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THE DREAM AS DESIGN IN BALZAC AND FAULKNER

Students of literature, and I mean critics together with professors and their progeny, are still too often prone, when comparing authors of uncommon productivity, to describe them as "inorganic" or "organic", as having either a fully rational involvement with their work or a total submission to the dictates of inspiration. Classifications are always false in the end, and this one leads the unwary to declare the first group of authors calculating individuals, insensitive to the noblest ideals of art, while the others are more cordially looked upon as sublime fools. These attitudes, perhaps more noticeable in Anglo-Saxon criticism, are unfortunate, to say the least, as they imply a verdict upon the works themselves and deprive us all of speaking calmly about the creative process and its results, of being open, that is, to miracles. Honoré de Balzac is the best example of those great authors promiscuously thrown into the first category described and William Faulkner, whose delightfully devious comments on not being a writer at all still mystify literary sleuths, is a fine instance of the second. A brief analysis of what seem to be fundamentally opposite perspectives entertained by Balzac and Faulkner toward their work serves to show not only that inspiration and rationality, dream and design, are coexistent in the creative process experienced by both authors, but that the very substance of the dream itself is the design.

The differences in the overall structure of the works of Balzac and Faulkner derive largely from the opposition between, on the one hand, what we might call Anglo-Saxon pragmatism, and on the other, the French tendency toward rationalism which explains why Balzac is, broadly speaking, part of the Cartesian tradition. For purposes of comparison, it is of course useful to underscore the fact that Balzac, throughout his life, consciously pursued a more specifically critical approach to his work than did Faulkner; the French author's numerous prefaces — often reworked or amplified — and countless explanatory letters, as well as the very outline of the *Comédie humaine*, testify to that fact. Balzac early conceived of a design and spent his lifetime refining and fulfilling it. In the foreword to *Le Gars*, which later became *Le Dernier chouan*, the first novel Balzac signed with his own name, the

author states his intention, formed about 1825—1827, of composing a series of novels dealing with the history of France, similar to Walter Scott's effort in relation to England. Although Balzac was to abandon this project, it is significant that, even at this early stage, he was preoccupied not only with the creation of a grand design, but with the fact that the subject should be a history; for the latter idea was to form the basis of his *Comédie humaine*.

In the *Introduction aux Romans et Contes philosophiques*, dated 1831 (which, although signed by his friend Philarète Chasles, appears definitely influenced, if not written in part, by Balzac himself), Balzac readily sees that his whole work to date has been inspired by the conception that he wished to develop in his *Etudes analytiques*, projected as early as 1820, and specifically in that portion of them entitled *Pathologie de la vie sociale*. The intention of the latter explains its title: it was to be the description of

> les manifestations de la pensée, prise sous toutes les formes que lui donne l'état social... L'état de société fait de nos besoins, de nos nécessités, de nos goûts, autant de plaies, autant de maladies, par les excès auquels nous nous portons, poussés par le développement que leur imprime la pensée: il n'y a rien en nous par où elle ne se trahisse [Balzac's italics][1].

While Balzac never finished the *Etudes analytiques*, they were to have been, according to him, the crowning portion of his *Comédie humaine*, and it is clear that the philosophy underlying the proposed studies is applied again and again in the completed part of Balzac's work. The *Introduction aux Romans et Contes philosophiques* specifies that

> L'analyse, dernier développement de la pensée, a... tué les jouissances de la pensée. C'est ce que M. de Balzac a vu dans son temps: c'est le dernier résultat de cet axiome de Jean-Jacques: L'homme qui pense est un animal dépravé.
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> Assurément il n'est pas de donnée plus tragique; car, à mesure que l'homme se civilise, il se suicide... Opposant au néant intérieur et profond du corps social, cette agitation factice et cette splendeur funèbre, il a cru... qu'il y avait encore une magie dans ce contraste [...][2]

Here we have already set forth an outline of the *Comédie humaine*.

In the years 1833 and 1834, a period of exceptional creativity, Balzac divides his work into two groups, the *Etudes de moeurs*, with its six subdivisions into *Scènes*, and the *Etudes philosophiques*, and he dictates to Félix Davin an introduction to each series. As Bernard Guyon notes[3], these introductions constitute, in effect, the first preface to the *Comédie humaine*. The opposition, brought out in the preceding quotation, between the outward forms of society and its inner motivations, is unders-

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[1] H. de Balzak, *L'Oeuvre de Balzac*, ed. Albert Béguin and Jean A. Ducourneau (Paris 1967), XII, p. 1517. Date of publication of a specific volume in this series will be noted only in first reference to that volume.

