



THE
MISFIT
OF THE
FAMILY

*Balzac and the
Social Forms of Sexuality*

Michael Lucey



THE *Misfit* OF THE FAMILY



Edited by Michèle Aina Barale,

Jonathan Goldberg, Michael Moon,

and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick

THE *Misfit* OF THE FAMILY

Balzac and the Social Forms of Sexuality *Michael Lucey*

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS DURHAM & LONDON 2003

© 2003 Duke University Press

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States

of America on acid-free paper ∞

Designed by Rebecca M. Giménez

Typeset in Carter and Cone Galliard

by Tseng Information Systems, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-

Publication Data appear on the

last printed page of this book.

PARA *Lalo*

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments, ix

Preface, xiii

INTRODUCTION Balzac and Alternative Families, i

CHAPTER ONE Legal Melancholy: Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet*
and the Napoleonic Code, 31

CHAPTER TWO On Not Getting Married in a Balzac Novel, 65

INTERLUDE Balzac and Same-Sex Relations in the 1830s, 82

CHAPTER THREE Balzac's Queer Cousins and Their Friends, 124

CHAPTER FOUR The Shadow Economy of Queer Social
Capital: Lucien de Rubempré and Vautrin, 171

EPILOGUE Vautrin's Progeny, 225

Notes, 239

Works Cited, 289

Index, 303

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book has been a long time in the writing. I first began working on it in 1990–1991, when I held a Junior Faculty Fellowship from the University of California at Berkeley’s Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities. The center’s director at the time, Paul Alpers, and the other members of its fellowship group provided a supportive context in which to get the project off the ground. The project turned out to be a lot more demanding than I had imagined, and over the years I’ve benefitted from many sources of encouragement to keep me going. Undergraduates and graduate students in my classes in Berkeley’s French and Comparative Literature Departments graciously put up with my ways of relentlessly including both obscure and well-known works by Balzac in my courses during those years. Many of those students contributed substantially to my efforts to find the right framework to say what I had to say about the works I examine in this volume. The Townsend Center provided further resources in 1995, allowing me the luxury of team teaching an interdisciplinary seminar with Carolyn Dinshaw. Together with a very smart group of graduate students we were able to pursue some of the theoretical reading and thinking that helped me find new ways of looking at much of this material.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s kind invitation to contribute to the anthology she edited, *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction* (Duke University Press, 1997) provided me with the occasion to bring an early version of chapter 3 to completion. An invitation from Yopie Prins to

give a lecture at the University of Michigan helped me along to that end as well. Moreover, Eve, Yopie, and Ross Chambers all helped out with encouraging comments on different versions of the material for that chapter.

I'm grateful for the early interest in the project along with the encouragement that came from the editors of Series Q and from Ken Wissoker at Duke University Press, and from James Creech and the other, anonymous, readers of the manuscript. A fellowship from the National Endowment of the Humanities allowed me to spend 1997 rethinking what I was up to. Thanks to an invitation from Leyla Ezdinli, I was able to try out a version of chapter 1 on an audience at Smith College in March of that year. More recently, the readers on the editorial board of *Representations* helped me to make further refinements to that same material, some of which appeared as "Legal Melancholy: Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet* and the Napoleonic Code" in *Representations* 76 (fall 2001): 1–26.

Margaret Waller also provided a helpful reading of the *Eugénie Grandet* chapter, and then kindly recommended to Michal Peled Ginsberg that she invite me to contribute to a volume she was preparing on *Le Père Goriot*. An earlier version of part of my introduction thus appeared in the volume Michal edited: *Approaches to Teaching Balzac's Old Goriot* (Modern Language Association, 2000), and is reprinted by permission of the copyright owner, the Modern Language Association of America. A further invitation from Michal to participate in an institute on the Family, Sexuality, and the Law sponsored by Northwestern University's French Interdisciplinary Group in spring 2002 provided me with a wonderful forum in which to think through some final revisions to the manuscript in the company of Michal, a friendly group of students, and four other helpful interlocutors: Rachel Fuchs, Marcela Iacub, Remi Lenoir, and Patrice Maniglier.

Carla Freccero's invitation to speak at the *Queer Encounters II* conference at the University of California, Santa Cruz, in spring 2000, provided a welcome occasion to try out the first half of the introduction. I was able to try out the whole of the introduction at the seminar "Sociologie des homosexualités" run by Didier Eribon and Françoise Gaspard at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in January 2001.

Trips to France have been crucial to my work on this book. Finan-

cial support obtained from Berkeley's Committee on Research, from its Freshman Seminar Program, and from the Department of Comparative Literature by way of its chair, Tony Cascardi, made a few of those essential trips possible. On the Parisian side of things, it's a great pleasure to thank Didier Eribon, Claude Servan-Schreiber, Françoise Gaspard, and Marie Ymonet and her family for some of the finest examples of hospitality I have experienced.

My encounter with Pierre Bourdieu and his work was crucial in shaping this book. At his invitation, some of the material in chapter 3 appeared in French as "Drôles de cousins" (translated by Christian Marouby) in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* no. 125 (December 1998), but more important was the intellectual example and the inspiration that he and his work provided.

