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Droit parisien
Law and Justice in the *Comédie Humaine*

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Abstract

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By Amanda Butterworth

Found in the multi-volume masterpiece *La Comédie Humaine,* Honoré de Balzac's novels *Le Père Goriot* and *Le Colonel Chabert* depict characters grappling with the tumult of Bourbon Restoration France beginning in 1819. Both title characters personally encounter a divide between law and justice in this epoch and seek assistance from the legal *Code civil* to validate their claims. Concurrently, Balzac creates a young law student named Eugene de Rastignac, recently arrived from the southern provinces to study at the *École de droit* in *Le Père Goriot* and a seasoned lawyer named Maitre Derville to witness the law's effects in *Le Colonel Chabert.* When established rules of conformity to law and rules of moral conduct intersect with human beings with their own interpretations of laws and justice, the true law of the city is revealed.

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Introduction

> "Les lois sont des toiles d'araignées à travers lesquelles passent les grosses mouches et où restent les petites" (Balzac, *La Maison Nucingen*)

In *La Maison Nucingen,* Honoré de Balzac continues the saga begun in *Le Père Goriot* of an ambitious man named Eugène de Rastignac. This quote makes an ironic commentary on the status of laws: while those of great consequence in society can pass through the sticky parameters of the law, the lesser paradoxically become trapped. In the vast web of Honoré de Balzac's *La Comédie Humaine,* two such small yet notable examples become tangled in the legal system in *Le Père Goriot* and *Le Colonel Chabert*. These novels investigate the lives of two miserable creatures in Paris who become victims in early Bourbon Restoration France. Through Balzac's text, the Bourbon Restoration is portrayed as appropriating the worst of the past. This age amalgamates the hierarchical inequalities of the monarchy, as well as the greed of bourgeois materialism. As a young law student in *Le Père Goriot*, Eugène de Rastignac, freshly arrived in Paris, depicts a novice guide who unearths the consequences of the divide between law and justice in this epoch. Thomas Carbonneau echoes this chasm between the written law and actual administration of justice in his article "Balzacian Legality" found in *Rutgers Law Review*. Carbonneau states:

> [Balzac's] novels confront the very questions that forever perplex and challenge the minds of teachers, students, and practitioners of law: the relationship between legality, legitimacy, and morality as reflected in personal and community ethics (Carbonneau 720-721).

When established rules of conformity to law and rules of moral conduct intersect with human beings, and with their own interpretations of laws and justice, therein reveals the true *Code* of these Balzacian novels.

Inquiry into these works by Honoré de Balzac will take into account written legal documents that attempt to promulgate justice at the time these novels are set. The texts used are foundational French legal texts such as the *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* of 1789, the *Code Napoléon* of 1804, and the resulting successor during the period these novels take place: the *Code civil.* The old French customs of the North and the Roman foundations of the South developed a French philosophy of law and fundamental principles that comprised law until the Revolution. These unwritten principles were codified during the Napoleonic Empire. This created a vast document that serves as a guide in courts still in use today in modern France. In 1819, when both *Le Colonel Chabert* and *Le Père Goriot* begin, King Louis XVIII has adopted what was formerly the *Code Napoléon* and now the *Code civil* in the Bourbon Restoration.

In *Le Colonel Chabert,* a Napoleonic war veteran returns from East Prussia in 1819 without the fanfare due to the hero of the Battle of Eylau. Instead he finds that he must begin a new battle on the home front against a society that fails to recognize him. Through the figure of the destitute Chabert, Balzac paints a figure to show what is wrong with the entire legal system. The returning soldier wants to be unearthed from the mound of legal documentation that actually took his life twelve years ago and, in effect, regain

his identity. He demands that the state return to him that which he left behind, such as his military pension and his wife.

The reader encounters Monsieur Goriot in *Le Père Goriot* as a man who made his fortune during the tumult of the French Revolution. Found in the *Code civil,* his concept of justice pertains to the principle of respect due to him as a father. His daughters Anastasie de Restaud and Delphine de Nucingen contravene this principle. The two deplete his retirement savings to fund their extravagances in French society and then leave him without the comfort of family to die accompanied only by poverty in the *pension bourgeoise*. In the delirium of his death, he demands the administration of justice for the disobeyed laws. In his mind, he believes the police should be summoned to compel his daughters to pay their respect.

My interest in these two characters is largely due to their status as once ambitious men of the Wars, both Revolutionary and Napoleonic, and their present condition as so vulnerable in this new age where they do not belong. In exile from their own countrymen, this dependency requires them to have advocates to speak on their behalf. In particular, both Goriot and Chabert call upon Maître Derville, a lawyer in Paris, to assist them in legal matters. Goriot also depends upon the young law student Rastignac in his final days to provide him with capital for medicines and funeral expenses. In her essay "Narrate or Educate: *Le Père Goriot* and the Bildungsroman," this dependency in the text is described by Professor Claudia Brodsky Lacour:

> In *Le Père Goriot* Balzac begins the separation of the contradiction contained in Chabert [of suffering in both body and story the contradiction *within* being at once a thing *and* a person], a contradiction

> that Balzac will sustain and elaborate throughout the *Comédie Humaine,* in which the "things" that becoming "something" depends on, the exchanges that compose narrative advancement, and the objects that are necessary context of plot also threaten, sooner or later, to efface the very subjects of such plots (Lacour 43).

The legal pupil and master, Eugène de Rastignac and Maître Derville, who both know the *Code civil,* now represent the law in the Bourbon Restoration. These men of the law are the necessary condition needed to escort Goriot and Chabert from the state of things—a faceless veteran and a shell of a father—to the state of *being* human. As described by Professor Ruth Amossy in her essay "Fathers and Sons in *Old Goriot:* The Symbolic Dimension of Balzac's Realism," the loss of old *fathers* and *greatcoats* of the past is less emblematic of the natural progression of sons following their fathers in paternal responsibility, but rather is indicative of a profound social and political crisis begun by the Revolution (Amossy 47).

In the following chapters, I hope to investigate law and justice through the lens of the characters of these Balzacian novels. Does the device of the *Code civil* successfully reflect and enforce characters' notions of laws *through* justice? Is it possible for the laws and justice of a society to be defined for all human beings collectively? Finally, by including such concepts in these novels, do the figures of law and justice that govern the characters say something larger about humanity? By turning the pages of this human comedy and glimpsing the *Code* in its margins, these texts disclose meaningful, comparative instances of the interplay between the law that binds all characters in Paris and its effect on their existence.

Vacillations in the Legal Mire of Paris

Among other guests residing in the Maison Vauquer boarding house on *rue Neuve-Sainte-Geneviève, entre le quartier latin et le faubourg Saint-Marceau* (Balzac 11) is Eugène de Rastignac, a student from the southern province of Angoulême seeking a legal education at the *École de droit* in Paris in *Le Père Goriot*. After encountering the enticements of the city, "les délices visibles du Paris matériel" (Balzac 36), Rastignac instead pursues independent research outside of the confines of law school in the complex discipline of "le Droit parisien" (Balzac 76). Members of differing economic and social statuses instruct the student. Each have varying opinions of what constitutes the law in this city and what justifies flouting moral or legal principles to seek one's own means. Through the medium of the education novel, Balzac uses a young law student in the flux of Bourbon Restoration France in 1819 to enter the spheres of the impoverished, the affluent bourgeois, and the aristocracy. Throughout the course of this education, Eugène de Rastignac must question his foundational beliefs as he is exposed to the ugly underbelly that lies below the glittering aura of Parisian society and configure a model of what the law is amidst the remnants of a collision of multiple systems of code. In due course, the reader tracks the young student's route through the streets of Paris—striking the natural ground with the weight of his own feet through the *océan de boue* (Balzac 244) and gliding in the carriage of the wealthy as Rastignac positions his own destination to jurisprudence.

Once an aspiring law student himself, contemporary to the character Eugène de Rastignac, Honoré de Balzac published *Père Goriot* in 1834 during the July Monarch in France. Choosing a poor law student who can navigate from *une pension bougeoise* to posh *faubourg Saint-Germain* is indicative of the social upheaval of Restoration France: Rastignac is situated post-*ancien régime* in the imitable position of having a title of nobility, but no wealth. Consequently, his family vests their economic interest in their son to *parvenir*: to come to the capital city to unearth and distinguish the Rastignac name from instruction at the *École de droit*. Just a few weeks into the fall semester in 1819, however, Eugène de Rastignac learns his first applied lesson in the unwritten *droits* of Paris:

> Mme de Marcillac [la tante d'Eugène de Rastignac] autrefois présentée à la cour, y avait connu les sommités aristocratiques. Tout à coup le jeune ambitieux reconnut, dans les souvenirs dont sa tante l'avait si souvent bercé, les éléments de plusieurs conquêtes sociales, au moins aussi importantes que celles qu'il entreprenait à l'École de droit ; il la questionna sur les liens de parenté qui pouvaient encore se renouer. Après avoir secoué les branches de l'arbre généalogique, la vieille dame estima que, de toutes les personnes qui pouvaient servir son neveu parmi la gent égoïste des parents riches, Mme la vicomtesse de Beauséant serait la moins récalcitrante. Elle écrivit à cette jeune femme une lettre dans l'ancien style, et la remit à Eugène...La vicomtesse répondit par une invitation de bal pour le lendemain. Grâce à sa tante de Marcillac, le pauvre étudiant avait été bien reçu dans cette maison, sans connaître l'étendue de cette faveur. Etre admis dans ces salons dorés équivalait à un brevet de haute noblesse. En se montrant dans cette société, la plus exclusive de toutes, il avait conquis le *droit* d'aller partout (Balzac 37-39).

