in-depth character portraits and real social settings. Isabelle Tournier writes: 'Il faut d'abord savoir que Balzac ne s'est jamais réclamé du mot 'réalisme'. Et pour cause: il n'existait pas avec son sens actuel à son époque. Ce n'est que quelques années après sa mort qu'un groupe d'écrivains assez oubliés, Champfleury en tête, élaborent une doctrine qu'ils baptisent de ce nom. Il s'agit de reproduire le plus exactement possible la réalité sans épargner aucun de ses aspects, même triviaux ou déplaisants. Le réalisme s'oppose à l'idéalisme. Ces théoriciens se cherchent des ancêtres: c'est à cette occasion qu'ils annexent Balzac et c'est à partir de là que le label de 'réaliste' lui est accolé.' Isabelle Tournier, 'Balzac est-il réaliste?', *Balzac. La Comédie humaine*, Maison de Balzac, n.d., <https://www.maisondebaltac.paris.fr/vocabulaire/furme/fiches/realiste.htm>, [accessed 7 April 2025].

<sup>38</sup> Jean-Paul Sermain, 'Les modèles classiques: aux origines d'une ambiguïté et de ses effets', *Dix-septième siècle*, 223 (2004), 173-181, p. 180.

Balzac's enduring inclusion in the curriculum paralleled a notable increase in translated texts, further broadening his readership on an international scale.<sup>39</sup>

Milo argues that by the 1890s, Balzac had become 'un auteur scolaire universel'.<sup>40</sup> He attributes this transformation to the proliferation of translations, which he identifies as the main catalyst behind 'les quelque cent dix adaptations cinématographiques de ses œuvres, de 1900 à nos jours'.<sup>41</sup> While Milo's analysis emphasizes translation as a key factor in Balzac's cultural endurance, a broader examination reveals additional forces that contributed to his institutional and cultural endorsement: the novel's growing literary prestige, the breadth and variety of Balzac's oeuvre, and the diversity of publishing formats that facilitated its circulation both across academic milieus and a wider, predominantly middle-class bourgeois readership.

### 3.4. Eclecticism, Realism, and Sensationalism: Hatier's *Classiques pour tous* and Silent-Film Adaptations

As an increasing number of Balzac's works were incorporated into the school curricula and published in diverse formats, interest in the *Petits classiques* editions also grew. Originally designed as study aids for students, these collections consisted of abridged versions of Balzac's works, presented as longer excerpts that maintain the original chronological progression of each narrative. While novels were presented through a sequence of selected extracts, novellas were often published in full, except when grouped with other shorter works

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<sup>39</sup> '[D]'après l'Index Translationum, publié par l'Unesco, Balzac est le classique du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle le plus traduit après Jules Verne, particulièrement en russe, en allemand et en espagnol. Nombreuses sont également les études critiques traduites dans au moins quinze langues différentes, cette activité éditoriale internationale étant bien entendu le reflet historique de la diffusion de l'œuvre balzacienne et des discours critiques dominants dans chaque pays.' Robert Tranchida, 'L'œuvre littéraire, ses lectures, sa diffusion: le cas Balzac', *Littérature et censure*, 12 (1964), 11-12, p. 12.

<sup>40</sup> Daniel Milo, 'Les classiques scolaires', p. 520.

<sup>41</sup> *Id.* For further insight into Balzac's growing popularity in the UK, see Donald Adamson 'La réception de *La Comédie humaine* en Grande-Bretagne au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle', *L'Année balzacienne*, 13(1992), 391-420.

in a single abridged volume.<sup>42</sup> Far from offering reductive summaries, these editions are adaptations in and of themselves, intended to guide readers through the key narrative and stylistic elements of Balzac's fiction. Unlike standard textbooks, which might include only one or two representative excerpts, the *Petits classiques* present a coherent, albeit condensed, version of the original story. Typically ranging from 80 to 150 pages, these compact editions use smaller font to condense content, reduce printing costs,<sup>43</sup> and encourage interdisciplinary interpretation through careful editorial curation and comprehension questions.

The narrative coherence of the abridged *Petits classiques* editions closely mirrors the structure of silent-film adaptations, both forms selecting key scenes to preserve the original work's dramatic and emotional impact while adapting it to a more condensed and accessible format. Accordingly, these editions function as literary analogues to silent film, distilling complex narratives into a sequence of vivid, plot-defining moments and heightened instances of tension and psychological insight. Early filmmakers transformed Balzac's intricate plots into visual sequences characterized by theatrical gestures, expressive glances, and carefully choreographed movement further enhanced by dynamic musical scores. As Andrew Watts argues, the adaptation of canonical writers 'served as a reliable means of attracting spectators, who were often curious to see how re-imaginings of classic texts appeared on screen'.<sup>44</sup> Balzac thus offered filmmakers a form of cultural capital: a guarantee of narrative substance, recognizability, and critical legitimacy. Whereas silent films relied on visual cues and

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<sup>42</sup> This editorial model evolved in later decades with the emergence of the *parascolaires*, a more recent version of the *Petits classiques* that now explicitly present the *texte intégral*, as indicated on the cover page. 'Parascolaire' – XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Composé de *para-I* et de *scolaire*. Qui, sans relever des activités ou des programmes scolaires, en constitue le prolongement ou le complément. *Activités parascolaires. Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. [online], <<https://www.dictionnaire-academie.fr/article/A9P0542>> [accessed 7 April 2025]. Today, a *parascolaire* is an educational supplement, often an abridged or annotated version of a literary text, designed to support students in understanding works commonly studied in school curricula. These editions will be discussed in Chapter Four.

<sup>43</sup> For example, the Hatier collection priced its editions at 0.50 and 0.60 francs. These editions were the shortest and most inexpensive out of the 3 collections.

<sup>44</sup> Andrew Watts, 'The Currency of Adaptation: Art and Money in Silent Cinema (1899–1929)', in *The History of French Literature on Film*, eds Kate Griffiths and Andrew Watts (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 19–62, p. 19.

intertitles to convey characters' internal states and advance the plot, the abridged *Petits classiques* editions enabled readers to grasp character motivations and complicated plotlines without exhaustive exposition. For instance, the selected excerpts from *Le Père Goriot* frequently focus on dramatic confrontations, such as those between Rastignac and Vautrin, critical plot developments like Goriot's mounting debts, and morally ambiguous scenes involving Rastignac's fraught ascent within Parisian society. In other words, both the abridged editions of Balzac's works and their silent-film adaptations reconceptualized the writer's prolific output for a wide range of audiences: students, literature enthusiasts and cinema goers alike. These different formats emphasized clarity, narrative momentum, and suspense, showing not only how Balzac's fiction can be continually segmented and reimaged in school editions and screen adaptations, but also how it re-energized the language of a new medium in the context of silent film.

The first *Petits classiques* collection was launched by Hatier in 1920, primarily edited by Marie-Louise Vincent, a French writer and biographer who devoted several works to nineteenth-century classic writers, notably Sand. The collection's strategic title, *Classiques pour tous*, granted classic texts mass-market appeal beyond the classroom, setting a competitive standard for subsequent collections in the publishing industry. The publishing house's objective was clear: to democratize classic works while preserving their authority through fidelity to the work's original structure, historical accuracy, and meticulous editorial standards. For instance, the 1922 one-volume edition of *Un Épisode sous la Terreur, El Verdugo, Le Réquisitionnaire, and L'Auberge rouge* was presented as follows:

La nouvelle collection de Classiques pour tous s'adresse à la fois aux élèves des Lycées et Collèges, aux Établissements d'Enseignement secondaire, aux étudiants des Facultés et à tous les Amateurs de littérature. Son prix réduit la met vraiment à la portée de tous, et justifie son titre ; mais elle offre des caractères particuliers, qui la distinguent essentiellement des collections analogues. En effet, les élèves, les maîtres et le public en général se plaignent légitimement de ne trouver à bon marché que des éditions sans aucune autorité, dont le texte est incorrect ou incomplet, et qui ne sont accompagnées d'aucune note. Nos volumes présentent au contraire des garanties critiques tout à fait nouvelles. Empruntés à la collection des auteurs français publiée à la même librairie sous la direction de M. Ch.-M des Granges, les textes ont été revus et sobrement annotés par chacun des auteurs pour donner aux lecteurs la solution

concise de toutes les difficultés grammaticales et historiques. Sans doute ces petites éditions ne peuvent dispenser de pratiquer les éditions plus complètes dont elles sont tirées, mais elles fournissent provisoirement, à des conditions exceptionnellement avantageuses, des instruments de travail préparés selon les meilleures méthodes.<sup>45</sup>

All editions followed a similar layout: primarily published in one volume, each included a one-to-two-page biography of Balzac, entitled *La vie de Balzac*, followed by a *Notice* on the source text, and an abridged version of the works themselves. Between 1922 and 1948, fourteen of Balzac's texts were published in the collection.<sup>46</sup> Between 1935 and 1947, the collection released new editions of *Le Colonel Chabert*, *Eugénie Grandet*, *Le Père Goriot*, and *Le Cousin Pons*. These editions adhered to the same layout but included two additional sections: a Balzac trivia questionnaire<sup>47</sup> and a segment entitled *Jugements*, which compiled critical praise, notably from Taine, Faguet, Béguin, and Alain. Moreover, the *Jugements* section was divided into three more sections: *I. Sa vie. Son caractère*, *II. Style* *III. Ce qui restera de lui*. Accordingly, these new editions were slightly longer and placed greater emphasis on Balzac's literary achievements and contributions to the realist aesthetic.

In the 1925 edition of *La Recherche de l'absolu*, Vincent urges a re-evaluation of the novel's scientific relevance for modern readers: 'faisons-lui donc un meilleur accueil que les lecteurs de 1834. C'est une œuvre maîtresse, une de celles qui font le plus d'honneur au grand romancier'.<sup>48</sup> Prioritizing a lexicon of praise—*œuvre maîtresse* and *grand romancier*—the editorial discourse presents Balzac not just as an accomplished writer, but as one whose work

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<sup>45</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Un Épisode sous la Terreur: et autres nouvelles*, ed. Marie-Louise Vincent (Paris: Librairie Hatier, 1922), p. 2-3.

<sup>46</sup> The results are displayed in Appendix A, Table A1. The Bibliothèque François-Mitterrand and the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal carry the majority of the original as well as newer editions of the *Petits classiques*. The fragility of certain volumes made the consultation of every physical copy impossible. However, the BnF's online inventory enabled the compilation of these editions.

<sup>47</sup> Composed of thirteen questions, this questionnaire focused on Balzac's life and allowed readers to acquaint themselves with the various facets of his eccentric personality. Some questions include: 'Sous quel pseudonyme H. De Balzac a-t-il publié ses premiers romans? Et dans quel genre?', 'Quelles sont les spéculations commerciales et financières que H. De Balzac entreprit pour faire fortune? Dans quelle mesure a-t-il réussi? Comment travaillait-il? — son horaire? — ses corrections d'épreuves?' Honoré de Balzac, *Le Père Goriot*, ed. Marie-Louise Vincent (Paris: Librairie Hatier, 1935), p. 124.

<sup>48</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *La Recherche de l'absolu*, ed. Marie-Louise Vincent (Paris: Librairie Hatier, 1925), p. 3.

continues to merit renewed attention and admiration.

This sustained glorification coexists with moments of ambivalence, as seen in the 1937 edition of *Le Père Goriot*, where the editor suggests that Balzac contributed to the realist aesthetic ‘un peu sans le savoir, et un peu sans le vouloir’<sup>49</sup>—as if his role in the genre emerged inadvertently, rather than by deliberate design. Despite this seemingly reluctant or unconscious innovation, the editor firmly positions Balzac as a key pioneer of French realism. The editor’s praise of Balzac’s ability to capture the realist aesthetics’ ‘foule d’incartades et de disparates’<sup>50</sup> suggests a conception of writerly greatness rooted in audacity and thematic heterogeneity. Rather than seeking cohesion through uniformity, Balzac’s work derives its power from its capacity to embrace contradiction, aesthetic risk and even violence. Realism is thus presented as a genre that focuses paradoxically on both the harsher and more violent aspects of life which, according to the editor, are ironically admired by the French whose demeanour is otherwise ‘gentle’: Nous [les Français] aimons les violences, les audaces et les crudités dans nos écrivains, parce que nous sommes les plus doux des hommes; et nous nous plaisons à lire des histoires de passions furieuses et épouvantables, parce que nous avons des passions légères’.<sup>51</sup> The paradoxical pairing of gentleness with a taste for violence, restrained with a fascination for excess, suggests that Balzac’s appeal lies not in spite of such juxtapositions, but precisely because they reflect a broader cultural sensibility, one that embraces sentimentality and fervent emotion as a response to the violent horrors of the real. In other words, the editor’s rhetoric turns this paradox into a point of pride, framing Balzac’s moral ambiguity and crude depiction of the real as essential to a national identity that privileges complexity over uniformity, disobedience over conformity. In doing so, the editors implicitly align themselves with Balzac, asserting, in effect, that Balzac, *c’est nous*.

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<sup>49</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Le Père Goriot*, ed. Marie-Louise Vincent (Paris: Librairie Hatier, 1937), p. 127.

<sup>50</sup> *Id.*

<sup>51</sup> *Id.*

While the language used across these editions may appear circular, reiterating rather than interrogating Balzac's greatness, it serves a deliberate function. The repeated use of terms such as *chef-d'œuvre*, *classique*, and *prodigieux* reinforces the writer's institutional consecration by replacing critical engagement with a form of predetermined reverence and monumentality. Nevertheless, the editors do not omit ambivalent assessments regarding the writer's style. For instance, they cite Faguet's criticism: 'Tout le monde tombe d'accord que Balzac écrivait mal. Il n'y a pas à redresser l'opinion sur ce point. Il écrivait mal. Il arrive quelquefois, et, en vérité, assez souvent, qu'on ne s'en avise point'.<sup>52</sup> While the inclusion of such criticism indicates that the editors were aware of the scrutiny surrounding Balzac's style, they seem to invoke Faguet's views to contextualize and even pardon the flaws of a literary genius. In other words, his prolific output, lasting impact, and poignant reflection of French national identity serve to offset any stylistic shortcomings.

The paratextual apparatus of the *Petits classiques* thus constructs a premeditated reading that imposes a sanctioned vision of Balzac's greatness, one that often reiterates rather than interrogates his literary merit. Furthermore, their cover designs evoke a neoclassical aesthetic that pays tribute to this celebrated stature. The Hachette editions, for instance, feature a solemn portrait of Balzac, whose upright posture evokes the dignified stance of French monarchs in Renaissance portraiture.<sup>53</sup> In contrast, the Larousse collection omits the author's likeness altogether, instead framing the work's title within a decorative arrangement of antique objects—knight's armour, velvet drapery, and an artist's wooden palette. The cover page, which Genette terms the 'péritexte éditorial',<sup>54</sup> thus comprises a multilayered system of

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<sup>52</sup> Émile Faguet, *Dix-neuvième siècle: études littéraires* (Paris: Société française d'imprimerie et de librairie, 1887), p. 447. Despite his criticism, Faguet also praised Balzac, calling him a 'grand romancier' (p. 416) and a 'génie' (p. 417).

<sup>53</sup> The Hatier collection also featured Balzac's portrait, though it was a smaller, hand-drawn profile positioned at the bottom of the page. In contrast, the Hachette collection used a larger, more detailed image, showcasing more advanced printing techniques. The portrayal of Balzac as a powerful, almost God-like figure is not new; Rodin's *Monument à Balzac* (1892-97) sought to embody the writer's genius by sculpting him in an upright, confident, and commanding posture.

<sup>54</sup> Gérard Genette, *Seuils*, p. 12.

signs, each contributing to the transmission of distinct meanings. The covers position Balzac as a figure of the past, emphasizing his appreciation of the fine arts and grandiose visions that reflect his nostalgic longing for an idealized national heritage.

These stylistic choices arguably perform a rehabilitative function. They recast Balzac's image in response to earlier criticisms and elevate him to a preeminent position within the academic canon, one that eclipses other nineteenth-century figures such as Stendhal, Hugo, Sand, and Chateaubriand, whose ideological position was much less ambiguous than Balzac's and therefore less subject to discussion.<sup>55</sup> The commercial implications of this positioning are also clear: Balzac's prominence in the classroom invites competing publishers to expand and enhance their own editions, incorporating more texts, annotations, and illustrations to match the evolving standards of the *Petits classiques* editions.

Between 1922 and 1948, eleven of Balzac's texts were reprinted in the Hatier collection,<sup>56</sup> with *Le Colonel Chabert*, *Eugénie Grandet*, *Le Père Goriot*, and *Le Cousin Pons* released as new editions. Several of these works—*L'Auberge rouge*, *Le Colonel Chabert*, *Eugénie Grandet*, *Le Père Goriot*, *César Birotteau*, and *Le Cousin Pons*—had already been adapted or were soon going to be readapted into silent films in France.<sup>57</sup> While filmmakers often turned to Balzac's most widely recognised novels such as *Le Colonel Chabert*, *Eugénie Grandet*, *Le Père Goriot*, and *Le Cousin Pons*, they also played a critical role in reviving and re-legitimising his shorter, darker, more melodramatic texts. Films such as Marcel L'Herbier's

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<sup>55</sup> The nineteenth-century literary canon reflected in school textbooks and the *Petits classiques* was shaped by the authors' growing prominence within the national curriculum. Hugo was absent from the Hatier collection, however, as other publishers entered the *Petits classiques* corpus, Hugo's work eventually surpassed Balzac's in number, particularly in the Larousse series. Chateaubriand ranked just behind Balzac, with nine publications, including a revised edition of *Atala*.

<sup>56</sup> *Un Épisode sous la Terreur*, *Le Réquisitionnaire*, *El Verdugo*, *L'Auberge rouge*, *Le Cousin Pons*, *César Birotteau*, *Le Père Goriot*, *Le Colonel Chabert*, *Louis Lambert*, *Adieu* and *Eugénie Grandet*.

<sup>57</sup> *Eugénie Grandet* (1910, Émile Chautard), *César Birotteau* (1911, Émile Chautard), *Le Colonel Chabert* (1911, Henri Pouctal and André Calmettes), *L'Auberge rouge* (1912, Camille de Morlhon), *L'Auberge rouge* (1923, Jean Epstein), *Le Père Goriot* (1921, Jacques de Baroncelli), *Le Cousin Pons* (1924, Jacques Robert) and another version of *L'Auberge rouge* (1951, Claude Autant-Lara). My project focuses on adaptations in France, however, during this period, there were also a considerable number of Balzac-inspired adaptations made in Italy and the US.

*L'Homme du large* (1920), based on *Un drame au bord de la mer* (1834), which appeared once in the Hatier collection in 1927; Gaston Ravel's *Ferragus* (1923), which, though not included in the *Petits classiques*, became increasingly important in Hatier's *parascolaire* editions as part of a renewed interest in the *Histoire des Treize* trilogy during the early and late 2000s, and Jean Epstein's *L'Auberge rouge* (1923), published twice in the Hatier collection in 1922 and 1929, all contributed to bringing renewed critical and public attention to narratives that had been omitted in the curriculum. These adaptations did more than exploit Balzac's lesser-known works for commercial purposes; they played an active role in reshaping the canon by recontextualizing these texts as culturally and pedagogically relevant.

The parallel rise of the *Petits classiques*, especially Hatier's eclectic selection of Balzac's texts, and the burgeoning field of silent-film adaptations in the early twentieth century thus catalysed a re-evaluation of Balzac's oeuvre. Both mediums played a crucial role in uncovering the spiritualist, psychological and criminalistic dimensions embedded within Balzac's fiction, facets often overshadowed by a prevailing emphasis on his realism. For example, L'Herbier's *L'Homme du large* (1920), set against the stark backdrop of the Atlantic coast, uses dramatic chiaroscuro to evoke themes of moral isolation and spiritual reckoning. The director's aesthetic decisions were also informed by a nationalist desire to resist the growing influence of American cinema and to assert a distinctly French cinematic identity, particularly through his evocative portrayal of the Breton landscape, a nationalist agenda that will be further explored in the context of Vichy-era adaptations.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, Epstein's *L'Auberge rouge* (1923) approached the novella 'not merely to make money, but to introduce spectators to new filmmaking techniques'<sup>59</sup> by employing abrupt close-ups and disorienting zooms that heightened suspense and psychological tension, immersing viewers in the

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<sup>58</sup> See Marcella Trifu, "Créer c'est adapter". *L'Homme du large* de Marcel L'Herbier', in *Balzac à l'écran*, ed. Anne-Marie Baron (Athis-de-l'Orne: Éditions Charles Corlet, 2019), 52-57.

<sup>59</sup> Kate Griffiths, Andrew Watts, *Adapting Nineteenth-Century France: Literature in Film, Theatre, Television, Radio and Print* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), p. 50.

characters' mounting dread of the murder mystery. Ravel's *Ferragus* (1923) also pays tribute to the novel's psychological intensity, notably in a key scene where Auguste de Maulincour misconstrues Clémence Desmarets's filial connection with Ferragus as romantic rivalry. It triggers a near-violent confrontation, keeping spectators on the edge of their seats.<sup>60</sup> Celebrated as 'l'une des plus intelligentes et des plus respectueuses adaptations qu'on ait faites de *La Comédie humaine*',<sup>61</sup> Ravel's film demonstrates a perceptive engagement with the source material (*intelligente*) and a tonal fidelity (*respectueuse*) that preserves the source text's emotional and thematic richness. Like the *Petits classiques* editions, such adaptations played a vital role in reiterating Balzac's relevance for new audiences, translating his narratives into cinematic and educational forms that aligned with shifting reading habits, pedagogic imperatives, and national cultural values.

### 3.5. The *Petits classiques* and Adaptations: Covers, Visuals and Impact

While cinematic adaptations tended to popularize a more Romantic, sensational, and detective-inflected image of Balzac, the *Classiques Larousse* series,<sup>62</sup> launched in 1930 under the direction of chief editor Félix Guirand, concentrated on a select few titles, favouring reprints of *Eugénie Grandet* and *Le Père Goriot*. Emphasizing depth over breadth, the collection published nine texts between 1934 and 1963, many across two volumes to preserve

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<sup>60</sup> To mark the film's centenary, Anne-Marie Baron, president of the Société des amis d'Honoré de Balzac, organised a special screening of *Ferragus* (1923) on 18 February 2023 at the Fondation Jérôme Seydoux-Pathé, accompanied by live piano music in keeping with the tradition of silent film projection. See: <https://www.lesamisdebalzac.org/projection-de-ferragus-1923/>

<sup>61</sup> Georges Darhuys, 'Gaston Ravel', *Cinéma*, July-August 1928.

<sup>62</sup> Pierre Larousse made enduring contributions to the French education system through works distinguished by their scholarly rigour and intellectual depth, most notably with the *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Published in 15 volumes between 1866 and 1876, Balzac was heavily criticized in this dictionary for being immoral: 'la critique de Balzac dans le *Grand Dictionnaire universel* demeure résolument négative, subordonnée à une éthique qui définit la grande œuvre avant tout par sa portée morale, et Larousse fait tardivement — l'article "Balzac" est de 1867, celui sur les diverses *Scènes* de 1875 — la synthèse des remarques hostiles qui avaient cours vingt ou trente ans plus tôt.' Raymond Trousson, 'Quand Pierre Larousse jugeait *La Comédie humaine*', *Revue littéraire en ligne*, 10 (2004), 1-20, p. 20.

the integrity of the original works.<sup>63</sup> The collection focused on his longer, more widely recognized novels, particularly those included in the school curricula, thereby reinforcing Balzac's status as a *classique scolaire*. Notably, these editions aligned with the four most frequently studied texts in the first half of the twentieth century: *Eugénie Grandet*, *Le Père Goriot*, *Le Lys dans la vallée*, and *Illusions perdues*.<sup>64</sup> While the Hatier collection sought to reach a broader readership by publishing a wider range of Balzac's work, the Larousse editions focused on consolidating his position within the educational curricula.

Jean Boudout, the editor of *Classiques Larousse*, offered a more rigorous and comprehensive presentation of Balzac's work. These editions were longer than Hatier's, included an average of 100 questions per text, and featured an expanded section on *Sujets de devoirs*, designed to develop students' writing skills through exercises such as the *explication de texte* and the *dissertation française*.<sup>65</sup> The comprehension questions aimed to contextualize Balzac's work within the landscape of seventeenth- and nineteenth-century literature and theatre. For example, the 1934 edition of *Le Père Goriot* included prompts that encouraged readers to compare Goriot with Shakespeare's *King Lear*<sup>66</sup> and to reflect on 'ce que Balzac doit aux grands écrivains classiques et aux philosophes du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle'.<sup>67</sup> These questions not only established a direct connection between Balzac and the literary giants of the Grand Siècle, but also invited readers to consider how Balzac revitalized and reinterpreted themes such as avarice, paternal love, and morally ambiguous social hierarchies for a contemporary

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<sup>63</sup> See Appendix A, Table A2 Balzac works printed and reprinted in the *Classiques Larousse* collection in Metropolitan France between 1934-63.

<sup>64</sup> Nathalie Denizot, *La scolarisation des genres littéraires (1802–2010)*, p. 219. Although these four texts were most used in school textbooks, other texts such as *La Cousine Bette*, *L'Avant-propos*, *La Peau de chagrin* and *César Birotteau* were also included in Denizot's data (p. 220). It is therefore unsurprising that these latter texts were also published in the *Petits classiques* collections.

<sup>65</sup> The *Petits classiques* generally followed a standard format: a one- to two-page summary of Balzac's life, a brief introduction to the text, and a set of questions and comments highlighting the author's merits. However, notable differences emerged, particularly in the Larousse collection, which included illustrations and a broader selection of dissertation topics.

<sup>66</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Le Père Goriot*, ed. Jean Boudout (Paris: Larousse, 1934), p. 107.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98-99.

readership. Balzac's connection to these earlier canonical authors can thus be interpreted as reciprocal: while Shakespeare and Molière undoubtedly influenced Balzac, he also reimagined their works and themes for a new era.

While these questions address specific dimensions of Balzac's work, they tend to reduce his writing to a set of recurring themes—character analyses and comparisons, descriptive techniques, contributions to the realist aesthetic, parallels with other authors, and rebuttals to critical attacks. Rather than encouraging nuanced analyses, they often distil criticism into reductive binaries, such as debating whether *La Cousine Bette* is an immoral novel.<sup>68</sup> Much like Hatier's collection, these questions tend to guide students toward reaffirming Balzac's greatness, thereby reinforcing his status as an established figure within the canon. In the 1954 edition of *Les Paysans*, students are invited to counter the claim that Balzac was a bad writer by analysing his description of *Les Aigues* in *Les Paysans*: 'On a prétendu que Balzac était un mauvais écrivain. Ne pouvez-vous prouver le contraire en étudiant la description des Aigues à l'automne?'.<sup>69</sup> Through these prompts, the Larousse editions also serve a dual purpose: they consolidate Balzac's literary legacy while guiding students to approach his work as 'classic', whose status is to be acknowledged, respected and upheld.