Closer to home, my conversations with Doug Beaton have been another crucial form of encouragement over the years. David Copenhagen's research assistance helped speed along my work. Carla Hesse gave me some crucial bibliographical advice early on. Many colleagues in the French and Comparative Literature Departments have been immensely supportive over the years. Let me mention gratefully here Ann Smock, David Hult, Suzanne Guerlac, and Eric Naiman. Leonard Johnson kindly left a book on the Marquis de Custine in my box one day. Ted Rex's inimitable form of friendly and attentive interest has been endlessly cheering. Numerous other colleagues have kindly read and commented on versions of these pages, including Susan Maslan, Debarati Sanyal, Robin Einhorn, Lydia Liu, Nancy Ruttenburg, Karl Britto, Linda Williams, Noah Guynn, Katherine Bergeron, and Elisabeth Ladenson. As for Tim Hampton, Leslie Kurke, Celeste Langan, and Sharon Marcus, I believe they have helped me with nearly every page. Having such a group of close readers to help say better what is trying to be said is surely as wonderful a gift as any intellectual could hope for. I'd like to mention my colleague Bill Nestrick as well. He was a great friend from my earliest days in Berkeley and he eagerly supported this project at its outset. I wish he were still with us to read the finished product.

A friend of Gerry Gomez's gave him a copy of *Cousin Pons* to read one day when he was in Guadalajara, making him a Balzacian before we had ever met—a happy coincidence that delights me. As for Gerry, he brings me joy every day.

PREFACE

There is nothing particularly original in the observation that for Honoré de Balzac the novel was an instrument for historical and sociological analysis. Georg Lukács's well-known praise of Balzac for his skillful creation of "types" in his characters is one critical acknowledgment of Balzac's successful efforts in this direction. For Lukács, Balzac's achievement is to be found in large measure in his way of linking individual characters to social history: "In his writings the unfolding of material problems is always indissolubly bound up with the consequences arising from the personal passions of his characters. This method of composition—although it seems to take the individual alone for its starting-point—contains a deeper understanding of social interconnections and implications, a more correct evaluation of the trends of social development than does the pedantic, 'scientific' method of the later realists."¹ I share Lukács's high estimation of Balzac's sociological acuity, although I will in this book choose to locate Balzac's sociological insight differently than did Lukács. As I will demonstrate shortly Lukács's notion of "types" does not permit much critical purchase on Balzac's interest in sexuality—in particular in the institutions that organize sexual interaction. In this preface I intend to offer a way of perceiving the forms of Balzac's sociological curiosity, a way that allows us to appreciate his achievement in analyzing sexuality.

That Balzac and a certain part of his public read novels as programmatic historical or sociological writing is evident in the paragraphs in

Illusions perdues (*Lost Illusions*) where Daniel D'Arthez advises Lucien de Rubempré on how to make his mark as a novelist:

If you don't want to ape Walter Scott you must invent a different manner for yourself, whereas you have imitated him. . . . Dealing with France, you will be able to oppose to the dour figures of Calvinism the attractive peccadillos and brilliant manners of Catholicism against the background of the most impassioned period of our history. Every authentic reign from Charlemagne onwards will require at least one work, and sometimes four or five, as in the case of Louis the Fourteenth, Henry the Fourth and Francis the First. In this way you will write a pictorial history of France in which you will describe costume, furniture, the outside and inside of buildings and private life, whilst conveying the spirit of the times instead of laboriously narrating a sequence of known facts. You will find scope for originality in correcting the popular errors which give a distorted view of most of our kings.²

(These overly earnest remarks are, of course, presented with a certain amount of irony, further evident in the fact that Balzac had abandoned a project a bit like this for what would become *La Comédie humaine*.)³ It should be equally clear, in thinking of some of the later novelists most deeply marked by Balzac's novelistic practice (among others, Marcel Proust, Henry James, Willa Cather, and William Faulkner) that much of what they learned from Balzac had to do with the possibility and the methods of a novel devoted to careful sociological analysis—analysis not only of economic relations but of sexuality and gender as well.⁴

The Marxist tradition of Balzac criticism has demonstrated the importance of the sociology of class relations in Balzac's writing.⁵ It has been argued that Balzac had a special relation with some of his women readers, who found in his novels both a representation and an analysis of their gendered situations that they considered significant,⁶ and there have been numerous feminist accounts of his work.⁷ It has often been noted that Balzac presents us with many characters who are not heterosexual.⁸ Yet I believe that it remains to imagine how the representation of gender and the sexual division of labor, in conjunction with the representation of characters who express a diversity of sexu-

alities, fits into the large sociological demonstrations that make up *La Comédie humaine*: this is my task in the following chapters.

When I began working on this book in 1991 I thought of it as an investigation into the question of why there had been so many psychoanalytically inclined critical readings of Balzac in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s. This volume has not turned out precisely to be an account of that investigation, but some of the questions crucial to that early formulation of my project remain central here. What had psychoanalytic criticism enabled us to see in Balzac and, at the same time, what had it masked? It did strike me that in that critical literature there were no satisfactory accounts of the nonheterosexual characters (throughout this book I often choose to refer to them as *queer*) who so frequently appear in the novels, and who were clearly so popular with Balzac's readers⁹ (see the epilogue on the latter topic). Over the course of my investigations of the ways in which Balzac's novels construct a relation between individuals and family forms and systems of law, of inheritance, and of sexuality, it has come to seem to me that psychoanalytic criticism has helped to reveal only a certain side of these kinds of relations and has perhaps obscured other aspects. Moreover, if psychoanalytic criticism seemed during a certain period so "appropriate" to a reading of Balzac, perhaps the fit between the novels and the theory should be understood as a historical phenomenon in its own right. That is, if a psychoanalytic reading of Balzac has at times seemed so convincing, perhaps in part it is because Balzac's novels reflect and reflect on the creation of a kind of society that finds comfort in psychoanalysis, and in part because one current in the novels helps produce an understanding of that society that runs along psychoanalytic lines. But perhaps the novels also do more than this. My goal in the following pages is never really to show that psychoanalytic readings of Balzac are, in general, *wrong*—although certainly I do find a number of them to be, in their particulars, wrong-headed. Rather, I would claim that certain psychoanalytic readings are burdened, not to say handicapped, by historically overdetermined interests in particular ways of understanding both family and its relation to larger social constructs.¹⁰

