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## Balzac and Violence

Representing History, Space,  
Sexuality and Death in  
*La Comédie humaine*

**FRENCH** STUDIES  
of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

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# Introduction

## Mourning Becomes Prometheus: History, Space, Gender and Death in Balzac

‘[M]ais doter son pays d’un Homère, n’est-ce pas usurper sur Dieu?’<sup>1</sup>

Ever since André Maurois’s *Prométhée, ou la vie de Balzac*<sup>2</sup> it has been common to associate Balzac’s life and works with Prometheus, the rebellious god who defied Zeus to steal fire for mankind. Such a link has, moreover, ample justification in Balzac’s own sense of the scale and challenge of his enterprise. As he writes to Madame Hanska in September 1841: ‘je remue un monde, et vous ne savez pas ce que c’est qu’un *Prométhée* debout, agissant, dont le vautour ne se voit pas et est enfermé dans le cœur même’.<sup>3</sup> Given Balzac’s consciousness of the demiurgic scale of his endeavours it is not surprising that he endows his fictional characters with a similar ambition: in *La Recherche de l’absolu* Balthazar Claës ‘avait soulevé le monde

- 1 Preface to the *Histoire des Treize*, in Honoré de Balzac, *La Comédie humaine*, ed. by Pierre-Georges Castex and others (Paris: Gallimard, ‘Bibliothèque de la Pléiade’, 1976–1981), 12 vols, V, p.788. Subsequent references to this edition will be placed where appropriate in parentheses in the text, indicated by *CH*, volume number (in Roman) and page number(s). The reference to ‘Mourning Becomes Prometheus’ is adapted from the title of Eugene O’Neill’s 1931 trilogy, *Mourning Becomes Electra*.
- 2 André Maurois, *Prométhée, ou la vie de Balzac* (Paris: Hachette, 1965). The classic work on Prometheus and literature, which contains however only a handful of references to Balzac, is Raymond Trousson, *Le Thème de Prométhée dans la littérature européenne* (Geneva: Droz, 1964).
- 3 Honoré de Balzac, *Lettres à Madame Hanska*, ed. by Roger Pierrot (Paris: Laffont, ‘Bouquins’, 1990), 2 vols, I, p.539. Volume 1 covers letters 1832–1844 and volume 2 1845–1850. Subsequent references to these volumes will be abbreviated to *LH*.

comme un Titan, et le monde revenait plus pesant sur sa poitrine'.<sup>4</sup> Not only ambition but also love can possess a similar *démesure*. As the self-consciously limited but nevertheless fulfilled Renée de l'Estorade writes to her erstwhile convent companion, the uncontrollably passionate Louise de Chaulieu in *Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées*: 'la Nature et la Société s'entendent pour détruire l'existence des félicités entières, parce qu'elles sont à l'encontre de la nature et de la société, parce que le ciel est peut-être jaloux de ses droits' (*CH*, I, p.371). Thus, as the above reference to 'usurper sur Dieu' shows, Prometheus's rebellion against Zeus can, even in apparently banal or innocuous circumstances, merge with Lucifer's rebellion against God and, in its turn, Balzac's *Comédie humaine* can also become a rival and an alternative to the divine as represented by Dante's *The Divine Comedy*.<sup>5</sup>

Although the references to Prometheus tend to foreground the demiurgic dimensions of Balzac's experience, *La Comédie humaine* and its two thousand characters, it is clear from the above that the demiurgic is also inseparable from violence and suffering. This violence and suffering is twofold. On the one hand, the initial rebellion against the deity, whether that deity be Zeus or God, is aggressive and painful. Hence, in the above-mentioned letter to Madame Hanska, Balzac feels he has internalised the vulture which in legend gnaws at the liver of the chained Prometheus. On the other hand, the act of rebellion itself is visited by inevitable retribution – in the case of Balthazar Claës, 'le monde revenait plus pesant sur sa poitrine' and in the case of Louise de Chaulieu, unbridled passion kills both the object of that passion and its instigator. This ambivalence of the Promethean act of defiance is, according to Carol Dougherty, integral to the Prometheus myth. According to Dougherty, the myth of Prometheus as benefactor of mankind is inseparable from Prometheus as implicated in the suffering of mankind: Prometheus's initial act of trans-

4 *CH*, X, p.798. Here the reference is, no doubt, to Atlas rather than Prometheus.

5 The relation between Balzac and Dante, who appears as a character in *Les Proscrits*, has been studied by René Guise in 'Balzac et Dante', *L'Année balzacienne 1963* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1963), pp.297–319. Subsequent references to *L'Année balzacienne* will be indicated *AB*.

gression to help humanity is predicated on his sharing the anguish of that humanity: ‘Prometheus functions as a kind of scapegoat – the one responsible for the difficulties and miseries of mankind. [...] Prometheus is thus also implicated in the suffering that marks the human experience.’<sup>6</sup> As a participant in humanity’s suffering Prometheus, in some versions of the myth, actually creates human beings, and creates them from mud and water – a water that is, moreover, not just any liquid but the liquid of *tears*.<sup>7</sup> From the outset, then, Prometheus is a god who is both rebellious and suffering, creative yet also in mourning. Thus Prometheus the usurper is, perhaps paradoxically, also the mourner. He is one of a long line of parahuman rebels – from Satan to the Minotaur and from Frankenstein to ‘Beauty and the Beast’ – who combine terror and grief, violence and mourning.