While this approach shares Hatier's emphasis on Balzac's greatness, the *Classiques Larousse* collection also alludes to the theatricality, popularity, and visual dynamism of Balzac's writing. In the 1952 edition of *La Cousine Bette*, readers are invited to demonstrate that 'il y a tout à la fois la profondeur d'analyse de Racine et l'artificiel d'Eugène Sue'.<sup>70</sup> This juxtaposition emphasizes the contradictory nature of Balzac's writing; the keen intellectual

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<sup>68</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *La Cousine Bette*, ed. Jean Dubois (Paris: Larousse, 1952), p. 99.

<sup>69</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Les Paysans*, ed. Jean Dubois (Paris: Larousse, 1954), p. 132.

<sup>70</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *La Cousine Bette*, p. 99. Sue's reception was driven by immense popularity and fleeting success, fostering a more superficial engagement with his work. In contrast, although Balzac also turned to the *roman-feuilleton* for wide dissemination, it was likely the intellectual depth and narrative complexity of his writing that enabled his reputation to surpass Sue's.

depth akin to Racine, and the sensationalism reminiscent of Sue's melodramatic narratives.<sup>71</sup> Additionally, the questions prompt readers to consider the novel's cinematic qualities: 'si l'on voulait faire un film de *La Cousine Bette*, quelles seraient les grandes lignes du scénario, les scènes importantes qu'il faudrait garder, celles qu'on devrait développer, enfin toutes les conditions qui devraient être réunies pour plier le roman aux nécessités artistiques du cinéma?'.<sup>72</sup> This question emerged at a time when *La Cousine Bette* had already been adapted to the screen in Max de Rieux's 1927 film. As Jean-François Rauger observes, the adaptation endowed the story with 'une dimension baroque, feuilletonesque, et souvent effrayante'<sup>73</sup> using techniques such as 'jeux de regards, gros plans, inserts soudains'<sup>74</sup> to heighten suspense and foreground key themes of rivalry and destructive ambition. This intersection of literature and cinema demonstrates how Balzac's writing, marked by its evocative atmosphere, visual acuity, and dramatic pacing, naturally lends itself to cinematic language, anticipating the visual grammar of film through its narrative design and contemporary relevance.

In addition to framing Balzac's work through questions that highlighted its cinematic qualities, the *Classiques Larousse* collection reinforced the symbiotic relationship between text and film through frontispiece illustrations, which were reminiscent of film stills, a visual strategy later adopted by the *parascolaire* editions.<sup>75</sup> Taken from the 1842 Furne edition, 'la

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<sup>71</sup> While Sue's works may now be overshadowed by Balzac's, they once enjoyed widespread popularity throughout Western Europe, with numerous adaptations, imitations, and translations into several languages.

<sup>72</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *La Cousine Bette*, p. 99.

<sup>73</sup> Jean-François Rauger, 'La Cousine Bette de Max de Rieux, un mécanisme fatal', in *Balzac à l'écran*, 58-59, p. 58.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>75</sup> The use of illustrations and portraits as a testament to a writer's prominence was popularized by Jules Jusserand, a distinguished diplomat who served as the French ambassador to the United States from 1903 to 1925. Jusserand's diplomatic career, alongside his cultural endeavours, made his selection as an editor at Hachette from 1887 to 1913 hardly incidental. One of his major projects was the creation of *Les Grands Écrivains Français*, a collection of critical reviews of France's most esteemed writers, including Balzac. Jusserand worked with critics such as Faguet, Boutroux and Lanson. For Jusserand, great writers were viewed as 'des génies puissants et charmants', 'des ancêtres nationaux' and 'des grands hommes', descriptive terms frequently used to characterize Balzac's work and personality, whether in the press, school textbooks, or the *Petits classiques*. Dragos Jipa, *La canonisation littéraire et l'avènement de la culture de masse*, p. 86.

plus grande série illustrée par l'auteur de son vivant',<sup>76</sup> these illustrations depict both primary and secondary characters, including Nanon, Madame Vauquer, Goriot, Genestas, and Nucingen, highlighting one of the central features of Balzac's work: character portraits.<sup>77</sup> The frontispiece thus offers an affordable avenue of visualization, as including one or two illustrations in an otherwise non-illustrated edition is a more cost-effective option than purchasing illustrated volumes from the Furne edition itself. Moreover, some editions, such as *Le Lys dans la vallée* and the second volume of *Illusions perdues* include drawn maps of Paris and the provinces, helping readers familiarize themselves with the realistic settings of Balzac's narratives. This reinforces the writer's acute sense of spatial and temporal awareness, reiterating his portrayal as a realist writer, particularly in his role as a 'copiste, secrétaire, sténographe et, mieux encore, daguerréotypiste'.<sup>78</sup>

As printing and lithographic techniques advanced throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially with the advent of the daguerreotype<sup>79</sup> and the photogravure, the inclusion of the author's portrait in the frontispiece became increasingly prevalent. This is evident in editions such as *Le Cousin Pons* and the first volume of *Illusions perdues*.<sup>80</sup> Between 1918 and 1930, editors such as Rouff, Fayard, Tallandier, and Flammarion 'cherchaient à allier l'art et la beauté du livre dans une édition populaire accessible à tous'.<sup>81</sup> The inclusion of the author's portrait thus enhanced the aesthetic appeal of these editions,

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<sup>76</sup> Tim Farrant, 'La vue d'en face? Balzac et l'illustration', p. 259. The 1842 Furne edition inspired artists such as J. David, Reville and Gervais to create plates-inset published in *Le Moniteur de la mode* in 1846. Originally commercialized as 'une édition de luxe à bon marché', the Furne edition combined luxury with affordability, something which the *Petits classiques* collections also strove to achieve.

<sup>77</sup> Apart from Genestas's portrait which comes from 'l'édition populaire de 1851-1853.'

<sup>78</sup> Jose-Luis Diaz, *Devenir Balzac: L'invention de l'écrivain par lui-meme*, p. 167.

<sup>79</sup> Marc Kereun reproduced the sole daguerreotype of Balzac taken by Bisson in 1842. Only two copies of this daguerreotype exist, one of which is currently housed in the Maison de Balzac.

<sup>80</sup> In the 1962 edition of *Illusions perdues*, Balzac's younger portrait graces the title page, drawing a parallel between the author's early ambitions and those of Lucien. In contrast, the 1958 edition of *Le Cousin Pons* features an older, more mature image of Balzac, perhaps the publisher's attempt to establish a connection between the writer and his characters, notably Pons, whose vast collection of priceless antiques mirrors Balzac's prolific output.

<sup>81</sup> Isabelle Olivero, *Les trois révolutions du livre de poche*, p. 256.

making Balzac virtually present and reinforcing his authorial identity within the French literary canon.<sup>82</sup>

In contrast to the broader range of texts published by Hatier and Larousse, the *Classiques Vaubourdolle* limited its corpus to two titles: *Le Père Goriot* and *Les Paysans*. Despite this small selection published in 1951, the series drew attention through its striking blue covers<sup>83</sup> and prominent portraits on the front page, giving the editions a distinctive visual identity.<sup>84</sup> Unlike the *Classiques Larousse* collection, which featured one or two illustrations in the frontispiece, the *Classiques Vaubourdolle* incorporated multiple illustrations throughout the text.<sup>85</sup> Initiated by editor René Vaubourdolle, the collection's layout closely resembled that of the *Classiques Larousse*.<sup>86</sup> *Le Père Goriot* was once again included, and by the 1950s, reinforced by its recurring presence in school textbooks and numerous cinematic adaptations. In other words, it had become one of Balzac's most revered works, described as 'un monument de notre culture, dont on remarquera qu'il a fait durant les années l'objet d'une piété toute particulière'.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, its inclusion in the collection served as an effective marketing strategy. The collection published an extensive series of classic texts that readers could take pleasure in purchasing, reading, and displaying in their personal libraries. Beyond their educational purposes, the *Classiques Vaubourdolle* editions stood out for their refined

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<sup>82</sup> Dragos Jipa argues that using the author's portrait in the frontispiece serves as a potent 'outil de canonisation, par la diffusion à grande échelle et dans un contexte matériel particulier (que ce soit dans une édition critique, une histoire illustrée de la littérature ou une monographie) de l'image d'un grand écrivain.' Dragos Jipa, *La canonisation littéraire et l'avènement de la culture de masse*, p. 81.

<sup>83</sup> The blue cover could be a nod towards the Librairie de la bibliothèque nationale collection created in 1863 by Nicholas David and a group of typographers from the Imprimerie Dubuisson. This collection targeted a more bourgeois readership 'qui aime se promener dans le quartier du Palais-Royal où elle est en vente chez le libraire Marpon', focusing on producing 'une petite collection de classiques à bas prix.' Isabelle Olivero, *Les trois révolutions du livre de poche*, p. 201.

<sup>84</sup> With its greater number of illustrations, this collection was more costly to print, likely accounting for the lower print runs. On average, authors including Stendhal, Sand, Chateaubriand, Hugo, Flaubert, and Zola, had one to two texts published.

<sup>85</sup> The illustrations are from the 20-volume Houssiaux edition of *La Comédie humaine* (1874-77).

<sup>86</sup> The Vaubourdolle collection was shorter than the *Classiques Larousse* editions, with a little under 100 pages. In addition, texts were published in one volume, unlike Larousse's collection which primarily published Balzac's texts in two volumes.

<sup>87</sup> Michel Lichtlé, 'La vie posthume du *Père Goriot* en France', p. 163.

aesthetic, making them desirable library volumes. Furthermore, they evoked a strong sense of familiarity and nostalgic reverence for the heritage and prestige of classic literature.

It was unexpected, however, that *Le Père Goriot* was paired with *Les Paysans*, a text that, according to Vaubourdolle, ‘demeure trop, aujourd’hui encore dans l’ombre’.<sup>88</sup> Praised for its ‘caractère exceptionnel’,<sup>89</sup> *Les Paysans* was defined as a ‘roman singulier et à part, il n’en est pas moins complet, total, pourrait-on dire, embrassant le réel et l’idée, le plus particulier et le plus général, roman classique en un mot et en tout point digne d’être étudié’.<sup>90</sup> Combining these texts reiterates the breadth and versatility of Balzac’s fiction, highlighting his extensive knowledge of France’s geography and social fabric: ‘[I]e roman des *Paysans* offre en effet, et à un degré éminent, les qualités communes à tous les romans de Balzac. L’art raffiné de la composition demeure sensible dans une œuvre pourtant inachevée, et qui reste dramatique. La puissance de l’évocation réaliste est la même que dans les romans les plus célèbres: tout détail porte vie’.<sup>91</sup> From the frenetic vibrancy of Parisian life in *Le Père Goriot* to the stark portrayal of rural struggles in *Les Paysans*, the latter presented a notably more pessimistic and unflinching view of provincial life, one that stood in contrast to its more idealized depictions in *Le Lys dans la vallée* or *Le Médecin de campagne*. Furthermore, the section featuring reader questions fosters comparisons between *Le Père Goriot* and *Les Paysans*, serving as an incentive to purchase both editions while affirming the latter’s importance in the canon.

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<sup>88</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Les Paysans*, ed. J. Baldacci (Paris: Hachette, 1951), p. 6.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6. Little is known about Vaubourdolle’s life or political affiliations, but his decision to publish *Les Paysans* was a bold one, given its controversial reception. Nonetheless, the novel was admired by Marx. Between the 1950s and 1980s, Marxist criticism gained prominence as a favoured lens for analysing Balzac, championed by figures such as Georg Lukács, Pierre Barbéris, and Pierre Macherey. By including a text favoured by Marxist thought, Vaubourdolle may have sought to attract the attention of leading Marxist intellectuals of the time.

The selection of authors in the *Petits classiques* collections thus reflects and reinforces a canon of predominantly male authors, with the exception of Sand, privileging works that emphasize character studies, genre distinctions, national identity and culture, as well as historical awareness. While these editions integrated questions that encouraged reflection on cinema, adaptation, and intermedial reading practices, they also played a role in shaping a broader nationalist discourse, presenting Balzac's greatness as emblematic of France's cultural superiority. This convergence was intentional: most of these works were not only reissued but also adapted during and after the collapse of the Vichy regime, a period marked by efforts to revive national pride and dignity. This strategic elevation of Balzac cultivated the image of an unassailable literary figure, diverting attention from the ideological tensions and sociopolitical implications embedded in his writing.

While the *Petits classiques* collections promoted a narrow and often uncritical view of Balzac's oeuvre, they ensured his wider accessibility, both among student readerships and 'amateurs de littérature'. Although Bellos describes Balzac as a 'passive participant in the development of French society',<sup>92</sup> exercising 'little or no direct influence over the changes in public and private morality',<sup>93</sup> his impact extends beyond literary achievement to encompass his foundational role in the emergence of paperback publishing. Ultimately, these collections served to preserve France's literary heritage during a turbulent era marked by two World Wars, economic instability, and growing anxieties over national identity, which undoubtedly placed considerable strain on the publishing industry. In response, publishers promoted and capitalized on national literary figures, shaping how their works were read, studied, and consumed. Even within what might appear to be a fixed corpus, the institutionalization of

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<sup>92</sup> David Bellos, *Balzac Criticism in France 1850–1900: The Making of a Reputation*, p. 146.

<sup>93</sup> *Id.*

Balzac's oeuvre has remained open to reinterpretation, allowing his legacy to be continually reframed across successive *parascolaires* and evolving cultural practices.

### 3.6. The Balzac Publishing Boom: Literature, Classics and Cinema (1930-60)

Between 1930 and 1960, *Le Père Goriot* remains the most frequently published text within the *Petits classiques* collections. However, other works, including *Le Colonel Chabert*, *Eugénie Grandet*, *Le Lys dans la vallée*, *La Cousine Bette*, *Le Cousin Pons*, and *Illusions perdues*, also secured their place within the series and gained further recognition through cinematic adaptations.<sup>94</sup> Given Balzac's consistent presence in these editions, the final section examines how this visibility may have shaped the broader publishing landscape in Metropolitan France, as reflected in the publishing frequency of the eight texts listed in Appendix A, Table A4.

The inclusion of *Eugénie Grandet*, *Le Père Goriot*, and *Le Cousin Pons*<sup>95</sup> on the Agrégation reading list in 1888, 1905 and 1910 marked a turning point in their publishing frequency. When these works became more widely studied in schools, their publication rates rose in tandem. As the remaining five texts were gradually integrated into the curriculum, they too were incorporated into the *Petits classiques* collections and reissued by a range of prominent publishers, including Calmann-Lévy, Garnier Frères, and Gallimard. Apart from *Le Colonel Chabert* whose publication peak occurred in the 1990s,<sup>96</sup> the publishing peaks for the remaining seven texts occurred between the 1930s and 1960s.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Except for *La Peau de chagrin*, which was not included in any of the three collections, the novel continues to play a significant role in France's national curriculum. The next chapter will explore its recurring presence in the *parascolaires*, including its inclusion in the 2023 Baccalauréat général.

<sup>95</sup> More recently, *Le Cousin Pons* was placed on the 2019 Agrégation reading list.

<sup>96</sup> See Appendix A, Table A3 for the publication history of *Le Colonel Chabert* in Metropolitan France during the 1990s.

<sup>97</sup> See Appendix A, Table A4 for the compilation of publication results from Tables A5 to A12.

Several factors may account for the increase in Balzac's publications during the 1940s and 1950s. The increase in Balzac-inspired adaptations produced during the German Occupation proved essential to maintaining his presence both on and off screen.<sup>98</sup> Between 1940 and 1944, seven of Balzac's works were adapted for the screen: *Tempête* by Dominique Bernard-Deschamps, loosely based on *Ferragus* (1940); *La Fausse maîtresse* (1942) by André Cayatte; *La Duchesse de Langeais* (1942) by Jacques de Baroncelli; *Vautrin* (1943) by Pierre Billon; *Un seul amour* (1943) by Pierre Blanchar, based on *La Grande Bretèche* (1831); and *Le Colonel Chabert* (1943) by René Le Hénaff. Though delayed due to wartime restrictions, *Le Père Goriot* was released in 1945 under the direction of Robert Vernay. Apart from *La Fausse maîtresse*, which was adapted for the first time in France in 1942, the rest of these works had earlier silent film adaptations and were soon going to be revisited during the RTF and ORTF eras between the 1950s and 1970s.

Under the Vichy regime, French filmmakers gravitated toward Balzac as a politically 'safe' yet culturally prestigious resource. His historical insight, vivid Parisian settings, and canonical status provided audiences with both an escape from reality and a space for ideological reflection and moral instruction, conveying a nostalgic vision of French national heritage. Max Andréoli argues that 'une des voies restées praticables pour le cinéma sous l'Occupation était l'adaptation, non sans circonspection, d'ouvrages littéraires—dont les romans de Balzac, écrivain qui par sa réputation européenne et sa notoriété d'auteur "réaliste" et conservateur paraissait offrir des garanties'.<sup>99</sup> However, Balzac's image as a conservative realist was largely constructed by filmmakers. His reputation during the Occupation must be understood within the framework of political agendas, nationalist discourse, cultural norms, and acts of censorship that governed the selection, presentation and dissemination of literature

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<sup>98</sup> See Véronique Monteilhet, 'Les adaptations balzaciennes sous l'occupation: un cinéma de collaboration ou de résistance?', *AB*, 3 (2002), 327-47.

<sup>99</sup> Max Andréoli, 'Place de Balzac dans le cinéma français sous l'Occupation', in *Balzac à l'écran*, 62-71, p. 65.

and its adaptations. His conservatism thus functioned more as a strategic projection imposed by filmmakers, rendering him particularly well-suited to the ideological demands of wartime France.

This political reframing is most clearly reflected in the sustained prominence of *Le Colonel Chabert*, both in print and on screen. A cornerstone of the *Petits classiques* series, published by Hatier in 1923 and reissued in 1947, and frequently adapted across various media, the novella retained cultural significance well into the postwar decades. It was adapted for television by Pierre Sabbagh in 1978 and later brought to the big screen by Yves Angelo in 1994, starring Gérard Depardieu. Its enduring relevance, including its continued presence in school curricula, as will be explored in Chapter Four, stems from the political depth and relevance of its themes.<sup>100</sup> The story of Chabert, a once-heroic Napoleonic officer confronting financial ruin and an existential crisis, reads as an allegory for the collective trauma and fractured sense of identity France endured during and after the Occupation. In times of political, historical and economic turmoil, the novella's themes remain powerfully relevant.

Balzac's oeuvre thus provided filmmakers with an effective vehicle to both reinforce nationalist narratives and elevate cinema to the realm of high culture. This dual ambition is most clearly embodied in the concept of the 'film littéraire',<sup>101</sup> a term coined by writer and screenwriter Jean Giraudoux in relation to his screenplay for Jacques de Baroncelli's 1942

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<sup>100</sup> Although his presidency in France would not begin until 1959, Charles de Gaulle met the start of the Second World War as a colonel and in 1940, was appointed as an undersecretary. Despite his strong political allegiances, he emigrated to Great Britain between 1940 and 1944 because he refused to accept France's government armistice with Germany. See Julian Jackson, *A Certain Idea of France: The Life of Charles de Gaulle* (London: Penguin Books, 2018), p. 185. The uncanny similarities between De Gaulle's and Chabert's hiatuses from their nation's political developments, their 'lost' identities and big personalities often subject to mockery and ridicule, demonstrates that adaptations also play a political role, implicitly underlining the sociopolitical challenges of an era.

<sup>101</sup> In 2023, the seminar *Le film littéraire* led by Professor Michel Viegnes at the University of Fribourg (CH), examined the symbiotic relationship between classic texts and their film adaptations. The syllabus focused on three films inspired by canonical authors, including Balzac, Flaubert, and Proust: *L'Amour de Swan* (Volker Schöndorff, 1984), *Madame Bovary* (Claude Chabrol, 1991), and *Ne touchez pas la hache* (Jacques Rivette, 2007).

film, *La Duchesse de Langeais*.<sup>102</sup> For Giraudoux, cinema was not merely popular entertainment but a legitimate extension of classic literature. In his *Avant-Propos*, Giraudoux frames cinema as a contemplative artform whose value rests not on its sensory effects but on its intellectual and aesthetic permanence, qualities traditionally associated with classic literature: '[l]a prose elle-même de l'organe le plus sonore de l'humanité ne vaudra que si elle mérite d'être accueillie dans ce livre d'où elle s'exhale en silence. C'est en ceci que doit résider la sanction pour tout film, la publication [...]'.<sup>103</sup> For him, cinematic works must aspire to the continuity and refinement of literature, elevating the screenplay to a status equal to, if not surpassing, that of the film itself. Within this framework, Giraudoux's screenplay functions both as an artistic manifesto and a critical meditation on adaptation.<sup>104</sup> His assertion of cinema's literary vocation anticipates later auteurist approaches, such as Rivette's *Out 1* (1971) and *Ne touchez pas la hache* (2007). This intellectual lineage positions Giraudoux not merely as a screenwriter or adaptor, but as a central figure in the mid-twentieth-century movement to elevate cinema to the level of high art.

A second factor contributing to the surge in publications lies in the commercial appeal of classic texts, reinforced by the growing popularity of pocket editions, most notably the *Livre de poche* series, which will be further examined in Chapter Four. In the wake of the First and Second World Wars and the economic fallout of the Great Depression, publishers needed to raise book prices significantly; from an average of '3.50 francs to almost 5 francs; they continued to rise in price, from 7.50 francs in 1923 to 9 francs in 1926, and 12 francs in 1927, only to finish at 15 francs on average in 1930'.<sup>105</sup> Faced with declining novel sales,

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<sup>102</sup> See 'Théâtre et film,' published in *Comœdia* on 11 April 1942. In 1942, Giraudoux also published the screenplay in an illustrated edition featuring drawings by Jean-Francis Laglenne.

<sup>103</sup> Jean Giraudoux, *Le film de La Duchesse de Langeais* (Paris: Éditions Bernard Grasset, 1942), p. 25.

<sup>104</sup> In the preface to his screenplay, Giraudoux also criticizes the reasoning behind the film's altered ending, where Antoinette dies melodramatically in Montriveau's arms rather than off-screen in a convent. He deems this change as a concession to 'le Dieu de convention.' What might have conveyed a tragic and authentic sense of inevitability was softened to align with societal expectations, leading Giraudoux to reproach modern sensibilities for no longer permitting the full expression of raw, tragic grandeur.

<sup>105</sup> Isabelle Olivero, 'The Paperback Revolution in France 1850-1950', p. 81.

publishers redirected their efforts toward more profitable sectors: contemporary fiction collections such as Horace de Carbuccia's *Le Livre d'aujourd'hui* (1931), Stock's *Le Roman cosmopolite à 6 francs*, and Calmann-Lévy's *Lisez*, as well as reprints of classic works celebrated in school curricula. This didactic imperative was further reinforced by the two major encyclopaedic series of the time: 'The Collection Armand Colin initiated in 1921, which sought to "popularise without lowering standards" ('vulgariser sans abaisser'), and the Collection Payot, which announced itself as the "French encyclopaedia of high culture" ('Encyclopédie française de haute culture')'.<sup>106</sup>

In 1926, the Éditions Tallandier turned its attention to reprinting nineteenth-century classics, primarily *in-8*. These editions appealed to readers who wished to identify themselves with an elite cultural sphere, offering collectable items that graced library shelves as *beaux livres* and carried recognised cultural authority. Between 1927 and 1932, Tallandier released *Les Contes drolatiques* (1927, *in-4*), *Eugénie Grandet* (1927, *in-8*), *La Cousine Bette* (1929, *in-8*), an edition that featured stills from Rieux's 1927 film adaptation, *La Peau de chagrin* (1930, *in-8*), *Le Père Goriot* (1930, *in-8*), and an illustrated edition of *Le Père Goriot* (1932, *in-8*). When the series was revived in 1943, during the Second World War, it was renamed under the telling title *Petite Bibliothèque nationale*. However, Balzac's work was not republished in the collection. Instead, it was primarily disseminated through cinema, where it provided a reassuring affirmation of French culture and identity in a form that was more readily accessible, entertaining, and comprehensible than his work. The revised collection focused on ancient and medieval authors, along with Goethe,<sup>107</sup> effectively

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<sup>106</sup> *Id.*

<sup>107</sup> All texts were published in 1943. They include: Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, Virgil's *Les Bucoliques et les Géorgiques*, Cicero's *Les Catilinaires*, Dante's *Inferno*, Corneille's *Le Cid*, Boileau's *Satires*, Pascal's *Pensées*, Voltaire's *Histoire de Charles XII, roi de Suède* and Goethe's *Faust*. The BnF online catalogue does not indicate the translator of Tallandier's edition of *Faust*, however notable French translations include Gérard de Nerval's 1828 version, which received praise from Goethe himself. See Stephen Butler, *The "Fausts" of Gérard de Nerval: Intertextuality, Translation, Adaptation* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2018).

sidestepping the complexities of modern literature and concluding with a German Romantic *Übermensch* whose work carried significant ideological weight. This represented an appropriation of cosmopolitan culture for authoritarian purposes, effectively hijacking it for political and cultural ends. Despite the difficulties confronted by the publishing industry in the first half of the twentieth century, classic texts came to embody more than mere commercial value. They reinforced the cultural prestige of the *lycées*' programmes and helped reconnect both students and the wider reading public with a sense of nationalist pride and nostalgic continuity. In engaging with these works, readers could reclaim their intellectual autonomy and, above all else, rekindle a sense of hope for the future.

A third explanation for the increasing success of Balzac's work may lie in its particularly strong resonance with female readers, especially novels such as *Eugénie Grandet*, *Le Lys dans la vallée*, and *La Cousine Bette*. Over the course of his career, Balzac received a remarkable volume of correspondence from women in France and abroad. Ranging from impassioned praise to pointed criticism, these letters attested to the emotional and intellectual connection many women felt his work attracted, earning him the epithet of 'le consolateur tant cherché, celui qui comprend'.<sup>108</sup> In the twentieth century, Balzac's novels continued to appeal to female readers, particularly as women gained increasing access to higher forms of education, including competitive examinations such as the Agrégation. Although he appeared less frequently than Molière, who was featured thirteen times on the Agrégation féminine between 1890 and 1914, he was included twice during that period, exclusively on the women's examination syllabus, and appeared twice more on the Agrégation de lettres modernes between 1956 and 1980.<sup>109</sup> Other prominent authors came from the Grand Siècle, notably

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<sup>108</sup> *Id.* In 1832, Zulma Carraud wrote to Balzac saying that he possesses 'une intelligence du cœur de la femme que jamais ne fut donnée à aucun homme.' Honoré de Balzac, *Correspondance avec Zulma Carraud*, ed. Marcel Bouteron, June 1832 (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), p. 16.