[2] Ph. Chasles, *Introduction aux Romans et Contes Philosophiques*, [in:] Balzac, *L'Oeuvre...*, XV, p. 79.

[3] In his preface to *Préfaces* (de Balzac), [in:] Balzac, *L'Oeuvre...*, XV, p. 16.

cored now as the very basis of Balzac's work. The *Etudes de moeurs au XIX*e *siècle* are to form the first part, the foundation, which is "une exacte représentation de la société dans tous ses effets". The author intends to study man:

> dans toutes les situations de sa vie, de le décrire sous tous ses angles, de le saisir dans toutes ses phases, conséquent et inconséquent, ni complètement bon, ni complètement vicieux, en lutte avec les lois dans ses intérêts, en lutte avec les moeurs dans ses sentiments, logique ou grand par hasard [...][4]

Balzac is here the historian he had first dreamed of being, but specifically "l'historien des moeurs" whose subject is the society of nineteenth-century France. If the *Etudes de moeurs* deal with the "effects" of contemporary society, the *Etudes philosophiques* "en constateront les causes"[5]: they are meant to explain the society described by the author's theory of passion, or *pensée*, as destructive of life. That theory had already been dramatically applied in *La Peau de chagrin* in which we see how "La vie décroît en raison directe de la puissance des désirs ou de la dissipation des idées"[6]. Briefly stated, the principle underlying the *Etudes philosophiques* is that of "la pensée tuant le penseur"[7]. In the famous *Avant-Propos* written for the first edition of the *Comédie humaine* in 1842, Balzac tells us of the genesis of his work and of the hopes he had wished to realize in its creation; it is a summary of the ideas nurtured in his mind for two decades and outlined in part in his various introductions and prefaces. It is here that he publicly applies the title of *La Comédie humaine* to his work:

> L'immensité d'un plan qui embrasse à la fois l'histoire et la critique de la Société, l'analyse de ses maux et la discussion de ses principes, m'autorise, je crois, à donner à mon ouvrage le titre sous lequel il paraît aujourd' hui: *La Comédie Humaine* [Balzac's capitals][8].

Balzac's work, then, intends to show on the one hand a history, and on the other a criticism of society. If one must finally reject Bernard Guyon's statement[9] that in Balzac the "philosopher" precedet the novelist because it denies the inspirations of genius, one can say certainly that the rationalist, the critic, functions in Balzac parallel to the artist, that the preoccupation with the total pattern of the work accompanies the delineation of those "magiques fantasmagories"[10] of the imagination. We have his own word for it: "Le génie n'est complet que quand il joint à la faculté de créer, la puissance de coordonner ses créations"[11].

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[4] Balzac, *L'Oeuvre...*, XV, p. 135.
[5] *Ibidem*, p. 126.
[6] *Ibidem*, p. 120.
[7] *Ibidem*, p. 123.
[8] *Ibidem*, p. 383.
[9] In: Balzac, *L'Oeuvre...*, XV, p. 15.
[10] Balzac, *L'Oeuvre...*, XV, p. 72.
[11] *Ibidem*, p. 135.

It is that critical faculty which not only conceived and refined the plan of the *Comédie humaine*, but made it comply with the principle of "l'unité de composition", the oneness of being. It is worthwhile here to remember that Balzac was a desciple of Buffon and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, of Lavater and Gall, as well as of the illuminists Swedenborg and Saint-Martin. God acts according to the principle of unity. Upon the Swedenborgian theory of correspondences between the material and spiritual worlds,

> Balzac superpose et, en fin de compte, substitue une vision scientifique du monde selon laquelle l'unité de l'univers ne résulte point tant de l'harmonie préetablie entre deux règnes hétérogènes que de l'unicité d'une même substance, dont les transformations donnent lieu à des phénomènes que nous rattachons tantôt à la matière et tantôt à l'esprit[12].

There is only one substance. With reference to the individual, thought or passion — *pensée* — is a part of that one substance, known only by the physical action it exercises upon the body. This doctrine of unity is applied throughout Balzac's works in varying aspects. There is, above all, the great theme of passion, or *pensée*, as destructive of life, of longevity as opposed to the "usure des forces".

There is no plan, nor are there divisions in the work of Faulkner set out by the author himself. While Balzac early envisioned a total design, Faulkner rarely admits to being similarly inspired. When he does, it is easy to find a vehemently contradictory statement elsewhere. Clearly, the fact that he did not like to be pinned down about his work and particularly shied away from suggestions that he was trying to picture the whole South or even to chronicle one portion of it, demonstrates that he in no way experienced Balzac's need to explain, rationalize or outline his fictional creation. If he does occasionally admit to having created and peopled an intact universe of his own, it is hardly, after all, a fact he can escape. The attitude is purely pragmatic; the facts speak for themselves. They tell, at least, of an internal logic within Faulkner's principal works, of a concept of unity which is no less real for not having been, as in the case of Balzac, repeatedly explained.