In *The Logic of Practice*, Pierre Bourdieu observes that "the 'unconscious' . . . is never anything other than the forgetting of history," by

which he means that by the time some historically produced social mechanism has been widely and efficaciously instituted in a large number of individual psyches, its historical production is likely to have been forgotten.¹¹ I find this a useful insight when it comes to thinking about Balzac, who through his novelist practice might help us *remember* a history that certain kinds of psychoanalytic reading might rather tend to reify into ahistorical psychic mechanisms. Indeed, such an insight has been present from the earliest days of French sociology. Consider these remarks from near the end of Durkheim's *The Division of Labor in Society*:

Social facts are not the mere development of psychological facts, which are for the most part only the prolongation of social facts within the individual consciousness. This proposition is very important, for to uphold the opposite viewpoint exposes the sociologist at every moment to risk taking the cause for the effect, and vice versa. For example, if, as has often happened, we see in the organisation of the family the necessarily logical expression of human sentiments inherent in every consciousness, we reverse the real order of facts. Quite the opposite is true: it is the social organisation of kinship relationships that has determined respectively the sentiments between parents and children. These sentiments would have been completely different if the social structure had been different. . . . Most of our states of consciousness would not have occurred among men isolated from one another and would have occurred completely differently among people grouped together in a different way.¹²

When in chapter 1 on *Eugénie Grandet* I suggest that we might profitably take a moment to consider melancholy in that novel to be an aspect of a historically located *habitus* rather than a general, ahistorical form of neurosis, I am drawing much of my inspiration from sociological insights such as those found in the citations above by Bourdieu and Durkheim.

Some fifty years before Durkheim, Balzac seems to have constructed his novels to demonstrate what it would mean, as Durkheim famously says in *The Rules of Sociological Method*, to treat social facts as if they were things. Durkheim notes that what he calls social facts are

phenomena that “reside in the society itself that produces them,” and that are “different from those which occur in consciousnesses in isolation.” “*They have a different substratum*,” he says, but “this does not mean that they are not in some sense psychical, since they all consist of ways of thinking and acting.”¹³ It is often noted that Balzac is not much given to psychological description. This might in some ways amount to saying that he is a sociological novelist in the Durkheimian sense, that his primary interest is not in the substratum of *psychic* facts but in that of *social* ones. “Collective ways of acting and thinking,” Durkheim writes, “possess a reality existing outside individuals, who, at every moment, conform to them.” He continues: “They are things which have their own existence. The individual encounters them when they are already completely fashioned and he cannot cause them to cease to exist or be different from what they are. . . . In order for a social fact to exist, several individuals at the very least must have interacted together and the resulting combination must have given rise to some new production” (45). I understand Balzac’s method in his novels, his experiments in narrative form, as part of an effort to envision the substratum of social facts, the complicated locus of social forms.¹⁴

Part of my project in this book is to call attention to Balzac’s analysis of the relations that exist between large social changes and changes in the specific social forms that enable sexual interaction, including, in particular, same-sex interactions. Such forms are, to use Durkheim’s term, *institutions*, and they evolve, just as do institutions.¹⁵ As part of his sociological analysis, Balzac inquires into the ways a set of shared practices might come to constitute a sexuality or a sexual identity; he inquires into the historical and social processes in which and through which such sets of practices, such social forms, become fixed or unfixed, come to seem consequential or inconsequential, come to seem open to revision or written in stone, and so on. In the remaining pages of this preface I offer, by way of a reading of some passages from Henry James’s essays on Balzac, some observations by Pierre Bourdieu in his *Pascalian Meditations*, and some passages from Balzac’s *César Birotteau*, a fuller account of what it means to think about the Balzacian novel’s active relation to a sociological knowledge of sexuality.

In 1880 Henry James, in a quite unfavorable review of Zola's *Nana*, insisted that in order to be rightly understood the novel in general needed to be thought of "as a composition that treats of life at large and helps us to *know*." Zola's particular novel, he asserted, makes no "contribution to our knowledge of ourselves."¹⁶ Like Balzac, then, James thought of the novel as an instrument of knowledge, and in his writing he takes care in reflecting on the ways in which Balzac used that instrument to serve particular kinds of knowledge. In his *Pascalian Meditations*, Pierre Bourdieu offers a caveat regarding novels and narrative, rooted in what he refers to as "ordinary language and its grammatical constructions ready-made for teleological description." That "teleological description" corresponds to a particular "philosophy of mind . . . which cannot conceive of spontaneity and creativity without the intervention of a creative intention, or finality without a conscious aiming at ends, regularity without observance of rules, signification in the absence of signifying intention." As for the nineteenth-century novel, it is riddled with such a philosophy of mind and philosophy of the subject, Bourdieu suggests, citing Michel Butor in support of his claim, that "the novel . . . in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was, as [Butor] points out, almost entirely identified with the narration of the adventures of an individual and almost always takes the form of strings of 'decisive individual actions, preceded by a voluntary deliberation, which determine one another.'"¹⁷ Such a novel, it seems, could not be an instrument of sociological knowledge because, to go back to the basic lessons one might learn from Durkheim, it has not taken the necessary first step of setting aside what Durkheim refers to as *notiones vulgares* or *praenotiones*.¹⁸ As Durkheim warns us, when we do not first construct a scientific understanding of the object that we intend to investigate, we are likely to remain closer to the ideas offered about the world through "common sense" than we are to the world itself:

Man cannot live among things without forming ideas about them according to which he regulates his behaviour. But, because these notions are closer to us and more within our mental grasp than the realities to which they correspond, we naturally tend to substitute them for the realities, concentrating our speculations upon them.