Through the introduction of his aunt, this invitation into society serves as Rastignac's ticket to a ball given by his distant cousin, Madame de Beauséant. There, the beauty of la Comtesse Anastasie de Restaud strikes Eugène de

Rastignac. Enacting the restoration of nobility, and armed with his entitlement to go *partout,* Rastignac pays a disastrous visit to la Comtesse Restaud at her home without a proper introduction, unannounced, and, since he had made the journey on foot, with traces of mud from the streets on his shoes.

Eugène de Rastignac amends his concept of his *Droit parisien* to knock on any door of Paris from this experience: in the society to which he now wishes to gain admittance, where one finds the company of women like the Comtesse de Restaud, he quickly discovers his title is less important than his connections**.** The powerful Beauséant name that he can claim association with is akin to the force of a "un coup de baguette magique" (Balzac 69):

> *Parent de Mme la vicomtesse de Beauséant par les Marcillac !*
> ces mots, que la comtesse prononça presque emphatiquement, par suite de l'espèce d'orgueil qu'éprouve une maîtresse de maison à prouver qu'elle n'a chez elle que des gens de distinction, furent d'un effet magique, le comte quitta son air froidement cérémonieux et salua l'étudiant.
> 'Enchanté,' dit [M. Restaud], 'monsieur, de pouvoir faire votre connaissance' (Balzac 65).

In the presence of the Restauds, uttering the name of his fellow lodger at Maison Vauquer, the domestically ridiculed old Monsieur Goriot, produces the opposite effect. Rastignac's lack of knowledge regarding the present social order and, consequently, the story of the daughters of Goriot the Comtesse de Restaud and the Baroness Delphine de Nucingen causes him to violate a societal law in the form of this embarrassing *faux pas.* Their father, Jean-Joachim Goriot, a retired vermicelli merchant who made his fortune selling his

goods during the scarcity of the French Revolution, is now rendered a pariah to his family tree in Restoration France:

> 'Vous comprenez bien que, sous l'Empire, les deux gendres ne se sont pas trop formalisés d'avoir ce vieux Quatrevingt-treize chez eux; ça pouvait encore aller avec Buonaparte. Mais quand les Bourbons sont revenues, le bonhomme a gêné monsieur Restaud, et plus encore le banquier...Ce père Doriot n'aurait-il pas été une tache de cambouis dans le salon de ses filles?' (Balzac 81-82)

Rastignac's exposure with this previous era of law, the chaos of the Revolution and the undoing of social hierarchy that Goriot participated in, coupled with the ignorance of modern day society, precipitates Rastignac's sentence: an expulsion from the Restauds' home indefinitely.

The curriculum of the *École de droit* has failed to prepare him for this system of laws. Seeking instruction to rectify his blunder, Eugène visits his cousin Madame de Beauséant. As the student witnesses from practical instruction, Madame de Beauséant is also involved in her own social campaigns: her lover marquis d'Ajuda-Pinto departs her home in haste as Rastignac enters. He is to marry Mademoiselle Rochefide, a wealthy young socialite in Paris. Meanwhile, *la meilleure amie* of Madame de Beauséant, la Duchesse de Langeais, comes to Hotel Beauséant bearing the news. Both women are armed with premeditated daggers to wound and find satisfaction in the misfortune of the other—all under the guise of pleasantries:

> 'Le monde est infâme,' dit la vicomtesse en effilant son châle et sans lever les yeux, car elle était atteinte au vif par les mots que Mme de Langeais avait dits, pour elle, en racontant [l'histoire du Goriot et ses filles]. 'Infâme! Non,' reprit la duchesse; 'il va son train, voilà tout. Si je vous en parle ainsi, c'est pour montrer que je ne suis pas la dupe du monde. Je pense comme vous,' dit-elle en pressant la main de la vicomtesse. 'Le monde est un bourbier, tâchons de rester sur les hauteurs' (Balzac 82).

Enduring both wounded pride and love from all that has occurred during Rastignac's visit, Madame de Beauséant brashly instructs her protégé in a ruthless nature of ambitious exertions in Parisian society and his naïveté in rendering himself vulnerable:

> 'Eh bien! monsieur de Rastignac, traitez ce monde comme il mérite de l'être. Vous voulez parvenir, je vous aiderai. Vous sonderez combien est profonde la corruption féminine, vous toiserez la largeur de la misérable vanité des hommes. Quoique j'aie bien lu dans ce livre du monde, il y avait des pages qui cependant m'étaient inconnues. Maintenant je sais tout. Plus froidement vous calculerez, plus avant vous irez. Frappez sans pitié, vous serez craint. Vous ne serez rien ici si vous n'avez pas une femme qui s'intéresse à vous. Mais si vous avez un sentiment vrai, cachez-le comme un trésor; ne le laissez jamais soupçonner, vous seriez perdu. Vous ne seriez plus le bourreau, vous deviendriez la victime. Si jamais vous aimiez, gardez bien votre secret! ne le livrez pas avant d'avoir bien su à qui vous ouvrirez votre cœur' (Balzac 83).

Madame de Beauséant abridges the textbook of *Droit parisien* for Rastignac that is physically non-existent, but rather bodily encapsulated by an internal tension between the reason of her mind and the passion of her heart.

As section two launches, "L'Entrée dans Le Monde," the reader may wonder where Eugène de Rastignac previously "was," and what occasion causes this entrance into the world. Is it his ascent into society? His first love? Or his noted absence from the *École de droit* and study out of doors:

> L'étudiant n'étudia plus. Il allait aux Cours pour y répondre à l'appel, et quand il avait attesté sa présence, il décampait. Il s'était fait le raisonnement que se font la plupart des étudiants. Il réservait ses études pour le moment ou il s'agirait de passer ses examens (89-90).

His début is defined by all of these occurrences; together, these experiences will form and define the shape of his legal model much like the *Code civil* in Bourbon Restoration France. The Roman foundations of French philosophy of

law and fundamental principles that comprised law were codified during the Napoleonic Empire, creating a vast document that serves as a guide in the courts. Eventually, Rastignac abandons his studies at the *École de droit*, instead beginning to adapt himself to pursue what he now desires—an entrance into the *cercle du droit parisien*:

> Son imagination, transportée dans les hautes régions de la société parisienne, lui inspira mille pensées mauvaises au coeur, en lui élargissant la tête et la conscience. Il vit le monde comme il est: les lois et la morale impuissantes chez les riches, et vit dans la fortune l'*ultima ratio mundi*. 'Vautrin a raison, la fortune est la vertu!' (Balzac 85)

As opposed to the civil code that is readily accessible and recognized, these laws are *not* codified, but are nevertheless notably enforced by the lessons of Rastignac's escapades:

> Le Méridional en était à son premier calcul. Entre le boudoir bleu de Mme de Restaud et le salon rose de Mme de Beauséant, il avait fait trois années de ce *Droit parisien* dont on ne parle pas, quoiqu'il constitue une haute jurisprudence sociale qui, bien apprise et bien pratiquée, mène à tout (Balzac 76)

The unanswered question, however, is why Balzac focalizes on a law student who does not actually study law at his institution and is instead more interested in love and society. This phenomenon could simply be the nature of an individual who is suffering acute academic malaise or distraction, but perhaps Rastignac's experience reveals something more. His impressions of Paris signify an underlying notion of the discrepancy between where a population collectively believes the law is enacted and where it actually exists and, likewise, that what the law is, differs from how it is actually implemented.

Another of the student's educationalists is a lodger at Maison Vauquer named Vautrin. He familiarizes Rastignac with the concept of the supreme

virtue of success. This connoisseur of law learned all he knows as a participant in the system of the nefarious nature. He is an escaped convict and legal advisor of a society differing from that of Mme de Beauséant:

> 'La Société des Dix mille est une association de hauts voleurs, de gens qui travaillent en grand, et ne se mêlent pas d'une affaire où il n'y a pas dix mille francs à gagner. Cette société se compose de tout ce qu'il y a de plus distingué parmi ceux de nos hommes qui vont droit en cour d'assises. Ils connaissent le Code, et ne risquent jamais de se faire appliquer la peine de mort quand ils sont pincés. Collin [Vautrin] est leur homme de confiance, leur conseil' (Balzac 166-167).

Vautrin is the *Dix mille's* equivalent of a Napoleonic leader and coordinates their organization. He instructs young Eugène about this highly organized segment of society who codify and enforce their own laws, obey no sovereigns such as the current king Louis XVIII, and are driven by the prospect of power and wealth and their association with one another.

Vautrin's opinions of the law and resulting code are certainly colored by his own criminal experiences. He believes his legal theory is ultimately superior to the confines of the *Code civil* of France and the system that enforces it, protecting those who are arguably no different than the league of the *Dix Mille*:

> 'Nous avons d'abord le Code à manger, ce n'est pas amusant, et ça n'apprend rien; mais il le faut. Soit. Nous nous faisons avocat pour devenir président d'une cour d'assises, envoyer les pauvres diables qui valent mieux que nous avec T.F. [travaux forces] sur l'épaule, afin de prouver aux riches qu'ils peuvent dormir tranquillement' (Balzac 108-109).