For most of the time Faulkner firmly reiterates that he is just writing about people in situations which seemed moving to him.

> I always write out of my personal experience, out of events I've been present at, out of stories I've heard from people [...] I like to tell stories, to create people and situations. But that's all[13].

Asked whether he was trying to picture the South in his writings, his answer is typical, one that he repeated with little change even in wording throughout some two decades of scattered interviews:

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[12] M. Milner, *Le sens "psychique" de "Massimila Doni" et la conception balzacienne de l'âme*, [in:] *L'Année balzacienne* (Paris 1966), pp. 165—166.

[13] W. Faulkner, *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner*, ed. James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate (New York 1968), p. 220.

> Not at all. I was trying to talk about people, using the only tool I knew, which was the country that I knew. No, I wasn't trying to — wasn't writing sociology at all. I was just trying to write about people, which to me are the important thing. Just the human heart, it's not ideas. I don't know anything about ideas, don't have much confidence in them[14].

Faulkner never tired of saying that it was the human heart with which he was concerned. He sometimes forgot particular situations in his novels when questioned closely; but his characters were ever present in his memory, and from his intimate knowledge of them he could reconstruct episodes in which they figured. "I write about [...] real people, people I used to know; I really know them"[15]. Whether he knew them in fact or in imagination is hardly important, as his belief in the reality of his characters is complete. He will say that they "insist" on doing certain things, that he "quarrels" with them, that they even "let him down"[16]. Speaking of the Snopes, he remarks: "They have been [...] alive and have been in motion, I have hated them and laughed at them and been afraid of them for thirty years now"[17]. Referring to what Lena Grove had stated at a certain juncture to Byron Bunch, he called it "One of the calmest, sanest speeches I ever heard [...]"[18] Balzac's identification with his characters is legendary; Faulkner's is equally consuming: when Cynthia Grenier in an interview noted that a family with the same name as hers figured in his novels, Faulkner replied,

> Why sure. Grenier was one of the first three settlers in my county. There was Habersham' Holston, and the Frenchman Grenier. The last of the Habershams was Miss Habersham — remember her in *Intruder in the Dust*?[19]

As for genealogies, Faulkner said, it was not he who developed them:

> I would think of one character to write about and suddenly he would drag in a lot of people I never saw or heard of before, and the genealogy developed itself[20].

Here, then, is Faulkner's point: that he is "too busy trying to create flesh-and--blood people that will stand up and cast a shadow"[21] to bother about symbolism or sociology. The author is the instrument of his creation, the novels develop in the writing of them, the characters act and feel as they must.

> Once these people come to life... they take off and so the writer is going at a dead run behind them trying to put down what they say and do in time [...] They have taken charge of the story. They tell it from then on[22].

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[14] W. Faulkner, *Faulkner in the University*, ed. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner (New York 1965), p. 10.

[15] Faulkner, *Lion*.., p. 284.

[16] Faulkner, *University*..., p. 33.

[17] *Ibidem*, p. 201.

[18] Quoted in: J. Stein, *William Faulkner: An Interview*, [in:] *William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism*, ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (New York 1963), p. 80.

[19] Faulkner, *Lion*..., p. 223.

[20] Faulkner, *University*..., p. 97.

[21] *Ibidem*, p. 47.

[22] *Ibidem*, p. 120.

The author's responsibility is to give the story "some order"[23], to "follow the fairly rigid rules [...] in which a novel has got to be compressed [...]"[24]. Faulkner would appear not to be concerned with criticism of the behavior of his characters. The writer, he says, is

> interested in all man's behavior with no judgment whatever [...] Maybe the writer has [...] only an integrity to hold always to what he believes to be the facts and truths of human behavior [...][25]

He is first of all just trying to show people as they are, for there are few plots[26]; men are eternally the same, "the milieu, the background, the environment will change the terms of their behavior not the act itself", and so the subject is ever the same as well:

> it's man in conflict with his heart, or with his fellows, or with his environment [...] man [...] trying to do the best he can with his desires and impulses against his own moral conscience, and the [...] social conscience of his time and his place — the little town he must live in, the family he's a part of [27].

Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha saga is the equivalent, one might say, to Balzac's *Etudes de moeurs*. Faulkner would have us believe, however, that there is no definite principle by which the characters are analyzed, much less a general principle of existence to be applied to his work:

> To me, all human behavior is unpredictable and, considering man's frailty [...] in the ramshackle universe he functions in, it's [...] all irrational. It couldn't be very rational because his universe is not a very rational one, it seems to me[28].

The wonder for Faulkner is "that we can endure it all"[29], "the doom of the fragile web of flesh and bone and mostly water [...] stuck together by a little electricity and a world of mostly coincidence [...]"[30]. It is a rugged view of life, and Faulkner was unrelenting in his notion that man must be tougher than the circumstances into which he is thrown. His brother Murry Faulkner says that he "regarded animals in the same light as he did human beings: neither asked to be here, both were, and both had to exist the best way they could"[31].

But the recounting of tales of that "fragile web of flesh and bone", with its "anguishes"[32], its passions, becomes the Yoknapatawpha saga. If Faulkner was too busy

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[23] *Ibidem.*

[24] *Ibidem*, p. 107.

[25] *Ibidem*, p. 267.

[26] *Ibidem*, p. 115.

[27] *Ibidem*, p. 59.

[28] *Ibidem*, p. 267.

[29] W. Faulkner, *Faulkner at West Point*, ed. Joseph L. Fant and Robert Ashley (New York 1964) p. 53.

[30] *Ibidem*, pp. 52–53.

[31] M. C. Faulkner, *The Faulkners of Mississippi, A Memoir* (Baton Rouge, La., 1967), p. 198.

[32] Faulkner, *West Point*..., p. 52.

to have time to think about whether or not he was drawing a picture of a region, forming a consistent mythology of his own, nevertheless that is what he did. While he was quick to point out that the South he pictured was by no means the whole South, it was, nonetheless, decidedly "my country", the "interior, the back wood", a small part of what was still frontier and dissimilar to

> the common picture of the South [...] all magnolias and crinoline and Grecian portals and things like that, which was true only around the fringes of the South[33].

It is through his "country" and his own familiar town, where the Old South, of which he felt so much a part, had been revealed to him both in fact and imagination, and where the encroachments of the New South were equally apparent, that Faulkner creates an entire social order framed in its own history. In Faulkner's overemphasis on not realizing what he was doing, as in Balzac's explaining his efforts to his public at every reasonable opportunity, only half the story is told. Occasionally, Faulkner will tell the other half. In the famous interview with Jean Stein in 1956, he is asked: "What caused you to begin the Yoknapatawpha saga?" The answer is clear and definite:

> [...] I found out [...] that not only each book had to have a design but the whole output or sum of an artist's work had to have a design. [...] Beginning with *Sartoris* I discovered that my own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about and that I would never live long enough to exhaust it, and that by sublimating the actual into the apocryphal I would have complete liberty to use whatever talent I might have to its absolute top. It opened up a gold mine of other people, so I created a cosmos of my own. I can move these people around like God, not only in space but in time too[34].

He is not only like God, he rivals God: "I think that any writer worth his salt is convinced that he can create much better people than God can"[35]. These are statements of an author confident of his genius, with absolute awareness of and mastery over his creation. He will put questioner in his place when asked about certain inconsistencies in his chronicle:

> when you go to the trouble to invent a private domain of your own, then you're the master of time, too. I have a right, I think, to shift these things around wherever it sounds best, and I can move them about in time and, if necessary, change their names[36].

The fact that the total design of his work is singularly important to him, after all, in spite of his own statements to the contrary, is summed up in the last lines of the same interview with Jean Stein:

> I like to think of the world I created as being a kind of keystone in the universe; that, small as that keystone is, if it were ever taken away the universe itself would collapse. My last book will be the Doomsday Book, the Golden Book, of Yoknapatawpha County. Then I shall break the pencil and I'll have to stop.

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[33] Faulkner, *University*..., p. 131.
[34] Quoted in: Stein, *op. cit.*, pp. 81–82.
[35] Faulkner, *University*..., p. 118.
[36] *Ibidem* p. 29.

It is not surprising then, that if Faulkner says that the artist holds "to what he believes to be the facts and truths of human behavior", Faulkner's own facts and truths necessarily constitute a criticism and judgment of that behavior. And indeed his characters are measured as they stand up to "the old verities [...] love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice". For without them, as he went on to say in his Nobel Prize speech, man "labors under a curse"[37]. It is by these truths that Faulkner passes judgment on the present and the past as they are imaginatively reconstructed through the people of his Yoknapatawpha County.