Instead of observing, describing and comparing things, we are content to reflect upon our ideas, analysing and combining them. Instead of a science which deals with realities, we carry out no more than an ideological analysis. (60)

This might suggest that the more a novel can be experienced as “realist” in its portrayal of the world and of the people in it, the more it is simply supplying a confirmation of commonsense “prenotions” about the world rather than opening a way to a critical understanding of that world. Yet I think that within certain traditions of novel writing, techniques of structuration or narration (in short, methods) are developed that can serve to push beyond commonsense approaches to a life, or to “vulgar” ideas about subjective agency, intentionality, and expressivity. (James’s critique of Zola—that he doesn’t help us to *know* anything—amounts, on one level, to saying that Zola’s thought never leaves the level of ideology, of vulgar prenotions, and that he never approaches his subject matter with any kind of rigorous sociological insight.)

There are, I think, even among the “realist” novels of nineteenth-century Europe, plenty of works that do not correspond to the stereotypical pattern evoked by Butor and Bourdieu, or to the critique James makes of Zola. It will be part of my argument in this book that at least a few of Balzac’s works are among them. It may seem odd to invoke a novelist so apparently aesthetic and psychological as James in the service of an attempt to renew our understanding of the novel’s sociological potential. The oddity of James’s devotion to Balzac was, of course, apparent to James as well. He freely admits that Balzac is his major influence as far as the novelistic enterprise goes, but he also often expresses bafflement as to how someone like Balzac, who apparently went about writing novels in what was for James an entirely incorrect way, managed to have any success at all:

All painters of manners and fashions, if we will, are historians, even when they least don the uniform: Fielding, Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, Hawthorne among ourselves. But the great difference between the great Frenchman [Balzac] and the eminent others is that, with an imagination of the highest power, an unequalled intensity of vision, he saw his subject in the light of science as well, in the light of the bearing of all its parts on each other, and under

pressure of a passion for exactitude, an appetite, the appetite of an ogre, for *all* the kinds of facts. We find I think in the union here suggested something like the truth about his genius, the nearest approach to a final account of him. Of imagination on one side all compact, he was on the other an insatiable reporter of the immediate, the material, the current combination, and perpetually moved by the historian's impulse to fix, preserve and explain them. One asks one's self as one reads him what concern the poet has with so much arithmetic and so much criticism, so many statistics and documents, what concerns the critic and the economist have with so many passions, characters and adventures. The contradiction is always before us; it springs from the inordinate scale of the author's two faces; it explains more than anything else his eccentricities and difficulties.¹⁹

Given James's system of aesthetic value, the favored terms here are "intensity of vision," "passions," and "imagination." The "historian's impulse to fix" or "arithmetic" or "criticism" are all apparently threats to the novel, which, for James, only works well when it works as an appeal made from one richly receptive imagination to another, an appeal that is best conveyed in a private, personal, and intensely affective experience of reading that has little to do with "arithmetic." Yet, as James points out, the lesson to be learned from Balzac is that, in the right hands, the novel can produce knowledge about the relationship between "passion" and "arithmetic."

Zola is, for James, an example of a novelist for whom only the arithmetic, statistics, and documents seem to have importance. Zola is thus mostly mechanical; Balzac, on the other hand, James understands as more often than not inspired:

It is exactly here that we get the difference between such a solid, square, symmetrical structure as "Les Rougon-Macquart," vitiated, in a high degree, by its mechanical side, and the monument left by Balzac—without the example of which, I surmise, Zola's work would not have existed. The mystic process of the crucible, the transformation of the material under aesthetic heat, is, in the "Comédie Humaine," thanks to an intenser and more submissive fusion, completer, and also finer. . . . It is hard to say where Zola is fine; whereas it is often, for pages together, hard to say where

Balzac is, even under the weight of his too ponderous personality, not. (130)

James is implying, I think correctly, that when Zola took on a sociological project that resembled Balzac's, but pursued it in a series of novels that are formally more predictable than Balzac's, some of the richness of Balzac's analytical project was lost, as was some of the acuity of his sociological perception. Indeed, one might well imagine that Zola could not borrow more extensively from Balzac in formal terms precisely because Zola's sociological vision was so much more limited. Yet James is also straining a great deal in order to force Balzac into his own highly aestheticized discourse of refined form and discourse, of intense experience, of the mystical transformation of the brute material of life within the heated crucible of aesthetic activity. (Indeed, it is practically miraculous that a project as rigorously sociological as Balzac's is able to survive the process of relentless aesthetic refinement to which James subjects it in developing his own novelistic practice—although this is altogether another story.) How astonishing—given this aestheticizing bias—to discover what a precise sense James has of Balzac's sociological project. At one point he writes: "Nothing appealed to him more than to show *how* we all are, and how we are placed and built-in for being so. What befalls us is but another name for the way our circumstances press upon us—so that an account of what befalls us is an account of our circumstances" (135). And elsewhere he comments: "The novel, the tale, however brief, the passage, the sentence by itself, the situation, the person, the place, the motive exposed, the speech reported—these things were in his view history, with the absoluteness and the dignity of history. This is the source both of his weight and of his wealth. What is the historic sense after all but animated, but impassioned knowledge seeking to enlarge itself? . . . His imagination achieved the miracle of absolutely resolving itself into multifarious knowledge" (110). James seems to be redeeming Balzac's historical and sociological tendencies by portraying Balzac's imagination—the novelistic faculty par excellence for James—as in itself sociological and historical. For James, Balzac, by acting aesthetically, performs sociology. There is something in the *imaginative form* of Balzac's novels that *is sociological*. For James, in Balzac's hands, sociology becomes for a moment an aesthetic (a novelistic) practice.