He asserts that his way is analogous to those amongst Parisian high society perpetrating as lofty aristocrats or wealthy bourgeois, such as Anastasie de

Restaud, who pawns family heirlooms to pay for the 100,000 franc gambling debts of her lover Maxime de Trailles or her sister's husband, the Baron de Nucingen, who is involved in real estate fraud. These members of the elite are emblematic of the plethora of those who are born into aristocracy or who gain admittance into society and attend parties held by Madame de Beauséant, yet who engage in deception and crime:

> 'Ça n'est pas plus beau que la cuisine, ça pue tout autant, et il faut se salir les mains si l'on veut fricoter; sachez seulement vous bien débarbouiller: là est toute la morale de notre époque. Si je vous parle ainsi du monde, il m'en a donné le droit, je le connais. Croyez-vous que je blâme? du tout. Il a toujours été ainsi. Les moralistes ne le changeront jamais. L'homme est imparfait. Il est parfois plus ou moins hypocrite. Je n'accuse pas les riches en faveur du peuple: l'homme est le même en haut, en bas, au milieu. Il se rencontre par chaque million de ce haut bétail dix lurons qui se mettent au-dessus de tout, même des lois; j'en suis. Vous, si vous êtes un homme supérieur, allez en droite ligne et la tête haute' (Balzac 112)

Value judgments are not solicited in Vautrin's lesson—to choose high society or the camaraderie of the *Dix Mille* are both valid choices. In Vautrin's opinion, however, to obtain a legal profession within the confines of the legal system, such as Rastignac studying in the *École de droit*, is to paradoxically be a prisoner; to be free is to live lawlessly:

> 'Le baron de Rastignac veut-il être avocat? Oh! joli. Il faut pâtir pendant dix ans, dépenser mille francs par mois, avoir une bibliothèque, un cabinet, aller dans le monde, baiser la robe d'un avoué pour avoir des causes, balayer le palais avec sa langue. Si ce métier vous menait à bien, je ne dirais pas non; mais trouvez-moi dans Paris cinq avocats qui, à cinquante ans, gagnent plus de cinquante mille francs par an? Bah! plutôt que de m'amoindrir ainsi l'âme, j'aimerais mieux me faire corsaire. Voilà le carrefour de la vie, jeune homme, choisissez' (Balzac 110)

Vautrin's instruction is straightforward—the difficulty of this lesson for Rastignac is the seemingly simple choice of vice over the law.

Vautrin reveals his foundational justifications for the *Dix mille*; his own rejection of law articulates a simultaneous criticism of using morality as validation for anything, particularly something that binds all citizens under threat of punishment from a sovereign. He asserts that morality is a merely relative term that differs for each individual; he holds the same view for the absolute concept of the law. Just as the impossible notion of morality leaves the virtuous pedestrians of Paris to endure lives of skewed hardship and disappointment, to try to abide by the strictures of the law is also not in one's best interest. The most important tenet of the law for Vautrin is that despite the standardization of law, such as the Napoleonic or Civil code, there is still no total consensus agreed upon by the people. He therefore justifies the reasoning that because it cannot be wholly identified, the mythical entity of the law does not exist:

> 'Un homme qui se vante de ne jamais changer d'opinion est un homme qui se charge d'aller toujours en ligne droite, un niais qui croit à l'infaillibilité. Il n'y a pas de principes, il n'y a que des événements; il n'y a pas de lois, il n'y a que des circonstances: l'homme supérieur épouse les événements et les circonstances pour les conduire. S'il y avait des principes et des lois fixes, les peuples n'en changeraient pas comme nous changeons de chemises. L'homme n'est pas tenu d'être plus sage que toute une nation. J'aurai une opinion inébranlable le jour où j'aurai rencontré trois têtes d'accord sur l'emploi d'un principe et j'attendrai longtemps! L'on ne trouve pas dans les tribunaux trois juges qui aient le même avis sur un article de la loi' (115-116).

Vautrin repudiates the *Code* and advises Rastignac to do the same; there is no true meaning that precedes law and creates the foundations from which the law claims power because there is no agreement between citizens as to what the laws actually are and no constancy that is inscribed in the laws that man

creates. Therefore, a successful man must make his own laws, choose his own sovereign, yet can also change these choices as life's situation evolves.

Conviction to be honest, moral, and responsible illogically impedes Rastignac's triumph in Vautrin's conceptualization of success:

> 'Vous croyez à quelque chose de fixe dans ce monde-là! Méprisez donc les hommes, et voyez les mailles par où l'on peut passer à travers le réseau du Code. Le secret des grandes fortunes sans causes apparente est un crime oublié, parce qu'il a été proprement fait' (Balzac 117).

For Vautrin, in this age of the advent of self-made wealth, the presence of fortune indicates a past of crime—unless one can track their wealth from the time Louis XVI. In this case that Vautrin proposes to Rastignac, the benefits of the crime perhaps negate or even outweigh the detriments, and therefore all the more reason to commit the crime just as the financially successful have before them. In the instructor's application of his pedagogy, he proposes a lethal scheme to kill the brother of Victorine Taillefer, a young resident of the Maison Vauquer who had been disinherited by her father and left in poverty. Vautrin's plot would allow Victorine to inherit her father's fortune. For Vautrin, this act is merely a different system choice from the justice of the civil law and is as just as the present state of unreasonable affairs, despite the manslaughter. Vautrin informs Rastignac that he pities those such as Victorine who will not help themselves. Recognizing their enslavement to their own sense of morality, he also predicts their fate as existences destined to be replete with misery without the intervention of a bold spirit:

> 'Mais que croyez-nous que sont l'honnête homme? À Paris, l'honnête homme est celui qui se tait, et refuse de partager. Je ne vous parle pas de ces pauvres ilotes qui partout font la besogne sans être jamais récompensés de leurs travaux, et que je nomme la confrérie de savates

> du bon Dieu. Certes, là est la vertu dans toute la fleur de sa bêtise, mais là est la misère. Je vois d'ici la grimace de ces braves gens si Dieu nous faisait la mauvaise plaisanterie de s'absenter au jugement dernier' (Balzac 111-112).

Vautrin instructs Rastignac to scorn the notion of the honest man but to also scorn the notion of faith in a higher order, such as in God or in natural, intangible rights that protect the unfortunate. Vautrin holds little concern for those whose existences hold no benefits for him and is of the opinion that human lives can be used as stepping-stones to line the streets for Rastignac (and himself):

> 'Voyez-vous, mon petit, je vis dans une sphère plus élevée que celles des autres hommes. Je considère les actions comme des moyens, et ne vois que le but. Qu'est-ce qu'un homme pour moi? Ça!' fit-il en faisant claquer l'ongle de son pouce sous une de ses dents. 'Un homme est tout ou rien. Mais un homme est un dieu quand il vous ressemble: ce n'est plus une machine couverte en peau, mais un théâtre où s'émeuvent les plus beaux sentiments, et je ne vis que par les sentiments. Un sentiment, n'est-ce pas le monde dans une pensée?' (Balzac 162).

Vautrin advises Rastignac that he should instead heed his counsel and divide the plunder because in the instance of Victorine Taillefer, Vautrin has a profound interest in righting this wrong, calling himself a "Don Quixote," but ultimately seeking a portion of Victorine's inheritance blocked by her paternally recognized brother. All parties (save the slain brother, Taillefer) could benefit in Vautrin's schema: Rastignac would marry Victorine and become more financially successful than he could ever have hoped to be, Vautrin would receive a twenty percent fee for his instruction, and Victorine would marry a handsome man she esteems and would also be reunited with her estranged family.

Rastignac contemplates his options: to arrive at a decision, he must utilize his argumentation skills, debating within himself the fundamental questions his colleagues at the *École* study in books, in relation to his own life:

> 'Quelle tête de fer a donc cet homme!' se dit Rastignac en voyant Vautrin s'en aller tranquillement, sa canne sous le bras. 'Il a deviné mes motifs aussitôt que je les ai conçus. En deux mots, ce brigand m'a dit plus de choses sur la vertu que ne m'en ont dit les hommes et les livres. Être fidèle à la vertu, martyre sublime! Bah! tout le monde croit à la vertu; mais qui est vertueux? Les peuples ont la liberté pour idole; mais où est sur la terre un peuple libre? Ma jeunesse est encore bleue comme un ciel sans nuage : vouloir être grand ou riche, n'est-ce pas se résoudre à mentir, plier, ramper, se redresser, flatter, dissimuler? n'est-ce pas consentir à se faire le valet de ceux qui ont menti, plié, rampé? Avant d'être leur complice, il faut les servir. Eh bien, non. Je veux travailler noblement, saintement; je veux travailler jour et nuit, ne devoir ma fortune qu' à mon labeur. Qu'y a-t-il de plus beau que de contempler sa vie et de la trouver pure comme un lis? Je ne veux penser à rien, le coeur est un bon guide' (Balzac 117-118).