Before moving on to a further consideration of violence in Balzac, it is important to reflect on another of Prometheus’s attributes – his association with work. As again Dougherty notes: ‘Prometheus’ story is that of the working man. [...] Prometheus has come to symbolize man’s need to work.’<sup>8</sup> It is appropriate, therefore, that, as we have seen, Balzac should identify the pain of constant literary labour with that of Prometheus. As he writes to Madame Hanska in April 1843: ‘je suis bien las de tant de travaux, inutiles, puisque je ne suis pas libre, et que je suis sans fortune, avec autant de liens qu’en a Prométhée, et que le vautour ne me manque pas, j’en ai plusieurs!’<sup>9</sup> This emphasis on the pain of literary labour has two characteristics both of which are crucial for violence in Balzac. Firstly, the emphasis on the pain of literary labour shows that writing itself is inseparable from violence – partly because writing itself represents a frequently overwhelming task and partly because the actual form or act of writing often involves, as it does for Félix de Vandenesse in *Le Lys dans la vallée*, the recollection and transcription of painful past experiences: ‘ma vie est dominée par un fantôme, il se dessine vague-

6 Carol Dougherty, *Prometheus* (London: Routledge, 2006), p.19.

7 See *ibid.*, pp.17, 19.

8 *Ibid.*, p.19.

9 Balzac, *LH*, I, p.662.

ment au moindre mot qui le provoque' (*CH*, IX, p.970). As will be seen in the course of this book, the actual form or act writing is, for Balzac, inseparable from violence: writing itself is, for Balzac, frequently indissociable from mourning and death.

There is, however, a second way of looking at the pain of literary labour which is equally important for a consideration of violence in Balzac. For, as Balzac's remarks to Madame Hanska show, the pain of creative labour is accompanied by reflection on the nature, role and importance of that creative labour and, therefore, on the violence inseparable from that labour. Writing does not just represent or embody violence but also offers an appraisal of that representation and of that embodiment. As again the haunted, traumatised Félix de Vandenesse indicates in his reference to 'le travail que nécessite les idées pour être exprimées' (*CH*, IX, p.970), the violence of writing is also a *working on* the violence of that writing. Since writing *represents* violence, writing violence can also be a *critique* of violence.<sup>10</sup> Or, in perhaps more Balzacian terms, writing violence also offers a *philosophy* or an *analysis* of violence.<sup>11</sup> A further reason, therefore, why this book takes Prometheus as its point of entry into the role and representation of violence in Balzac is, therefore, because the Promethean myth offers a productive way not only of highlighting the

- 10 See the celebrated 1921 article by Walter Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence', in his *Selected Writings*, ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, Vol.1 1913–1926 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp.236–52. For Benjamin '[t]he critique of violence is the philosophy of its history' (*ibid.*, p.251). This sense of critique is rather different from what is being explored here, where critique is seen as the paradoxically similar objectification which characterises both violence and its appraisal.
- 11 The relation between Balzac's approach to philosophy and his representation of violence will be explored in Chapter Two on *Sténie ou les Erreurs philosophiques* and *El Verdugo*. Perhaps even more clearly than the *Études philosophiques*, it is, however, the unfinished *Études analytiques*, as exemplified by the *Pathologie de la vie sociale*, which would have offered a diagnosis of society as a diseased or defective organism, with, according to René-Alexandre Courteix, a view to reconstructing 'un individu mutilé par la civilisation moderne' (R.-A. Courteix, *L'Humanitarisme, hypocrisie de la société moderne? La vision prémonitoire de Balzac* (Paris: L'Écriture du Publieur, 2006), p.199).

relationship between creativity and violence but also a way of reflecting critically on the nature and development of that relationship. The combination of creativity, violence and work associated with Prometheus shows how it is possible – for both Balzac, his characters and his critics – to work consciously, like Félix, on the effects of violence, pain and trauma.<sup>12</sup> Prometheus shows that the work that is integral to both creation and violence can also be used to reflect on that violence and even, perhaps, to progress beyond and out of violence. Thus, as well as being a witness to the power of violence, Balzac's writing is also a witness to the possibilities of exorcism and expiation.<sup>13</sup>