I find this to be an interesting claim for the relation between Balzac and sociology, in part because it includes an aspect missing from most accounts of that relation, accounts that have usually not found a way to take novelistic form and practice into consideration. The usual accounts of Balzac's relation to sociology start from a consideration of Balzac's relation to other sociological thinkers of his moment. A typical version of the history of French sociology in the early decades of the nineteenth century divides the nascent field into two camps with two different impulses.²⁰ The first is based on an effort to establish rigorous protocols for the use of statistics to study social phenomena, and is associated with those like Adolphe Quetelet who in 1835 published a text discussing the concept of the "average man" (*l'homme moyen*). As Michelle Perrot puts it: "The 'average man' sketches out a norm, and the distance from the mean provides the measure of a deviance that can be estimated through calculations of probability. Thus Quetelet 'treats social facts as things,' and by doing so opens the way for Durkheim, who will coin the phrase. A science of society becomes imaginable: a sociology whose instruments will be statistics, tables, and calculations."²¹ The second sociological impulse of Balzac's historical moment is that which led to the development of the *enquête*, the survey or inquiry or site study, which Perrot associates mainly with the efforts of public health officials in the production of documents like the 1834 *Report on the Spread and Effects of Cholera in Paris and the Rural Areas of the Seine District*; and with investigations of working-class communities, such as the work of Louis-René Villermé published in 1840, *An Account of the Physical and Moral State of Silk, Cotton, and Wool Workers*. In *The Taming of Chance*, Ian Hacking associates the *enquête* with the figure of Frédéric Le Play, and sees a close parallel between Le Play's enterprise and Balzac's:

A man no less ambitious than Balzac, [Le Play's] vision of his life's work was formed exactly when Balzac's was. He dated it 1829. Like Balzac's *Comédie humaine* it started with the idea of classifying the various types of humanity, sorted first according to their conjugal situation, their families, and then according to their location, their work, and above all their domestic budget. It was directed not at the prospering classes of France but at the labourers of Europe. It was cast not in the form of novella but as quantitative studies of

individual household expenses. It was numerical but, like Balzac's masterpiece, antistatistical. It did not study Quetelet's averages but used representative individuals to display the chief features of their type, as a rock or plant might serve the natural historian as a paradigm.²²

Hacking is particularly interested in the contrast between Quetelet's *l'homme moyen* and Le Play's representative individuals. Le Play's aim was in fact to produce monographs on representative *families*, not individuals. He describes his goal as being to "ground the study of populations on the study of a few judiciously chosen working-class families."²³ Still, one can assume that some notion of "typicality" is important to him. Le Play insists that in any given locale, one should—for typicality's sake—always choose a family originally from the area, as well as one representing some kind of norm ("qui réunisse à peu près des conditions moyennes" [15]). This means that certain households are best excluded from consideration: those without children, for instance, or households of unmarried people.

From Lukács onward, many have praised Balzac for his ability to produce *typical* characters. As Lukács puts it, "The central category and criterion of realist literature is the type, a peculiar synthesis which organically binds together the general and the particular both in characters and situations. What makes a type a type is not its average quality, not its mere individual being, however profoundly conceived; what makes it a type is that in it all the humanly and socially essential determinants are present on their highest level of development"²⁴ Lukács's typicality is thus different from Le Play's, for Lukács often insists that it has nothing to do with the "reproduction of 'average' reality" (60). Yet both forms of typicality have their limitations. Le Play's "typical" exclusion of unmarried people and of households with no children means that his sociology will have nothing to do with a thorough investigation of the social forms of sexuality. Lukács's typicality may have little to do with "averages," yet his concept of typicality is nonetheless normalizing (in a way Balzac rigorously fails to be). Because of Lukács's insistence on types in relation to his particular version of the social, there will be, for him as for Le Play, no place for a nonjudgmental investigation of sexuality in his sociology. "Individual destinies," he says, "are always a radiation of the socially typical,

of the socially universal, which can be separated from the individual only by an analysis *a posteriori*. In the novels themselves the individual and the general are inseparably united, like a fire with the heat it radiates" (55). Lukács's normalizing impulse lies within his version of what he here chooses to name the "universal" and the "general." In his essay "Healthy or Sick Art?" he speaks out more specifically against what he sees as the "substitution of pure psychologism for the representation of the real and complete, that is, social, human being." The social, and therefore typical, person will certainly not be "a shapeless bundle or uncontrolled torrent of free, undisciplined associations." When artists turn to a depiction of such a state, "love becomes mere eroticism; the erotic declines into mere sexuality; finally sexuality is reduced to mere phallicism."²⁵ Of all the things that might be said about the point of view behind such commentary, it will suffice here to note that when it grapples with the imbrication of social processes and sexual forms, it does so in terms that are not sufficiently capacious to capture the full range of sexual forms that any society will evince. Nor will it come as a surprise to discover that Lukács is thus not well positioned to appreciate either the richness or the extent of Balzac's sociological approach to sexuality.

Henry James is much more helpful when it comes to apprehending the kind of sociological interests that Balzac's novels demonstrate. His comment that for Balzac "nothing appealed . . . more than to show *how* we all are, and how we are placed and built-in for being so" nicely calls attention to Balzac's open-mindedly curious interest in sociologically structuring processes (in how we come to be built-in). Lukács's "typicality" assumes the shape of a "complete human personality" to be already known, to be normatively given. Balzac knows social forms to have histories too complicated to accord with that point of view. It is via Balzac's interest in the *production* of social agents (rather than in the "typicality" of any given agent) and his interest in the particular kinds of existence possessed by the social forms taken on by those agents that we will gain access to his insights on sexuality.

Thus I want to suggest, *pace* Lukács, that what is important sociologically about Balzac has little to do with the typicality of his characters, a quality that might be disputable in many cases. How is it that Balzac's practice of novel writing, his formal choices, allow him analytic purchase on the particular substratum of social facts and forms?