At ends with his former instructors and struggling with the concept of bloodshed for success, Eugène must seek out the opinion of an outside source from his friend Bianchon through the mode of a metaphor:

> 'Te souviens-tu de ce passage [de Rousseau] où il demande à son lecteur ce qu'il ferait au cas où il pourrait s'enrichir en tuant à la Chine par sa seule volonté un vieux mandarin, sans bouger de Paris...S'il t'était prouvé que la chose est possible et qu'il te suffit d'un signe de tête, le ferais-tu ?'
>
> 'Est-il bien vieux, le mandarin? Mais, bah! jeune ou vieux, paralytique ou bien portant, ma foi...Diantre! Eh bien ! non.'
>
> 'Tu es un brave garçon, Bianchon. Mais si tu aimais une femme à te mettre pour elle l'âme à l'envers, et qu'il lui fallût de l'argent, beaucoup d'argent pour sa toilette, pour sa voiture, pour toutes ses fantaisies enfin?
>
> 'Mais tu m'ôtes la raison, et tu veux que je raisonne.'
>
> 'Eh bien! Bianchon, je suis fou, guéris-moi. J'ai deux soeurs qui sont des anges de beauté, de candeur, et je veux qu'elles soient heureuses. Où prendre deux cent mille francs pour leur dot d'ici à cinq ans? Il est,

> vois-tu, des circonstances dans la vie où il faut joueur gros jeu et ne pas user son bonheur à gagner des sous.'
>
> 'Mais tu poses la question qui se trouve à l'entrée de la vie pour tout le monde, et tu veux couper le noeud gordien avec l'épée. Pour agir ainsi, mon cher, il faut être Alexandre, sinon l'on va au bagne. Moi, je suis heureux de la petite existence que je me créerai en province, où je succèderai tout bêtement à mon père. Notre bonheur, mon cher, tiendra toujours entre la plante de nos pieds et notre occiput; et, qu'il coûte un million par an ou cent louis, la perception intrinsèque en est la même au-dedans de nous. Je conclus à la vie du Chinois' (Balzac 136-137)

Bianchon simplifies Rastignac's dilemma and easily identifies what he believes all men are faced with: the dual concerns of the pursuit of happiness and the temptations of lawlessness. If man chooses lawlessness, he must be the *Alexander the Great* of lawlessness. The bold spirit that Vautrin cites will solve a complicated dilemma by a rash, bold stroke of the sword—the weapon against the "l'arme de la médiocrité qui abonde" (Balzac 111). This course is indeed the gamble that Rastignac knows it to be. To choose that kind of vast circumference, as an Alexandrian protégée who seeks power to the *ends of the world and to the Great Outer Sea* in the densely populated Paris is to involve many people, however, and to consequently render human lives as fuel for his own victory. To make that circumference simply the space around yourself, states Bianchon, is to seize your own happiness and future, and to simultaneously be in harmony with your own conscience. This reinforces what Rastignac wants to hold as his own sentiment: that his success should be derived entirely from his merits (Balzac 37).

Eugène de Rastignac receives his final lessons in a tumultuous day of examination of himself, his instructors, and the city that surrounds them.

Vautrin, also known as Jacques Collin the escaped convict, is betrayed by a member of the Maison Vauquer and is arrested by the police in their home:

> Chacun comprit tout Vautrin, son passé, son présent, son avenir, ses doctrines implacables, la religion de son bon plaisir, la royauté que lui donnaient le cynisme de ses pensées, de ses actes, et la force d'une organisation faite à tout" (Balzac 195).

The residents are shocked by this deceptive, lawless criminal in their midst who was moments ago the gregarious character who was so integral to the dynamic of Maison Vauquer. More scandalizing, however, is when they receive the searing verdict that their presence burdens to *his* notion of society:

> 'Etes-vous meilleure que nous? Nous avons moins d'infamie sur l'épaule que vous n'en avez dans le cœur, membres flasques d'une société gangrenée: le meilleur d'entre vous ne me résistait pas.' Ses yeux s'arrêtèrent sur Rastignac, auquel il adressa un sourire gracieux qui contrastait singulièrement avec la rude expression de sa figure. 'Y a-t-il un de vous qui soit, comme moi, riche de plus de dix mille frères prêts à tout faire pour vous ?' demanda-t-il avec fierté. 'Il y a du bon là,' dit-il en se frappant le cœur, 'je n'ai jamais trahi personne' (Balzac 196-197).

Despite his past criminal offenses viewed by the law, Collin cannot be accused of betraying his fellow men. He believes he is not a hypocrite like the proprietor of the boarding house, Madame Vauquer, who cheats her tenants in the most immoral yet legal ways imaginable, then judges criminals like *Trompe-la-Mort* who differ only because they are under the jurisdiction of the law for their crimes:

> 'Etes vous bêtes, vous autres! n'avez-vous jamais vu de forçat? Un forçat de la trempe de Collin, ici présent, est un homme moins lâche que les autres, et qui proteste contre les profondes déceptions du contrat social, comme dit Jean-Jacques, dont je me glorifie d'être l'élève. Enfin, je suis seul contre le gouvernement avec son tas de tribunaux, de gendarmes, de budgets, et je les roule' (Balzac 198).

The police take Collin away without the camaraderie of those in his Society in tow; he is rather alone, born free yet in chains just as Jean-Jacques described in *The Social Contract* (Rousseau xvi).

Likewise, Madame de Beauséant departs her final imperial evening as one also betrayed, following her societal "public execution" due to the imminent marriage of her former lover Marquis d'Ajuda-Pinto. Alone in a carriage, she departs for solitary confinement in Normandy:

> Rastignac s'en alla vers cinq heurs, après avoir vu Mme de Beauséant dans sa berline de voyage, après avoir reçu son dernier adieu mouillé de larmes qui prouvaient que les personnes le plus élevées ne sont pas mises hors de la loi du coeur et ne vivent pas sans chagrins, comme quelques courtisans du peuple voudraient le lui faire croire. Eugène revint à pied vers la Maison Vauquer, par un temps humide et froid. Son éducation s'achevait (Balzac 250-251).

That the influential teachers have fallen is a powerful lesson for Rastignac; the stoic figures have received severe blows to the façades of their platforms. These pillars that represented the foundations of his conceptualization of *Droit parisien* have crumbled, leaving behind the rubble of the reality of an unpredictable, ever-changing Paris.

Rastignac must now sift through what he has seen, felt, and learned. The course of his education led him to backwardly stumble into love with the Baroness de Nucingen, the sister of his original attraction, la Comtesse de Restaud and daughter of Goriot, initially interacting with her as means to incite the jealousy of Anastasie. His capriciousness in love is likewise emblematic of the vacillating internal dialogue and resolutions he precipitates throughout the novel. His education has caused him to change his moral and legal concentration through manifold instances: he has proclaimed both the

virtue of success *and* the sure nature of the heart as a guide. His liaison with Delphine, however, and the reality of loving a woman in this morally rationed city shows the true shifting nature of Eugène de Rastignac:

> Il alla s'habiller en faisant les plus tristes, et les plus décourageantes réflexions. Il voyait le monde comme un océan de boue dans lequel un homme se plongeait jusqu'au cou, s'il y trempait le pied. 'Il ne s'y commet que des crimes mesquins!' se dit-il. Vautrin est plus grande. Il avait vu les trios grandes expressions de la société: l'Obéissance, la Lutte et la Révolte; la Famille, le Monde et Vautrin. Et il n'osait prendre parti. L'Obéissance était ennuyeuse, la Révolte impossible et la Lutte incertaine. Sa pensée le reporta au sein de sa famille. Il se souvint des pures émotions de cette vie calme, il se rappela les jours passés au milieu des êtres dont il était chéri. En se conformant aux lois naturelles du foyer domestique, ces chères créatures y trouvaient un bonheur plein, continu, sans angoisses. Malgré ces bonnes pensées, il ne se sentit pas le courage de venir confesser la foi des âmes pures à Delphine, en lui ordonnant la Vertu au nom de l'Amour. Déjà son éducation commencée avait porté ses fruits. Il aimait égoïstement déjà (Balzac 244-245).

To return to the natural law of his childhood is rendered impossible—he now knows too much about what he sees as the true nature of the world, albeit consisting only of Paris. The hypothetical Mandarin lesson from Bianchon, although morally upright and commendable, lacks the worldly elements that he now requires as necessity in his life. The revolution from law that Vautrin attempted to elicit from Rastignac is conversely too hazardous to his underlying altruistic principles of law that he cannot wholly adhere to nor refute. The interim struggle of limitless amendments to his *constitution actuelle de [son] désordre sociale* is thus the only tolerable option (Balzac 107).

Honoré de Balzac thus creates neither a hero, nor an anti-hero, but merely a flawed human being: Eugène de Rastignac, product of society in

Paris. After the death of the saintly namesake of this novel, old Monsieur Goriot, Rastignac is ultimately left alone without guidance or direction:

> Le jour tombait, un humide crépuscule agaçait les nerfs ; il regarda la tombe et y ensevelit sa dernière larme de jeune homme, cette larme arrachée par les saintes émotions d'un coeur pur, une de ces larmes qui, de la terre où elles tombent, rejaillissent jusque dans les cieux. Il se croisa les bras, [et] contempla les nuages.
> Rastignac, resté seul, fit quelques pas vers le haut du cimetière et vit Paris tortueusement couché le long des deux rives de la Seine, où commençaient à briller les lumières. Ses yeux s'attachèrent presque avidement entre la colonne de la place Vendôme et le dôme des Invalides, là où vivait ce beau monde dans lequel il avait voulu pénétrer. Il lança sur cette ruche bourdonnante un regard qui semblait par avance en pomper le miel, et dit ces mots grandioses: 'A nous deux maintenant!'
> Et pour premier acte du défi qu'il portait à la société, Rastignac alla dîner chez Mme de Nucingen (Balzac 278-279).

Situated amidst shades of gray between the empty cemetery and the hive of Paris, Eugène de Rastignac declares a warning to the city that has indiscriminately claimed queens of society, criminals, and forgotten saints. The oath is compelling. The narrator's final words that Eugène will therefore go to dine with Madame de Nucingen, the woman he loves, but who also abandoned her now deceased father is an undoing of any shred of higher meaning the previous pages bestow upon a reader. This intrigue constitutes neither a definitive ending nor an adequate foundation for the commencement of a new tale. A tidy absolute of a resolution to the life of Madame de Beauséant, Vautrin, or Père Goriot is absent; the expected deference to the law of plot is not followed. Rastignac goes forth from this moment on the cemetery mount to continue his humanistic litany of contradictions and disputation between his conscience and the egotism of his human desire as an irresolute pupil perpetuating an erroneous mélange of jurisprudence.