<sup>109</sup> See Table 2 of Anne-Marie Thiesse et. al, 'Le Déclin de l'âge classique et naissance des classiques: l'évolution des programmes littéraires de l'Agrégation depuis 1890', p. 99.

Racine, Corneille and Rabelais. Racine was the most frequently featured, appearing 20 times between 1890 and 1914 on the Agrégation hommes.<sup>110</sup> Among the nineteenth-century authors, Hugo was the most prominent, with 11 appearances on the Agrégation féminine.<sup>111</sup> Balzac's relatively limited presence on the Agrégation may be attributed to his unvarnished realism, which may have appeared too stark for the sensibilities of such a turbulent period, especially in the tense years leading up to the First World War.

The increased publication of Balzac's texts during this period can also be linked to their portrayal of idealized gender roles, particularly through characters including Eugénie, Goriot, Rastignac, Madame de Mortsauf, and Adeline Hulot. Balzac's complex and contradicting views on gender, Catholicism, and political ideologies allowed a wide range of readers with varying beliefs to project their own values onto his work, contributing to its appeal in textbooks and on screen. Balzac's writings reflected diverse ideological stances, making him 'libéral et absolutiste, radical et modéré, légitimiste et progressiste, réactionnaire et révolutionnaire, etc. Il fut tout cela pour la simple raison qu'il ne cessa de rechercher ce qu'il y avait de bon, d'excellent même, dans tous les systèmes, avec l'espoir d'en faire passer la synthèse de l'action'.<sup>112</sup> This ideological versatility, coupled with some of the works' alignment with traditional gender norms, likely contributed to his popularity in educational curricula where character analyses, genre studies, and moral assessments of the novel were central to academic discourse. However, this success is both revealing and problematic, as many of the female characters in these eight texts<sup>113</sup> are defined by their conformity to societal expectations, familial obligations, and their subservience to male counterparts who rescue

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<sup>110</sup> *Id.*

<sup>111</sup> *Id.*

<sup>112</sup> Saint-Paulien, 'Napoléon, Balzac et l'empire de *La Comédie humaine*', p. 145.

<sup>113</sup> Notably Pauline Gaudin de Witschnau, the Comtesse Ferraud, Eugénie Grandet, Delphine de Nucingen, Anastasie de Restaud, Madame de Mortsauf, Adeline Hulot, and even Valérie Hulot, who yields to Bette's control.

them from fates such as prostitution, as exemplified by the Comtesse Ferraud.<sup>114</sup> The depiction of these female characters upholds a traditional ideal of femininity and submission. This reflects the values promoted by the conservative political factions of the Third Republic.<sup>115</sup>

The final factor for the publishing peak of Balzac's work involves the commemoration of the writer's centenary in 1950, which united readers, scholars, and publishers nationwide. To mark the occasion, Roger Pierrot organized an exhibition at the Bibliothèque nationale on 14 November 1950 as part of the *Semaine Balzac*.<sup>116</sup> The accompanying exhibition catalogue featured a range of portraits and illustrations of Balzac, including an 1822 portrait of his father by Marie-Éléonore Godefroid, a caricature of Balzac by Nadar, illustrations by Gavarni, and a copy of the dedication of *Le Père Goriot* to Madame Hanska.

Publishers also revisited *La Comédie humaine*, reorganizing the collection either according to the internal chronology of the narratives or based on their original publication dates. Through the organization of Balzac's texts into multi-volume collections and varied arrangements, publishers offered new perspectives on how readers could navigate his work and engage with its nonlinear structure: 'leur simple possibilité atteste la capacité de l'architecture balzacienne à allier rigueur logique et plasticité, à offrir plusieurs entrées et parcours possibles et en même temps qu'un ordre, toute liberté pour le bouleverser'.<sup>117</sup> In this

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<sup>114</sup> Between the 1940s and 1970s, *Eugénie Grandet* was frequently published alongside *Pierrette* and *Ursule Mirouët*. In 1946, Daubin issued an edition pairing it with *Une fille d'Ève* and *Le Colonel Chabert*, while F. Hazan's 1949 edition included *Ursule Mirouët*. The 1966 edition from Étampe Gasnier paired the novel with *Ursule Mirouët*, *Pierrette*, and other *Études de mœurs* works, such as *Le Curé de Tours*, *La Rabouilleuse*, *L'interdiction*, *Le Contrat de mariage*, and *Autre étude de la femme*. In 1969, the Presses de la Renaissance also published it with *Pierrette*. Most of these editions featured female protagonists whose virtue and submission lead to tragic fates, emphasizing the vulnerability of the *femme au foyer*.

<sup>115</sup> This included the *Bloc national* which was in favour of promoting military forces and Catholic values. Cited by William D. Ervine, 'French Conservatives and the "New Right" during the 1930's', *French Historical Studies*, 8 (1974), 534-62, p. 559.

<sup>116</sup> Other events included *Les Journées Balzac à la Sorbonne*, the tribute to Balzac held at the Grand Amphithéâtre of the Sorbonne, and a series of debates and discussions at the Centre culturel international de Royaumont. See Roger Pierrot et al., *Honoré de Balzac : 1799-1850 : exposition organisée pour commémorer le centenaire de sa mort* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1950).

<sup>117</sup> Joëlle Gleize, *Honoré de Balzac: Bilan critique* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2005), p. 47.

development, the contributions of Pierre-Georges Castex were pivotal. During his tenure at the Sorbonne from 1956 to 1982, he produced numerous publications, such as his 1961 seminar, *Nouvelles et contes de Balzac: études philosophiques*.<sup>118</sup> This was followed by his 1963 Garnier Frères edition of *Le Père Goriot*, and culminated in the monumental publication of *La Comédie humaine* in the Pléiade series (1976-81), which definitively established the writer's place within academic scholarship.

These editions were designed to honour Balzac's legacy, featuring exclusive formats with leather covers, *papier bible*, and recognizable illustrations, notably from the Furne edition, reflecting the enduring national esteem for his work. In his introduction to the 1963 Garnier edition of *Le Père Goriot*, for example, Castex praised both the novel's historical significance and the vitality of its characters. He emphasized the novel's autonomous status, affirming that Balzac 'a su préserver l'unité nécessaire à toute œuvre d'art'.<sup>119</sup> Castex also highlighted Balzac's youthful ambitions, 'cette idée de conquérir la société et de régner sur elle'<sup>120</sup> as a driving force behind the novel's central conflicts. His edition thus paid tribute to Balzac's creative genius, presenting *Le Père Goriot* as a self-contained masterpiece while situating it within the larger vision of *La Comédie humaine*.

This ongoing interest in Balzac's oeuvre also led to an expansion in multi-volume publishing, as publishers aimed to serialize a significant portion, if not the entirety of *La Comédie humaine*. Collections included the 16-volume edition *Le Club français du livre* (1949-53), edited by Albert Béguin and Jean A. Ducourneau, and the 28-volume edition *Le Club de l'honnête homme* (1956-63), edited by Maurice Bardèche. Béguin's edition stands out for its chronological arrangement of the novels based on the period in which their stories

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<sup>118</sup> See Pierre-Georges Castex, *Nouvelles et contes de Balzac (études philosophiques). Les Deux rêves. L'Elixir de longue vie. Jésus-Christ en Flandre. Les proscrits. Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu. Gambara. Massimilla Doni. Melmoth réconcilié* (Paris: Centre de documentation universitaire, 1961).

<sup>119</sup> Pierre-Georges Castex, *Introduction au Père Goriot* (Paris: Garnier frères, 1963), p. XI.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. XXII.

are set, thus maintaining a continuity within the fictional universe.<sup>121</sup> This approach contrasts with the 24-volume series by Éditions Rencontre (1958-62), where Chollet's prefaces focus on the actual chronology of Balzac's writing and publication dates. By comparison, the first eleven-volume Gallimard-Pléiade edition (1952-64) represents a pivotal moment in Balzac's place within the publishing canon as inclusion in the Pléiade series leaves a 'mark of recognition and prestige for an author's contributions to literature. It is a major sign that the said author belongs to the literary canon'.<sup>122</sup>

Across these collections, *Le Colonel Chabert*,<sup>123</sup> *Eugénie Grandet*,<sup>124</sup> *Le Père Goriot*,<sup>125</sup> *Le Lys dans la vallée*,<sup>126</sup> and *Illusions perdues*<sup>127</sup> were typically placed in earlier volumes, while *La Peau de chagrin*,<sup>128</sup> *La Cousine Bette*,<sup>129</sup> and *Le Cousin Pons*<sup>130</sup> appeared in later volumes and were published less frequently between the 1930s and 1960s.<sup>131</sup> Notably, *Le Colonel Chabert*, *Eugénie Grandet*, *Le Père Goriot*, and *Le Lys dans la vallée* were often placed within the first five volumes of any given series, apart from a single instance in which

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<sup>121</sup> The chronology was inspired by the 1912 *La Renaissance du livre* edition, influencing editors such as A. Martel and Guy le Prat to republish the texts. Martel's edition was released between 1946 and 1951, while le Prat's appeared in 1960.

<sup>122</sup> Jean Barré et al. 'Operationalizing Canonicity: A Quantitative Study of French 19th and 20th Century Literature', p. 6.

<sup>123</sup> See Appendix A, Table A5 for the publication history of *Le Colonel Chabert* in Metropolitan France between the 1930s and the 1960s.

<sup>124</sup> See Appendix A, Table A6 for the publication history of *Eugénie Grandet* in Metropolitan France between the 1930s and the 1960s.

<sup>125</sup> See Appendix A, Table A7 for the publication history of *Le Père Goriot* in Metropolitan France between the 1930s and the 1960s.

<sup>126</sup> See Appendix A, Table A8 for the publication history of *Le Lys dans la vallée* in Metropolitan France between the 1930s and the 1960s.

<sup>127</sup> See Appendix A, Table A9 for the publication history of *Illusions perdues* in Metropolitan France between the 1930s and the 1960s.

<sup>128</sup> See Appendix A, Table A10 for the publication history of *La Peau de chagrin* in Metropolitan France between the 1930s and the 1960s.

<sup>129</sup> See Appendix A, Table A11 for the publication history of *La Cousine Bette* in Metropolitan France between the 1930s and the 1960s.

<sup>130</sup> See Appendix A, Table A12 for the publication history of *Le Cousin Pons* in Metropolitan France between the 1930s and the 1960s.

<sup>131</sup> It was also during this period that *Les Contes drolatiques* entered the Pléiade series, with the first edition appearing in 1959 and a second edition in 1966. This ensured that an archaic and often marginalised work secured a place in the Balzac canon through a serious, legitimate, and prestigious edition. See Takeshi Matsumura, 'Désinvolture ou imposture? Sur quelques éditions modernes des *Cent Contes drolatiques*', *Glaliceur*, 65 (2022), 1-10.

*Le Lys dans la vallée* appeared in volume eight of the Gallimard series. The placement of a text within multi-volume publishing may reflect its relative standing among the rest of Balzac's work. This aligns with the fact that the four most prominently positioned texts were also the ones most frequently taught in schools, adapted for theatre and film, and published between the 1930s and 1960s. For instance, *Le Colonel Chabert* was published forty-five times, *Le Lys dans la vallée* forty-seven times, *Le Père Goriot* seventy-five times, and *Eugénie Grandet* ninety-three times. This pattern strongly suggests that a text's canonical status and popularity is reflected in its publishing frequency, (re)adaptations, and recurring presence in educational curricula.

The period from the late 1940s to the 1970s also witnessed the creation of several major scholarly institutions dedicated to the study of Balzac and his oeuvre: *Les Études balzaciennes*, founded by Marcel Bouteron and *La Société des Amis d'Honoré de Balzac* by Léon Gédéon in 1949; *Le Groupe d'Études balzaciennes*<sup>132</sup> in 1959, as well as *Le Groupe International de Recherches balzaciennes* in 1975.<sup>133</sup> These organizations facilitated the creation of academic journals such as *L'Année balzacienne* (1960), which disseminated research on Balzac's oeuvre internationally. This scholarly activity reinforced the prominence of French erudition at a time when globalization posed challenges to its influence and prestige.<sup>134</sup>

The period from the 1930s to the 1960s thus proved crucial for Balzac's visibility, marked by a surge of interest from publishers, scholars, and filmmakers. While new editions

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<sup>132</sup> Founded under the patronage of André Billy, Marcel Bouteron, Jacques Duron, Jean Pommier, William Royce and Pierre-Georges Castex.

<sup>133</sup> The *GIRB* was founded in 1975 by a group of French and international scholars under the leadership of Claude Duchet (Université Paris 8). It was established with the aim of fostering collaborative research on Balzac's work across national and disciplinary boundaries.

<sup>134</sup> By the 1940s and 1950s, countries in Western Europe 'fell under the immense cultural, economic and political influence of the United States.' In fear of losing France's national identity, it became commonplace to contrast 'French good taste, quality, erudition, individuality, and manners with American banality, conformity, anti-intellectualism, and optimism.' Herrick Chapman, 'Modernity and National Identity in Postwar France', *French Historical Studies*, 22 (1999), 291-314, p. 296-98.

were infrequent,<sup>135</sup> his texts were consistently reprinted every decade, especially *Le Colonel Chabert*, *Eugénie Grandet*, *Le Père Goriot*, and *Le Lys dans la vallée*. In some cases, these reprints occurred within short intervals, suggesting both Balzac's continuous best-selling appeal and a commercial strategy to revive interest in his work, harking back to nineteenth-century publishing practices. Notable examples include the 1930 and 1932 Tallandier editions of *Le Père Goriot*,<sup>136</sup> the 1943 and 1945 Gründ editions of *Le Lys dans la vallée*,<sup>137</sup> and the 1949 Larousse editions of *Eugénie Grandet*.<sup>138</sup>

Balzac's continued presence in the national curricula, the *Petits classiques* collections and the broader publishing landscape emphasizes the significant role his work played in shaping French national memory and cultural identity. The repeated selection and republication of the eight texts attest to their pedagogic value and their symbolic weight as cultural artefacts. These texts do not simply transmit historical knowledge or literary technique; rather, they act as active agents in the formation of a collective imaginary. The institutional canonization of Balzac must be understood as a strategic and culturally resonant act. The works selected for curricular study, pocket editions, and cinematic adaptation serve not only as educational tools but also as *lieux de mémoire*, to borrow Pierre Nora's term. As cultural touchstones, they forge a connection between the past and the present, sustaining a curated vision of greatness, refinement, and national pride rooted in France's literary and historical heritages.

Balzac's presence in this symbolic constellation is particularly potent because of his

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<sup>135</sup> In most reprints, the main text remains unchanged, with publishers rarely introducing substantial editorial revisions. However, the introductory materials, typically written by Balzac specialists, serve a crucial role in contextualising the works for contemporary readers. Among the most frequently cited contributors are Marcel Bouteron, Maurice Allem, Albert Béguin, Pierre-George Castex, and Isabelle Mimouni. In more recent paperback editions (notably the *Livre de poche* and *Folio classique*), scholars such as Gaëtan Picon, Michel Serres, Patrick Berthier, and Nadine Satiat have offered updated prefaces that reflect shifting critical perspectives on Balzac's oeuvre.

<sup>136</sup> See Appendix A, Table A7.

<sup>137</sup> See Appendix A, Table A8.

<sup>138</sup> See Appendix, A, Table A6.

detailed and nuanced portrayal of the social, economic, and moral landscape of France before, during, and after its Revolutions. His narratives, featuring recurring characters, diverse urban and provincial settings, and a broad range of social types, present a comprehensive depiction of the nation during a period of substantial sociopolitical and economic change. His texts thus become vehicles through which France continues to define and redefine what it remembers, values, and understands through its own cultural lineage.



## Chapter 4 – Classics, Classrooms and Cinema: Pocket Editions, *Parascolaires*, Baccalauréat, *Séquences*, *Dossiers pédagogiques* (1958-2024)

This chapter brings together the trajectories traced in Chapters One, Two, and Three to examine how the publishing, educational, and audiovisual spheres, especially theatre, television, and cinema have continued to rearticulate Balzac's academic and cultural presence in France from the second half of the twentieth century to the present day. It examines the increasingly coordinated strategies deployed across these modes of dissemination to show how editorial presentation, curricular incorporation, and screen adaptation work in concert to reaffirm, reframe, and expand his literary image. In tracing these intersecting developments, the chapter demonstrates how such cross-sectoral collaborations sustain Balzac's relevance and shed new light on the more speculative, eclectic, and formally experimental dimensions of his oeuvre for contemporary audiences.

The *Petits classiques* editions positioned Balzac as a pioneer of French realism, presenting works such as *Eugénie Grandet* and *Le Père Goriot* as the 'modèles du réalisme balzacien et modèles narratifs'.<sup>1</sup> This editorial strategy contributed to what Denizot and Veck describe as 'une sorte de vulgate scolaire'<sup>2</sup> in which Balzac's novels were framed as quintessential examples of nineteenth-century French realist fiction, often alongside the works of Flaubert and Zola.

While this 'vulgate scolaire' continued to shape Balzac's portrayal as a longstanding realist writer well into the second half of the twentieth century, this chapter seeks to nuance that legacy. It will examine how publishing and broadcasting developments have contributed to reconfiguring the writer's canonical image for contemporary audiences. Central to this

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<sup>1</sup> Joëlle Gleize, *Honoré de Balzac: Bilan critique* (Paris: Éditions Nathan, 1994), p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> Nathalie Denizot, *La scolarisation des genres littéraires (1802–2010)*, p. 256. 'L'existence de cette vulgate scolaire est visible à travers deux exemples, pris cette fois non plus dans les manuels, mais dans les listes du baccalauréat des années 1990, étudiées par Bernard Veck, et dans des ouvrages parascolaires'. *Id.*

process is the proliferation of his works in the *Classiques de poche* and *Folio classique* collections, the Baccalauréat syllabi, the *parascolaires*, and the *séquences pédagogiques*.<sup>3</sup> The abundance of television and film adaptations of his work in France has further reinforced this renewed visibility. These intersecting editorial and audiovisual practices operate through distinct yet mutually reinforcing mechanisms that reveal how the realist label is historically contingent upon shifting sociocultural and political contexts.

Structured in five sections, this chapter begins by examining the promotion of Balzac's work through mass-market publishing, with particular emphasis on the *Classiques de poche* series launched by the *Livre de poche* in 1958. The second section considers the impact of media transformations from the 1960s to the 1980s, tracing the dynamic interplay between these pocket editions, as well as televised and cinematic portrayals of Balzac's work. This period also saw a redefinition of Balzac's presence in cinema by key figures of the Nouvelle Vague, notably Rivette and Truffaut, whose experimental approaches challenged traditional forms of filmmaking in novel-to-film adaptations. Their interventions introduced a more fluid and avant-garde vision of Balzac, one that stood in stark contrast to the classic portrayals prevalent in TV-film adaptations disseminated by the RTF and ORTF. The third section explores the convergence of publishing and screen media in the 1990s, focusing on the mutually reinforcing strategies of book marketing and heritage screen adaptations as evidenced through book covers and film posters. The fourth section turns to Balzac's evolving institutional presence from the 2000s onward, analysing his continued relevance in the Baccalauréat corpus, as well as the *parascolaires* and *séquences* editions. The final section examines the *Zéro de conduite* pedagogic dossiers used to promote Balzac's work from 2012 to 2023, highlighting how cinematic adaptations have become an integral classroom

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<sup>3</sup> The term *séquence* refers to 'un ensemble de séances autour d'un même objet d'études (un groupement de textes, une œuvre complète, etc.)<sup>3</sup> taught at the collège and lycée levels. Nathalie Denizot, 'La séquence didactique', *Recherches*, 20 (1994), 43-49, p. 44. They are presented to teachers in magazine formats, with ideas for lesson plans, activities and comprehension questions.

component in the era of multimedia learning. These teaching dossiers position screen adaptations as key gateways into Balzac's oeuvre, inviting students to engage with reinterpretations of his work rather than solely with the original texts. This approach reflects a broader shift in the portrayal, interpretation, and transmission of classic literature through the medium of film.

#### 4.1. Disseminating Balzac via Pocket Editions: *Classiques de poche*

By the 1950s, Balzac had been 'figé dans son statut d'auteur classique, scolaire'.<sup>4</sup> His works were firmly embedded in school curricula and widely available in multiple volume as well as stand-alone editions. A key milestone in this publishing landscape was the creation of the *Livre de poche* by Henri Filipacchi in 1953. Launched to meet a growing demand for affordable literature, the *Livre de poche* soon became one of the largest distributors of classic texts, offering extensive collections tailored to a broad readership. Despite early resistance from authors such as Henri Michaux, Julien Gracq, and Maurice Blanchot, who objected to the reduced size<sup>5</sup> of the volumes, the series' lower production costs, increased accessibility, and convenient format contributed to its rapid success. Its growing monopoly became so influential that being published in a pocket edition came to symbolize 'la consécration d'un auteur'.<sup>6</sup> While nineteenth-century authors largely relied on educational institutions, notably the Académie française to achieve recognition, legitimization, and canonization, twentieth-century writers increasingly turned to publishing houses to establish their reputations. The critical and

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<sup>4</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1976), p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Some commentators viewed the rise of pocket editions as a threat to the prestige of literary culture, arguing that it dismantled what they saw as an aristocracy of readers and thereby diminished the intellectual status of classic literature. In a 1964 interview conducted by INA, one interviewee remarked: 'Ça a fait lire un tas de gens qui n'avaient pas besoin de lire finalement, qui n'avaient jamais ressenti le besoin de lire. Avant ils lisaient *Nous deux* ou *La Vie en fleurs*. Et d'un seul coup, ils se sont retrouvés avec Sartre dans les mains.' 'Le livre de poche, ça fait lire des gens qui n'en avaient pas besoin', *Ina Culture*, 21 September 1964 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQ-Gp6XOE7A>> [accessed on 25 April 2025].

<sup>6</sup> Isabelle Olivero, *Les trois révolutions du livre de poche* (Paris: Sorbonne Université Presses, 2022). p. 316.

commercial success of these editions spurred other major publishing houses, such as Flammarion, Presses de la Cité, and Gallimard, to launch their own paperback series: *J'ai lu* (1958), *Presses Pocket* (1971), and *Folio* (1971),<sup>7</sup> respectively.

The first Balzac text published by the *Livre de poche* was *La Duchesse de Langeais* in 1958, which was paired with *La Fille aux yeux d'or*.<sup>8</sup> Although Baroncelli's film and Giraudoux's screenplay were released sixteen years prior to the pocket edition, the film's critical and commercial success brought greater visibility and public appreciation to the text, positioning it as a fitting candidate for inclusion in the pocket collection.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the decision to pair *La Duchesse de Langeais* with *La Fille aux yeux d'or*—the latter adapted for film by Jean-Gabriel Albicocco in 1961, starring Marie Laforêt—appears to reflect a deliberate effort to restore Balzac's critical standing at a time when his work was being challenged by proponents of the Nouveau Roman.<sup>10</sup> With their enigmatic allure, heightened melodrama, and

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<sup>7</sup> *Folio classique* will be examined for its contemporary marketing strategies, which include redesigned cover pages featuring film posters and the use of social media platforms to promote classic literature and engage with student readerships: 'L'enrichissement des éditions se joue aussi en introduisant du lien entre lecteurs et éditeur. Celui-ci offre un prolongement du livre sur Internet, notamment en répondant aux questions que les lecteurs posent sur Facebook ou par mail. Il montre ainsi que, derrière un auteur classique "mort", il y a un éditeur "vivant", qui fait vivre le classique. Par le biais du webmarketing, l'éditeur va chercher les lecteurs sur leur terrain. À la rentrée scolaire 2015, Folio a lancé une communication sur les réseaux sociaux (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) en direction des lycéens, les invitant à discuter des livres prescrits autour du hashtag #FinisTonClassique: il s'agissait de détourner, par l'humour, la difficulté souvent rencontrée par les élèves à aller jusqu'au bout d'un livre prescrit.' Blanche Cerquiglini, 'De quoi les classiques sont-ils le nom? Marketing et patrimoine', *Littératures classiques*, 3 (2016), 45-57, p. 50.

<sup>8</sup> Although both texts appear in the same volume, the cover features an illustration of Antoinette in her habit, gazing sorrowfully at Montriveau. The title font for *La Duchesse* is noticeably larger than that of *La Fille aux yeux d'or*, suggesting a visual hierarchy that positions the former as the more significant work.

<sup>9</sup> Véronique Monteilhet argues that that film production during France's German occupation was strikingly paradoxical because despite severe economic hardship, the period saw a remarkable boom in novel-to-film adaptations. These films navigated a dual register, at once embodying a cinema of resistance and one of collaboration, while offering escapist spectacles that catered to 'cette volonté de montrer la vie fastueuse de personnages riches dans des décors majestueux : la plupart des œuvres choisies pour être adaptées mettent en scène des aristocrates au cœur de la vie parisienne mondaine.' Véronique Monteilhet, 'Les adaptations balzaciennes sous l'occupation: Un cinéma de collaboration ou de résistance?', p. 329.

<sup>10</sup> Authors, critics, and theorists such as Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute, Jean Ricardou, and Claude Simon questioned his continued relevance, criticising his formulaic narrative structures, digressive descriptions, reductive treatment of realism, and his apparent alignment with outdated bourgeois values. Works include Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Pour un nouveau roman* (Paris: Ed. de Minuit, 1963), Claude Simon, Nathalie Sarraute, *Discours de Stockholm* (Paris: Ed. Minuit, 1986) and Jean Ricardou, *Problèmes du Nouveau Roman* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967). Scott Lee describes the 1950s and 1960s as a period of relative instability in Balzac's critical reception and legacy, characterizing it as the writer's 'low point.' However, his increasing presence in pocket editions counteracted this decline. See Scott Lee, 'Balzac's Legacy', *The Cambridge Companion to Balzac*, ed. Owen Heathcote & Andrew Watts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 175-88, p. 183.

exploration of fluid gender dynamics, both narratives resist any reductive framing of Balzac as a mere realist or chronicler of bourgeois society, instead showcasing the breadth and theatrical flair of his creative vision. It was precisely their gripping plots and dramatic twists that first captivated readers and fuelled the success of early pocket collections such as the *Bibliothèque des chemins de fer*.