How is it that he focuses attention on what it means to be “built-in,” or that he elaborates on the meanings of the verb “to press” in James’s other phrase, “how our circumstances press upon us”? Elisheva Rosen is one critic who has helpfully directed attention to this capacity in the Balzacian novel. She speaks of “the importance that [Balzac] gives in the definition of a field to the social actors that constitute it, to their concrete aptitudes, to their particular personalities.” She continues: “The situations that Balzac imagines always have something unique about them. They are tied to a particular conjuncture that can be quite complex, to a precise moment in History. This is why the presentation of a social actor by Balzac is always oriented toward a particular moment in that actor’s trajectory, a moment that cannot be fully deduced from its antecedents, yet whose antecedents must be known in order to comprehend the strategies for action that the actor will adopt.”²⁶ Rosen valuably directs our attention to Balzac’s interest in the way particular moments of crisis reveal something about a social actor, who is then required to produce strategies of action that reveal how he or she has been “built-in” or “pressed upon” by past experience. In another article, Rosen names what she is describing here as the “interactional competence” of a Balzacian character, a particular sociological capacity that, as she puts it, is not “equally distributed” among his characters. Understanding that capacity and the mechanisms of its distribution is at the heart of Balzac’s sociological project. “There are certainly, in Balzac’s universe, interactional prowesses that are more remarkable than others, and social mobility is often the prize related to the finest strategies. But talent in this area does not guarantee success.”²⁷ Rosen and James help us to understand that Balzac’s methodical efforts to apprehend, on the one hand, successful and unsuccessful forms of social action and, on the other, the productive nature of the relation between a given individual and equally given social facts and forms, make up the primary areas of his sociological inquiry.

Balzac sometimes gives theoretical summaries of the principles that govern his sociological insight. Consider the description in *César Birotteau* of why Césarine Birotteau chooses to marry Anselme Popinot, a skinny, befreckled, red-headed shop assistant who limps:

There are moralists who hold that love is the most involuntary, the most disinterested and least calculating of all passions, a mother’s

love always excepted, a doctrine which contains a gross error. . . . Any sympathy, physical or mental, is none the less based upon calculations made by brain or heart or animal instincts. Love is essentially an egoistical affection, and egoism implies profound calculation [Qui dit égoïsme, dit profond calcul]. For the order of mind which is only impressed by outward and visible results, it may seem an improbable or unusual thing that a poor, lame, red-haired lad should find favor in the eyes of a beautiful girl like Césarine; and yet it was only what might be expected from the arithmetic found in bourgeois matters of feeling [Néanmoins, ce phénomène est en harmonie avec l'arithmétique des sentiments bourgeois]. (6:132, 113–14)²⁸

Balzac's direct mention here of what he designates profound *calculation* or the *arithmetic* of bourgeois feeling is a helpful reminder of one of the central sociological phenomena he is interested in grappling with. Only rarely does he, in constructing his novels, turn to situations in which the calculus or the arithmetic, or, to use Bourdieu's term for this capacity, the *habitus* with which they are endowed, serves his characters well.²⁹ Within *César Birotteau*, even if the marriage between Césarine and Anselme does end up being a happy one, it is only recounted within the bounds of a novel mainly devoted to a short period in the life of Césarine's father, César, during which he unsuccessfully attempts to move a step up the social ladder. He enters into some financial speculations, renovates his house, and gives an extravagant ball to celebrate his being named to the Legion of Honor, only to find that once he has made all these changes he is no longer able to perform the day-to-day calculations necessary to guarantee his economic survival:

A week after the ball, that final flare of the straw-fire of a prosperity which had lasted for eighteen years, and now was about to die out in darkness, César stood watching the passers-by through his shop window. He was thinking of the wide extent of his business affairs, and found them almost more than he could manage. Hitherto his life had been quite simple. . . . But now . . . the poor man had so many things to think of that he felt as if he had more skeins to wind than he could hold. . . . Birotteau was very careful to hide his thoughts from his wife and daughter, and from his assistant; but

within himself he felt as a Seine boatman might feel if by some freak of fortune a Minister should give him the command of a frigate. (6:181, 171)

The contrast between César and his daughter is instructive. Through her marriage to Anselme she and her husband will, over the course of a few decades, rise to the highest circles of social distinction, gaining success after success, title after title. Further, unlike many in the Balzacian bourgeoisie, Césarine will reveal an internal nobility that will correspond in a satisfying way to the aristocratic titles she will assume. This very success may well be why we will only see her in the margins of future Balzac novels; indeed, even in *César Birotteau*, the novel in which she plays a major role, it is clear that for Balzac the analysis of the sudden failure of her father's ability to act successfully in his social world is more interesting than his daughter's potential successes. Balzac's interest in the fluctuations in the ways different social agents are enabled or disabled from acting successfully—his particular interest in social action—corresponds to a Bourdieusian insight expressed in many places, including *Pascalian Meditations*, where Bourdieu writes that “habitus is not necessarily adapted to its situation nor necessarily coherent. It has degrees of integration. . . . As a result, it can happen that, in what might be called the Don Quixote effect, dispositions are out of line with the field and with the ‘collective expectations’ which are constitutive of its normality. This is the case, in particular, when a field undergoes a major crisis and its regularities (even its rules) are profoundly changed.”³⁰ Balzac's novels indeed do portray a variety of “Don Quixote” effects, and one could do worse than to imagine that an analysis of that effect is the centerpiece of his novelistic enterprise. That Bourdieu should have recourse to a character from a novel to label this phenomenon is perhaps a sign that within the history of the novel there is a practical knowledge of the phenomenon in question, a knowledge that Balzac was able to actualize as fully as perhaps any novelist could be expected to do.