The medium of Rastignac's education is the law, but any discipline could be transposed to exemplify the life long nature of an education in the art of living. In Rastignac's multi-foundational education, how he chooses to conduct himself is a choice based on what he learns from instruction, but also what he inherently feels. In this *Comédie Humaine*, Balzac reveals to the attentive reader who has the conviction to follow Eugène de Rastignac the duration of his education a commentary on the law. The significance of the law is less defined by absolute principles of a *Code,* but rather the inscription of humanity into the codes that govern. Because the law cannot always dictate what his heart desires, Eugène de Rastignac can therefore matriculate with a degree in *Droit parisien* and begin his practice as a "docteur en droit-travers" (Balzac 54).

Reading Between the Lines of Conflict on the Face of Colonel Chabert

In Honoré de Balzac's novel *Le Colonel Chabert,* a disenfranchised and disfigured relic of the Napoleonic Empire unsuccessfully attempts to reclaim the physical representations of his rights in Bourbon Restoration France. Colonel Chabert served as a cavalry officer during the Napoleonic War and was severely wounded during the Battle of Eylau in 1807. Although Chabert is pronounced dead by military doctors and is buried in a mass grave with his fellow soldiers in East Prussia, he survives, emerging from the bodies of the dead. Following a bout of memory loss, and an Odyssey-like journey through villages and country sides, the Colonel returns to Paris twelve years later to find that he was recorded as dead in the official bulletin of battle, *Victoires et Conquêtes,* and that his wife has inherited his property and remarried a Faubourg Saint-Germain aristocrat who rose to power with the Bourbons. Chabert struggles to reclaim his identity, facing the changes that took place in his absence: those presently in command endeavor to silence his claim simply by not recognizing his existence.

The French *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* of 1789 served as an integral textual weapon of the French Revolution against the sovereign king, Louis XVI, enumerating that rights claimed by any man are metaphysically grounded and inalienably preexist the audible declaration claim. Conversely, in his text *Fables of Responsibility: Aberrations and*

Predicaments in Ethics and Politics, literary critic Thomas Keenan reveals a divergent notion in a chapter entitled “Left to Our Own Devices: On the Impossibility of Justice.” Keenan asserts that a declaration claims "the right to declare;" however, rights do not preexist the claim, for otherwise there would be no necessity to claim them: “Why is the noise, the clamor, of the speech act required, if it happens only in order to make what’s already so manifest manifest?” (Keenan 41). He argues that the paradox of claiming innate rights demonstrates that the French declaration requires a foundational claim because rights are *not* metaphysically founded. A literary representation of this tension between the preexisting, grounded rights of the *Déclaration des Droits de l’Homme et du Citoyen* and Thomas Keenan’s notion of the uncertainty of rights is distinguished by a temporal gap central in *Le Colonel Chabert* from when the Colonel is absent from his life in Paris during a change in power, only to return after defying death and to confront the realities of coming back to life.

Like the arm of his fallen comrade that he uses to free himself, Chabert emerges from the bodies in the grave as a grotesque metaphor of himself: an errant appendage of the Empire. Upon his recovery and return to Paris in 1819, he discovers that everything that had belonged to him is lost—his wife to the Count Ferraud, his property, and his name. Driven to remedy this disparity between his past and his present, Chabert naturally declares his inalienable *Déclaration* rights that he feels are self-evident, yet he encounters difficulty due to disfigurement—the physical representation of the breach of

his rights before his injuries and the claims to rights that he wishes to now make:

> Le visage, pâle, livide et en lame de couteau, s'il est permis d'emprunter cette expression vulgaire, semblait mort...Le cuir qui garnissait l'intérieur de son chapeau était sans doute fort gras, sa perruque y resta collée sans qu'il s'en aperçût, et laissa voir à nu son crâne horriblement mutilé par une cicatrice transversale qui prenait à l'occiput et venait mourir à l'œil droit, en formant partout une grosse couture saillante (Balzac 16-17).

Chabert is no longer the man he once was because he is unrecognizable in a time before scientific verifications of DNA to ascertain his identity. He is so outwardly changed and unrepresentative of his former self that he discovers that due to his exceptional status as legally dead, yet physically living, he must seek representation through the law to assert his foundational claims to restore his pre-existing, ungrounded rights that were so unquestionable before to this soldier.

In his absence, during his fall into temporary oblivion and without the authority of the past to recognize his sacrifice when he returns, Chabert is legally dead. His unusual situation reveals a dangerous ambiguity in the *Code* that legal death may at times be separate and perhaps more important than physical death. From the certification of his legal death, all remnants of his life are dispersed. Through the order of the *Code civil* in the Bourbon Restoration, the relic of the past Napoleonic Code makes a foundational claim for that which he believes is fundamentally and sacredly his right: to be equitably indemnified of his humanity. His claim for humanity is expressed in his assertions for the tangible objects like property, ergo his wife. To fulfill his petition to lay claim on his wife who holds all his property and has re-married

the Count de Ferraud, he must be able to prove his existence within the strictures of the *Code civil*: "L'époux absent dont le conjoint a contracté une nouvelle union, sera seul recevable à attaquer ce mariage par lui-même, ou par son fondé de pouvoir, muni de la preuve de son existence" (Code civil, Article 139). In claiming his rights, he wishes to overturn his certified status as a dead person, and rather now to be recognized as one who was absent and has now returned. The only possibility of rectifying this chiasmus is to testify his story and to find someone who will perhaps believe him, but, most importantly, represent him.

Chabert seeks out legal representation because he inherently believes in this process of representation, as stated by the *Déclaration:* "La Loi est l'expression de la volonté générale. Tous les Citoyens ont droit de concourir personnellement, ou par leurs Représentants, à sa formation" (Article VI). Chabert's belief in the law's authority for himself is nevertheless unfounded: he forgets that he is no longer enjoys *Citoyen* citizenship status in France. He appeals to the rights of the living as a perplexed ghost returns to haunt his worldly domain despite his survivors' wishes for him to leave them in peace; he denotes Thomas Keenan's illustration of one abandoned by justice as "a ghost, limitless and unnatural...asking for an answer" (Keenan 11). As the ghost of Colonel Chabert, wandering bewildered through the streets of Paris, this form is seen as a faceless *vieux carrick* to most characters, such as the clerks in the office of the lawyer Derville. He continues to search for some semblance of what he thought he knew at the door of justice, i.e. the office of lawyers, to find someone who will answer his demand for rights; Thomas

Keenan asserts in his “Impossibility of Justice” that Chabert engages in a flawed process described by French philosopher Claude Lefort:

> [Lefort] articulates exactingly this structuring paradox, fundamental to what he calls the ‘democratic invention’: without a king or any transcendental authority, rights have no foundation, and so they come to depend on the very declaration which would seem to refer them to that missing elsewhere. ‘Impossible to detach the statement from the utterance as soon as no one is able to occupy the place, at a distance from all others, from which he would have the authority to grant or ratify rights’ (Keenan 39).

He must therefore continue on in his endeavor and call upon one more legal authority in hopes of overturning the metaphysical underpinnings of the law.

Because he is legally dead, yet physically alive, Chabert’s claim to rights is contingent upon his claim to be physically present and to reiterate this claim to the legally, physically living who cannot fathom the trembling, unstable ground he stands upon. In his pursuit of reclaiming his identity, Chabert has been chased from towns as an enemy, mocked as a madman, and even thrown into an asylum in Stuttgart until he ceases to claim to be Colonel Chabert. He encounters the same treatment in hostile, repressive Bourbon Restoration Paris from his wife and from lawyers who refuse to see him. He is turned away by all, bar the brilliant legal mind Derville who encounters Chabert one night in his office and listens to the colonel’s tale of escape:

> ‘Il y a eu quelque chose de plus horrible que les cris, un silence que je n'ai jamais retrouvé nulle part, le vrai silence du tombeau. En furetant avec promptitude, car il ne fallait pas flâner, je rencontrai fort heureusement un bras qui ne tenait à rien, le bras d'un Hercule! un bon os auquel je dus mon salut. Sans ce secours inespéré, je périssais! Mais, avec une rage que vous devez concevoir, je me mis à travailler les cadavres qui me séparaient de la couche de terre sans doute jetée sur nous, je dis nous, comme s'il y eût eu des vivants ! J'y allais ferme, monsieur, car me voici! Mais je ne sais pas aujourd'hui comment j'ai pu

> parvenir à percer la couverture de chair qui mettait une barrière entre la vie et moi' (Balzac 20-22).

Interrupting the history of his departure from the grave, Chabert constitutes his proclamation that he is alive. He feels the necessity to state the obvious—that he escaped—because seeking his claim to his rights depends upon his making this assertion repeatedly in testimony. The declaration to his lawyer Derville that he is *here* constitutes a fundamental gesture of the claim to rights in Thomas Keenan's explanation of the claim:

> Who claims, and on what basis, if any? The most obvious, if not the best, answer is simply: *I* claim, I claim something that belongs to me as my property, as what is proper and essential to me in virtue of what I am or what I have or what I do (and I am, for starters, human, but I am all sorts of other things too, various identities, understood here as given or, better, as taken, taken for granted)...what is owed to me as me and no one else—the claim to a right is justified here precisely on the grounds that the site of the claim and the right are identical. In short, I am right...(Keenan, 38-39).