*La Duchesse de Langeais* and *La Fille aux yeux d'or* were published in the *Classiques de poche* series, first launched in 1958 by Michel Simonin as part of a commercially astute initiative that celebrated France's literary giants. The series aimed to honour the canonical stature of these authors while maintaining accessibility to a broad readership. Balzac's inclusion was reinforced by the critical engagement and publications of prominent Balzac scholars, including, but not limited to André Maurois, Maurice Bardèche, Pierre Barbéris, Éric Bordas, Chantal Massol, Nicole Mozet, and Isabelle Mimouni:

Cette nouvelle série n'est pas conçue dans un esprit scolaire. Elle entend présenter les grandes œuvres consacrées par le temps dans tous les pays et remettre en lumière certains écrivains qui, faute d'une diffusion suffisante, n'ont pas conquis la notoriété qu'ils méritaient. Selon la règle du Livre de poche, tous les textes seront publiés intégralement dans l'édition la plus correcte et, s'il s'agit d'auteurs étrangers, dans la traduction la plus fidèle. Pour chaque volume, un des plus grands écrivains français de ce temps a accepté de rédiger une préface, qui situera l'œuvre et l'auteur. Tous les esprits soucieux de culture trouveront dans cette série ample matière à réminiscences ou à découvertes.<sup>11</sup>

The emphasis on publishing comprehensive, authoritative editions, whether in the original language or through translations, and on commissioning prefaces by reputable scholars reflects a dual ambition: to ensure textual rigour while expanding cultural accessibility. This approach defines the collection's readership through a broader intellectual curiosity, thus embodying a democratizing view of literary culture. Although originally conceived for a general readership, the *Classiques de poche* series swiftly found its most enthusiastic audience among students. Its affordability, critical apparatus, and focus on canonical texts naturally

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<sup>11</sup> Michel Simonin, Introduction to *Les Chouans* (Paris: Livre de poche, 1961), p. 508.

aligned with the needs of a younger demographic, particularly ‘un public jeune de collégiens, de lycéens, d’étudiants et d’universitaires qui achètent massivement des livres de poche [...]’.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, the *Classiques de poche* series exemplifies how a project aimed at wide cultural outreach can become firmly embedded in institutional endorsement, subtly redefining the boundary between scholarly and wider readerships.

#### 4.2. Balzac in Print and on Air: Pocket Editions, the ORTF, and Media Shifts from the 1960s to the 1980s

A revealing parallel can be drawn between the revitalization of Balzac’s authorial persona through intensified posthumous publishing activities and the prolific wave of made-for-television films and series produced in France between the 1950s and 1980s, an expansion propelled by the Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (RTF) in 1949. Between the founding of the RTF and the establishment of the Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (ORTF) in 1964, a structure that remained in place until 1974, thirteen television films inspired by Balzac’s work were produced.<sup>13</sup> Anne-Marie Baron affirms that these productions were stylistically influenced by the legacy of the Buttes-Chaumont studios, one of Paris’s most

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<sup>12</sup> Isabelle Olivero, *Les trois révolutions du livre de poche*, p. 312.

<sup>13</sup> One of the main challenges in compiling this corpus, however, stems from inconsistencies in the archival metadata, particularly the incomplete or missing entries in the ‘adaptation’ field. For example, *La Fille du photographe* (Claude Barma, 1957), based on *Albert Savarus*, and *Melmoth réconcilié* (Georges Lacombe, 1964) are not listed in Anne-Marie Baron’s filmography, nor are they available via INA’s Madelen streaming platform. As a result, their institutional provenance remains uncertain. During the Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (RTF) era, the following adaptations were released: *Eugénie Grandet* (Maurice Cazeneuve, 1956), the three-part mini-series *Vautrin* (Jean Vertex, 1957), *Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan* (Jean Paul Carrère, 1960), *La Grande Bretèche* (Claude Barma, 1960), and *La Rabouilleuse* (François Gir, 1963). Under the Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (ORTF), established in 1964 and active until 1974, the following adaptations were produced: *La Cousine Bette* (Yves-André Hubert, 1964), the four-part mini-series *Illusions perdues* (Maurice Cazeneuve, 1966), *Béatrix* (Alain Boudet, 1967), *Le Réquisitionnaire* (Georges Lacombe, 1968), *Le Curé de village* (Jean-Louis Bory, 1968), *Eugénie Grandet* (Alain Boudet, 1968), *Le Lys dans la vallée* (Marcel Cravenne, 1970), and *Le Père Goriot* (Guy Jorre, 1972). See Isabelle Mette, *Exploitation et valorisation du patrimoine audiovisuel français* (Villeurbanne: ENSSIB, 2011), mémoire d’étude du diplôme de conservateur de bibliothèque, <https://www.enssib.fr/bibliotheque-numerique/documents/49091-exploitation-et-valorisation-du-patrimoine-audiovisuel-francais.pdf> [accessed 13 June 2025].

prominent cinematic institutions in the first half of the twentieth century, which came under the control of the RTF in 1953.

The Buttes-Chaumont aesthetic was characterised by its preference for in-studio shooting, static camerawork, pronounced use of close-ups, densely written dialogue, and a cohesive visual style reminiscent of the period dramas that gained widespread popularity across Europe, particularly in the United Kingdom. Referred to as *dramatiques*, these productions emphasized the theatrical and tragic dimensions of classic works, drawing heavily on an aesthetic reminiscent of classical French theatre. Characterized by elaborate, historically accurate costumes and carefully composed *mises-en-scène*, this stylistic approach aimed to recreate the atmosphere of the nineteenth century with exacting detail. As Baron notes, however, it also attracted criticism for its ‘lourdeur et académisme’.<sup>14</sup> Yet despite such reservations, directors often turned these stylistic constraints into strengths, using them to highlight the sombre, cynical, and tragic dimensions of Balzac’s fiction. It also accentuated the darker strands of his social commentary against the backdrop of the nation’s postwar period.

These adaptations not only paid homage to well-known works such as *Eugénie Grandet* (1956, 1968), *La Cousine Bette* (1964), and *Le Père Goriot* (1972), but also brought lesser-known texts to the screen, including *Le Réquisitionnaire* (1968) and *Le Curé de village* (1968), both of which featured the acclaimed actress Alice Sapritch, who appeared in multiple Balzac-inspired productions, including Mme Alberte in *La Fille aux yeux d’or* (1961), an uncredited role, absent from the novel and created for the cinematic version, Bette in *La Cousine Bette* (1964), Véronique Graslin in *Le Curé de village* (1968), and Mme de Dey in *Le Réquisitionnaire* (1968).<sup>15</sup> The use of classically trained actors, opulent costumes, and a refined

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<sup>14</sup> Anne-Marie Baron, ‘Le film de Marcel Cravenne’, in *Le Lys dans la vallée*, 2014 <https://www.lysdanslavallee.fr/ressources-en-ligne/le-film-de-marcel-cravenne-par-anne-marie-baron> [accessed 27 August 2025].

<sup>15</sup> Alice Sapritch became something of a Balzacian emblem through her recurring appearances in on-screen adaptations inspired by the writer’s work and her active involvement in literary and cultural circles dedicated to his legacy. She was the only woman to serve on the *Jury des Treize* for the *Prix Balzac*, a literary prize

*mise-en-scène* helped to anchor these productions within the national cultural imaginary, while reinforcing their pedagogic function and deepening viewers' literary knowledge and shared sense of cultural heritage.

The stylistic choices dictated by the production constraints and institutional mandates of the RTF and later the ORTF were instrumental in shaping a particular image of Balzac, one that elevated him as a canonical figure chiefly through his realist credentials and perceived alignment with conservative ideological values. Among the most telling manifestations of this conservatism is the gendered dichotomy consistently drawn between his male and female characters.

While certain adaptations, such as the 1966 four-episode mini-series *Illusions perdues*, focuses on the downfall of Lucien de Rubempré, the broader corpus of Balzac TV-films repeatedly returns to the trope of the suffering woman, with narratives that often culminate in the character's social marginalisation, emotional devastation, physical decline, or death. This pattern is particularly evident in the portrayals of Diane in *Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan* (1960),<sup>16</sup> Eugénie in *Eugénie Grandet* (1956, 1968), Adeline and Bette in *La Cousine Bette* (1964),<sup>17</sup> Coralie in *Illusions perdues* (1966) and Madame de Mortsauf in *Le Lys*

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established in 1971 by the Société des Amis d'Honoré de Balzac and awarded to 'personnalités remarquées pour leur importance dans *La Comédie humaine de notre temps dans tous les domaines*.' A close friend of Jean-Louis Bory, Sapritch played a key role in bringing Balzac's imaginative world into popular media. In 2018, Depardieu was awarded the Prix Balzac. See <https://www.prixbalzac.com/>

<sup>16</sup> In Jean-Paul Carrère's 1960 adaptation, Diane de Cadignan is framed as a damsel in distress. This is most evident in the climactic scene where she burns her album of lovers in a ritual of purification, later declaring to Daniel: 'Mon chéri, tu m'as vaincue, tu m'as sauvée. Grâce à toi, je me retrouve telle que j'étais sortie de l'enfance alors que rien ne m'a encore révélé les bassesses du monde.' Daniel responds: 'La princesse de Cadignan n'existe plus' [1:01:10-1:01:29]. The implications are unequivocal: the woman who once authored her own myths is reduced to an archetype of female vulnerability. The film shifts its moral tone to Daniel's forgiveness, reaffirming a traditional narrative in which female redemption is bestowed through male absolution, and thus re-inscribes patriarchal norms under the guise of conventional romance.

<sup>17</sup> With frequent reprints in the 1950s and a Garnier Frères edition in 1965 (introduced by Maurice Allem, and released one year after the film), *La Cousine Bette*, which fuses classical tragedy with scandal, infidelity, and melodrama, offered rich material for screen adaptation. First filmed in 1927 by Max de Rieux, the novel has also attracted Anglo-American interest, notably with a 1971 BBC serial and a 1998 film starring Jessica Lange. Though the 1964 French adaptation was generally well received, its slightly altered ending drew criticism. In the final minutes of the film, Bette sees Hulot passionately embracing the housemaid; the camera then cuts to Adeline, stricken by yet another betrayal, before returning to Bette, who returns to bed to die a painful death. Andrew Watts suggests that this change makes the ending more accessible to television audiences by emphasizing Bette's defeat rather than Adeline's humiliation. Yet another interpretation is possible: rather than

*dans la vallée* (1970). While these *dramatiques* served to legitimise the cultural authority of television by anchoring it in national literary heritage, they simultaneously reinforced dominant gender norms through narratives of female virtue, sacrifice, and retribution. While tragic heroines are not uncommon in Balzac's oeuvre, it is revealing that even female characters who exhibit agency, such as Diane de Cadignan, are ultimately denied triumph on screen.<sup>18</sup> This selective emphasis reflects a wider trend in the way literature was packaged and circulated on screen, recalling nineteenth-century collections such as the *Bibliothèque des chemins de fer*, which similarly privileged works on tormented female protagonists, notably Eugénie and Pierrette.

This portrayal of Balzac as a conservative realist was reinforced for three main reasons. First, it conformed to the technical and budgetary limitations of the time, which favoured economical production methods over costly innovations like elaborate special effects. Second, this interpretation resonated with both audience expectations and commercial imperatives. By this point, Balzac's identity as a pioneer of French realism, especially within educational contexts, had become firmly entrenched, rendering this framing not only institutionally sanctioned but also commercially advantageous. Lastly, this version of Balzac aligned with the moral and cultural values that shaped public broadcasting under the ORTF. Established to serve 'les besoins d'information, de culture, d'éducation et de distraction du public',<sup>19</sup> the ORTF operated as an 'instrument of the government's policy'.<sup>20</sup> In other words, it promoted the

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dying in defeat, Bette may draw one final breath of satisfaction before death, having once more witnessed her cousin's suffering. Even in death, she secures a last moment of vindication, highlighting the story's profound moral ambiguity and its refusal to offer full redemption to either woman. See Andrew Watts, 'Adapting Balzac', p. 166.

<sup>18</sup> Even works with more hopeful endings were altered to fit a moralizing narrative. For example, the 1982 television adaptation of *Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan* alters the ending so that Daniel d'Arthez abandons Diane upon discovering her deceit. This shift replaces the novel's nuanced portrayal of feminine cunning and eventual reconciliation with a more punitive, moralistic conclusion. Despite being produced after the ORTF's dissolution, the adaptation retains many ORTF characteristics, such as voice-over narration, theatrical *mise-en-scène*, static camerawork, and a focus on psychological introspection.

<sup>19</sup> Enforced by 'la loi n° 64-621' on 27 June 1964.

<sup>20</sup> Raymond Kuhn, *The Media in France* (London/New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 116

‘civilizing benefits of the nation’s cultural heritage’.<sup>21</sup> This cultural mandate reflected broader Gaullist ideals that championed national grandeur and autonomy, positioning state television as both a showcase of French cultural excellence and a bulwark against growing American influence.

The state’s promotion of cultural heritage through televised adaptations ran parallel to the expansion of the *Classiques de poche* series. After the 1958 release of *La Duchesse de Langeais* and *La Fille aux yeux d’or*, *Les Chouans* quickly followed in 1961.<sup>22</sup> Absent from the earlier *Petits classiques* editions, its eventual inclusion signalled a renewed editorial focus on works that had played a decisive role in establishing Balzac’s canonical status, a recognition further reinforced by Maurice Allem’s preface to the 1953 edition published by *Le Club français du livre*. Between 1958 and 2024, fourteen of Balzac’s works were reprinted in the *Classiques de poche* series, eleven of which had been, or would later be, adapted or readapted for television or film.<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, public broadcasters and major publishing houses acted in concert to disseminate Balzac’s work, sustaining a shared vision of cultural transmission which aligned with de Gaulle’s broader ideology of French exceptionalism. Reflecting this mission, the ORTF’s programming strategy sought to democratise access to literary heritage by guiding ‘le lecteur néophyte sur la voie des classiques en lui ménageant une transition sans douleur vers la vraie culture’.<sup>24</sup> Yet the adaptations themselves often remained challenging to watch: their academic inflection, deliberate pacing, and erudite vocabulary preserved the intellectual density of the source texts. Far from diluting Balzac, these productions upheld the demands of

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<sup>21</sup> Lucy Mazdon, ‘French television: Negotiating the national popular’, in *Imagining the Popular*, in *Contemporary French Culture*, ed. Diana Holmes & David Looseley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), p. 162-93, p. 173.

<sup>22</sup> The novel was adapted twice for film: first in 1947 by Henri Calef, entitled *Les Chouans*, and again in 1988 by Philippe de Broca, entitled *Chouans!*, starring Sophie Marceau.

<sup>23</sup> See Appendix B, Table B1 for a list of works republished in the *Classiques de poche* series. Among these, only *La Femme de trente ans*, *Le Médecin de campagne*, and *La Recherche de l’absolu* were not adapted for the screen.

<sup>24</sup> Isabelle Mette, ‘La place de Balzac dans la politique patrimoniale de l’audiovisuel français’, in *Balzac à l’écran*, ed. Anne-Marie Baron (Paris: Éditions Charles Corlet), p. 166-178, p. 173.

the canon, and they continue to fascinate, and at times unsettle, viewers precisely because they foreground the linguistic and conceptual rigour traditionally associated with high culture.

While the proliferation of Balzac's work in both print and televised form during the postwar decades reinforced his status as a pillar of the national literary canon, particularly through a corpus shaped by realist conventions and a more conservative aesthetic, the late 1960s and 1970s marked a critical shift both in scholarly interpretations of Balzac's work and its portrayal on screen. During this period, intellectuals began to challenge traditional realist readings by accentuating the narrative complexity and formal experimentation within Balzac's writing, while cinematic adaptations embraced more avant-garde approaches to his oeuvre. Two emblematic films from this period include Truffaut's *Baisers volés* (1968),<sup>25</sup> loosely inspired by *Le Lys dans la vallée*, and Rivette's *Out 1: Spectre* (1971), which draws on *L'Histoire des Treize*.<sup>26</sup> Both films feature Jean-Pierre Léaud, whose recurring presence establishes him as a kind of spectral Balzacian figure, reappearing in different guises and underlining the fluidity and omnipresence of the writer's magnum opus.

These cinematic reworkings paralleled a broader intellectual movement that sought to challenge and reframe Balzac's reputation. A decisive moment in this re-evaluation came with the publication of Barthes's *S/Z* (1970), which dismantled realist paradigms and reinterpreted

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<sup>25</sup> Truffaut was an ardent admirer of Balzac. In a 1951 letter to Robert Lachenay, he wrote: 'Balzac et Proust sont les deux plus grands romanciers de la langue française.' François Truffaut, *Correspondance*, 26 January 1951 (Paris: Hatier, 1988), p. 61. Furthermore, Jean Gruault writes that 'François ignorait volontairement des pans de la littérature, par exemple Rabelais, Dante, Homère, Melville, Faulkner, Joyce, mais connaissait à fond un autre pan, plus 'réaliste', plus 'français', Balzac, Proust, Cocteau, Louis Hémon, Roché, Audiberti, Léautaud, et appréciait Thomas Raucat, Jouhandeau, Céline, Calet, Albert Cohen, Raymond Guérin. Ses livres, lus et relus, étaient bourrés de notes et de passages soulignés, témoignant qu'il appliquait à la lecture des œuvres qu'il aimait une attention aussi soutenue et minutieuse que celle avec laquelle il voyait et revoyait les films.' Jean Gruault, *Ce que dit l'autre* (Paris: Julliard, 1992), p. 276-77. This selective devotion reflects Truffaut's intention to represent a vision of French literary heritage anchored in authors' realist aesthetics.

<sup>26</sup> Rivette's passion for Balzac was influenced by Éric Rohmer's advice: 'Quand on veut faire des films, il y a deux écrivains qu'il faut lire: Balzac et Dostoïevski'. J'ai lu Dostoïevski tardivement. Quant à Balzac, je l'ai découvert une nuit d'insomnie, en tombant sur *Une ténébreuse affaire*. Ce roman m'a converti et m'a donné la clef pour lire l'ensemble de son œuvre.' See Armel, Aliette, 'Jacques Rivette', *Nouvelle Revue Française*, 1996, 60-69, p. 68. Rivette's close readings of Balzac's work sparked not only a lifelong admiration but also profoundly shaped the director's cinematic engagement with narrative complexity, character psychology, and the interplay between reality and fiction that so deeply characterises Balzac's writing. See Francesca Dosi, 'Balzac et Rivette: l'énigme d'une rencontre', *AB*, 12 (2011), p. 337-63.

*Sarrasine* through a structuralist lens of intersecting codes and semiotic systems. In this emerging critical landscape, the reflections of Barthes repositioned Balzac not as a fixed symbol of a past literary tradition, but as an author whose oeuvre invites constant reinterpretation; its enduring relevance lies in its ability to generate new meanings across time.

As Balzac's novels were reprinted in pocket editions, featured in scholarly publications, and widely adapted for television and cinema, he remained firmly embedded in both popular and academic culture. Even after the dissolution of the ORTF in 1974, adaptations inspired by his work continued to flourish alongside this renewed editorial and scholarly interest. Seeking to promote a more liberal approach to cultural policy, President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (1974-81) oversaw a sweeping reorganisation of the ORTF, dismantling it into seven independent entities: Télédiffusion de France, Société française de production, Institut national de l'audiovisuel, Radio France, Télévision française 1, Antenne 2, and France Régions 3. While this restructuring granted broadcasters greater operational autonomy, the state continued to exert significant influence through the *cahiers des charges*, which imposed 'cultural obligations' on programming.<sup>27</sup> For example, these mandates introduced quotas for serious programming across multiple genres, allocating dedicated airtime for educational broadcasts aimed at school and university audiences.

These measures ensured the sustained prominence of high-cultural content on television, reinforcing the medium's role as an instrument of civic education and cultural refinement. Whereas earlier programming closely followed the Gaullist ideal of disseminating 'Culture with a capital C, post-1968 shifts in elite attitudes saw mass culture increasingly acknowledged as a legitimate component of *la culture populaire*'.<sup>28</sup> These liberalising reforms culminated in 1982 with a broadcasting bill that formally ended the state monopoly. This

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<sup>27</sup> Lucy Mazdon, 'French television: Negotiating the national popular', p. 178.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

represented a pivotal moment in French media history as it reflected the broader cultural and technological liberalisation ushered in during the early Mitterrand presidency.

Adaptations produced during this transitional decade still retained the aesthetic hallmarks of the ORTF era. Notably, they continued to emphasize the harrowing, violent, and traumatic experiences of predominantly female protagonists, as seen in *Pierrette* (1979),<sup>29</sup> *Les Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées* (1981), *Ursule Mirouët* (1981), *Adieu* (1982), *Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan* (1982), and *La Duchesse de Langeais* (1983). These productions typically avoided engagement with the spiritual or fantastic, instead favouring a moralistic and realist interpretation of Balzac's oeuvre, exemplified by Michel Favart's *La Peau de chagrin* (1980).<sup>30</sup>

From the early broadcasts on RTF and ORTF to later independent film productions and theatrical releases, classic works including *Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan*, *Le Colonel Chabert*, *Eugénie Grandet*, *Le Père Goriot*, *La Duchesse de Langeais*, *Le Lys dans la vallée*, *La Cousine Bette*, *Le Cousin Pons*, and *Illusions perdues* consistently returned to screens. This cyclical process of adaptation, alongside renewed publication efforts, sustained their presence both in popular culture and on bestseller lists, accentuating their enduring cultural and

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<sup>29</sup> Both films depict the physical and emotional suffering of their heroines, with the latter including graphic scenes of abuse by the Rogron cousins. What is especially unsettling is the casting of Valérie Valère as Pierrette, who died by suicide shortly after the film's release. In her first autobiographical book, *Le Pavillon des enfants fous* (1978), Valère recounts her abusive upbringing and her years of institutionalization in a psychiatric hospital for anorexia nervosa. The parallels between her experiences of domestic abuse, mental and physical suffering, and Pierrette's struggles blur the line between fiction and reality, reinforcing Balzac's realist aesthetic while raising important questions about the relationship between actors and the roles they embody.

<sup>30</sup> Following a close-up of the protagonist's still face in Pauline's arms, the film abruptly cuts to an intertitle that reads: 'La peau de chagrin n'est pas autre chose que notre vie... Quant au diable... qui a jamais eu besoin du diable dans cette histoire! Pas même monsieur de Balzac...' Michel Favart, *La Peau de chagrin*, 1980, [2:19:46]. The culturally biased message is reflected in the creators' attempts at rationalizing Balzac's work on moral grounds. The magic skin is reduced to a metaphor for unchecked material desire, thereby negating the author's well-documented fascination with the occult, the metaphysical, and the realm of the fantastic. Such a reading not only simplifies Balzac's imaginative breadth but also undermines his position as a writer whose work deeply engages with spiritual and fantastical dimensions. This tendency reflects longstanding critical biases in France that have historically relegated fantastic literature, science fiction, and graphic novels to a lower cultural status—a prejudice that has only begun to be challenged in academic discourse over the past two decades, as these genres have gradually gained scholarly recognition.

commercial potential.<sup>31</sup> Despite ongoing transformations within France's educational, socioeconomic, and political spheres, Balzac remained a constant presence, continually reimagined and reframed to align with the concerns of each era.

### 4.3. Selling Balzac: Book Covers, Film Posters, Heritage Cinema, and Television in the 1990s

The 1990s witnessed yet another wave of Balzac adaptations across television and cinema, marking a shift away from the rigid formalism that had characterised the ORTF era.<sup>32</sup> These later productions embraced greater creative freedom, offering richer and more psychologically nuanced interpretations of Balzac's oeuvre. Notably, they reimagined female characters with a new emphasis on strength, resilience, and autonomy. Rather than portraying female suffering as a prelude to a character's downfall, these adaptations reframe it as a source of resilience and empowerment. Characters such as Marianne in Rivette's *La Belle Noiseuse* (1991), the Comtesse Ferraud in Angelo's *Le Colonel Chabert* (1994), and Eugénie in Verhaeghe's *Eugénie Grandet* (1994) move beyond their objectified and fatalistic roles to emerge as complex, self-directed protagonists whose agency, whether over their bodies, finances, or decisions, grants them a measure of independence no longer contingent upon male wealth or approval.

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<sup>31</sup> According to Cerquiglini, the top five best-selling Balzac texts in 2022 were: *Le Père Goriot*, *Illusions perdues*, *La Peau de chagrin*, *Le Colonel Chabert* and *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*. These were followed by: *Eugénie Grandet*, *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, *Le Lys dans la vallée*, *La Femme de trente ans* and *Le Cousin Pons*. The only slight discrepancies between the companies' rankings concern the ordering of *Le Père Goriot* and *Illusions perdues*, and the replacement of *Le Colonel Chabert* with *Eugénie Grandet*. In 2021, *Illusions perdues* briefly surpassed *Le Père Goriot* in sales, a shift likely driven by the release of Xavier Giannoli's film adaptation that same year. However, *Le Père Goriot* regained its position as Balzac's best-selling text in 2023. Among Folio's top ten best-sellers, six appear in the *Folio Classique* series: *Le Père Goriot* (1999), *Illusions perdues* (1999, 2013), *Le Colonel Chabert* (1994, 1999), *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* (1994, 2015), *Eugénie Grandet* (1999, 2016, 2021) and *Le Cousin Pons* (1973, 2007, 2022). *Le Cousin Pons* only has two new editions, released in 1973 and 2022. According to Cerquiglini, the 2007 edition is merely a reprint. Despite its updated title page design, it contains no editorial changes compared to the 1973 edition.

<sup>32</sup> For television: *Une fille d'Ève* (Alexandre Astruc, 1990), *La Femme abandonnée* (Édouard Molinaro, 1993), *L'Interdiction* (Jean-Daniel Verhaeghe, 1993), *La Duchesse de Langeais* (Jean-Daniel Verhaeghe, 1994), and *Albert Savarus* (Alexandre Astruc, 1995). For cinema, two Balzac-inspired films were released: *La Belle Noiseuse* (Jacques Rivette, 1991) and *Le Colonel Chabert* (Yves Angelo, 1994).