Here is where Faulkner joins Balzac. Bur where it is wrong for readers to accept uncritically Faulkner's deemphasis of the rational aspect of his creation, so it is wrong for them to overlook the creative coincidences, the sheer force of inspiration that produced the *Comédie humaine*. It is only natural that Balzac himself needed to describe a plan for a vision of such scope; but as his constant shifting of novels from one group of *Scènes* to another shows he had more difficulty than is usually acknowledged in adjusting to any outline. For Balzac's readers, certainly, the immensity of his work forces attention upon its rational arrangement; the latter gives one a toehold on the most extraordinarily productive literary genius of all time. Ultimately, however, it is the quality and the magnitude of the inspiration, it is the poet we care about and not the "philosopher". Balzac's eloquent statements on the experience of artistic creation are more important than any rational outline of the work itself. The opening pages of *Facino Cane* are only one example. Another of the most famous is contained in the preface to the first edition of *La Peau de chagrin*, in which he attempts to define the nature of the poet:

> Il va, en esprit, à travers les espaces [...] Il a réellement vu le monde, ou son âme le lur a révélé intuitivement [...] Les hommes ont-ils le pouvoir de faire venir l'univers dans leu cerveau, ou leur cerveau est-il un talisman avec lequel ils abolissent les lois du temps et de l'espace?[38]

The exaltation of creation, by which the artist becomes emperor or street vendor at will is constantly underscored in Balzac's works and in his correspondence. He is possessed of "une vie immense", and in his head, he says, there is "une société tout entière" waiting to be given form[39]. The artist does not belong to himself; he is driven by a force over which he has no control:

> Un soir, au milieu de la rue, un matin en se levant... il arrive qu'un charbon ardent touche ce crâne, ces mains, cette langue... le travail est là, tenant tous ses fourneaux allumés [...] Enfin c'est l'extase de la conception, voilant les déchirantes douleurs de l'enfantement[40].

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[37] W. Faulkner, *Essays, Speeches and Public Letters*, ed. James B. Meriwether (New York 1965), p. 120.

[38] Balzac, *L'Oeuvre...*, XV, p. 72.

[39] Quoted in: A. Maurois, *Prométhée ou la vie de Balzac* (Paris 1965), p. 319.

[40] Balzac, *L'Oeuvre...*, XIV (1967), pp. 964–965.

Finally, as early as 1822, he seems to have foreseen the fatal effect of his immense creative drive. Writing to Mme de Berny, his mistress, "mother", and great friend, he says, "Je serai victime de ma propre imagination"[41].

The anguish, the joy, the journeys beyond the self, the drive to create at any cost, all these characteristics that are traditionally associated with the poet touched by the divine spark, are shared by Faulkner. His friend Phil Stone declared that he wrote because "he couldn't help it [...] I think he would have quit writing years ago if he could have done it"[42]. In the Foreword to the Modern Library Giant *Faulkner Reader*, Faulkner says, "I wrote a book, and discovered that my doom, fate, was to keep on writing books". Most often his description of the artist is that he is "demonridden", or driven by a "dream" which, as he put it once, "anguishes him so much he must get rid of it. He has no peace until then. Everything goes by the board: honor, pride, decency, security, happiness, all, to get the book written"[43]. This is a statement Balzac would have understood: family, friends, creditors could importune him in vain for his attention, nothing would stop him from that "effroyable labeur"[44]. Balzac also speaks of the idea of the *Comédie humaine* as having come to him like "un rêve [...] une chimère", and goes on to say how the latter, "comme beaucoup de chimères, se change en réalité, elle a ses commandements et sa tyrannie auxquels il faut céder"[45]. Faulkner, speaking of the effort of artistic creation, says,

> Gide hardly needed to tell us that he admired only those books whose authors had almost died in order to write them – for it is always that way. A great book is always accompanied by a painful birth[46].

There are a good many stories about Faulkner's liking for liquor, as there are about Balzac's potent brews of coffee which he prepared himself for his working hours; and perhaps it was partly through such predilections that Balzac's "Mille et Une Nuits de l'Occident", which became his *Comédie humaine*, was revealed to him, and, as the critic Maurice Coindreau suggests[47], Faulkner's "Pays de Merveilles".

But if Balzac and Faulkner share the frenzy of the poet, which drives them to create a unified and coherent world of their own, there is a fundamental difference in their attitude toward their "dream". It is that difference that illuminates Faulkner's general reluctance to talk about his work, and Balzac's necessity to endlessly explain it. Where Faulkner is content simply to acknowledge the creative drive, Balzac goes one step further in his desire to fathom its mystery. There is no equivalent in Faulkner

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[41] H. de Balzac, *Correspondance*, ed. Roger Pierrot (Paris 1960), I, p. 195. Date of publication of a specific volume in this series will be noted only in first reference to that volume.