His requisite to proclaim his existence and to be recognized marks the instability of the ungrounded, preexisting rights from the French *Déclaration* in present day Bourbon Restoration France, not simply for himself because he is unrecognizable and ignored. Derville recognizes that for Chabert the truths of the *Declaration* are not the unshakable pillars of justice that they are asserted to be: like this client who is unlike any other, the uncommon Derville agrees to take on Chabert's case when no other lawyer will.

Not coincidentally in Chabert's tale of temporal divergence, Maître Derville is the legal representation for both Chabert and his former wife, the Countess de Ferraud. Derville must find a common ground for the claims of both spouses. He must also construct a link between Chabert's rights before

and after his false death as described by literary critic Peter Brooks in his essay "Transaction and Transference (Unburying "Le Colonel Chabert)": "[Chabert] delivers himself to Derville as a dependent, financially as in all other respects, making of Derville the mediator of his effective existence" (Brooks 104). Chabert cannot solely regain his rights without the assistance of a higher authority because he is a product of his experience as a subject to ruler, from the French monarchy to his beloved Napoleon Bonaparte, who would have the authority to undo his death if he were still in power: "'J'avais un père, l'empereur! Ah! s'il était debout, le cher homme ! et qu'il vît *son Chabert*, comme il me nommait, dans l'état où je suis, mais il se mettrait en colère'" (Balzac 30). His departure from the grave into the exterior of the post-Napoleonic, Bourbon Restoration world signals his departure from the notions of justice encapsulated in the space of his past life such as the justice of his occupation in the military that he still clings to: "La justice militaire est franche, rapide, elle décide à la turque, et juge presque toujours bien; cette justice était la seule que connût Chabert" (Balzac 47). Chabert's continued reliance on the justice of a higher order of the Empire of Napoleon Bonaparte as he exits the grave marks a naked rebirth inaugurating a new era defined by failure to regain all that was claimed by the past:

> The possibility of (the establishment of) justice means that the 'disjuncture' between now and then, me and the other, the actual state of injustice and the ideal future of universal justice, can in principle, however, negative, be reduced. These promises are also promises to the idea, to an ideal of comprehension or understandability, of universality, an ideal universality which the very performative structure of the promise has to disregard and indeed to disfigure (Keenan 35).

As he arduously emerges from the freshly packed soil in the battle for his life, so too will the unstable grounds of the claim henceforth prove problematic for the colonel.

Because he cannot assert his rights alone, Colonel Chabert's requirement for representation is necessary yet also difficult because of the realities of Chabert's case. Derville unsuccessfully endeavors to disguise the hindrances of the situation, echoing Thomas Keenan's contention that any representation to regain rights cannot be successful: "Right is my (own) right, not even right of or on behalf of others (no representation is possible here), what is owed to me as me and no one else" (Keenan 38). The ruse that the lawyer attempts is accordingly flawed from its foundations because it too relies on a continuance of the foundation of the past: an attempted return to Colonel Chabert's bygone facade, without the physical, empirical representations of his present existence. The lawyer separates Chabert and his wife, divided in the text by a barrier to ensure the separation of the two entities for Chabert's interests; however, Derville involuntarily connects the temporal gap between the former Empire of Colonel Chabert and the present Bourbon Restoration period of Countess Ferraud. The countess laments the permeability of the ground facilitating the return of her husband because she is presently the legal proprietor of Chabert's property under the parameters of the *Code civil*:

> Tant que l'absent ne se représentera pas, ou que les actions ne seront point exercées de son chef, ceux qui auront recueilli la succession, gagneront les fruits par eux perçus de bonne foi (Code civil, Article 138).

She intends to ensure that Chabert does *not* gain succession to his rights: to never return, recognized as previously absent, and thus to die again. The

callous, fiscally driven Restoration female bolsters the dormant pride of Chabert's past, compelling him to reveal himself:

> 'Que voulez-vous donc, mme?' [dit Derville].
> 'Je veux... je ne veux pas de procès; je veux...'
> 'Qu'il reste mort?' dit vivement Derville en l'interrompant.
> 'Monsieur,' dit la comtesse, 's'il faut vingt-quatre mille livres de rente, nous plaiderons...'
> 'Oui, nous plaiderons,' s'écria d'une voix sourde le colonel, qui ouvrit la porte et apparut tout à coup devant sa femme, en tenant une main dans son gilet et l'autre étendue vers le parquet, geste auquel le souvenir de son aventure donnait une horrible énergie.
> 'Mais monsieur n'est pas le colonel Chabert,' s'écria la comtesse en feignant la surprise (Balzac 66).

Nevertheless, because Chabert is unrecognizable in the present, his lawyer remarks that he further assures that the space between the claim and the right will remain divided:

> 'Eh bien, colonel, n'avais-je pas raison en vous priant de ne pas venir? Je suis maintenant certain de votre identité. Quand vous vous êtes montré, la comtesse a fait un mouvement dont la pensée n'était pas équivoque. Mais vous avez perdu votre procès, votre femme sait que vous êtes méconnaissable' (Balzac 67).

Chabert's claim will not be fulfilled because of a lack of identification, due to the inability of comrades or by the willful denial of his wife if the case is brought to court:

> Without cognition, without recognition, and without any sharing, least of all a common humanity. Not because we are monadic and singular subjects, but because language—as it opens (breaches) us to others—removes the foundations to which we might refer together (Keenan 42).

The unspoken agreement between the parties in power to bar Chabert's re-entry in Paris is a collective refutation of the past to eschew the bloodshed of the Revolution and Napoleonic Empire as described by Brook's critical reading: "Burial alive [of Colonel Chabert] may evoke ancient punishments for

the transgression of impurity or indeed the entire mechanism, and burden, or repression, burying and encrypting a past which insists on continuing to live" (Brooks 101).

Colonel Chabert's failure to rectify his rights and his claim essentially renders him dead from the moment of his fall at the Battle of Eylau. His false death was an actual death apart from his physical body. The compromise cannot take place between him and his past; his two temporal halves cannot be roughly stitched together any longer. In the flesh, he understands the words of the *Code civil* that in the declaration of his death there is no option of an *ex post facto* rebirth in the Bourbon Restoration: "La loi ne dispose que pour l'avenir; elle n'a point d'effet rétroactif" (Article II). As if the ghastly scar on his skull is ripped apart permanently by the violent hand of time, his relationship with the past Empire begins to fissure with his emergence from the grave and wholly ruptures from his loss of property, ergo his rights held by his wife:

> 'Je remercie le hasard qui nous a désunis. Je ne sens même pas un désir de vengeance, je ne vous aime plus. Je ne veux rien de vous. Vivez tranquille sur la foi de ma parole, elle vaut mieux que les griffonnages de tous les notaires de Paris. Je ne réclamerai jamais le nom que j'ai peut-être illustré. Je ne suis plus qu'un pauvre diable nommé Hyacinthe, qui ne demande que sa place au soleil. Adieu...' (Balzac 80).

Although justice fails to support his rights, through the character of Derville, the law does recognize Chabert as someone who has the right to claim rights. Yet, even the narrator of *Colonel Chabert* notes the inability of the law to recognize the inalienable rights of those who are unable to self-assert their own rights: "Dès qu'un homme tombe entre les mains de la justice, il n'est

plus qu'un être moral, une question de droit ou de fait, comme aux yeux des statisticiens il devient un chiffre" (Balzac 82). Although he is still alive, Colonel Chabert discovers that the society's continued negligence towards him serves as if a death sentence. The death, or perhaps even the non-existence, of these inalienable rights seem like the metaphor for his own spectral, indistinct return to Paris. Did he actually exist before his escape from the grave? Is he mad in believing he is who he knows himself to be? Does he even exist now? The lack of recognition he experiences constitutes his *mort civile* within the *Code civil*:

> La condamnation à la mort naturelle emporta la mort civile. Par la mort civile, le condamné perd la propriété de tous les biens qu'il possédait ; sa succession est ouverte au profit de ses héritiers, auxquels ses biens sont dévolus, de la même manière que s'il était mort naturellement et sans testament. Il ne peut être nommé tuteur, ni concourir aux opérations relatives à la tutelle. Il ne peut être témoin dans un acte solennel ou authentique, ni être admis à porter témoignage en justice. Il ne peut procéder en justice, ni en défendant, ni en demandant, que sous le nom et par le ministère d'un curateur spécial, qui lui est nommé par le tribunal ou l'action est portée. Il est incapable de contracter un mariage qui produise aucun effet civil. Le mariage qu'il avait contracté précédemment est dissous, quant a tous ses effets civils. Son époux et ses héritiers peuvent exercer respectivement les droits et les actions auxquels sa mort naturelle donnerait ouverture. (Code civil, Section II, Article 23-25).

He is barred from all claims and action to regain his rights in the Bourbon Restoration: he has lost his property, his conjugal relationship with his wife, and his ability to testify in court; he was declared dead twelve years ago and is unable to prove otherwise.

Formed by an estrangement from the society that abandons him, Colonel Chabert undergoes a transition into a non-human due to a lack of recognition:

> ‘Bonjour, colonel Chabert,’ lui dit Derville.
> ‘Pas Chabert! pas Chabert! je me nomme Hyacinthe, répondit le vieillard. Je ne suis plus un homme, je suis le numéro 164, septième salle,’ ajouta-t-il en regardant Derville avec une anxiété peureuse, avec une crainte de vieillard et d'enfant (Balzac 87).

The inhuman hyacinth sprouts from the failure of justice for the former Colonel Chabert. He now takes on a new identity that no longer clings to the rights of the past and scorns his fallibility in claiming his preexisting rights to regain the natural rights of humankind: “’Vous ne pouvez pas savoir jusqu'où va mon mépris pour cette vie extérieure à laquelle tiennent la plupart des hommes. J'ai subitement été pris d'une maladie, le dégoût de l'humanité’” (Balzac 85).