The surge in screen adaptations during the 1990s coincided with a renewed editorial emphasis on Balzac's work in Gallimard's *Folio* series. His work was reissued across several collections: *Folio classique* (1991), *Foliothèque* (1991),<sup>33</sup> *Folioplus classique* (2004),<sup>34</sup> *Folio collège* (2016) and *Folio lycée* (2019). According to Blanche Cerquiglini, current chief editor of Folio, *Folio classique* has become one of Gallimard's most prolific and enduring series, thanks to its affordable pricing, frequent reprintings, and careful curation of major literary works. She emphasizes the series' strong editorial commitment to Balzac, citing a long-term ambition to reissue the entirety of *La Comédie humaine* across the *Folio classique* collection.<sup>35</sup>

This sustained editorial investment is further supported by strategic efforts to increase the commercial appeal of Balzac's work, most notably through the design and marketing of book covers, a practice that becomes especially effective when coordinated with the release of film and television adaptations. References to on-screen adaptations revive public engagement with a classic text, enhancing its visibility and sales often irrespective of the adaptation's critical reception.<sup>36</sup> However, this marketing strategy must be carefully weighed against the *droit moral de l'auteur*, the French legal principle that guarantees an author 'le droit au respect de son nom, de sa qualité et de son œuvre'.<sup>37</sup> Publishers must assess whether the adaptation's aesthetic and thematic choices respect the integrity of the original work, particularly when dealing with posthumous authors. When this criterion is satisfied, film posters or other

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<sup>33</sup> Due to budgeting restrictions, Foliothèque no longer exists and released its final texts in 2010.

<sup>34</sup> This collection is a series of *parascolaires* that are primarily targeted toward students.

<sup>35</sup> See Appendix B, Table B2 for a list of Balzac works republished in the *Folio classique* collection. In collaboration with Isabelle Mimouni, it is worth noting that a new edition of *La Comédie humaine* has recently been launched within the same collection. The novels are being released in the order originally intended by Balzac. The first volume, edited by Isabelle Mimouni and published in September 2024, includes: *La Maison-du Chat-qui-pelote*, *Le Bal de Sceaux* and *La Bourse*. The most recent addition to this expanding catalogue is *Le Père Goriot*, published in March 2025.

<sup>36</sup> Cerquiglini refers to this exponential sales surge as 'le coefficient multiplicateur, c'est à peu près six fois plus que les ventes habituelles d'une œuvre.'

<sup>37</sup> This law was established in France during the nineteenth century through jurisprudence. It was later formalized by the law of March 11, 1957. See Carine Bernault, Jean-Pierre Clavier, 'Fiche 10. Le droit moral de l'auteur Généralités', *Fiches de Droit de la propriété intellectuelle*, 2016, 57-61, p. 58.

adaptation-inspired visuals are often incorporated into cover designs to increase the edition's appeal while leveraging the adaptation's wider cultural impact.

This strategy was particularly evident in the 1990s with *Le Colonel Chabert*.<sup>38</sup> In 1994, France saw the publication of thirteen different editions of the novella, including a *Livre de poche* edition whose cover prominently featured one of the stills from Angelo's film adaptation.<sup>39</sup> The film has since become a seminal reference within the Balzac corpus, both in cinema and as a fixture in educational curricula. It draws on the prestige of the French literary canon while serving as a commercial venture to navigate the challenges of a rapidly evolving and competitive audiovisual environment.

The convergence of cinematic imagery and print publication helped sustain and amplify Balzac's presence in the public sphere at a time when cinema attendance was waning in comparison to the rapid rise in television ownership and viewership. Following a peak of nearly '412 million admissions in 1957, cinema attendance in France experienced a vertiginous decline—falling to 184 million by 1969, a 55% drop that proved profoundly destabilizing for the entire industry'.<sup>40</sup> This severe downturn was followed by a 'stagnation throughout the

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<sup>38</sup> Balzac's presence on the big screen was already well established by the 1990s, but Rivette helped reignite interest with *La Belle Noiseuse* (1991), starring Michel Piccoli. The only prior adaptation of *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* was *Mr. Frenhofer and the Minotaur*, a short experimental film directed by Sidney Peterson in the United States in 1949. Rivette's feature-length four-hour film marked the first French adaptation of the novella. Notably, Rivette also created a shorter, 125-minute version for television, *La Belle Noiseuse: Divertimento*, assembled from alternative takes and reordered scenes, offering yet another instance of fragmentation and adaptation. Despite its critical success, contemporaneous editions of *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* saw no significant changes to their cover designs. This may reflect an emphasis on Rivette's auteur vision rather than an attempt to situate the film within a broader wave of popular Balzac adaptations. Since my research examines the symbiotic relationship between text and film, *La Belle Noiseuse* will be discussed for its impact on the *séquences* and parascolaire editions, where it has gained renewed prominence.

<sup>39</sup> Publishers can retroactively update cover pages to reflect a new visual lexicon. A notable example is the 1998 *Livre de poche* edition of *La Duchesse de Langeais*, which was later reissued with a cover featuring a still from Jacques Rivette's 2007 film *Ne touchez pas la hache*. Montriveau (Guillaume Depardieu) is kissing Antoinette (Jeanne Balibar) on the forehead, encapsulating the restrained intimacy central to Balzac's narrative. Although the film premiered nearly a decade after the edition's original publication, the reuse of its imagery in subsequent reprints highlights a broader commercial strategy to not only establish a closer link between text and screen but also sell more copies. This approach, already evident in the 1990s, would be employed more systematically by publishers such as Folio from the 2010s onward. Folio's 2013 edition of *Illusions perdues* features a still from Giannoli's adaptation, showing Lucien's symbolic crowning ceremony as well as the 2021 edition of *Eugénie Grandet*, featuring a still with Eugénie, played by Joséphine Japy and Grandet, played by Olivier Gourmet.

<sup>40</sup> Raymond Kuhn, *The Media in France*, p. 21.

1970s, averaging around 180 million annual admissions, before plunging to a historic low of 116 million in 1992'.<sup>41</sup> In this context of diminished cinematic reach, the integration of film aesthetics into book marketing thus served as a vital conduit linking the established realm of print culture with the evolving audiovisual landscape.

In response to the increasingly fragmented and saturated media landscape, *Le Colonel Chabert* skilfully bridges the divide between earlier television programming, often associated with elitist, more educated culture and a *culture populaire*, 'understood as being desired by the people, a culture that they could recognize and enjoy'.<sup>42</sup> This dual resonance is embodied in Depardieu's performance, which consolidated his position as one of France's leading and most versatile actors in late twentieth-century cinema. He seamlessly balances the solemn gravitas required for adaptations of the heritage film aesthetic,<sup>43</sup> which Ginette Vincendeau terms 'cultural super-productions',<sup>44</sup> with the energetic vitality typical of popular cinema, exemplified by films such as *Astérix et Obélix*.<sup>45</sup>

In the face of global image culture (television, advertisements, music videos), heritage films strategically place cinematic and national specificity on the agenda. The accent is on high production values, a mise-en-scène which stresses beautiful landscape (*Jean de Florette*), decor and costumes (*Cyrano de Bergerac*), music (*Tous les matins du monde*) and the French language. Heritage films foreground French culture and history for a mainstream audience. They fulfill the 'middlebrow' function of the popular literary classics on which they are often based, as in *Cyrano de Bergerac* and *Germinal*. *Le Colonel Chabert*, for instance, perfectly merges culture and history, with Balzac's tale set at the time of the Napoleonic wars. Internationally, the successful French heritage films must offer a Janus-faced vision of Frenchness, attractive to the home audience and consumable abroad, especially in the USA.<sup>46</sup>

While Vincendeau classifies *Le Colonel Chabert* as a paradigmatic film of the heritage film aesthetic, her assessment overlooks the film's confrontation with violence, one of the

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<sup>41</sup> *Id.*

<sup>42</sup> Lucy Mazdon, 'French television: Negotiating the national popular', p. 177.

<sup>43</sup> Heritage cinema, exemplified by productions such as *Jean de Florette* (1986), again starring Depardieu, emphasized rigorous fidelity to historical detail, sumptuous mise-en-scène, and a nostalgic evocation of France's cultural legacy.

<sup>44</sup> Ginette Vincendeau, *Stars and Stardom* (London & New York: Continuum, 2000), p. 230.

<sup>45</sup> Gérard Depardieu remains an inescapable figure in French media. As a *monstre sacré* of cinema, his legacy reflects the tension between his celebrated portrayals of iconic characters from France's literary heritage and the controversies surrounding his conduct toward women.

<sup>46</sup> Ginette Vincendeau, *Stars and Stardom*, p. 231.

characteristics of the ‘post-heritage’ aesthetic.<sup>47</sup> This is evident in the film’s harrowing opening sequence, which depicts the aftermath of the Battle of Eylau through a montage of fallen soldiers, bloodied horses, and destroyed bivouacs; in the violent encounters between the Comtesse Ferraud and Chabert, marked by underlying sexual tension; and in Depardieu’s virile portrayal of Chabert driven by desire to reclaim his estranged wife, despite the original character’s loss of identity and spectral presence, ‘a symbol of the trauma of castration’.<sup>48</sup> The prolific output and stylistic diversity of Balzac-inspired adaptations in the 1990s underscore their resistance to chronological categorization, revealing the difficulty of situating his oeuvre within a single cinematic or televisual aesthetic.<sup>49</sup>

The 1990s thus saw a dynamic interplay between literature, cinema, and television, in which Balzac’s work was in active circulation and continuously reinterpreted for new audiences. His texts appeared across multiple platforms: promotional film materials were repurposed as book covers, while film and television adaptations played a growing role in shaping how filmmakers and audiences understood and engaged with his writing. Through these shifting modes of adaptation, Balzac remained a vital cultural figure, both a cornerstone of the literary canon and a rich source of cinematic and pedagogic renewal.

Josée Dayan’s *Balzac* (1999), a two-part TV-film featuring Depardieu as Balzac, alongside Fanny Ardant and Jeanne Moreau, epitomizes this mediation between cultural

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<sup>47</sup> In contrast to heritage cinema, post-heritage cinema embraced more experimental narrative techniques that drew attention to themes that earlier adaptations frequently marginalized, such as gender, violence, and sexuality. See Claire Monk, ‘Sexuality and the Heritage’, *Sight & Sound*, 10 (1995), 32-34. Monk’s article was republished as ‘Sexuality and heritage’ in *Film/Literature/Heritage*, ed. Ginette Vincendeau (London: British Film Institute, 2001), 6-11. See also Claire Monk, *Heritage Film Audiences: Period Films and Contemporary Audiences in the UK* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011) and Andrew Watts, ‘Adapting Balzac in Jacques Rivette’s *Ne Touchez pas la hache (Don’t Touch the Axe)*: Violence and the Post-Heritage Aesthetic’ in *Screening European Heritage: Creating and Consuming History on Film*, ed. Paul Cooke, Rob Stone (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 145-62, p. 150.

<sup>48</sup> Jean-Marie Roulin, ‘The return of the undead: The body politic in *Le Colonel Chabert*’, *South Central Review*, 29 (2012), 20-35, p. 25.

<sup>49</sup> Some TV films from the 1970s exhibited post-heritage characteristics, notably Guy Jorre’s *Pierrette*, which aired on TF1 in 1979. The film explores the heroine’s sexuality and includes graphic depictions of domestic abuse, challenging any idealized vision of nineteenth-century provincial life.

prestige and popular appeal. Following his performance in *Le Colonel Chabert*, Depardieu's portrayal of Balzac drew on the same commanding physicality and expressive intensity which emblematically captured the writer's contradictory nature and larger-than-life personality. Ardant, having previously portrayed Balzacian characters in *Le Colonel Chabert* and *Les Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées* (1981), helped establish a sense of continuity in the evolving cinematic engagement with Balzac's oeuvre. Stars like Depardieu and Ardant, much like Alice Sapritch and Jean-Pierre Léaud before them, became part of the enduring on-screen Balzac brand, embodying and popularising his work for new audiences. Furthermore, Moreau, a leading actress of the Comédie-Française, lent gravitas to her portrayal of Balzac's infamous mother, while also evoking a sense of nostalgia among audiences familiar with her celebrated acting career. Featuring actors from diverse generations, artistic backgrounds, and social milieus, this production offered audiences an intimate and multifaceted dramatization of Balzac's oeuvre and enduring legacy. It reaffirmed his presence in French cultural memory, while bridging the gap between culture with a capital C and popular entertainment at the turn of the century.

#### **4.4. Balzac as a Cultural Icon and a Curriculum Staple: TV-Films, Baccalauréat, *Parascolaires*, and *Séquences* (2001-23)**

As pocket editions, TV-films and cinematic releases of Balzac's work made a broader spectrum of classic texts more accessible to readers, school curricula, beginning in the 1970s, were likewise evolving to encourage the study of complete literary works rather than isolated extracts.<sup>50</sup> From the 2000s onward, this shift was further reinforced by a growing tendency among educators to adopt more interdisciplinary teaching approaches, notably by integrating

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<sup>50</sup> Beginning in the 1970s, the French school curriculum began encouraging students to read complete novels rather than isolated extracts: 'l'arrivée du livre dans la classe est, en réalité, entrée des livres, et donc mise en évidence de la variété des éditions.' Brigitte Louichon, 'Définir la littérature patrimoniale', p. 46.

film adaptations and visual art to enrich students' engagement with canonical literature. In Balzac's case, this pedagogic reorientation led to a 'rapprochement entre Balzac et les écrivains romantiques qui contribue à rendre visible un autre Balzac, puisque les programmes des années 2000 imposent l'étude d'un "mouvement littéraire et culture"'.<sup>51</sup> These shifts were also reflected in the revised structure of the *parascolaires* launched by Hatier, Larousse, and Hachette in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Echoing the lasting impact of the *Petits classiques* series in the first half of the twentieth century, these publishing houses have continued to reissue and adapt their collections. While Larousse has preserved the *Petits classiques* label, its editions are now commonly referred to as *parascolaires*, a change in nomenclature that signals a move toward a more academic and institutionally anchored positioning.<sup>52</sup>

While the *Petits classiques* collections primarily emphasized Balzac's role in shaping nineteenth-century French realism, the more recent *parascolaires* indicate a subtle broadening and refinement of this image, presenting a more nuanced understanding of Balzac's realist aesthetic. In Hachette's *Bibliocollège* and *Bibliolycée* series, a section entitled *Mouvement littéraire* attributes each text to one or more literary movements. The 2022 editions of *La Peau de chagrin* and *Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées*, for example, associate both texts within the romantic and realist aesthetics, while *La Peau de chagrin* is further classified as a text pertaining to *le réalisme fantastique*. These labels recognize the hybrid nature of Balzac's oeuvre, highlighting his capacity to traverse, intertwine, and transcend the conventions of diverse literary movements and aesthetic schools. However, such classifications are presented without contextual clarification, as though their meanings were intrinsically understood. This tacit assumption presumes students' familiarity with the distinctions and convergences between

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<sup>51</sup> Nathalie Denizot, *La scolarisation des genres littéraires (1802–2010)*, p. 258.

<sup>52</sup> *Parascolaire* editions generally fall into two categories: scholarly editions presenting the complete or abridged text, such as the *Petits classiques* series dating back to the 1930s, or editions dedicated exclusively to textual analyses, such as Hatier's *Profil* series. This chapter focuses exclusively on the former category.

these movements, typically defined by different periods, writers, stylistic traits, and thematic tendencies more consistent with the schematic needs of *lycées* programmes.

The *parascolaires* editions released by Larousse (*Petits classiques*), Hatier (*Classiques & Cie*), and Hachette (*Classiques Hachette*, *Bibliocollège*, and *Bibliolycée*) are more extensive than their 1930s counterparts and offer a broader array of questions focused on the primary text.<sup>53</sup> Since the 2000s, these collections have incorporated more visual material as well as practice exercises designed to enhance students' critical thinking and writing skills. In addition to providing annotated examples of well-crafted *dissertations* and *explications de texte*, as well as a step-by-step guide for developing a compelling *problématique*, these editions also highlight the contemporary relevance of Balzac's oeuvre. For example, in the 2007 Larousse edition of *Le Père Goriot*, editor Yves Bomati emphasizes the writer's enduring importance for contemporary readers:

Car si Balzac continue à séduire des générations entières dans le monde, c'est pour autre chose que ses vues de Paris. C'est pour sa grandeur épique, pour ses personnages qui se rassemblent pour former une grande œuvre. C'est aussi pour ses phrases, ses paragraphes, ses dialogues au vitriol où les plus profonds instincts des hommes se révèlent dans leur cruauté, ou les rouages d'une société pétrie d'ambition annulent le sage goût de l'Être pour faire triompher les âpres et décevants désirs de l'Avoir. Rares sont en effet les romanciers qui ont assez de souffle pour raconter l'aventure d'une société, et projeter sur le temps des réflexions encore valides aujourd'hui.<sup>54</sup>

Between 2001 and 2022, Larousse published eight of Balzac's texts, two of which—*Le Père Goriot* (2001, 2007) and *La Peau de chagrin* (2011, 2022)—were republished in new editions.<sup>55</sup> In 2004, Verhaeghe adapted *Le Père Goriot* as a TV-film, featuring Charles Aznavour in the title role.<sup>56</sup> In a 2009 interview with Anne-Marie Baron for the *Société des*

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<sup>53</sup> Whereas the *Petits classiques* of the 1930s primarily featured factual and dissertation-style questions, more recent *parascolaires* have incorporated a wider variety of exercises, including multiple-choice questions, fill-in-the-blank sentences, as well as short-answer and long-answer questions, designed to prepare students for a broader range of written assessments.

<sup>54</sup> Yves Bomati, Introduction to *Le Père Goriot* (Paris: Larousse, 2007), p. 18.

<sup>55</sup> See Appendix B, Table B3 for the publication history of Balzac works in the Larousse – *Petits classiques* collection in Metropolitan France from the 2000s to the present day.

<sup>56</sup> The film was adapted by Jean-Claude Carrière, a well-established novelist, actor, and award-winning screenwriter.

*Amis d'Honoré de Balzac*, the film's screenwriter, Jean-Claude Carrière, noted that the production sought to retell Balzac's narrative through his vibrant character portraits, evoking the psychological depth that had already been a hallmark of earlier ORTF dramatizations.<sup>57</sup> This emphasis is particularly evident in the portrayal of Goriot as the self-sacrificing, broken father, a role Aznavour embodied with poignant sorrow. His expressive features, melancholic gaze, and modest stature translated powerfully on screen, to the extent that stills from his performance were featured on the cover of both the 2004 *Livre de poche* edition and Larousse's 2004 *parascolaire* version.<sup>58</sup> A similar dynamic between adaptation and publication is evident in the case of *La Peau de chagrin*, which was reimagined for television in 2010 by Alain Berliner. Stills from his production were featured in Nathan's 2022 *parascolaire* edition, a fitting choice, considering the work's inclusion in the 2023 Baccalauréat général and the film's aesthetic appeal to younger audiences.<sup>59</sup>

Compared to the 1930s Larousse collection, three additional texts have been introduced into the corpus: *Les Chouans* (2014), *La Peau de chagrin* (2014), and *Mémoires de deux jeunes*

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<sup>57</sup> The interview was posted on 5 July 2018 on the Amis de Balzac YouTube channel. It can be accessed via the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PUy1c-Mu6E4>. These adaptations were part of a broader wave of TV-films from the period, including: *Rastignac ou les Ambitieux* (Alain Tasma, 2001), a series of four ninety-minute episodes, and *La Maison du chat-qui-pelote* (Jean-Daniel Verhaeghe, 2009). They reflect the continued vitality of Balzac's oeuvre and the growing synergy between education, publishing, and televised storytelling.

<sup>58</sup> See Appendix B, Table B4 for the publication history of *Le Père Goriot* in Metropolitan France between 2000-09.

<sup>59</sup> Starring Thomas Coumans, Berliner's interpretation diverges notably from Michel Favart's 1980 television version, which aired on TF1, in which Raphaël was played by Marc Delsaert, a classical theatre actor known for his gravitas and measured intensity. Whereas Delsaert's performance emphasized Raphaël's philosophical despair and existential weariness, Coumans brings a more youthful and dynamic energy to the role. His cocky and mischievous interpretation presents Raphaël's charm as both an asset and a character flaw. Berliner's adaptation also incorporates modern vernacular, with expressions such as *louper* and *diarrhée verbale*, thereby speaking to a younger generation of viewers. See Andrew Watts, 'Balzac et la loi du plus fort: l'adaptation, l'éco-traductologie, et *La Peau de chagrin*', in *Balzac et les disciplines du savoir: Actes du Colloque de Cerisy*, 12 (2025), 153-169. Watts draws comparisons between the 2010 adaptation and the *Harry Potter* franchise, particularly in relation to their shared use of fantastical realism and a whimsical-horror aesthetic. Berliner's film does more than merely reference genre tropes: it departs radically from earlier adaptations by emphasizing the skin's autonomy and unsettling vitality. In one scene, the talisman clings to Raphaël's arm as he attempts to dispose of it in a well, while whispering voices intensify around him [1:09:20]. In another, the skin slides down his wrist and fuses with his body, its movement heightened by an unnerving extradiegetic score [1:22:08]. These moments not only heighten the horror of Raphaël's fate but also offer a visual metaphor for his loss of agency. Berliner's adaptation thus reclaims the novel's metaphysical dimension, embracing a visceral and imaginative aesthetic that reinforces the moral and philosophical weight of Balzac's work.

*mariées* (2022). One of the most notable shifts between the earlier and more recent Larousse collections is the repeated inclusion and increasing emphasis on *La Peau de chagrin* and *Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées*. This focus is likely connected to their prominence in school programmes and their inclusion on the 2023 Baccalauréat général and Baccalauréat technologique. Accordingly, the latest 2022 editions of both texts offer tailored exam preparation materials, including mock dissertations, *commentaires composés*, and *explications de texte*. Despite the inclusion of three new texts, the Larousse corpus has undergone relatively little change since the 1930s, a continuity that reflects the collection's original pedagogic mission. From its inception, Larousse positioned itself as a highly academic resource designed to standardise literary instruction in schools, where Balzac was primarily taught through his realist works. With the exception of *La Peau de chagrin*, which was excluded from the *Petits classiques* editions, the selection continues to emphasize Balzac's role as a central figure in nineteenth-century French realism. This continued focus seems to reflect the priorities of the French curriculum, where time constraints and the need to cover a vast range of texts necessitate an emphasis on introducing students to nineteenth-century authors primarily associated with specific literary movements—Hugo for Romanticism, Balzac and Flaubert for Realism, Zola for Naturalism, and Baudelaire for Symbolism. Consequently, the Larousse *parascolaires* reinforce a canonical image of the author shaped largely by the structural demands of the curriculum.

Compared to the Larousse collection, the Hatier catalogue offers a more expansive selection of Balzac's work, echoing the editorial diversity of its 1920s publishing agenda. The *Classiques & Cie* series includes a wider range of Balzac's dramatic and crime-driven narratives, notably the *Histoire des Treize* trilogy, as well as shorter and less commonly

anthologized works such as *Sarrasine*, which appears in the collection for the first time.<sup>60</sup> In total, Hatier published ten of Balzac's texts in this series. Of these, six were reprinted—*La Peau de chagrin* (2011), the *Histoire des Treize* trilogy (2008, 2011), *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*, and *Sarrasine* (2005, 2012); three were reissued as new editions—*Le Colonel Chabert* (2011), *Le Père Goriot* (2013), and *La Peau de chagrin* (2022); and two were published only once—*La Femme de trente ans* (2006) and *Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées* (2022).

The increased diversity of texts in the Hatier collection not only reflects the publishing house's longstanding commitment to presenting a more expansive Balzac corpus, but also appears to respond to changes in the national curriculum, particularly with the introduction of art history in 2008.<sup>61</sup> This curricular shift likely prompted editors to include works more explicitly connected to the visual arts, such as *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*,<sup>62</sup> while enriching new editions with illustrations, reproductions of paintings, and images of sculptures. With the introduction of art history into the curriculum, educators also began to incorporate digital tools into the classroom, such as televisions and projectors to support, 'la diffusion dans la classe de spectacles ou d'œuvres filmiques, d'images, de sons'.<sup>63</sup> As students began engaging with Balzac's work through a wider range of audiovisual media, the *parascolaire* editions published by Hatier placed greater emphasis on the writer's artistically oriented texts as well as those that had recently been adapted for film. This editorial shift reflects a conscious alignment with contemporary pedagogic approaches that value multimedia engagement.

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<sup>60</sup> See Appendix B, Table B5 for the publication history of Balzac works in the Hatier – *Classiques et Cie* collection in Metropolitan France from the 2000s to the present day.

<sup>61</sup> Brigitte Louichon, 'Définir la littérature patrimoniale', p. 46.

<sup>62</sup> The novella gained renewed interest in schools as well as on stage. In 2023, Michel Favart adapted it into a monodrama that ran from 27 March to 27 June at the Théâtre Essaïon. Featuring Catherine Aymerie, she embodied multiple roles, including the narrator, Frenhofer, Pourbus, Nicolas Poussin, and Gillette. Accordingly, Favart crafted an avant-garde interpretation, employing minimalist staging, while still retaining the shifting narrative perspectives of the original work.

<sup>63</sup> Violaine Houdart-Merot, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique? Qu'est-ce qu'une œuvre patrimoniale?', in *Enseigner les "classiques" aujourd'hui. Approches critiques et didactiques*, eds Isabelle de Peretti and Béatrice Ferrier (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2012), 23-36, p. 46.

Between 1994 and 1997, the *Classiques Hachette* collection published three of Balzac's texts: *Le Colonel Chabert*, *Eugénie Grandet*, and *Le Père Goriot*. Each of these works was subsequently republished between 2007 and 2008.<sup>64</sup> From 2002 to 2022, the *Bibliocollège* and *Bibliolycée* collections largely adhered to the same corpus, introducing only two additional texts: *La Peau de chagrin* (2004, 2022) and *Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées* (2022).<sup>65</sup> Echoing the cover design of the Larousse and Nathan *parascolaire* editions, which used stills from cinematic adaptations, the 2020 *Bibliolycée* edition of *Le Colonel Chabert* features a close-up of Depardieu's face from Angelo's film. A dedicated 'Portfolio' section further showcases stills from the film. These editorial choices reflect a broader strategy of bringing literary texts into dialogue with their screen adaptations, reinforcing visual literacy in the classroom. They also emphasize the reciprocal influence of screen adaptations, Baccalauréat reading lists, and publishing strategies in shaping the contours of the literary canon.

While *parascolaire* editions and the reading lists for the Baccalauréat and the Agrégation<sup>66</sup> have each contributed to consolidating Balzac's place within the academic canon, the regularly updated *séquences* have also proven effective in showcasing the interdisciplinary potential of his work. Since the early 2000s, the *Nouvelle Revue Pédagogique* (NRP), a prominent literary periodical that has published bi-monthly teaching resources since 1946, has become one of the leading educational magazines within the French pedagogic landscape

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<sup>64</sup> See Appendix B, Table B6 for the publication history of Balzac works in the *Classiques Hachette* collection in Metropolitan France between 1990s and the 2010s.