[42] Quoted in: J. W. Webb and A. W. Green (eds.), *William Faulkner of Oxford* (Baton Rouge, La., 1965), p. 226.

[43] Quoted in: Stein, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

[44] Quoted in: Maurois, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

[45] Balzac, *L'Oeuvre...*, XV, p. 368.

[46] Faulkner, *Lion...*, pp. 71–72.

[47] In: *Faulkner tel que je l'ai connu*, [in:] *Preuves* (Paris), 13 (January, 1963).

of Balzac's *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu, Gambara,* and *Massimila Doni.* It is only by studying Faulkner's public statements and particularly his Nobel Prize speech that we may have an idea of the author's aesthetic. Whereas Balzac's trilogy, but especially *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu,* must be regarded as a manifesto in which the criticism applied to society, that passion is destructive of life, takes on full significance: for it is here applied to the author himself and becomes a total aesthetic by which he measures both the process of artistic endeavor and the fulfillment of his own destiny.

Beyond fixing reality, which makes Balzac refer to himself as "le plus humble des copistes"[48], and beyond the shaping of it into artistic from: "Tout est petit et mesquin dans le réel; tout s'agrandit dans les hautes sphères de l'idéal"[49], is the struggle to probe the essence of life itself and to render it in art. In Balzac's *Le Chef-d' oeuvre* inconnu, the artist Frenhofer states his aim: "il s'agit de lutter avec la nature", "forcer l'arcane de la nature"[50], to break through Form itself in order to arrive at the spirit of all things. "La Forme est [...] und truchement pour se communiquer des idées, des sensations, une vaste poésie". Frenhofer has for ten years been working on a painting which he will show no one until it is complete. None of his former creations will be able to rival this one, for "Peut-être ai-je là-haut [...] la nature alle-même". Frenhofer himself is referred to as a demon, a supernatural being, "une complète image de la nature artiste [...] cette nature folle à laquelle tant de pouvoirs sont confiés [...]" Touched with madness, he says that "Comme Orphée, je descendrais dans l'enfer de l'art pour en ramener la vie". When he is asked to show his painting before it is finished, he cries out, "Comment! [...] montrer ma créature, mon épouse?" Here is the crux of the matter; for it is not "Art" we must look for, but life. At last he is willing to show his work to the two friends who have importuned him:

> Ah! Ah!... Vous êtes devant une femme, et vous cherchez un tableau... Où est l'art? perdu disparu?... Mais elle a respiré, je crois!... Les chairs palpitent. Elle va se lever, attendez.

But in that supreme and courageous effort to face the depths to which his consciousness carried him, the artist has gone mad. Frenhofer's stupefied friends see only a huge canvas of wild colors and irregular shapes, out of which a single foot, whole and beautifully shaped, protrudes at one of the lower edges of the canvas, as if to signify the artist's last tenuous hold on himself and the real world. This story, as well as numerous passages in his correspondence, reveals Balzac's awareness of the possibility of his succumbing to madness himself. He knew that, like Frenhofer, in pursuing to the last the limits of the mind he might finally "douter de l'objet même de ses recherches". Frenhofer dies, after having set fire to his paintings. Balzac makes at least two points in this story. Somewhere on the borderline between the

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[48] Balzac, *L'Oeuvre...*, XV, p. 101.

[49] Quoted in: Guyon, *ibid.*, p. 9.

[50] These and the following quotations in this paragraph are taken from: *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu,* [in:] Balzac, *L'Oeuvre...*, XII, pp. 157—191.

expressible and the inexpressible, between madness and the perception of truth or the constants of nature, lies the realm of Art. Secondly, Balzac's realization of the tragic paradox of the genius is strikingly expressed here: the very passion of creation is the death of the artist. In a letter to his good friend Zulma Carraud, written in 1832, he says: "J'ai, pendant un mois, à ne pas quitter ma table, où je jette ma vie comme un alchimiste son or dans un creuset"[51]. Throughout his correspondence runs the counterpoint of triumph as the creation is finished, and agony at the knowledge of the cost. Balzac's early death, it is generally agreed, was caused by the extremes of selfsacrifice, mental, emotional, physical, to which he forced himself in order to accomplish his vision. He knew his work would be his martyrdom: "Halte-là, madame la Mort!"[52] he cries in one letter. The story of Frenhofer-Balzac illustrates the idea of art as passions, that is, as suffering and martyrdom. When Balzac says that "Les grandes oeuvres [...] subsistent par leurs côtés passionés"[53], he is referring also to the artist's ultimate sacrifice: "quand on le voit [...] s'abandonner à la fougue de ses folies [...] il est mort[54]. In Balzac's formula of longevity versus the fulfillment of passion, which is also a main theme of *La Comédie humaine*, the artist has no choice but to hasten his own death. So it is that aesthetic becomes destiny and another measure given of the extraordinary unity of Balzac's work.