The Rotten Fruits of Fatherhood

When the young aspiring lawyer Eugène Rastignac meets his friend Horace Bianchon in the gardens of Luxembourg one morning in Honoré de Balzac's *Le Père Goriot*, the two engage in an ethical debate. Rastignac jokingly proposes the theoretical killing of a Mandarin person halfway across the world in exchange for one's own financial success. Bianchon has little difficulty in coming to the opinion that this hypothetical course of action is morally reprehensible. Rastignac grudgingly admires his friend's upstanding ethics. Why does Honoré de Balzac choose to include an ethical parable of a victim so remote in Asia, far from the city of Paris where this novel takes place? Does this Mandarin's unknown status to these characters make this conclusion easier or more difficult, or does it influence the outcome of their decision at all? The allegory is interesting to situate within the larger story of *Le Père Goriot*, as the namesake of the novel is himself depicted as a veritable Parisian Mandarin. Balzac's fiction poses the question: why is it easier for the characters of this novel to cast off a human being viewed as a burden to society in their daily lives than a conceptualized, unknown human being?

The French *Code civil* gestures reciprocity of rights for aliens like the Mandarin in France. The legal text creates the possibility for equal access to rights for non-Frenchmen: "L'étranger jouira en France des mêmes droits civils que ceux qui sont ou seront accordes aux Français par les traites de la nation à laquelle cet étranger appartiendra" (Titre I, Chapitre 1, Article 11).

This notion of universality of rights in this article as translatable to all nations reveals a certain fantasy of human rights that is collectively obeyed by its subjects. For the context of *Le Père Goriot,* the *Code civil* specifically designates the status of the fathers like Goriot and their mandate of respect: "L'enfant, a tout age, doit honneur et respect à ses père et mère" (Code civil, Titre IX, Article 371). At the time when Eugène de Rastignac makes his residence at Maison Vauquer, however, old Goriot does not receive the respect the *Code civil* demanded for a father from his daughters, nor even common decencies as a human being from his fellow residents at the boarding house.

Goriot is described as the Père *Eternel* of paternity, loving his daughters without concern for his own human needs for requited love. Each year his daughters claim more of the capital he saved to live upon in retirement. Any semblance of a relationship with his daughters simultaneously causes him to live in deeper poverty in the boarding house, described by Balzac specialist Jeannine Guichardet:

> Au début de son séjour à la pension Vauquer, 'Monsieur Goriot,' négociant distingué, y occupe au premier un appartement de trois chambres puis, réduisant sa pension il passe au second étage et n'est plus que le 'père Goriot.' Vers la fin de la troisième année il est enfin relégué au troisième étage, dépouillé de tout dans une mansarde infâme, réduit a l'état de 'zéro Réaumur.' Perte d'identité progressive jusqu'à l'ultime reniement. Identité vacillante jusque dans les propos légitimistes de la duchesse de Langeais! Ce 'Foriot,' ce 'Moriot,' ce 'Loriot,' ce 'Doriot' (p. 97), qui est-il? (Guichardet 49-50).

Who is Père Goriot? He is a human being whose singular purpose is to adore and protect his daughters. Born Jean-Joachim Goriot, the man is never once called by his proper name in this novel, bar the historic recounting from the narrator of his youth (Balzac 91). In gaining his honorific title of *Père* at the

Maison Vauquer from his fellow boarders through ridicule, Goriot paradoxically has lost his status as a father. The hemorrhaging expenditure of his assets depreciates the only currency he needs to purchase the conditional love of Anastasie de Restaud and Delphine de Nucingen.

Goriot amasses a fortune during the French Revolution by selling Italian vermicelli marked up ten times the cost to him during a time of scarcity. With the return of a monarch and the emphasis on social hierarchy in the Restoration, and the reality of his ever-dwindling fortune, Goriot is shut out from the homes of his daughters. He is a social liability to them with the soiled hands of dirty money. Although all who enjoy wealth in the Balzacian Paris traffic in this currency, the stain on Goriot's hands is one that cannot be removed due to the political implications of the Revolution. In defying his own father of France, King Louis XVI, he incongruously fights for the rights of the *Code*—the rights of fathers—yet, he does not follow this code in his own parenthood. In his extreme selflessness in parenthood, he believes he follows the Republican values of idyllic fatherhood, but he is rather unnatural in his fanatical love for his daughters. That his daughters are ashamed of their father, regardless of how he procured a living, violates this most basic commandment of the rights of the parent: to be honored and to receive respect. The daughters flout the law to seek their own ends, however, distancing themselves from the old man. With time, dehumanization of their father becomes easier as they squeeze the mandarin for their own greedy thirst.

This intrigue of *Père Goriot* fits well within the larger context of Honoré de Balzac's *Comédie Humaine* and his inspiration to chronicle the duality of the human who coexists in the congested city limits of Paris and the *noble savage* erroneously attributed to Rousseau, much like the hypothetical Mandarin:

> Cette idée [de la *Comédie Humaine*] vint d'une comparaison entre l'Humanité et l'Animalité. Il n'y a qu'un animal. Le créateur ne s'est servi que d'un seul et même patron pour tous les êtres organisés. L'animal est un principe qui prend sa forme extérieure, ou, pour parler plus exactement, les différences de sa forme, dans les milieux où il est appelé à se développer. Les Espèces Zoologiques résultent de ces différences. Pénétré de ce système bien avant les débats auxquels il a donné lieu, je vis que, sous ce rapport, la Société ressemblait à la Nature. La Société ne fait-elle pas de l'homme, suivant les milieux où son action se déploie, autant d'hommes différents qu'il y a de variétés en zoologie ? (Balzac "Avant Propos").

What is similar between the Mandarin and Goriot is their seeming dispensability in the societal context of the Parisian jungle. The violation of their rights both exist outside the legal, penalizing scope of the *Code civil*: Goriot suffers violations of paternal law, and the unknown Mandarin the divine law of humanity. The differences between the notion of the Mandarin's hypothetical murder and Goriot's demise, however, are the differences of those seeking gains implementing a swift, sterile death and a slow, labored death. The law student Eugène Rastignac does not know the "Mandarin" in his situation—Monsieur Taillefer—who will be killed for his own financial success. The kill is swift and takes place while Eugène sleeps at the Maison Vauqer. The slow death of father Goriot, however, is a violence of ignorance that is arguably more painful because as he suffers on his deathbed, he consciously realizes that *he is the Mandarin*. Without actually plunging a knife into his

heart, Goriot's daughters rather starve their father of love he needs to survive by reiterating their disrespect of him and the *Code*. Their instincts for survival are mediated by a system of exchange and barter for what each can vend in order to satiate their own desires.

Goriot glosses over the greed and exploitation of his daughters in the pursuit of his own ideal of maintaining the familial unit. His illusions of parenthood, as one who caters to every whim and indulges his daughters, teaches the family unit parasitical habits that will ultimately leave him to die alone of a father's broken heart:

> 'Elles sont innocentes, mon ami ! Dites-le bien à tout le monde, qu'on ne les inquiète pas à mon sujet. Tout est de ma faute, je les ai habituées à me fouler aux pieds. J'aimais cela, moi. Ça ne regarde personne, ni la justice humaine, ni la justice divine. Dieu serait injuste s'il les condamnait à cause de moi. Je n'ai pas su me conduire, j'ai fait la bêtise d'abdiquer mes droits. Je suis un misérable, je suis justement puni' (Balzac 263).

The intricacies of notions of paternity in this novel abound; characters have an ideal of what a father is and what he does. Vautrin, for example, sees himself as becoming a father in America as a slave owner:

> 'Mon idée est d'aller vivre de la vie patriarcale au milieu d'un grand domaine, cent mille arpents, par exemple, aux États-Unis, dans le sud...vivant comme un souverain, en faisant mes volontés, en menant une vie qu'on ne conçoit pas ici. J'ai besoin de deux cent mille francs, parce que je veux deux cents nègres, afin de satisfaire mon goût pour la vie patriarcale. Des nègres, voyez-vous? C'est des enfants tout venus dont on fait ce qu'on veut' (Balzac 112-113).

This vision is precipitated from a man who warns the law student Rastignac of the slavery of studying the law and the binding chains of the *Code civil* by circumventing the law for his own gain in the American South. His fellow boarder at the Maison Vauqer, the illegitimate orphan Victorine Taillefer, also

suffers from misguided chimeras of the father. The young girl is resolute in her yearly pleas to enter into some semblance of a paternal relationship with an unfeeling, monstrous father who does not recognize her and leaves her to live in poverty:

> '[Victorine] s'est jetée alors aux pieds de son père et lui a dit avec courage qu'elle n'insistait autant que pour sa mère, qu'elle obéirait à ses volontés sans murmure; mais qu'elle le suppliait de lire le testament de la pauvre défunte, elle a pris la lettre et la lui a présentée en disant les plus belles choses du monde et les mieux senties...[Taillefer] l'a jetée sur la cheminée en disant: 'C'est bon!' Il a voulu relever sa fille qui lui prenait les mains pour les lui baiser, mais il les a retirées' (Balzac 53).

Balzac intentionally does not create a father figure in *Père Goriot* who is exemplary; all figures of fathers are perverted pantomimes of some unrealized, non-existing entity. Diaphanous illusions depending upon idealization of the father figure as providers of love, power, and money ultimately collapse for the children who depend upon them and the fathers that perpetrate them; for Goriot, when the bank account balance reaches zero, so too will the love of his lionized daughters default.