We might say, then, that Balzac is sociological novelistically in the sense that he is able to use the novel to encapsulate a knowledge of social practice, of the ways a habitus functions, especially in moments of social crisis when that habitus no longer necessarily serves its agent well. And, more specifically for my purposes in the chapters ahead,

Balzac is sociological in his ability to understand the shifting social forms of sexuality (especially sexuality in some kind of social crisis) in relation to the habitus of individual agents who both *work within* and *do work on* the social forms through which their sexuality comes to expression.³¹

Balzac's interest in sexuality as a social institution causes him often to turn to the relation of sexuality to other social institutions—to the family, of course, but also, for instance, to the state. I will wind up this preface by offering three reflections regarding sexuality as it appears in Balzac's novels, regarding its institutional status, and regarding the imbrication Balzac sees and allows us to see between state, sexuality, and habitus.

First, Balzac demonstrates that some sexualities serve to bring agents into reasonably satisfying conformity with the position that they occupy in a given social field; other sexualities create dissonances that can give rise to critical awareness of one's social positioning; and sometimes both of these will be the case for the same person in different circumstances. Here again Bourdieu can be quite helpful, as when he writes in *Pascalian Meditations*:

The relationship between dispositions and positions does not always take the form of the quasi-miraculous and therefore mostly unremarked adjustment that is seen when habitus are the product of stable structures, the very ones in which they are actualized. . . . In particular because of the structural transformations which abolish or modify certain positions, and also because of their inter- or intra-generational mobility, the homology between the space of positions and the space of dispositions is never perfect and there are always some agents “out on a limb”, displaced, out of place and ill at ease. The discordance . . . may be the source of a disposition towards lucidity and critique which leads them to refuse to accept as self-evident the expectations and demands of the post, and, for example, to modify the post to the demands of the habitus rather than the habitus to the demands of the post.³²

For Balzac, this sexual out-on-a-limbness sometimes results only in intense social vulnerability (Cousin Pons and his friend Schmucke, for instance), whereas it sometimes also makes possible a lucidity that

allows for room to maneuver socially (Vautrin, but not in every moment; Eugénie Grandet).

Second, in order to grasp Balzac's understanding of sexuality it will not help to consider homosexuality as a sexual-identity category that is in opposition to heterosexuality (those terms themselves being anything but sociologically self-evident). Such a categorical division (itself a product of a certain history) is not sufficiently supple nor sufficiently universal to allow one to grasp the relation between sexuality and habitus in all times and all places, certainly not in the times and places about which Balzac was writing. Suppose we understand (as Balzac does) sexual commerce or behavior or desire or interaction to be a "profound calculation." There is no reason to assume that the division of sexual actions, exchanges, decisions, calculations, desires, or strategies into categories based on an opposition between same-sex and opposite-sex forms will succeed in capturing the whole set of processes in question—even though, as Balzac shows us, during the mid-nineteenth century such a categorical division becomes an increasingly important factor in the minds of social agents themselves.

Finally, if we want to understand Balzac's sociological vision of sexuality, we might do well to understand sexual acts, exchanges, and desires as being part of a logic of practice rather than as expressive of some subjective set of intentions. A final quotation by Bourdieu from *Pascalian Meditations* can be our guide here:

The world is comprehensible, immediately endowed with meaning, because the body, which, thanks to its senses and its brain, has the capacity to be present to what is outside itself, in the world, and to be impressed and durably modified by it, has been protractedly (from the beginning) exposed to its regularities. Having acquired from this exposure a system of dispositions attuned to these regularities, it is inclined and able to anticipate them practically in behaviours which engage a *corporeal knowledge* that provides a practical comprehension of the world quite different from the intentional act of conscious decoding that is normally designated by the idea of comprehension. (135)

What would it mean to think of sexuality as a form of practical corporeal knowledge through which one comprehends the world as best one

can, and not always well? What would it mean to understand sexuality as a set of social forms, of institutions, differentially distributed across a social field, subject to modification both by external social forces and by the cumulative effect of individual actions? What do people express as they move through these social forms? These are the questions Balzac can help us to pursue.

INTRODUCTION

Balzac and Alternative Families

In chapters 1 and 2 of this book, I will focus on forms of misfit—the “out-on-a-limbness” evoked in the preface—that manifest themselves as failures of reproduction, both biological and social. In chapters 3 and 4, I turn to forms of misfit that involve specifically same-sex relations of various kinds. In the interlude between chapters 2 and 3 I hope to make clear that for Balzac in particular, and for his world more generally, certain social forms existed that enabled something like what we today think of as socio-sexual identities based on sexual preference. Yet despite what this division into chapters might suggest, it is also the case that there was not in place in Balzac’s world or in his mind any widely accepted and durable distinction between homosexual and heterosexual identities such as is taken for granted by many today.

Perhaps, for Balzac, when studying the range of alternative sexualities he saw in the world, categorization for its own sake was not quite so interesting as it was to become later. Balzac seems to have been more interested in the process by which sexual forms in general prove responsive to circumstance or prove adaptable when it comes to providing a means of expression. Eugénie Grandet (discussed in chapter 1) and the various people who do not marry in *Pierrette* (chapter 2) exist within the same spectrum of affective and erotic possibilities as do Cousin Pons or Cousin Bette (chapter 3) or Lucien de Rubempré (chapter 4). Their stories respond to similar historical and sociological

conditions. Their sexualities, for Balzac, arise out of and work within and on the same set of expressive possibilities.