It is perhaps curious that Balzac's aesthetic has little, if anything, to do with the "moral" responsibility of the artist. Balzac appears to show such concern only for the purpose of self-defense in cases of attack by the prudish; if he does not always respond with the tongue-in-cheek humor of his preface to the second edition of *Le Père Goriot*, his attitude, nonetheless, seems very much a conventional reflex responding to the conventional language and disposition of his time. No intelligent reader can deny Balzac's admiration for the vindictive Cousin Betty, nor fail to detect the undertone of contempt for, even disbelief in, the good Adeline Hulot. The real sublimity of Goriot is reached when he curses his daughters and admits what all of us lesser beings recognize, that moral violence is axiomatic to blood relationship. And indeed the particular impositions of family, Church, and community stand perenially in the way of happiness and selffulfillment in the *Comédie humaine*, as one may note in such other diverse works as *La Recherche de l'absolu*, *Le Curé de village* — "Il n'y a plus rien ici de désolé que mon coeur", says the dying Véronique as she surveys the flowering plain of Montégnac — *Le Lys dans la vallée*, and *Eugénie Grandet*. The title of that great book, *Illusions perdues*, constitutes, in fact, the *tabula rasa* upon which the *Comédie humaine* is delineated.

Whereas Balzac rejects the familiar notions of morality, Faulkner, on the other hand, uses character as the proving ground between the elemental forces of good

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[51] Balzac, *Correspondance...*, I, p. 661.
[52] Quoted in: Maurois, *op. cit.*, p. 289.
[53] Balzac, *L'Oeuvre...*, XIV, p. 1225.
[54] *Ibidem*, p. 965.

and evil. It is *Go Down, Moses*, whose title, too, describes the tenor of the author's entire work, that provides the key to the Yoknapatawpha series: here genealogy becomes symbol merging with that of the hunt to express the author's idea of selfhood as the product of kinship with men and the sense of union with all life. Just as Faulkner's *presonae* are judged as they adhere to "the old verities", so what we know of his aesthetic results from a viewpoint more traditional than that of Balzac. In a generation when similar questions were a good deal less fashionable than they were in the French autor's time, Faulkner bases his idea of the artist's role on a noble vision of the essential morality of his aims. "Man comes from God", he was to say, and "Man is important because he possesses a moral sense"; "neither God nor morality can be destroyed"[55]. The artist's works participate in the harmony which is God and are themselves proofs of God and of man's immortality: "If God can be of any good to us, he would represent certainly harmony [...] It seems to me that in no way can man attain harmony better than in the creation of something which [...] will outlast him"[56]. "It is the writer's duty to show that man has an immortal soul"[57], that is, as he put in his Nobel Prize speech, "that man will not merely endure: he will prevail"[58]. Art, because it mirrors this, is the "salvation of mankind"[59]. Art is man's record of the fact that he has endured and prevailed, and his reason for the hope that he will continue to do so: it "[holds] out to man a promise of his future as a measure against his past"[60]. The artist, however, is not simply a "recorder", he must be in search of truth, "the truth inside the heart"[61], not facts, because "ideas and facts have very little connection with truth"[62]: as man endures and prevails, so do "the things that are true to all people, which are love, friendship, courage, fear, greed [...]"[63]. It is the balance of these which, one might say, constitutes "life", or "motion", for Faulkner when he says that,

> The aim of every artist is to arrest motion, which is life, by artificial means and hold it fixed so that a hundred years later, when a stranger looks, at it, it moves again since it is life. Since man is mortal, the only immortality possible for him is to leave something behind him that is immortal since it will always move[64].

Finally, the artist gives us "some reason to believe that man can be better than he is"[65]: he does this not just by telling us of the good in men, but of the evil as well,

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[55] Faulkner, *Lion...*, pp. 71 and 70.
[56] *Ibidem*, p. 103.
[57] *Ibidem*, p. 202.
[58] Faulkner, *Essays, Speeches...*, p. 120.
[59] Faulkner, *Lion...*, p. 71.
[60] *Ibidem*, p. 201.
[61] Quoted in: Webb and Green, *op. cit.*, p. 132.
[62] Quoted in: Stein, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
[63] Faulkner, *Lion...*, p. 202.
[64] Quoted in: Stein, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
[65] Faulkner, *Lion...*, p. 94.

for if we have prevailed in spite of it, we shall not only continue to prevail but more than that, we may "believe always that [man] can be better than he probably will"[66]. For the artist's single responsibility, at the last, is belief in his fellows: "the way of the artist is to believe in man. And to be a writer is to learn to believe most in man"[67], believe that he will "be braver than he might ... more compassionate than he might ... less selfish than he wants to be"[68].