Goriot endures a slow, painful torture of the separation from his daughters due to his social shortcomings: "'Je souffre en ce moment...ce n'est rien en comparaison de la douleur que m'a causée le premier regard par lequel Anastasie m'a fait comprendre que je venais de dire une bêtise qui l'humiliait: son regard m'a ouvert toutes les veines'" (Balzac 261-262). Despite the knowledge that his daughters unflinchingly exploit him, he sells his last assets—satirically dining utensils that could be used as a last resort within a societal context to nourish the host body his daughters feed upon—to purchase a dress made of gold to be worn by Anastasie de Restaud at a ball. Goriot

suffers a final blow of apoplexy as his daughters descend upon the boarding house for a *last supper* to feast on the remnant of their father's retirement fund. The women enter his dismal cell to find that all that remains is a carcass of an old, destitute creature that cannot be bled for a single red cent more:

> 'Mais on ne peut donc rien faire de son sang?' cria le vieillard désespéré. 'Plus rien !' dit-il en s'arrachant les cheveux. 'Allons, je dois mourir, je n'ai plus qu'à mourir. Oui, je ne suis plus bon à rien, je ne suis plus père! non. [Anastasie] me demande, elle a besoin! et moi, misérable, je n'ai rien. Crève, crève comme un chien que tu es! Oui, je suis au-dessous d'un chien, un chien ne se conduirait pas ainsi! (Balzac 233).

Anastasie and Delphine are portrayed as vile and calculating, but are the creations to blame or rather the creator? In allowing himself to be misused by those he loves, he endures this unbalanced familial relationship as a masochistic idealist, never correcting his daughters for their abuse while silently harboring his own isolated misery and sorrow lurking deep within his soul. In the attempt to shoulder any experience of the disappointment and hardship of the realities of life during their childhoods, he thwarts his daughters' capacity to view him as a human being, rather than the android-like father:

> 'Je suis un vrai père. O mes enfants! voilà donc votre vie? Mais c'est ma mort. Les pères devraient vivre autant que leurs enfants. [Mon Dieu], tu devrais nous empêcher de souffrir dans nos enfants. Mes chers anges, quoi! ce n'est qu'à vos douleurs que je dois votre présence. Vous ne me faites connaître que vos larmes. Eh bien! Oui, vous m'aimez, je le vois. Je voudrais prendre vos peines, souffrir pour vous' (Balzac 229-230).

Ordering himself *to die as a dog*, while simultaneously using himself to exist as the buttress for his *angels* to exist in a plane higher than himself, Goriot prophetically digs his own grave of solitary confinement, as the women will not

even furnish the funds after his death to bury him.

To most clearly view his existence, Goriot requires the out of body experience of dying to finally comprehend that to which he has blinded himself. Although his paternal devotion is limitless, in his extremity he taught his daughters to annihilate him:

> 'Il faut mourir pour savoir ce que c'est que des enfants. Ah! mon ami, ne vous mariez pas, n'ayez pas d'enfants! Vous leur donnez la vie, ils vous donnent la mort. Vous les faites entrer dans le monde, ils vous en chassent. Ah! Si j'étais riche, si j'avais gardé ma fortune, si je ne la leur avais pas donnée, elles seraient là, elles me lécheraient les joues de leurs baisers. L'argent donne tout, même des filles...Un père doit être toujours riche, il doit tenir ses enfants en bride comme des chevaux sournois' (Balzac 260-261).

In his painful expiration, he realizes that not only have his daughters violated the law, so has he. Realizing his error, he is too old and tired to regroup and revolt in an age that does not respect the *Code* of fathers attained through the bloodshed of his youth. He tries to now invoke those rights of the *Code civil* that he flouted in his love and calls out to his notions of paternity that are relics of an *ancien* time for the age of Revolution and Napoleon to bring him justice:

> 'Envoyez-les chercher par la gendarmerie, de force ! la justice est pour moi, tout est pour moi, la nature, le code civil. Je proteste. La patrie périra si les pères sont foulés aux pieds. Cela est clair. La société, le monde roulent sur la paternité, tout croule si les enfants n'aiment pas leur père' (Balzac 262).

Goriot commands that his daughters should come to him as he dies, because the law wants them to: "'La loi veut qu'on vienne voir mourir son père'" (Balzac 263). Because the daughters do not come, and he dies alone, Goriot's previous assertion that because *he is the law* thus leaves a warrant on earth for

those who did not report at his request. Eerily on his deathbed he asks young Rastignac what the possibility is of his return as a specter: "'Dites donc, si je vais en paradis, je pourrai revenir sur terre en esprit autour d'elles. J'ai entendu dire ces choses-là. Sont-elles vraies?'" (Balzac 258). In the death of the Mandarin of their own father, Anastasie de Restaud and Delphine de Nucingen pave the streets with the bones of their own flesh and blood; in his death, they futuristically embrace a haunting reckoning.

Conclusion

What have we learned about the relationship Carbonneau claims to find in the Balzacian novel of "legality, legitimacy, and morality," and how does Balzac reflect such in "personal and community ethics of Paris"? Because the claims for justice on behalf of Père Goriot and Colonel Chabert are made outside of the physical lines of the law, the *Code civil* fails to represent them by exclusion. In their cases, the laws disregarded or broken cannot be formally prosecuted. This is due to lack of evidence, lack of corporeal harm inflicted, or lack of concern from their jury of peers. The laws and justice intersecting with the newly burgeoning emphasis on money and status of the Bourbon Restoration, wholly excludes their rough hands, scarred faces, and lack of politesse from present contemporary society. The ease with which most Parisians cast off the specters of the past in these Balzacian novels reveals an opinion about the current state of humanity, as argued by literary critic and Professor Ruth Amossy:

> The father, who symbolically stands for the law, no longer represents its power, does not know its real use, and calls in vain for its support. The breakdown of paternal authority and the increasing gap between law and natural rights threaten the very existence of the new society (Amossy 50).

The critique does not end with the looming notion of *society*, however, and Amossy is correct to also place some responsibility on the shoulders of those who cannot evolve. Without an understanding of the law, these men recall outdated notions of their idealized youth that do not apply in the time they are

living. These antiquated crutches repeatedly hamper these two men's progress; thus, they cannot claim justice.

What or who is left at the ends of *Le Père Goriot* and *Le Colonel Chabert*? Certainly not the human characters designated in the titles. As Balzac pans to his final literary thrust of these novels, we see Eugène de Rastignac on the hill in the cemetery with the body of Goriot still warm in the grave nearby and the retiring Maître Derville bidding farewell to the remains of Colonel Chabert. As the author reveals, all that remains are the figures of the law that go forth from these tragic deaths as cases lost. The two figures emerge from the deaths of Goriot and Chabert. One is a man of irresolute morality, who has neither studied the *Code civil* with diligence, nor discarded a woman who has shown her penchant for society over those she loves. Rastignac will go forth from *Le Père Goriot* in the *Comédie Humaine* to become successful in Paris as he hoped; his love for Delphine de Nucingen, however, does not stand the test of time. The other man, Derville, sells his practice in *La Maison Nucingen* and retires to the country after a life of success as well, but he notes the implication of all he has seen in the last pages of *Le Colonel Chabert*. He does not choose to eschew the city for the quiet life of Rastignac's youth; he *must* leave Paris because of the injustice he has witnessed:

> 'Il existe dans notre société trois hommes, le prêtre, le médecin et l'homme de justice, qui ne peuvent pas estimer le monde? Ils ont des robes noires, peut-être parce qu'ils portent le deuil de toutes les vertus, de toutes les illusions. Le plus malheureux des trois est l'avoué. Nos études sont des égouts qu'on ne peut pas curer. Combien de choses n'ai-je pas apprises en exerçant ma charge! J'ai vu mourir un père dans un grenier, sans sou ni maille, abandonné par deux filles aux laquelle il

> avait donné quarante mille livres de rente! Je ne puis vous dire tout ce que j'ai vu, car j'ai vu des crimes contre lesquels la justice est impuissante. Enfin, toutes les horreurs que les romanciers croient inventer sont toujours au-dessous de la vérité. Vous allez connaître ces jolies choses là, vous; moi, je vais vivre à la campagne avec ma femme. Paris me fait horreur' (Balzac 88-89).

Through the character of Derville, Goriot and Chabert are mourned. Two decades after his client Goriot dies, Derville still recounts the tragedy of the father's life. He also charitably gives the elderly Chabert a twenty-franc piece for tobacco when he meets him in the road at the Bicêtre hospital. As a man who once made his living speaking on other's behalf and protecting his client's interests, to continue his services for these men *pro bono* in a world where even the mourners at Goriot's funeral must be paid indicates a distinction of his character from most of the characters in the *Comédie Humaine*. Balzac creates this exemplary *personnage* to convey something truly paramount to the reader as he makes a final condemnation of mankind through the voice of one of few upstanding characters found in these texts. The former lawyer states that in this fictional novel where he exists, the story that Balzac has written of these two miserable men does not even begin to explain the horrors of the true state of injustice in this state. Therefore, this man of law can no longer make his home in the lawlessness of Paris. Just like his two clients, he no longer has a place.

The question of why the only major characters who know the *Code civil* in these novels (save the convict, Vautrin) will be the only ones to remember and recognize abandoned Goriot and Chabert gives pause to the rendering of a final verdict. Why are the legal ties of these abandoned men the only

connections that remain, despite the failing of the law to bring these characters? The answer is in the words of Derville: only those Rastignacs and Dervilles who have contact with the law and justice can fathom the depravity of mankind, and thus, only they can recognize the depths of all that can be true.

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