<sup>65</sup> See Appendix B, Table B7 for the publication history of Balzac works in the *Bibliocollège & Bibliolycée* collection in Metropolitan France from the 2000s to the present day.

<sup>66</sup> From the late 1970s, when Balzac's work began to appear more frequently on the Agrégation reading lists. Five of his works were selected for this prestigious examination: *La Peau de chagrin* (1978-79), *Le Lys dans la vallée* (1993-94), *La Femme de trente ans* (1993-94), *Illusions perdues* (2003-04), and *Le Cousin Pons* (2018-19). Although *Le Cousin Pons* was published only once in 2018 and five times between 2010 and 2022, its relatively modest publishing frequency contrasts with the considerable scholarly interest it has attracted. Notably, the 2021 issue of *AB*, entitled *De Balzac lecteur aux lectures du Cousin Pons*, focused on Balzac's dense network of intertextual references. The volume emphasizes the text's sustained dialogue with classic authors from the UK, France, Spain, and Italy. The work's resurgence in academic discourse has helped to reaffirm both its contemporary resonance and its canonical status. See Appendix B, Table B8 for the publication history of *La Femme de trente ans* in Metropolitan France between 1990-99. See Appendix B, Table B9 for the publication history of *Le Lys dans la vallée* in Metropolitan France during the 1990s. See Appendix B, Table B10 for the publication history of *Le Cousin Pons* in Metropolitan France from the 2010s to the present day.

through its *Cahiers NRP* series.<sup>67</sup> These volumes offer an extensive range of *séquences pédagogiques* designed to facilitate close textual analyses, encourage collaborative learning, and provide adaptable, classroom-ready materials. Rather than limiting instruction to conventional formats such as *commentaires composés* or *explications de texte*, the *séquences* aim to contextualize literary works within broader historical, cultural, and national frameworks. In doing so, they invite students to engage critically with France's literary canon while formulating personal and critical interpretations of the texts. This approach aligns with Gérard Langlade's notion of 'la lecture participative': '[c]ette lecture participative, loin d'être "naïve" et de diluer l'œuvre dans de vagues références au vécu, est au fondement même de la lecture littéraire. Elle réalise en effet l'indispensable appropriation d'une œuvre par son lecteur dans un double mouvement d'implication et de distance où l'investissement émotionnel, psychologique, moral et esthétique inscrit l'œuvre dans une expérience singulière'.<sup>68</sup>

A more reflective engagement with the text is enabled through interactive activities, such as guided museum tours that showcase the visual artworks referenced in texts such as *Pierre Grassou*, which was featured in a 2012 *séquence*.<sup>69</sup> These experiences help students situate nineteenth-century artistic production within the complex dynamics of the period's prolific art market, thereby reinforcing the links between literature, visual culture, and history.

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<sup>67</sup> The other key journal is *L'École des lettres*, founded in 1909. The original aim of the research was to compare Balzac inventories in the *NRP* and *L'École des lettres*. However, due to limited data and restricted access to the *École des lettres* archives, only contact with *NRP* personnel was possible, granting access solely to their publication records.

<sup>68</sup> Gérard Langlade, 'Le sujet lecteur: auteur de la singularité de l'œuvre', *Le sujet lecteur: lecture subjective et enseignement de la littérature*, (2004), 81-92, p. 90.

<sup>69</sup> Sébastien Le Clech's commentary presents the 1839 novella as a key entry point into Balzac's exploration of vanity and bourgeois ambition: 'La nouvelle constitue donc à la fois une entrée dans l'univers balzacien et un document d'une grande précision sur les phénomènes historiques qui affectent la peinture sous la Restauration et la monarchie de Juillet. La marchandisation des œuvres, l'organisation des salons, la vie des ateliers, le rôle de l'Académie ou celui des musées, tout ce qui participe à la vie culturelle, sociale et économique de la peinture trouve sa place dans *Pierre Grassou*' Sébastien Le Clech, *Pierre Grassou de Balzac: l'art et l'argent* (Paris: Éditions Nathan, 2012), p. 1. Balzac's engagement with the arts can also be linked to his attendance at the Salon of 1839, which notably promoted the works of Delacroix and Gigoux. In a letter to Madame Hanska dated 4 June 1839, he expressed admiration for 'une magnifique *Cléopâtre* de Delacroix, un sublime portrait d'Amaury-Duval, une charmante *Vénus anadyomène* de Chassériau, élève d'Ingres.' Honoré de Balzac, *LH*, vol. I, p. 487.

*NRP* has published seven of Balzac's texts in the form of a *séquence*, including *Pierre Grassou* (2012), *Physiologie du mariage* (2013), *Le Faiseur* (2015), *La Duchesse de Langeais* (2017),<sup>70</sup> *Le Père Goriot* (2018), *La Peau de chagrin* (2023), and *Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées* (2023). The corpus also includes a contemporary novel heavily inspired by Balzac's work: *Balzac et la Petite Tailleuse chinoise* (2006).<sup>71</sup> While this selection partially overlaps with the works featured in the *parascolaire* editions, it also includes more unexpected texts, such as *Physiologie du mariage*<sup>72</sup> and *Le Faiseur*.<sup>73</sup> This corpus reflects a deliberate attempt to

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<sup>70</sup> Entitled *La Duchesse de Langeais, œuvre réaliste ou romantique?*, the *séquence* invites students to reassess Balzac's canonical status as a realist. Framing the novel as a hybrid of the realist and romantic aesthetics, the programme pairs Balzac's *La Duchesse de Langeais* with Rivette's *Ne touchez pas la hache*, prompting students to consider how cinematic adaptations can serve both as tributes to classic works and be autonomous creations in and of themselves. It encourages close analyses of key scenes, such as the tense exchange in Antoinette's salon and the emotionally charged reunion at the Discalced Carmelite monastery in Spain, to explore how Rivette translates Balzac's psychological and dramatic intensity to the screen. These scenes become a springboard for deeper reflection on the challenges and possibilities of adapting a classic on screen. One suggested classroom activity is a debate on the question: 'la réalisation d'un film à partir d'un texte littéraire est-elle selon vous une simple adaptation ou une œuvre à part entière?' This exercise pushes students to think beyond the traditional framework of fidelity criticism and invites them to assess the literary and artistic legitimacy of film adaptations. This interdisciplinary approach not only enhances students' engagement with Balzac's oeuvre but also introduces them to the filmmakers and actors who continue to shape and revitalize his cultural presence on screen. Elsa Jollès, *La Duchesse de Langeais* (Paris: Éditions Nathan, 2017), p. 27.

<sup>71</sup> The *séquence* examines both the novel *Balzac et la Petite Tailleuse chinoise* and its 2002 film adaptation, also directed by Dai Sijie. It highlights intertextual references to *Ursule Mirouët* and *Le Père Goriot*, as well as the heroine's ambitions, which recall those of Rastignac, notably in the novel's conclusion. Lao and the narrator discover that the young seamstress has left the remote village of 'Phoenix of the Sky' to begin a new life elsewhere. When asked about her departure, the narrator recalls their exchange: '— Elle est partie, lui dis-je. — Elle veut aller dans une grande ville, me dit-il. Elle m'a parlé de Balzac. — Et alors ? — Elle m'a dit que Balzac lui a fait comprendre une chose: la beauté d'une femme est un trésor qui n'a pas de prix.' Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la Petite Tailleuse chinoise* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), p. 438-39.

<sup>72</sup> While the text is seldom studied in school curricula, likely due to its considerable length, its intricate structure divided into *Méditations*, and its mature subject matter, making it less accessible and interesting to younger readerships, the *séquence* is carefully structured as a rhetorical journey from Hippocrates to Pascal to Balzac. This progression equips students with a refined critical vocabulary (*maxime, axiome, principe, théorème, pastiche*) to trace the text's evolution from rational argumentation to irony and satire. In doing so, it highlights Balzac's use of wit to undermine the very social norms, particularly those related to marriage and fidelity, that he ostensibly codifies.

<sup>73</sup> The play is paired with Baudelaire's 1845 satirical prose piece, *Comment on paie ses dettes quand on a du génie*. This short, ironic text, part caricature, part fictionalised anecdote, offers a humorous yet incisive portrait of Balzac as a debt-ridden genius and serves as a valuable counterpoint to the themes of financial speculation explored in the play. The juxtaposition invites students to explore the contradictions embedded in Balzac's literary persona: simultaneously grandiose and self-parodic, visionary and ensnared in the material realities of his time. Described by Sophie Pailloux-Riggi as 'une pièce au cœur de l'actualité: celle, financière, de la dette et de la spéculation,' *Le Faiseur* provides an especially timely lens through which to interrogate these tensions. The *séquence* thus capitalizes on the play's contemporary resonance to encourage critical reflection on the entanglement of artistic genius with economic excess. In doing so, it emphasizes the dual nature of Balzac's legacy, a complexity frequently echoed in the biographical prefaces of the *Petits classiques* editions, where he is depicted as both monumental and highly flawed. Sophie Pailloux-Riggi, *Balzac et la comédie d'argent: Le Faiseur* (Paris: Éditions Nathan, 2015), p. 32.

balance established canonical works, such as *Eugénie Grandet* and *Le Père Goriot*, with lesser-known or marginal texts, and works that highlight Balzac's philosophical and intellectual ambitions. On one side is the traditional image of Balzac as the foundational realist, the historian of post-revolutionary society, and a permanent fixture of the literary canon. On the other side, a more fluid and experimental Balzac emerges, whose writing encourages interdisciplinary study and intercultural reinterpretation. In today's educational landscape, shaped by cross-media approaches such as museum visits and film analyses, Balzac's oeuvre is no longer confined to a single instructional framework. Instead, these *séquences* reflect a curriculum that balances the authority of tradition with the drive for pedagogic innovation. Balzac emerges not only as a canonical figure of the past, but as a dynamic, multifaceted writer whose irony, realism, and metaphysical insight continue to resonate within contemporary cultural and educational practices.

#### **4.5. The Balzac Canon Reframed: Teaching the Classics Through Film in *Zéro de conduite* Educational Kits (2012-23)**

In response to evolving curricular trends that have increasingly encouraged the integration of cinematic adaptations into classrooms, new platforms have emerged to support this pedagogic turn. One such initiative is exemplified by the creation of *Zéro de conduite*, an online educational resource led by publishing editor Vital Philippot.<sup>74</sup> The platform reflects and reinforces these broader shifts by providing educators with film-focused teaching dossiers. These materials serve to cultivate interdisciplinary engagement between literature and cinema, offering new modes of access to canonical works and reviving interest in lesser-known texts

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<sup>74</sup> The online resource is supported by the CNC (*Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée*), the PROCIREP (an organisation for the collective management of audiovisual rights), and *La culture avec la copie privée*, which administers France's private copying levy system. In return, manufacturers and importers of recording devices (like smartphones and USB drives) pay a fee that is distributed to authors, artists, and producers to compensate for private copying and to support cultural initiatives.

from Balzac's corpus. A key example includes *Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan*, which, despite being adapted twice during the RTF and ORTF eras, was only recently brought back to contemporary audiences through its 2023 film adaptation directed by Arielle Dombasle.

What sets these dossiers apart from the occasional film analyses found in *parascolaire* editions is their treatment of cinema as a fully-fledged interpretative medium rather than a pedagogic supplement to classic literature. Through curated scene analyses, contextual introductions, and thematic discussion prompts, the dossiers invite students to engage with Balzac's texts and their subsequent adaptations as dynamic works in constant dialogue, thereby open to reinterpretation and responsive to evolving cultural ideologies. In other words, this approach encourages students to understand the act of adaptation as a creative and evolving process that can both illuminate, deconstruct and challenge the original text.

Angelo's *Le Colonel Chabert* was the first Balzac adaptation to be featured in the *Zéro de conduite* dossiers. Since then, five Balzac-inspired adaptations have been included in the corpus. In addition to Florence Salé's commentary on *Ne touchez pas la hache*, entitled 'Balzac et l'insoutenable cruauté du romanesque', comprehensive teaching dossiers have been developed for Alain Berliner's *La Peau de chagrin* published in 2014, Marc Dugain's *Eugénie Grandet* in 2021, Xavier Giannoli's *Illusions perdues* in 2022, and Arielle Dombasle's *Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan* in 2023. The latter film's inclusion is particularly significant. Despite its relatively limited appearance in *parascolaire* collections, having only been published once in Magnard's *Classiques & contemporains* series in 2002,<sup>75</sup> the text has nonetheless enjoyed a recurring, though often overlooked, audiovisual afterlife. While some scholars, such as Anne-Marie Baron, have welcomed the film's originality for its feminist

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<sup>75</sup> One exercise invites students to '[c]hercher des scènes de rencontre dans la littérature ou au cinéma' encouraging them to reflect on how romantic encounters are constructed across literary and cinematic forms. See Michel Dobransky *Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan* (Paris: Magnard, 2002), p. 111.

underpinning,<sup>76</sup> other critics, most notably from *Le Monde* and *Première*, have dismissed it as a ‘sympathique désastre’<sup>77</sup> and an ‘ego trip en costumes’,<sup>78</sup> critiquing what they perceive as the film’s self-indulgent tone and Dombasle’s excessive reliance on close-ups.

Despite its commercial failure, drawing only 7,508 spectators and ranking among the least-watched theatrical releases in France in 2023,<sup>79</sup> Dombasle’s adaptation has nevertheless attained a degree of unexpected institutional recognition. Unlike other Balzac works featured in the *Zéro de conduite* dossiers, whose film adaptations prompted updated cover designs in the *Livre de Poche* and *Folio* editions, *Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan* was neither republished in 2023 nor reissued with a cover featuring the film’s poster. Nonetheless, its inclusion on the *Zéro de conduite* platform signals a renewed pedagogic interest. This curricular endorsement reflects a broader rethinking of how the success and cultural legitimacy of screen adaptations are assessed, shifting the focus from purely commercial or critical measures to their educational potential and cultural resonance.

This shift in pedagogic interest can be contrasted with the poor critical reception that has often greeted classic novel-to-film adaptations. For example, the French press’s response to Dombasle’s film and Ridley Scott’s *Napoléon* (2023) illustrate a persistent impulse to criticize provocative anachronisms and narrative liberties, particularly when filmmakers reinterpret texts or figures deemed integral and even iconic to France’s literary, cultural, or historical heritage. Such critiques often mobilize entrenched binaries—literature versus cinema, canonical prestige versus popular appeal, historical fidelity versus creative

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<sup>76</sup> In 2023, Anne-Marie Baron conducted an interview with Arielle Dombasle following the film’s release. The interview is available online: <https://www.lesamisdebaltac.org/les-secrets-de-la-princesse-de-cadignan-interview>.

<sup>77</sup> Murielle Joudet, ‘*Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan*: Arielle Dombasle s’offre un ego-trip en costumes’, *Le Monde*, 13 September 2023, [https://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2023/09/13/les-secrets-de-la-princesse-de-cadignan-arielle-dombasle-s-offre-un-ego-trip-en-costumes\\_6189159\\_3246.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2023/09/13/les-secrets-de-la-princesse-de-cadignan-arielle-dombasle-s-offre-un-ego-trip-en-costumes_6189159_3246.html). [Accessed on 8 June 2024].

<sup>78</sup> *Id.*

<sup>79</sup> See Mathieu Victor-Pujebet, ‘Les 10 plus gros échecs du box-office français de 2023’, *Écranlarge*, 28 December 2023, <https://www.ecranlarge.com/films/dossier/1488078-films-10-echecs-box-office-francais-2023>. [Accessed on 8 June 2024].

innovation—that continue to shape public discourse on adaptation. This critical tendency aligns with what Constantine Verevis has defined as the logic of ‘BADaptation’,<sup>80</sup> a term that ‘captures the drive towards the denigration of adaptation as “bad theoretical object”’,<sup>81</sup> routinely employing a rhetoric of betrayal and degradation, of ‘infidelity’ to some idealized original.

Dombasle’s production might be perceived as a ‘badaptation’ not merely due to its anachronistic soundtrack or historically inaccurate costuming, but more pointedly because of its casting, specifically, Dombasle’s performance in the eponymous role. Her public persona, cultivated through a flamboyant media presence and an eclectic career as both actress and singer, is frequently associated with spectacle, excess, and a form of celebrity often dismissed as superficial or even vulgar. This association stands in stark contrast to the cultural prestige typically conferred upon canonical authors, whose works are often seen to warrant faithful, intellectual or auteur-driven interpretations. In embracing an aesthetic of vibrant colours, anachronistic music, and a sensibility often associated with kitsch and camp, Dombasle’s film unsettles conventional hierarchies of cultural legitimacy. It offers a ludic engagement with Balzac’s already playful work, prioritizing female pleasure, self-love, and intertextual homage.

Throughout the film, Diane not only quotes phrases from the novella but also gestures toward the broader architecture of *La Comédie humaine*. Her scintillating conversations with Daniel d’Arthez, played by Cédric Kahn, echoes the classificatory ambition of the *Avant-propos*, invoking Balzac’s taxonomic vision of human society. Figures such as Rastignac, Maxime de Trailles, and Nucingen make brief but memorable appearances, situating the narrative within the writer’s vast intertextual web. Dombasle also references Molière’s *Le*

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<sup>80</sup> See Constantine Verevis, ‘BADaptation. Is Candy faithful?’ in *B is for Bad Cinema: Aesthetics, Politics, and Cultural Value*, ed. Claire Perkins & Constantine Verevis (New York: University of New York Press, 2014), 215-240, p. 216. See also Kamilla Elliott, ‘The Theory of Badaptation’, in *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*, ed. Dennis Ray, Katja Krebs & Eckart Voigts-Virchow (London: Routledge, 2018), 34-45.

<sup>81</sup> Madeleine Hunter, ‘Adaptation studies has a kids problem’, *Adaptation*, 17 (2024), 469-92, p. 480.

*Misanthrope*, weaving his work into the fabric of the film to accentuate its allegorical, cultural and intertextual depth. These references are deliberate, framing the adaptation as both a tribute and a reinterpretation. In doing so, the film stages a bold negotiation between the ‘classic’ and the ‘popular’, the revered and the playful. It embraces theatricality, excess, and pastiche to challenge the very hierarchies that separate ‘high’ culture from so-called ‘low’ or mass forms. It is precisely through this aesthetic dissonance that the film articulates its subversive and pedagogic potential. Within this framework, ‘badaptation’ emerges not as a sign of artistic failure, but as a transgressive mode of engagement with the canon:

Le film est ainsi à l’image de sa créatrice, véritable ‘femme-orchestre’ qui écrit, réalise, joue et chante. En adaptant cette nouvelle de Balzac, Arielle Dombasle revient à ses premières amours cinématographiques, celles des films de Rohmer où sa diction précise et distinguée créait un étrange filtre d’artifice, propre à l’analyse et à la dissection des sentiments. Elle s’est aussi entourée de ses amis créateurs, ainsi le costumier Vincent Darré, dont les costumes chatoyants rappellent ceux du Casanova de Fellini, ou du grand décorateur Jacques Garcia (qui définit son style comme « sexy et grand genre »), qui a prêté les décors spectaculaires du château du Champ de Bataille en Normandie. En même temps qu’elle sert la profusion romanesque balzacienne, cette esthétique de l’excès et du trop-plein est fidèle à l’exubérance et au dandysme au féminin qu’incarne la réalisatrice.<sup>82</sup>

The Balzac corpus showcased in the *Zéro de conduite* teaching kits thus exemplifies the shifting role of adaptation within educational contexts. Rather than a mere derivative adjunct to literature, it represents a vital agent in the ongoing process of canon formation. These adaptations reflect the broader convergence of publishing practices, curricular reform, and the expanding reach of audiovisual media. This reconfiguration is particularly salient for twenty-first-century students, whose reading practices are increasingly shaped by digital tools and visual media. The pedagogic value of adaptations lies in their accessibility and in their ability to prompt discussion about how literature is reinterpreted, reshaped by different genres, and translated from page to screen. As one of the editors observes in relation to the *Colonel Chabert* teaching kit: ‘dans le cadre de l’enseignement “Littérature et société”, ce film permet de

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<sup>82</sup> Florence Salé, *Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan: Dossier pédagogique* (Paris: Zérodeconduite, 2023), p. 16.

travailler la question de l'adaptation d'une œuvre littéraire à l'image'.<sup>83</sup> This allows educators to use the film within various year groups and adapt it for different educational purposes—introducing French realism in *Seconde*, focusing on character analysis in *Première*, or exploring adaptation theory within the 'Littérature et société' curriculum. Beyond their instructional flexibility, these films have become central to teaching classic literature. In some instances, they may even supersede the literary work itself, an aspect further examined in the conclusion.

Twentieth- and twenty-first-century publishing, educational, cinematic, and broadcasting institutions have collectively constructed, and continually reconfigured, Balzac's plural identities: as a classic and popular writer, a realist, a romantic, a satirist, and a philosopher. His work has circulated across interconnected educational spheres via the *Livre de Poche* and *Folio* editions, Baccalauréat reading lists, *parascolaire* collections, *séquences*, *Zéro de conduite* teaching kits, and a long-standing tradition of television and film adaptations. Rather than acting in isolation, these institutions operate in symbiosis, each reinforcing, complicating, or renewing the interpretive frameworks surrounding Balzac's oeuvre. Series such as the *Classiques de poche* and *Folio classique* have not only sustained the circulation of his most canonical works but have also revived lesser-known texts through modern designs and scholarly apparatus. In some cases, with *Illusions perdues* being a notable example, these editorial choices have coincided with prominent screen adaptations, which have brought nineteenth-century novels back onto twenty-first-century bestseller lists. Through its strategies of scholarly framing and visual branding, the publishing industry navigates the dual imperatives of academic legitimacy and mass appeal, allowing Balzac's oeuvre to be treated as 'un étonnant texte protéiforme, perpétuellement en mouvement'.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Marie-Cécile Febvre-Flory, *Le Colonel Chabert: Dossier pédagogique* (Paris: Zérodeconduite, 2012), p. 2.

<sup>84</sup> Nicole Mozet, *Balzac au pluriel* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1990), p. 290.

From early silent films to Occupation-era productions, from the educational broadcasts of the RTF and ORTF to heritage cinema, post-heritage aesthetics, and the streaming platforms of the twenty-first century, Balzac has remained a constant presence. At the heart of this enduring visibility lies an on-screen Balzac canon, shaped by a core group of directors and actors. While adaptations produced under the Vichy regime promoted a nationalist, escapist, and conservative cultural heritage, films from the RTF and ORTF periods reflected ideological concerns shaped by a nation negotiating the social, cultural, and economic repercussions of the postwar era, as well as competing influences from American media. Furthermore, during the ORTF era, filmmakers such as Alain Boudet, Marcel Cravenne, Guy Jorre, and Jean-Louis Bory adapted numerous Balzac works for television, often employing serialized episodic formats that harked back to the original *romans-feuilletons*. These works tended to favour realist depictions, portraying characters struggling with economic hardship, gender divides, and broader societal tensions. In the decades that followed, auteur directors including Rivette and Truffaut reimagined Balzacian themes through the prism of Nouvelle Vague cinema, blending his narrative structures and character archetypes with the movement's experimental aesthetics and modern sensibilities. In contrast, Verhaeghe helped consolidate a more traditional Balzac canon for television, anchoring his 1990s and early 2000s adaptations in the visual and narrative conventions of heritage film. A recurring ensemble of actors, including Alice Sapritch, Gérard Depardieu, Fanny Ardant, and Jean-Pierre Léaud, have portrayed Balzacian characters across multiple adaptations, creating a sense of continuity reminiscent of the reappearing characters of *La Comédie humaine*. Broadcasting institutions have thus been instrumental in reshaping Balzac as a national and transmedia icon, expanding his presence well beyond the printed page.

Ultimately, Balzac's legacy is not defined by a single medium, institution, or genre, but by the ongoing interplay between them. His oeuvre is continually reshaped by the publishing,

cinematic, and educational spheres, each adapting his texts to suit shifting pedagogic goals, market conditions, and aesthetic sensibilities. This dynamic reinvention resists the static veneration often associated with classic writers. As audiences and cultural paradigms evolve, so too does Balzac: narrative structures are deconstructed, female protagonists are reimagined, and overlooked themes, including race, queerness, and the ribald humour of *Les Contes drolatiques* gain new visibility.<sup>85</sup> Through this ongoing process of canon reconfiguration, Balzac transcends his status as a monumental *classique scolaire* to become a dynamic and evolving figure, both revered and re-examined, preserved and reshaped, continually open to new readings across media and generations.

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<sup>85</sup> In recent years, *Les Contes drolatiques* has garnered renewed attention in both academic and cultural spheres. For example, on 17-18 October 2024, Vincent Bierce and Éric Bordas organised a conference at the École Normale Supérieure de Lyon entitled *Balzac: lire les Contes drolatiques*. It explored the literary and stylistic dimensions of his work. In the cultural domain, four of the tales were adapted into a graphic novel by Paul and Gaëtan Brizzi, published by Futuropolis in 2021, reflecting a nascent interest in revisiting Balzac's more experimental texts through contemporary visual media.



## Conclusion

While *La Comédie humaine* is institutionally recognized as Balzac's monumental oeuvre, this thesis has identified a core group of works that have played the most decisive role in securing his consecration as a classic writer. Through an examination of intersecting models of canonization—serialization, publication, education and adaptation—the four chapters have shown how these forces have combined and evolved to shape a dynamic Balzac canon marked by internal hierarchies. The works most frequently taught in schools, most widely published in both pocket and scholarly editions, and most often adapted for the stage and screen have occupied the status of his most classic works. The primary corpus of such works has included: *La Physiologie du mariage*, *Les Chouans*, *La Peau de chagrin*, *Le Colonel Chabert*, *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*, *Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan*, *Eugénie Grandet*, *Le Père Goriot*, *La Duchesse de Langeais*, *Le Lys dans la vallée*, *Illusions perdues*, *La Cousine Bette*, and *Le Cousin Pons*. The sustained prominence of these titles in different educational, cultural, political, and audiovisual contexts has been central to shaping and maintaining Balzac's status as a classic writer.

The intersecting subsets of Balzac's works and their interdependent models of canonization, understood through patterns of perpetual recurrence, have produced multiple, coexisting constructions of his authorial identity. This process has allowed the Balzac canon to evolve and reveal a post-realist dimension that engages with contemporary issues such as environmental ethics, gender dynamics, social inequality, and national identity. This adaptability also extends to the educational sphere, characterized by an ambivalence between the canonical and the popular, which Denizot describes as 'une culture scolaire en tension entre tradition et renouvellement qui se dessine ainsi, culture faite de genres reconstruits et

reconfigurés, de corpus textuels sélectionnés et scolarisés en vue d'objectifs spécifiques, et de vulgates scolaires sans cesse récompensées'.<sup>1</sup>

The academic canon is not passively inherited but continually reshaped by pedagogic aims and ideological currents. In this evolving landscape, educational practices increasingly converge with digital publishing, shifting reader expectations, and the growing prominence of classic novel-to-film adaptations, a trend that has gained popularity for Balzac in the 2020s. Although institutions often uphold Balzac as a fixed literary monument, the very frameworks that sustain his canonical status also serve to renew and recontextualize his image and oeuvre for future generations.