While the study of the differing attitudes of Balzac and Faulkner toward the design of their total work renders one sensitive to the uniqueness of the individual author, which is perhaps the main function of criticism, it makes equally clear the ways in which the two novelists resemble one another. Each is, above all, a poet driven by his dream of a magical universe perpetually renewable within its own vast confines; once the fundamental source is discovered — for Balzac, the peculiar configurations of nineteenth-century France, for Faulkner, "the postage stamp of native soil" — the design is self-generating, released through no compulsions of the "rational" mind, but through the sheer intensity of the creative force. Developed in a series of cyclical novels and described through remarkably similar narrative techniques, we find in the work of each a complete society shaped about the town-country antithesis and unified by the use of reappearing characters and genealogies[69]. There results, on one level, an intensely private investigation of contemporary history and the history of the near past by which cultural tragedy is defined, from a viewpoint both Rousseauist and reactionary, as the continual erosion of the primacy of feeling and imaginative experience. Blaise Cendrars says of the French genius: "Balzac n'est pas un précurseur. Il est le créateur du monde moderne"[70]. Faulkner's epic is in the Balzacian tradition, recreating in its own terms the saga of modern experience.

Both human comedies in turn affirm the humanistic belief that man may forge form out of tragic limitations and re-direct his destiny. Balzac and Faulkner in their spiritual journeys arrive at the substance of the present and eternal, the human heart. The design, the cosmos, has no justification except as it witnesses to the passion of existence. The drama of both men is basically, of course, an inner and psychological one describing, in Balzac's case, the will to knowledge through the discovery of new forms of self-realization, and in Faulkner's, the progression toward conscience and "a tougher kind of purity"[71].

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[66] *Ibidem.*

[67] *Ibidem*, p. 200.

[68] *Ibidem*, p. 201.

[69] For a discussion of similarities in design, see R. V. Antoniadis, *Faulkner and Balzac: The Poetic Web*, "Comparative Literature Studies" (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), vol. IX, No. 3 (September, 1972).

[70] B. Cendrars, in his preface to *Ferragus*, [in:] Balzac, *L'Oeuvre...*, II (1966), p. 373.

[71] R. W. B. Lewis, *William Faulkner: The Hero in the New World*, [in:] *Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert Penn Warren (Englewood Cliffs, N. J. 1966), p. 216.

UPORZĄDKOWANE MARZENIA U BALZAKA I FAULKNERA

STRESZCZENIE

Badanie porównawcze utworów Honoriusza Balzaka i Williama Faulknera otwiera szerokie perspektywy, lecz przedmiotem, który najbardziej nadaje się do porównania u tych dwóch autorów, jest ogólny model ich dzieł, czyli dokładnie to, co okazuje się główną przeszkodą w skutecznym komentowaniu tego specyficznego przedmiotu badań anglo-francuskich. Błąd leży w skłonności wielu krytyków do określania Balzaka jako pisarza „nieorganicznego", którego „racjonalne" traktowanie jego fikcji nie pozwala porównać go z „natchnionym" twórcą „organicznej" sagi Yoknapatawpha. Jeśli Balzak dążył do bardziej krytycznego podejścia do swojej twórczości, podczas gdy Faulkner zwykle zaprzeczał, jakoby jego prace były rezultatem planowych zamierzeń, to analiza ich dzieł, jak również oświadczeń spoza ich kręgu wykazuje, że wysuwanie inspiracji i racjonalności jest niewskazane dla intrepretacji procesu twórczego obu autorów. Opozycji ich postaw w stosunku do ich utworów należy się raczej doszukiwać w uderzającej różnicy między ich koncepcjami artysty: podczas gdy Balzak jest zaabsorbowany formułowaniem ogólnej estetyki podkreślającej tragiczny paradoks geniusza i postaci fikcyjnych, to Faulkner interesuje się podstawową zasadą moralności artysty i jego akceptacją tradycyjnych rozróżnień między dobrem i złem. Różnica ta jednak w niczym nie umniejsza faktu, że w dziełach tak Balzaka, jak i Faulknera ujawnia się samorodny kosmos, którego istota wynika ze sposobu spojrzenia obu autorów na dramat namiętnego serca szukającego spełnienia we współczesnym świecie.

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