I would like in this introduction to begin to establish the common social context for the analyses that make up the two halves of this book. I take up the issues of chapters 1 and 2 here by way of a discussion of Balzac's *Ursule Mirouët* and the issues of chapters 3 and 4 by way of a discussion of *Le Père Goriot*. I introduce my analysis of each of these two novels with a discussion of a different moment in the history of France's Civil Code (*Le Code civil*), the body of law that regulates the institution of the family. To frame the discussion of *Ursule Mirouët* I focus on the concerns about the institution of *adoption* that can be found in the debates among the first architects of the Code, concerns that Balzac scrutinized in his novel. To frame the discussion of *Le Père Goriot*, I turn to the debates in the 1990s concerning the project to revise the Code to take account of same-sex domestic partners. I contrast the analytical radicalism of Balzac's novel with the conservatively structured imagination of many of the opponents of the legislative efforts of the 1990s. That conservative imagination, I claim, is the historical product of the mid-nineteenth-century moment about which and in which Balzac was writing.

FAMILY FEELING / PROPERTY RIGHTS

Les liens du sang qui unissent et qui constituent les familles sont formés par les sentimens d'affection que la nature a mis dans le cœur des parens les uns pour les autres. L'énergie de ces sentimens augmente en raison de la proximité de parenté, et elle est portée au plus haute degré entre les pères et les mères et leurs enfans.

Il n'est aucun législateur sage qui n'ait considéré ces différens degrés d'affection comme lui présentant le meilleur ordre pour la transmission des biens.

[The blood ties that unite and constitute families are formed by the sentiments of affection that nature has placed in the hearts of relatives for each other. The energy of these sentiments increases with the closeness of the kin relation, and finds its highest point between fathers and mothers and their children.

There is no wise legislator who has failed to consider that these different degrees of affection provide him with the best order for the transmission of property.]—M. Bigot-Préameneu, presenting the articles of the proposed Civil Code regarding wills to the corps législatif in 1804

2 THE MISFIT OF THE FAMILY

La science de l'homme fait partie de la science du gouvernement. . . . Que les philosophes pénètrent donc de plus en plus dans l'abyme du cœur humain: qu'ils y cherchent tous les principes de son mouvement, et que le Ministre profitant de leurs découvertes, en fasse selon les tems, les lieux et les circonstances, une heureuse application.

[The science of man is part of the science of government. . . . Let philosophers then probe ever more deeply into the human heart: let them seek out its workings, and then let the Ministers profit from these discoveries, let them apply them wisely to a given time, place, and set of circumstances.]—Claude-Adrien Helvétius, *De l'homme* (1773)

Here is what Jean-Étienne-Marie Portalis, one of the architects of the French Civil Code, had to say about the right to the property of a deceased person: "Property rights cease with the life of the proprietor." This being the theory, there are some basic practical questions that Portalis then poses: "Will the possibility of leaving your estate to someone be allowed or forbidden, or will it suffice to place limits on that possibility?" A state itself exists, Portalis suggests, so as to have an agency to answer that question. And the particular answer in this case is that the French state will choose to limit in dramatic ways a citizen's freedom to dispose of her or his property after death: "State intervention is essential in all these matters, because it is necessary both to grant and to guarantee to people the right to inherit, and it is necessary to establish a mode for dividing up the inheritance. For goods rendered ownerless through death, the only real claim on them one sees initially is the State's claim. Let there be no mistake, the State's claim is not to inherit, but to order and to administer the inheritance."¹ Portalis's qualifications in the final clause of this citation notwithstanding, the level of state intervention incorporated into the French Civil Code was to be substantial. Starting from the premise that "no member of a deceased person's family has a rigorous title to property over the deceased's goods," it was the state that would answer in great detail all of the following questions: "How will the estate be divided between children, or, when there are no children, between close relatives? Is one sex to be favored over the other? Is primogeniture a relevant consideration? Are illegitimate children to be treated equally with legitimate ones? If there are no children, will any collateral relative suffice, no matter how distant?"²

The Civil Code, in answering these questions, fixed deeply within French culture a particular social category, that of the *héritier*, the heir. All persons of property with legal family necessarily, by law, accumulate heirs around them.³ Whether you can or cannot be someone's heir in France depends on the law and on your familial relation to that person as defined by the law. Thus it is that the concept of *héritier* lies at the center of a complex legal, historical, cultural, and psychological web that could be thought of as the French epistemology of the family. This epistemological web is *felt* as well as *known*. How it is felt and known in the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s, both by those woven into it and by those woven out of it, was one of the primary theoretical concerns of Honoré de Balzac.

In the *avant-propos* to *La Comédie humaine*, Balzac lays claim to a certain conservative social position regarding the family. He writes, "I also consider the Family and not the Individual as the true social unit. In this regard, taking the risk of being considered a backwards thinker, I place myself alongside de Bossuet and de Bonald, instead of following modern innovators" (1:13). Yet Balzac is not telling the whole truth here. For there is nothing necessarily backwards about focusing on the family, especially if one realizes, as Balzac does, that the term itself designates no fixed, transcendental object—that, as is the case of early nineteenth-century France, numerous conflicting family forms exist in uneasy proximity to one another. Different social groups, different classes, different regions are all likely to think differently about what a family is, or, one might better say, they are likely to enact the concept of the family in different ways. Some family forms will seem backwards to some, some will seem innovative to others. Within and between different social groups, attitudes toward the evolution of family forms will be different and often in conflict.

Balzac's analytical gaze on the family will thus not confirm the conservative polemic he voices in the *avant-propos*. His novels attest to a rambunctiously radical curiosity about all of the different ways in which "family" might be understood or enacted. Those novels portray a world in which all family forms seem to be in crisis; in which there is no clear, fixed, hegemonic form to the family but in which there are clear ambitions to assert or establish the hegemony of this or that form. For Balzac two of the forces most clearly overdetermining the contested space of the family are, first, the reorganizations of civil society