These evolving reinterpretations, however, also raise important methodological considerations, particularly when engaging with an author as prolific and heavily adapted as Balzac. Given his extensive body of work, the abundance of existing scholarship and hundreds of adaptations, the challenge was to identify the specific editions, curricular developments, and adaptations that most clearly reflected broader institutional, cultural, economic, and political shifts in France. For reasons of methodological rigour, this thesis has focused on a selection of *Petits classiques* editions, educational anthologies including the *parascolaires*, *séquences* and *Zéro de conduite* teaching kits, and major film and television adaptations from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries directed in France. This has enabled me to approach his work as a cultural artefact shaped by shifting media and institutional frameworks.

This thesis opens pathways for broader comparative inquiry, proposing that the analytical framework, partly informed by Barré's canonization models, could be extended to other prolific and frequently adapted authors such as Hugo, Zola, or Sand. More broadly, the study encourages renewed interdisciplinary dialogue regarding literature as a dynamic archive, shaped not only by textual content but also by the infrastructures of circulation, reproduction,

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<sup>1</sup> Nathalie Denizot, *La scolarisation des genres littéraires (1802–2010)*, p. 268.

and institutional mediation. In this regard, the thesis has offered both a focused case study and a methodological proposition: literary scholarship should engage more fully with the academic and cultural processes through which certain authors are consecrated as ‘classic’. This challenges any assumptions that literary value is purely intrinsic, revealing instead that canonical status often depends as much, if not more, on a constellation of external factors, including social and institutional connections, timing, and circumstantial determinants, such as socioeconomic background, and, at times, sheer luck.

Future iterations of this research could further refine existing models of canonization by incorporating the reader’s canon. This model is influenced by the lived experiences of individual reading practices, emotional responses, and the sociocultural contexts in which classic texts are first encountered or later revisited. As Laure Murat illustrates in *Relire: enquête sur une passion littéraire*, rereading classic texts inevitably prompts readers to reassess them, resulting in renewed understanding, deeper appreciation, or occasionally, critical detachment.<sup>2</sup> One of Murat’s interviewees, the writer Marianne Alphant, recounted an initial aversion toward *Eugénie Grandet*, which gave way to a more nuanced understanding upon rereading it later in adulthood: ‘[u]n des problèmes du passage à l’âge adulte, c’est la rencontre de livres qui n’ont pas, comme les livres d’enfance, des fins heureuses. Je me souviens de mon ressentiment contre Balzac après ma lecture d’*Eugénie Grandet*. J’en voulais beaucoup au roman [...]’.<sup>3</sup> Such responses reveal that classic texts function as rites of passage, not simply because they are included in syllabi, but because they evoke emotional and critical engagement connected to moments of personal or intellectual transformation that naturally evolve over time. This individual dimension provides a crucial counterbalance to more institutional and hierarchical models of literary transmission and consecration. Furthermore, it emphasizes the

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<sup>2</sup> See Laure Murat, *Relire: enquête sur une passion littéraire* (Paris: Flammarion, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

enduring significance of rereading classic texts in response to pressing contemporary issues, notably the climate crisis. *Eugénie Grandet*, for example, has recently been reread through ecocritical perspectives, with scholars reimagining its protagonist as a figure embodying ecological awareness, entangled in systems of financial exploitation and gendered dispossession.<sup>4</sup> These emerging interpretations not only revitalize Balzac's fiction but also demonstrate how classic works continue to generate new meanings within shifting critical paradigms.

Such reinterpretations do not emerge in isolation; they are shaped by the sociocultural and media environments through which readers (re)encounter and interact with classic literature. This includes not only chain and independent bookstores but also digital platforms, including the influential realm of social media, which actively shape and construct their own canons and genre classifications. Activities such as rereading classic texts, participating in digital book clubs, taking quizzes that align readers with specific characters, engaging in peer-to-peer recommendations, and reading texts in tandem with their screen adaptations exemplify how literary value is continually redefined beyond the traditional avenues of institutional consecration.

A notable instance of this canon redefinition involves the *Zéro de conduite* pedagogic dossiers. As discussed in the final chapter, they have been used to promote Balzac's work from the 2010s to the present day, highlighting how cinematic adaptations of his work have become integral to multimedia learning. Recent studies in France have proposed methodological approaches that engage students with classic literature through pathways more attuned to their evolving digital literacy. For example, Marie-Hélène Cuin's 2023 study on what she terms 'la

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<sup>4</sup> See Jessy Neau 'Eugénie Grandet de Marc Dugain (2021). Le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle low-key ou le drame historique dans son versant intime et féministe', *Revue Balzac*, 6 (2023), p. 171-190. For further reading, see *The Balzac Review / Revue Balzac*, 8, 2025, entitled *Écologies/Ecologies*, eds Göran Blix and Andrea Goulet, in collaboration with Francesco Spandri.

lecture transmodale'<sup>5</sup> within the French *lycée* system highlights the pedagogic value of pairing classic texts with secondary discursive objects. As discussed in the introduction, these include film adaptations, book covers, and other forms of interpretive media. Cuin's model focuses on the close reading of four emblematic passages from *Madame Bovary*: Emma's wedding, the Vaubyessard ball, Rodolphe's seduction, and the heroine's death. It also draws on a range of multimedia resources, including Claude Chabrol's 1991 film adaptation starring Isabelle Huppert and ten different cover designs of the novel. The reliance on selected passages rather than the full novel, however, suggests a broader pedagogic shift: classic texts are increasingly presented as fragmented rather than unified literary artefacts, a practice that recalls the editorial logic of the abridged *Petits classiques* editions.

One student in Cuin's study wrote that they learned to 'penser en dehors de la boîte de ne pas être trop-scolaire [...] j'ai essayé de reconquérir des œuvres — de les faire passer de l'état liste noire au stade *peut-être intéressant*'.<sup>6</sup> This statement illustrates the transformative potential of these pedagogic approaches. The use of the term *scolaire* is revealing; it positions the 'classic' as an object of institutional imposition, yet also as a category that can be reappropriated and reimagined. Through multimodal engagement, students are not merely consuming classic texts but are reappropriating them as sites of personal discovery and intellectual exploration. In other words, adaptations represent the current form of the 'classic', just as publications in novels, reviews and newspapers functioned as the currency of the 'classic' in Balzac's time, a reality reflected upon in *Le Père Goriot*: 'Ainsi ferez-vous, vous qui tenez ce livre d'une main blanche, vous qui vous enfoncez dans un moelleux fauteuil en vous disant: Peut-être ceci va-t-il m'amuser'.<sup>7</sup> Balzac's awareness and attitude mirrors that of

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<sup>5</sup> See Marie-Hélène Cuin, 'Entre transmodalité et multimodalité : quelle(s) lecture(s) de *Madame Bovary* ?', *Le français aujourd'hui*, 220 (2023), 105-115.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>7</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Le Père Goriot*, CH III (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1976), p. 50.

Cuin's student, demonstrating that while each era promotes different forms of literary currency, the central processes of adaptation and reconfiguration remain constant.

This recontextualization of classic French texts finds further resonance in a 2024 study conducted in Algeria, where two cohorts of students were introduced to *Le Père Goriot*. One group viewed Verhaeghe's 2004 TV-film before reading the novel, while the other engaged with the text without any audiovisual support. The results revealed that the cohort exposed to the adaptation completed the novel more swiftly and exhibited a deeper emotional and thematic attachment to the text:

Le groupe ayant visionné le film avant la lecture a non seulement terminé l'œuvre dans un délai plus court, mais a également rencontré moins de difficultés et a exprimé des émotions plus variées et profondes, témoignant d'une meilleure connexion avec les personnages et les thèmes. En revanche, le groupe témoin, n'ayant pas eu cette exposition préalable, a éprouvé des difficultés à saisir les nuances de l'intrigue et des motivations des personnages, ce qui a limité leur appréciation de l'œuvre.<sup>8</sup>

Although limited in scope, this study reinforces Cuin's findings by rendering complex literary works not only more accessible, but also more meaningful for students. It affirms that literary interpretation needs not, indeed perhaps cannot be solely anchored to the printed page, but unfolds dynamically through the interrelation of image, sound, and narrative; modes of expression that often resonate with today's digitally immersed learners. This also invites a deeper reflection on the evolving dialogue between text and film: in an era defined by digital fluency, visual culture, and constant media saturation, might adaptations begin to eclipse the original works in terms of canonical significance? What defines a 'classic' when its most influential afterlife exists in its screen-bound, reimagined form?

This thesis has laid the foundation for such inquiry, positioning the sociology of the 'classic' as a vital site of renewed critical engagement. It calls for methodologies that are comparative, transnational, empirical, digitally informed, and attentive to student experience.

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<sup>8</sup> Chanez Hamdad & Amèle Hamdad, 'Le Père Goriot à l'écran: une clé pédagogique pour comprendre l'œuvre', *Multilinguales*, 22 (2024), 1-19, p. 15.

The figure of Balzac, at once a pillar of nineteenth-century French literature and a continually reinterpreted presence, offers a particularly fertile locus from which to explore the shifting meanings, mechanisms, and trajectories of literary canonization.

This thesis has shown how Balzac and his oeuvre maintain a ubiquitous presence across literary, cinematic, and pedagogic terrains: ‘le chef-d’œuvre classique unifie, révèle, réalise et culmine; une fois qu’il est là, il bouche l’horizon et occupe toute la place’.<sup>9</sup> Schlanger’s observation powerfully captures the totalising force of the ‘classic’. Such a work does not merely invite attention; it frames the very horizon of literary discourse, occupying and defining the space in which interpretation occurs. This all-encompassing presence speaks to the ideal of universality long held as a hallmark of the canon. While notions of universality and timelessness have risked becoming a reductive shorthand for literary value, it is this very capacity to ‘occuper toute la place’ that renders a ‘classic’ enduring: not because it resists change, but because it invites reinterpretation, thrives on recontextualization, and continually renews itself across different historical and medial landscapes.

A ‘classic’ is universal through its capacity to accommodate transformation, whether in meaning, form, or in the evolving perceptions of its readers. Its vitality lies not solely in its intrinsic richness and intricacies, but also in the systems that shape its afterlife: institutional consecration, editorial practices, and the renewed cultural visibility afforded by theatrical, televisual, and cinematic adaptations. These modes of dissemination allow the work to circulate fluidly between spheres of popular and high culture, between the ephemeral and the enduring. Balzac’s oeuvre epitomizes this dynamic. His texts explore themes that extend beyond their historical context, including love and capital, visibility and power, self-fashioning and social hierarchy, which ensure their continued resonance across generations. These ongoing preoccupations are mirrored in the very trajectory of Balzac’s career, which oscillated between

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<sup>9</sup> Judith Schlanger, *La mémoire des œuvres* (Paris: Editions Verdier, 2008), p. 113-14.

the aspiration towards literary greatness and the temptations of commercial success, between financial speculation and chronic indebtedness, between irony and gravitas, laughter and despair. From obscurity to recognition, from recognition to stardom, from stardom to legend, and from legend to myth, Balzac secured his legacy not through permanence, but through a series of metamorphoses.

Balzac's fluid authorial personae enabled him to inhabit characters as varied as Lucien de Rubempré, Eugénie Grandet, and Eugène de Rastignac, each reflecting a flawed yet perceptive humanity, marked by what Ann Jefferson describes as an 'intriguingly anomalous kind of character, alternating between majesty and nullity under the effects of forces that he does not control'.<sup>10</sup> His singular ability to embody contradiction and to migrate across roles and registers positions him as a prism of cultural, historical, and narrative complexity; a figure of ceaseless reinvention, and an embodiment of the very qualities that define the 'classic'. Yet this creative flexibility comes at a cost: the genius that enables such protean versatility is not merely a gift but a condition, at once generative and corrosive, sustaining and self-consuming: '[l]e génie est une horrible maladie. Tout écrivain porte en son cœur un monstre qui, semblable au taenia dans l'estomac, y dévore les sentiments à mesure qu'ils y éclosent. Qui triomphera? la maladie de l'homme, ou l'homme de la maladie? Certes, il faut être un grand homme pour tenir la balance entre son génie et son caractère'.<sup>11</sup>

Balzac's status as a classic writer is thus forged in the fierce tension between high-mindedness and high-profile celebrity, hubris and humiliation, vision and vulnerability. If the 'classic' endures through contradiction, transformation, popularity, and mythic reinvention, then Balzac is not simply its embodiment; he is its most unruly, defiant incarnation.

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<sup>10</sup> Ann Jefferson, *Genius in France: An Idea and its Uses*, p. 137.

<sup>11</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, CH V, p. 544.



## Appendices

The appendices are organized into Appendix A, containing tables related to the Balzac works discussed in Chapter Three, and Appendix B, corresponding to Chapter Four. The legend provided applies to both appendices and specifies the different categories of publications of Balzac's works.

<b>Legend</b>
AY = Adaptation for youth
COLL = Collection of texts (1 vol.)
DE = Digital Edition
EXTS = Extracts*
GN = Graphic Novel
ILL = Illustrated edition**
INS = Instalments
NE = New edition
PARA = <i>Parascolaires</i>
PC = <i>Petits classiques</i>
RP = Reprint
SAN = Stand-alone Novel
TA = Theatrical Adaptation
TIP = Total Iterations Published***
MVP = Multi-Volume publishing
VPI = Volume publishing individual****

\* These editions contain selected extracts from Balzac's works and rarely exceed 100 pages. They are not primarily intended for scholarly study, a purpose more clearly defined in the *Petits Classiques* editions. Extracts from different texts are anthologized within a single volume, as in the case of selections from *Le Père Goriot* combined with passages from *Illusions perdues* and *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*.

\*\* Illustrations include etchings, water colours, etc.

\*\*\* Iterations are defined as both new editions and reprints.

\*\*\*\* Publishing a single text in volumes (especially applicable for texts such as *Illusions perdues*).

## Appendix A – Chapter Three Publishing Data

**Table A1**

**Balzac works printed and reprinted in the Hatier – *Classiques pour tous* collection in Metropolitan France between 1922-1948**

<b>Hatier – <i>Classiques pour tous</i></b>		
<b>Year</b>	<b>Text(s)</b>	<b>Vols.</b>
1922	<i>Un Épisode sous la Terreur</i> <i>Le Réquisitionnaire</i> <i>Le Verdugo</i> <i>L'Auberge rouge</i>	1 vol.
1922	<i>Le Cousin Pons</i>	1 vol.
1923	<i>César Birotteau</i>	1 vol.
1923	<i>Le Père Goriot</i>	1 vol.
1925	<i>Le Colonel Chabert</i>	1 vol.
1925	<i>Louis Lambert &amp; Adieu</i>	1 vol.
1925	<i>Le Père Goriot</i>	1 vol.
1925	<i>La Recherche de l'absolu</i>	2 vols.
1927	<i>Le Cousin Pons</i>	1 vol.
1927-29	<i>Eugénie Grandet</i>	2 vols.
1927	<i>La Maison du chat-qui-pelote</i> <i>Un drame au bord de la mer</i>	1 vol.
1928	<i>César Birotteau</i>	1 vol.
1929	<i>Un Épisode sous la Terreur</i> <i>Le Réquisitionnaire</i> <i>Le Verdugo</i> <i>L'Auberge rouge (reprint)</i>	1 vol.
1935	<i>Le Père Goriot (new ed.)</i>	1 vol.
1936	<i>Le Cousin Pons (new ed.)</i>	1 vol.
1938	<i>Eugénie Grandet (new ed.)</i>	2 vols.
1947	<i>Le Colonel Chabert (new ed.)</i>	1 vol.
1948	<i>Louis Lambert &amp; Adieu</i>	1 vol.

Table A2

Balzac works printed and reprinted in the *Classiques Larousse* collection in Metropolitan France between 1934-63

<b>Larousse – <i>Classiques Larousse</i></b>		
<b>Year</b>	<b>Text(s)</b>	<b>Vols.</b>
1934	<i>Eugénie Grandet</i>	2 vols.
1934	<i>Le Père Goriot</i>	2 vols.
1952	<i>La Cousine Bette</i>	2 vols.
1952	<i>Le Père Goriot</i> (reprint)	2 vols.
1953	<i>Eugénie Grandet</i> (reprint)	2 vols.
1954	<i>Les Paysans</i>	1 vol.
1955	<i>Le Père Goriot</i> (reprint)	2 vols.
1955	<i>La Recherche de l'absolu</i>	1 vol.
1956	<i>Le Lys dans la vallée</i>	1 vol.
1958	<i>Le Cousin Pons</i>	2 vols.
1958	<i>Le Médecin de campagne</i>	1 vol.
1962	<i>Illusions perdues</i>	2 vols.
1963	<i>Illusions perdues</i> (reprint)	2 vols.

Table A3

The publication history of *Le Colonel Chabert* in Metropolitan France during the 1990s

<i>Le Colonel Chabert (1990-99)</i>					
Publishing House	Year	Type	Publishing House	Year	Type
Nathan	1990	SAN	Bordas	1994	SAN, PARA
Gallimard	1990	COLL	Horvath	1994	SAN, ILL
Presses pocket	1991	SAN	Hachette	1994	MVP
Le Grand livre du mois	1992	COLL	Flammarion	1995	SAN
Flammarion	1993	COLL	CDDP de l'Eure	1997	SAN
Gallimard	1993	COLL	Paris-Musées	1997	SAN
EJL	1994	SAN	Maxi-livres-Profrance	1998	SAN
Librairie générale française	1994	SAN	Pocket	1998	SAN
Bookking international	1994	COLL	Le Livre à la carte-Libris édition	1998	SAN
Éd. Carrefour	1994	SAN	Éd. Carrefour	1998	SAN
Éd. de la Seine	1994	SAN	Acamédia	1998	COLL
Flammarion	1994	SAN	Gallimard	1999	SAN
L'Archipel	1994	SAN	Omnibus	1999	COLL
Bordas	1994	SAN	France loisirs	1999	COLL
J'ai lu	1994	SAN	OEM	1999	COLL
Gallimard-Folio	1994	SAN	<b>TIP = 31</b>		

Table A4

Compilation of publication results from Tables A5 to A12

<b>Title</b>	<b>1930s</b>	<b>1940s</b>	<b>1950s</b>	<b>1960s</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>La Peau de chagrin</i>	6	11	9	10	<b>36</b>
<i>Le Colonel Chabert</i>	8	16	10	11	<b>45</b>
<i>Eugénie Grandet</i>	19	26	22	26	<b>93</b>
<i>Le Père Goriot</i>	18	16	23	18	<b>75</b>
<i>Le Lys dans la vallée</i>	8	14	15	10	<b>47</b>
<i>Illusions perdues</i>	1	3	13	13	<b>30</b>
<i>La Cousine Bette</i>	8	6	12	7	<b>33</b>
<i>Le Cousin Pons</i>	8	5	11	10	<b>34</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>393</b>

Table A5

The publication history of *Le Colonel Chabert* in Metropolitan France between the 1930s and the 1960s

1930-39		
Publisher/ Publishing house	Year	Type
René Kieffer	1930	SAN, ILL
Librairie Garnier frères	1932	COLL
Corbeil	1932	VPI
A. Fayard	1933	SAN
Éditions Rivarol	1936	SAN
Firmin-Didot	1937	COLL, ILL
Éditions Rivarol	1937	SAN
Gründ	1939	COLL
<b>TIP</b>		<b>8</b>

1940-49		
Publisher/Publishing house	Year	Type
Argenteuil	1941	MVP, 2 vols., vol. 2
F. Schmid	1941	COLL
La Tradition	1942	SAN, ILL
Éditions La Bruyère	1943	SAN
Société parisienne de librairie & d'éditions	1943	SAN
Société parisienne de librairie & d'éditions	1944	SAN
Office français du livre	1944	SAN, ILL
Éditions du Dauphin	1944	SAN, ILL
Neveu-Brunier	1946	SAN, ILL
M. Daubin	1946	COLL
Éditions de Montsouris	1947	COLL
Éditions G.P.	1947	COLL, ILL
Hatier	1947	PC
A. Guillot	1947	COLL, ILL
Gründ	1947	COLL, ILL
F. Nathan	1948	SAN, ILL

Formes et reflets: Le Club français de l'art	1949	MVP, ILL, 16 vols., vol. 1
<b>TIP</b>		<b>16</b>

<b>1950-59</b>		
<b>Publisher/Publishing house</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Type</b>
A. Michel	1951	COLL
Calmann-Lévy	1951	COLL
F. Hazan*	1952	COLL
F. Hazan	1952	COLL
A. Quillet	1953	COLL
Formes et reflets: Le Club français du livre	1953	MVP, ILL, 16 vols., vol. 1 (new ed.)
Garnier frères	1955	COLL
Gallimard	1956	MVP, 11 vols., vol. 2
Tournai	1956	SAN, ILL
Club de l'honnête homme	1957	MVP, ILL, 28 vols., vol. 4
<b>TIP</b>		<b>10</b>

<b>1960-69</b>		
<b>Publisher/Publishing house</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Type</b>
Delagrave	1960	COLL
M. Didier	1961	SAN
Société des textes français modernes	1961	SAN
A. Quillet	1961	COLL
Club français du livre	1962	MVP, ILL, 16 vols., vol. 1
Charpentier**	1963	SAN
Charpentier	1963	SAN
Garnier	1964	COLL
Le Livre de poche	1964	COLL
Les Bibliophiles de l'originale	1966	MVP, ILL, 17 vols., vol. 10
Club de l'honnête homme	1968	MVP, ILL, 27 vols., vol. 4
<b>TIP</b>		<b>11</b>

\*The 1952 F. Hazan editions are duplicates, with the same publishing year and identical cover pages.

\*\*The 1962 and '1963' Charpentier editions are duplicates. Although the BnF catalogue indicates that the editions were published one year apart, both texts have the same copyright, indicating 1963 as the correct publishing year.

Table A6

The publication history of *Eugénie Grandet* in Metropolitan France between the 1930s and the 1960s

1930-39		
Publisher/ Publishing House	Year	Type
Éditions Nillson	1932	SAN, ILL
Impr. française de l'Édition	1932	SAN
Corbeil	1932	SAN
A. Fayard	1933	INS
C. Vaubaillon	1933	TA
Larousse	1934	PC, VPI
Librairie Hachette	1934	SAN, ILL
Gallimard	1934	SAN
Gallimard	1935	MVP
R. Simon éditeur	1935	SAN
Société universitaire d'éditions et de librairie	1935	SAN, ILL
Éditions du Vert-Logis	1936	EXTS
Gründ	1936	SAN
Éditions de Cluny	1937	MVP, 59 vols., vol. 12
L'Illustration	1937	TA
Les Belles Éditions	1938	SAN
Hatier	1938	PC, VPI
Delagrave	1939	SAN, ILL
J. de Grigord	1939	SAN
<b>TIP</b>		<b>19</b>

1940-49		
Publisher/Publishing House	Year	Type
L'Alliance du livre	1940	EXTS
Géraud Venzac	1940	EXTS
L'artiste	1941	SAN, ILL
Gründ	1941	SAN
F. Schmid	1941	COLL
Éd. Balzac: anciennes Éd. Calmann-Lévy	1943	SAN

Neveu-Brunier	1943	SAN, ILL
SEN	1944	SAN
Etampes (M. Gasnier)*	1944	SAN, AY, ILL
Éditions littéraires de France	1945	SAN, ILL
Etampes (M. Gasnier) - 285 p.	1945	SAN, ILL
Etampes (M. Gasnier)	1946	SAN
R. Rasmussen	1946	SAN
Éditions La Bruyère	1946	SAN, ILL
G. Ratier	1946	SAN, ILL
M. Daubin	1946	EXTS, COLL
J. Gibert	1947	SAN
R. Rasmussen	1947	SAN
F. Nathan	1948	SAN, AY
F. Hazan	1949	COLL
Hatier	1949	SAN
Larousse**	1949	SAN
Larousse	1949	SAN
Calmann-Lévy	1949	SAN
Delmas	1949	SAN
<b>TIP</b>		<b>26</b>

<b>1950-59</b>		
<b>Publisher/Publishing House</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Type</b>
Éditions de Cluny	1950	SAN
Garnier frères	1950	SAN
A. Guillot	1950	COLL, ILL
Delagrave***	1950	SAN, AY ILL
Formes et reflets: Le Club français du livre	1951	MVP, ILL, 79 vols., vol. 18
Formes et reflets: Le Club français de l'art	1950	MVP, ILL, 16 vols., vol. 5
L. Fabre	1951	SAN, ILL
Delagrave	1951	SAN, AY, ILL
Club Français du livre	1951	COLL, ILL
Larousse	1953	PC, VPI
Société universitaire d'éditions & de librairie	1953	SAN, ILL

Formes et reflets: Le Club français du livre	1954	MVP, ILL, 16 vols., vol. 5 (new ed.)
Gründ	1955	SAN
Gallimard	1956	MVP, 11 vols., vol. 3
Hatier	1956	EXT, VPI
Club de l'honnête homme	1957	MVP, ILL, 28 vols., vol. 5
Éditions du Panthéon	1957	SAN, ILL
Éditions de la Tour du guet	1957	SAN, ILL
Garnier frères	1958	SAN
A. Colin	1959	SAN
Delagrave	1959	SAN, AY, ILL
Le Club du meilleur livre	1959	SAN
<b>TIP</b>		<b>22</b>

<b>1960-69</b>		
<b>Publisher/Publishing House</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Type</b>
A. Michel	1960	SAN
Éditions G.P.	1960	SAN, ILL
O.D.E.J.	1960	SAN, ILL
Garnier Frères	1961	SAN, ILL
Club français du livre	1962	MVP, ILL, 16 vols., vol. 5
Garnier-Flammarion	1964	SAN
Bordas****	1965	PARA
Éditions G.P.	1965	SAN, ILL
Éd. Baudelaire	1965	SAN
Le Livre de poche	1965	SAN
Larousse	1965	VPI
Hatier	1965	EXT, VPI
Garnier Frères*****	1965	SAN, ILL
Les Bibliophiles de l'originale	1965	MVP, ILL, 17 vols. vol. 5
Gallimard	1966	COLL
Étampes: Gasnier	1966	COLL
Bordas	1966	PARA
Garnier frères	1966	SAN, ILL
Hatier	1966	EXT
Le Club des classiques	1967	COLL

Hatier	1968	EXTS, ILL
Club de l'honnête homme	1968	MVP, ILL, 27 vols., vol. 5
Édition de l'Érable	1969	SAN
Gautier Languereau	1969	SAN, ILL
Tallandier	1969	SAN
Presses de la Renaissance	1969	COLL
<b>TIP</b>		<b>26</b>

\*Between 1944-46, three copies of *Eugénie Grandet* were published by Etampes Gasnier. The 1944 and 1946 editions are shorter than the 1945 edition. The 1944 and 1945 editions include illustrations, whereas the 1946 collection does not.

\*\*Both editions are duplicates. The page numbers are the same including their title pages.

\*\*\*The only distinction between the 1950 and 1951 Delagrave editions are their illustrators. The 1950 edition was illustrated by Pierre Lissac whereas Piere Rousseau illustrated the 1951 edition.

\*\*\*\*The 1965 and 1966 Bordas editions are the same, including their cover pages. No editorial changes were made.

\*\*\*\*\*The 1965 Garnier frères edition includes an introduction by Pierre-Georges Castex whereas the 1966 includes an introduction in English by Barbara Thompson.

Table A7

The publication history of *Le Père Goriot* in Metropolitan France between the 1930s and the 1960s

1930-39		
Publisher/ Publishing House	Year	Type
Tallandier*	1930	SAN, ILL
Éditions du Monde moderne	1930	SAN
L. Conard	1931	MVP, ILL, 40 vols., vol. 6
Garnier frères	1930	SAN
Imprimerie française de l'édition	1931	SAN
Corbeil	1932	MVP, 2 vols., vol. 1
Éditions Nilsson	1932	SAN, ILL
Tallandier	1932*	SAN, ILL
A. Fayard	1933	INS
Morney	1933	SAN, ILL
Larousse	1934	PC, VPI
R. Simon**	1935	SAN
Hatier	1935	PC
R. Simon	1936	SAN
Éditions du Vert-Logis	1936	EXT
Gründ	1936	SAN
Éditions de Cluny	1937	MVP, 59 vols., vol. 13
H.Béziat	1938	SAN
<b>TIP</b>		<b>18</b>

1940-49		
Publisher/ Publishing House	Year	Type
Argenteuil	1941	MVP, 2 vols., vol. 2
F. Schmid	1941	COLL
SEN	1943	EXTS
Maurice Berty	1944	SAN, ILL
Éditions du Myrte	1944	SAN, ILL
Éditions du Pré-aux-Clercs	1946	SAN
Éditions du Chardon	1946	SAN
R. Simon	1946	SAN

J. Vautrain	1946	SAN, ILL
Union bibliophile de France	1946	COLL, ILL
J. Gibert	1947	SAN
SFELT	1947	SAN
La Jeune Parque	1947	EXTS
F. Hazan	1948	COLL
A. Guillot	1948	SAN, ILL
Bordas	1949	SAN
Éditions Garamond	1949	SAN
<b>TIP</b>		<b>16</b>

<b>1950-59</b>		
<b>Publisher/ Publishing House</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Type</b>
Hatier	1950	PARA
Formes et reflets: Le Club français de l'art	1950	MVP, ILL, 16 vols., vol. 4
Imprimerie nationale (éd. nationale de la centenaire)	1950	MVP, ILL, 10 vols., vol. 1
Garnier frères	1950	SAN
Formes et reflets: Le Club français du livre	1950	MVP, ILL, 79 vols., vol. 18
Hatier	1950	EXTS
A. Lemerre***	1951	SAN
Hachette	1951	PC
Delmas	1951	SAN
Éditions La Bruyère	1952	SAN
A. Sauret	1952	SAN, ILL
A. Michel	1952	SAN
Larousse	1952	PC, VPI
A. Lemerre	1952***	SAN
Formes et reflets: Le Club français du livre	1954	MVP, ILL, 16 vols., vol. 4 (new ed.)
Hatier	1953	SAN
Édition des Trois pommiers	1954	SAN
Larousse	1955	PC, VPI
Hatier****	1955	PARA
Gallimard	1956	MVP, 11 vols., vol. 2

Club de l'honnête homme	1957	MVP, ILL, 28 vols., vol. 4
Hatier	1957	PARA
Le Club du meilleur livre	1957	SAN
<b>TIP</b>		<b>23</b>

<b>1960-69</b>		
<b>Publisher/ Publishing House</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Type</b>
A. Quillet	1960	COLL
Garnier frères	1960	SAN
Charpentier	1961	SAN, AY
Librairie générale française	1961	SAN
Club français du livre	1962	MVP, ILL, 16 vols, vol. 4
Hatier*****	1965	PARA
Tallandier*****	1965	SAN
Les Bibliophiles de l'originale	1966	MVP, ILL, 17 vols., vol. 9
Éditions G.P.	1966	SAN
Garnier-Flammarion	1966	SAN
Garnier frères	1966	SAN
S.E.C.A	1966	SAN
Hatier	1967	PARA
Le Club des classiques	1967	COLL
Club de l'honnête homme	1968	MVP, ILL, 27 vols., vol. 4
Cercle du bibliophile	1968	SAN, ILL
Éditions de l'Érable	1969	SAN
Les presses de la Renaissance	1969	SAN
<b>TIP</b>		<b>18</b>

\*The 1930 and 1932 Tallandier editions are almost identical, apart from their cover pages. No editorial changes were made. While the BnF catalogue indicates the second Tallandier edition was published in 1932, the copyright indicates 1930. This is likely due to human error.

\*\*Apart from their different cover pages, the 1935 and 1936 R. Simon editions are the same. No editorial changes were made.

\*\*\*The 1951 and 1952 A. Lemerre editions are almost the same, apart from their cover pages. No editorial changes were made. While the BnF catalogue indicates that the second A. Lemerre edition was published in 1952, the copyright indicates 1951. This is likely due to human error.

\*\*\*\*The 1955, 1957 and 1965 Hatier editions are identical, including their cover pages. No editorial changes were made.

\*\*\*\*\*The 1965 and 1967 Hatier editions differ in their total page numbers and cover pages. The 1967 edition was modified with editorial changes and is longer than the 1965 edition.

\*\*\*\*\*The BnF catalogue indicates that there was another Tallandier edition published in 1967, however, the copyright indicates the text was in fact published in 1973. For this reason, the edition does not appear in the appendix.

Table A8

The publication history of *Le Lys dans la vallée* in Metropolitan France between the 1930s and the 1960s

1930-39		
Publisher/ Publishing House	Year	Type
Garnier frères	1931	SAN
Argenteuil	1931	SAN
Libr. Gibert	1932	SAN
Nelson	1933	SAN
H. Béziat	1936	SAN
Gründ	1936	SAN
R. Simon	1937	SAN
Les Belles Éditions	1938	SAN
<b>TIP</b>		<b>8</b>

1940-49		
Publisher/ Publishing House	Year	Type
Éditions Balzac	1942	SAN
Gründ*	1943	SAN, ILL
J. Vautrain	1945	SAN, ILL
Gründ	1945	SAN, ILL
M. Gasnier	1946	SAN, ILL
Les Éditions de la Nouvelle France	1946	SAN, ILL
R. Simon	1946	SAN
F. Hazan	1947	COLL
L'artiste	1947	SAN, ILL
F. Nathan	1947	SAN, AY
Delamain et Boutelleau	1948	SAN
Gallimard	1949	COLL
Formes et reflets: Le Club français du livre	1949	MVP, ILL 79 vols., vol. 10
Formes et reflets: Le Club français de l'art	1949	MVP, ILL, 16 vols., vol. 1
<b>TIP</b>		<b>14</b>

1950-59		
Publisher/ Publishing House	Year	Type
A. Guillot	1950	SAN, ILL
Les Compagnons du livre	1950	SAN
A. Lemerre	1950	SAN
Éditions La Bruyère	1951	SAN
Éditions Vedette	1952	SAN, ILL
Garnier frères**	1952	SAN
Éditions du Dauphin	1953	SAN
Hachette	1953	SAN
Formes et reflets: Le Club français du livre	1953	MVP, ILL, 16 vols., vol. 1 (new ed.)
Gallimard	1955	MVP, 11 vols., vol. 8
Garnier frères	1955	SAN
Larousse	1956	PC
Club de l'honnête homme	1957	MVP, ILL, 28 vols., vol. 5
Nouvelle librairie de France	1958	SAN, ILL
Charpentier	1959	SAN, ILL
<b>TIP</b>		<b>15</b>

1960-69		
Publisher/ Publishing House	Year	Type
Garnier frères	1961	SAN
Éditions G.P.	1961	SAN
Club français du livre	1962	MVP, ILL, 16 vols., vol. 1
Le Livre de poche	1965	SAN
Les Bibliophiles de l'originale	1965	MVP, ILL, 17 vols., vol. 7
Garnier frères***	1966	SAN, ILL
Tallandier	1966	SAN
Garnier frères	1968***	SAN, ILL
Bordas	1968	PARA
Club de l'honnête homme	1968	MVP, ILL, 27 vols., vol. 5
<b>TIP</b>		<b>10</b>

\*The 1943 and 1945 Gründ editions are the same, including their cover pages. No editorial changes were made.

\*\*The 1952 and 1955 Garnier frères editions are the same in that both their introductions were written by Maurice Allem. However, the 1955 edition has more pages. The change in font choice allowed for a clearer reading.

\*\*\*The 1966 and 1968 Garnier frères editions are identical, including their cover pages. No editorial changes were made. While the BnF catalogue indicates that the edition was published in 1968, the copyright indicates 1966.

Table A9

The publication history of *Illusions perdues* in Metropolitan France between the 1930s and the 1960s

1930-39		
Publisher/ Publishing House	Year	Type
Argenteuil	1936	COLL
<b>TIP</b>		<b>1</b>

1940-49		
Publisher/ Publishing House	Year	Type
Droz*	1946	SAN
La Jeune Parque	1947	COLL, EXT
A. Guillot	1949-50	VPI, ILL
<b>TIP</b>		<b>3</b>

1950-59		
Publisher/ Publishing House	Year	Type
F. Hazan	1950	SAN
F. Hazan	1950	COLL
Formes et reflets: Le Club français de l'art	1950	MVP, ILL, 16 vols., vol. 4
Imprimerie nationale (éd. nationale de la centenaire)	1950	MVP, 10 vols., vol. 2
Calmann-Lévy	1951	VPI
Gallimard	1952	MVP, 11 vols., vol. 4
Formes et reflets: Le Club français du livre	1954	MVP, ILL, 16 vols., vol. 4 (new ed.)
Les Éditeurs français réunis	1954	SAN
Garnier frères	1956	SAN
Club des Libraires de France	1957	MVP, ILL, 2 vols., vol. 1
Club des Libraires de France	1957	SAN
Le Club du meilleur livre	1957	VPI
Le Club de l'honnête homme	1958	MVP, ILL, 28 vols., vol. 8
<b>TIP</b>		<b>13</b>

1960-69		
Publisher/ Publishing House	Year	Type

Le Club des amis du livre	1960	VPI
Garnier frères	1961	SAN
Le Livre de poche	1962	SAN
Larousse	1962–1963	PC, VPI
Club français du livre	1962	MVP, ILL, 16 vols., vol. 4
P. Gaudin	1965	EXT, ILL
Gründ	1965	SAN
Les Bibliophiles de l'originale	1966	MVP, ILL, 17 vols., vol. 8
Garnier-Flammarion	1966	SAN
Garnier frères	1967	SAN
Club de l'honnête homme	1968	MVP, ILL, 27 vols., vol. 7
Presses de la Renaissance	1969	SAN
Tallandier	1969	VPI
<b>TIP</b>		<b>13</b>

\*Only *Les Deux poètes* was published.

Table A10

The publication history of *La Peau de chagrin* in Metropolitan France between the 1930s and the 1960s

1930-39		
Publisher/ Publishing House	Year	Type
Heugel	1930	TA
Tallandier	1930	SAN, ILL
A. Fayard	1933	INS
Garnier frères	1933	SAN
Gallimard	1937	MVP, 2 vols., vol. 1
H. Béziat	1938	SAN
<b>TIP</b>		<b>6</b>

1940-49		
Publisher/ Publishing House	Year	Type
A. Leconte	1942	SAN
Éditions de la Nouvelle France	1943	SAN, ILL
Éditions du Panthéon	1945	SAN, ILL
M. Gasnier	1945	SAN, ILL
G. Ratier	1946	SAN, ILL
J. Rouff	1946	SAN
Éditions de la Vie réelle	1946	SAN, ILL
J. Gibert	1947	SAN
J. Vautrain	1947	SAN, ILL
R. Rasmussen	1947	SAN
Gründ	1948	SAN, ILL
<b>TIP</b>		<b>11</b>

1950-59		
Publisher/ Publishing House	Year	Type
Éditions du Dauphin	1950	SAN
Formes et reflets: Le Club français de l'art	1951	MVP, ILL, 16 vols., vol. 7
A. Michel	1951	SAN
Calmann-Lévy	1951	SAN

Formes et reflets: Le Club français du livre*	1951	MVP, ILL, 79 vols., vol. 21
A. Guillot (Ed. de centenaire)	1952	SAN, ILL
Formes et reflets: Le Club français du livre	1954	MVP, ILL, 16 vols., vol. 7 (new ed.)
Gallimard	1955	MVP, 11 vols., vol. 9
Garnier frères	1955	SAN
<b>TIP</b>		<b>9</b>

<b>1960-69</b>		
<b>Publisher/ Publishing House</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Type</b>
Club de l'honnête homme	1960	MVP, 28 vols., vol. 18
Garnier frères	1960	SAN, ILL
Charpentier	1962	SAN, AY
Union générale d'éditions	1962	VPI
Club français du livre	1963	MVP, ILL, 16 vols., vol. 7
Cercle du bibliophile	1965	COLL
Le Livre de poche	1966	SAN
Les Bibliophiles de l'originale	1967	MVP, ILL, 17 vols., vol. 14
Garnier frères	1967	SAN
Club de l'honnête homme	1969	MVP, ILL, 27 vols., vol. 14
Éditions G.P.	1969	SAN, ILL
<b>TIP</b>		<b>10</b>

Table A11

The publication history of *La Cousine Bette* in Metropolitan France between the 1930s and the 1960s

1930-39		
Publisher/ Publishing House	Year	Type
A. Fayard	1933	INS
Bar-le-Duc	1933	VPI
Argenteuil	1936	COLL
Les Belles Éditions	1937-38	VPI
Garnier frères	1937	SAN
R. Simon*	1937	VPI
Gründ	1938	VPI
R. Simon	1939	VPI
<b>TIP</b>		<b>8</b>

1940-49		
Publisher/ Publishing House	Year	Type
Éditions du Panthéon	1946	VPI, ILL
S.E.P.E.	1947	SAN
Mulhouse	1948	SAN
Bordas	1948	SAN
A. Guillot	1948	VPI, ILL
Larousse	1949	SAN
<b>TIP</b>		<b>6</b>

1950-59		
Publisher/ Publishing House	Year	Type
F. Hazan	1951	SAN
Formes et reflets: Le Club français de l'art	1951	MVP, 16 vols., vol. 9
Gallimard	1952	MVP, 11 vols., vol. 6
Larousse	1952	PC, VPI
Formes et reflets: le Club français du livre	1952	MVP, 79 vols., vol. 27
Formes et reflets: Le Club français du livre	1954	MVP, ILL, 16 vols., vol. 9 (new ed.)

Delmas	1957	SAN
Gérard et Cie	1958	SAN
A. Michel	1958	SAN
Club de l'honnête homme	1959	MVP, ILL, 28 vols., vol. 12
Club du meilleur livre	1959	SAN
Garnier frères	1959	SAN
<b>TIP</b>		<b>12</b>

<b>1960-69</b>		
<b>Publisher/ Publishing House</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Type</b>
Le Livre de poche	1963	SAN
Club français du livre	1963	MVP, ILL, 16 vols., vol. 9
Garnier frères	1965	SAN, ILL
Éditions S.E.C.A.	1966	SAN
Bordas	1966	PARA
Les Bibliophiles de l'originale	1968	MVP, ILL, 17 vols., vol. 17
Club de l'honnête homme	1969	MVP, ILL, 27 vols., vol. 10
<b>TIP</b>		<b>7</b>

\*R. Simon published *La Cousine Bette* in two volumes between 1937-39. The texts are not duplicates. Their cover pages are different and their total number of pages.

Table A12

The publication history of *Le Cousin Pons* in Metropolitan France between the 1930s and the 1960s

1930-39		
Publisher/ Publishing House	Year	Type
Société française d'imprimerie et de librairie	1932	SAN, AY
René Hilsum	1933	VPI
Gallimard	1936	COLL
Hatier	1936	PC
Garnier Frères	1937	SAN
Gründ	1938	SAN
H. Béziat	1938	SAN
Delagrave	1938	SAN, ILL
<b>TIP</b>		<b>8</b>

1940-1949		
Publisher/ Publishing House	Year	Type
Éditions littéraires de France	1942	SAN
J. Gibert	1945	SAN
Éditions Diderot	1946	SAN
S.E.P.E.	1947	SAN, ILL
A. Guillot (ed. centenaire)	1949	SAN, ILL
<b>TIP</b>		<b>5</b>

1950-59		
Publisher/ Publishing House	Year	Type
F. Hazan	1950	COLL
Formes et reflets: Le Club français de l'art	1951	MVP, ILL, 16 vols., vol. 10
Gallimard	1952	MVP, 11 vols., vol. 6
A. Michel	1952	COLL
Le Club français du livre	1952	MVP, ILL, 79 vols, vol. 36
Formes et reflets: Le Club français du livre	1954	MVP, ILL, 16 vols., vol. 10. (new ed.)
Delmas	1955	SAN

Garnier frères	1956	SAN
Classiques Larousse	1958	PC, VPI
Club de l'honnête homme	1959	MVP, ILL, 28 vols., vol. 13
Les Amis du Club du livre du mois	1959	SAN
<b>TIP</b>		<b>11</b>

<b>1960-69</b>		
<b>Publisher/ Publishing House</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Type</b>
Les Productions de Paris	1960	SAN
Delagrave	1960	AY
Club de livres	1961	COLL
Le Livre de poche	1963	SAN
Le Club français du livre	1963	MVP, ILL, 16 vols., vol. 10
Éditions S.E.C.A.	1966	SAN
O.D.E.G.E.	1967	COLL
Les Bibliophiles de l'originale	1968	MVP, ILL, 17 vols., vol. 17
Garnier frères	1969	SAN
Club de l'honnête homme	1969	MVP, ILL, 27 vols., vol. 11
<b>TIP</b>		<b>10</b>



## Appendix B – Chapter Four Publishing Data

**Table B1**

The publication history of Balzac works (reprints and new editions) in the *Classiques de poche* collection in Metropolitan France

<i>Classiques de poche</i>			
Text(s)	Year(s)	Type	New Ed. or Reprint
<i>La Duchesse de Langeais</i>	1958, 1973, 1998	COLL, COLL, SAN	NE (1998)
<i>Les Chouans</i>	1961, 1972	SAN, SAN	NE (1972)
<i>Le Lys dans la vallée</i>	1965, 1972	SAN, SAN	NE (1972)
<i>La Femme de trente ans</i>	1967, 1991	SAN, SAN	NE (1991)
<i>La Recherche de l'absolu</i>	1967, 1999	COLL, SAN	NE (1999)
<i>Albert Savarus</i>	1968, 2015	COLL, SAN	NE (2015)
<i>Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées</i>	1969, 2022	SAN, SAN	NE (2022)
<i>Le Médecin de campagne</i>	1972, 1999, 2024	SAN, SAN, SAN	NE (2024)
<i>Le Père Goriot</i>	1972, 2004	SAN, SAN	NE (2004)
<i>Illusions perdues</i>	1972, 2006	SAN, SAN	NE (2006)
<i>Le Colonel Chabert</i>	1973, 1994	COLL, SAN	NE (1994)
<i>César Birotteau</i>	1972, 2018	SAN, SAN	NE (2018)
<i>La Fille aux yeux d'or</i>	1973, 2019	COLL, SAN	NE (2019)

Table B2

The publication history of Balzac works (reprints and new editions) in the *Folio classique* collection in Metropolitan France

<i>Folio Classique</i>			
Text(s)	Year(s)	Type	New Ed. or Reprint
<i>Le Colonel Chabert</i>	1994, 1999	SAN, SAN	NE (1999)
<i>Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu</i>	1994, 2015	COLL, SAN	NE (2015)
<i>Sarrasine, Gambarà, Massimilla Doni</i>	1995, 2007	COLL, COLL	NE (2007)
<i>Le Père Goriot</i>	1999, 1999, 2024	COLL, SAN, SAN	NE (1999), NE (2024)
<i>Illusions perdues</i>	1999, 2013	COLL, SAN	NE (2013)
<i>Eugénie Grandet</i>	1999, 2016, 2021	SAN, SAN, SAN	NE (2016), RP (2021)
<i>Le Cousin Pons</i>	1973, 2007, 2022	SAN, SAN	NE

Table B3

The publication history of Balzac works in the Larousse – *Petits classiques* collection in Metropolitan France from the 2000s to the present day

<b>Larousse – Petits Classiques</b>	
<b>Text(s)</b>	<b>Year</b>
<i>Le Père Goriot</i>	2001
<i>Eugénie Grandet</i>	2002
<i>Le Père Goriot</i> (new ed.)	2007
<i>La Peau de chagrin</i>	2011
<i>Le Colonel Chabert</i>	2013
<i>Les Chouans</i>	2014
<i>Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées</i>	2022
<i>La Peau de chagrin</i> (new ed.)	2022

Table B4

The publication history of *Le Père Goriot* in Metropolitan France between 2000-09

<b><i>Le Père Goriot</i> (2000–2009)</b>		
<b>Publisher/ Publishing House</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Type</b>
L’Aventurine	2000	SAN
Gallimard	2000	SAN
Larousse	2001	SAN
Éditions Garnier	2002	DE
Librairie générale française	2004	SAN
Hatier	2004	SAN
Éditions Autrement	2005	EXT
Livraphone	2005	DE
Micro application	2006	DE
L’École des loisirs	2006	SAN
Livraphone	2006	DE
Larousse	2007	SAN
Éditions de Lodi	2008	SAN
Flammarion	2009	SAN
Delcourt	2009	GN
<b>TIP</b>	<b>15</b>	

Table B5

The publication history of Balzac works in the Hatier – *Classiques et Cie* collection in Metropolitan France from the 2000s to the present day

<b>Hatier - <i>Classiques et Cie</i></b>	
<b>Text(s)</b>	<b>Year</b>
<i>La Peau de chagrin</i>	2002
<i>Ferragus</i> <i>La Duchesse de Langeais</i> <i>La Fille aux yeux d'or</i>	2003
<i>Le Père Goriot</i>	2004
<i>Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu</i> <i>Sarrasine</i>	2005
<i>Le Colonel Chabert</i>	2005
<i>La Femme de trente ans</i>	2006
<i>Ferragus</i> <i>La Duchesse de Langeais</i> <i>La Fille aux yeux d'or</i> (reprint)	2008
Le Colonel Chabert (new ed.)	2011
<i>Ferragus</i> <i>La Duchesse de Langeais</i> <i>La Fille aux yeux d'or</i> (reprint)	2011
<i>La Peau de chagrin</i> (reprint)	2011
<i>Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu</i> <i>Sarrasine</i> (reprint)	2012
<i>Le Père Goriot</i> & autres textes sur le thème de l'argent (new ed.)	2013
<i>Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées</i>	2022
<i>La Peau de chagrin</i> (new ed.)	2022

Table B6

The publication history of Balzac works in the *Classiques Hachette* collection in Metropolitan France between 1990s and the 2010s

<b>Hachette - <i>Classiques Hachette</i></b>	
<b>Text(s)</b>	<b>Year</b>
<i>Le Colonel Chabert</i>	1994
<i>Eugénie Grandet</i>	1995
<i>Le Père Goriot</i>	1997
<i>Le Père Goriot</i> (reprint)	2007
<i>Le Colonel Chabert</i> (reprint)	2007
<i>Eugénie Grandet</i> (reprint)	2008

Table B7

The publication history of Balzac works in the *Bibliocollège & Bibliolycée* collection in Metropolitan France from the 2000s to the present day

<b>Hachette - <i>Bibliocollège &amp; Bibliolycée</i></b>		
<b>Text(s)</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Collège or Lycée</b>
<i>Le Colonel Chabert</i>	2002	<i>Bibliocollège</i>
<i>La Peau de chagrin</i>	2004	<i>Bibliolycée</i>
<i>Le Père Goriot</i>	2012	<i>Bibliolycée</i>
<i>Eugénie Grandet</i>	2012	<i>Bibliocollège</i>
<i>Le Colonel Chabert</i>	2019	<i>Bibliolycée</i>
<i>Mémoire de deux jeunes mariées</i>	2022	<i>Bibliolycée</i>
<i>La Peau de chagrin</i> (new ed.)	2022	<i>Bibliolycée</i>

**Table B8**

The publication history of *La Femme de trente ans* in Metropolitan France between 1990-99

<i>La Femme de trente ans (1990-99)</i>		
Publisher/ Publishing House	Year	Type
Le Livre de poche	1991	SAN
Presses Pocket	1991	SAN
Gallimard	1991	SAN
Le Grand livre du mois	1992	SAN
Gallimard	1993	MVP
Flammarion	1996	SAN
Acamédia	1998	DE
Bibliopolis	1998-99	DE
France Loisirs	1999	MVP
<b>TIP</b>		<b>9</b>

**Table B9**

The publication history of *Le Lys dans la vallée* in Metropolitan France during the 1990s

<i>Le Lys dans la vallée (1990-99)</i>		
Publishing House	Year	Type
Presses Pocket	1990	SAN
Le Grand livre du mois	1991	SAN
Gallimard	1991	SAN
Seuil	1992	SAN
Éd. Carrefour	1994	SAN
Bookking International	1994	SAN
Librairie generale française	1995	SAN
EDDL	1996	SAN
Acamédia	1998	DE
Éd. Carrefour	1998	SAN
Nouvelle librairie de France	1999	MVP
Pocket	1999	SAN
<b>TIP = 12</b>		

**Table B10**

The publication history of *Le Cousin Pons* in Metropolitan France from the 2010s to the present day

<i>Le Cousin Pons (2010-22)</i>		
<b>Publisher/ Publishing House</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Type</b>
L'École des loisirs	2014	SAN
Flammarion	2015	SAN
Éditions Thélème	2017	DE
Classiques Garnier	2018	SAN
Gallimard – Folio classique	2022	SAN
Éditions Ararauna	2025	SAN
<b>TIP</b>		<b>6</b>



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