It is a regrettable truth that bloodshed and violence characterise many if not all periods of French history. At virtually any time the intervention of a propitiatory Prometheus would have been welcome to give support to an often divided, suffering nation. However, two periods in French history stand out as particularly bloody: firstly, the early modern period, culminating in the Wars of Religion;<sup>14</sup> secondly, and even more importantly for Balzac, the Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. The period of the Wars of Religion, as represented by the 'reign' of Catherine de Médicis, are the subject of the important if somewhat neglected Balzac work, *Sur Catherine de Médicis* (1830–1841). Since, moreover, the final section of *Sur Catherine de Médicis* juxtaposes sections on the violence of the Wars of Religion and the violence of the Revolution and the Terror, Balzac ensures that the violences of French history form a continuum where, as Christine Marcandier-Colard has pointed out, 'la violence joue dans l'Histoire

12 See Dougherty, p.64.

13 For religious expiation as a leitmotiv of character and plot in Balzac see Joyce O. Lowrie, *The Violent Mystique: Thematics of Retribution and Expiation in Balzac, Barbey d'Aurevilly, Bloy, and Huysmans* (Geneva: Droz, 1974), pp.41–62, and, with reference to *Le Curé de village*, Laura J. Poulosky, *Severed Heads and Martyred Souls. Crime and Capital Punishment in French Romantic Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), pp.119–37.

14 See for example Stuart Carroll, *Blood and Violence in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

un rôle tout à fait fondateur et permanent'.<sup>15</sup> However the link between the two periods and the two sets of violence also confirms that it is the violence of the Revolution and its aftermaths which, as Jean-Clément Martin claims, marks 'la naissance d'un mythe national'.<sup>16</sup> And what characterises and marks the Revolution, again according to Martin, is, precisely, a combination of politics and violence: 'Cette interférence entre violence et politique constitue le moment par lequel commence la Révolution proprement dite.'<sup>17</sup> The Revolution thus marks the *institutionalisation* of violence as not only an instrument of politics but as part of the nature of politics: 'la politique passe par la violence, au point de voir toute violence comme politique.'<sup>18</sup> The Revolution and its aftermath thus epitomise one of the themes of this book – that violence is both instrument and essence; that violent form and violent content are inseparable.

However inseparable violent content and violent form in the institutionalisation of violence in Revolutionary politics, there are nevertheless moments where such violence can be measured and thus

- 15 Christine Marcandier-Colard, 'Violence et histoire: exercices du pouvoir royal absolu dans l'œuvre balzacienne', in *Balzac dans l'Histoire*, ed. by Nicole Mozet and Paule Petitier (Paris: SEDES, 2001), pp.145–57 (p.148). In her equally illuminating *Crimes de sang et scènes de meurtre, essai sur l'esthétique romantique de la violence* (Paris: PUF, 1998) Marcandier-Colard confirms and illustrates links between form and violence in Balzac and in her 'Criminels balzaciens, de bandit à flibustier' (in *Balzac et la crise des identités*, ed. by Emmanuelle Cullmann and others (Saint-Cyr-sur-Loire: Christian Pirot, 2005), pp.139–49), presents a further aspect of the thematics of violence in Balzac.
- 16 See Jean-Clément Martin, *Violence et révolution. Essai sur la naissance d'un mythe national* (Paris: Seuil, 2006). For studies of the relation between Balzac and the Revolution see, for example, Ronnie Butler, *Balzac and the French Revolution* (London: Croom Helm, 1983); *Balzac et la Révolution française*, Maison de Balzac, 13 octobre 1988–13 janvier 1989 (Paris Musées, 1988); *AB 1990 'Balzac et la Révolution'* (Paris: PUF, 1990); René-Alexandre Courteix, *Balzac et la Révolution française* (Paris: PUF, 1997).
- 17 Martin, op. cit., p.51.
- 18 Ibid., p.82. For the more general links between violence and politics, see Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.26–54. For a classic study of political violence, see Hannah Arendt, *Du mensonge à la violence*, trans. by Guy Durand (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1972).

possibly controlled. There are, as Martin points out, moments of rupture, crisis and critique such as ‘le moment thermidorien’,<sup>19</sup> when the Revolutionaries could at least momentarily stand back and distance themselves from the Revolutionary process. It would indeed seem, therefore, that the very act of distancing embodied in violence can be applied to the violence itself, enabling a form of self-critique of violence and thus pointing to possible ways out what seemed to be an unbreakable circle of violence and trauma. In Marxist, and as will be seen, also Balzacian terms, violence is not just a material force but a means to reflect on that force and possibly re-channel it in different, more positive ways.<sup>20</sup> Such moments of self-critique can, moreover, indeed be seen as Promethean since, although profoundly implicated in violence, Prometheus can, as has been seen, intervene at another level, and act as both *prise de conscience* and potential saviour. The fact that violence is not just content but also form also facilitates this *prise de conscience* and this self-critique – particularly when subject to ‘le travail que nécessitent les idées pour être exprimées’. The distancing effect of representing violence combines with the dis-

19 Martin, op. cit., p.246.

20 For Marxist or at least *marxisant*, approaches to Balzac see for example André Wurmser, *La Comédie inhumaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970); Georg Lukács, *Studies in European Realism* (London: The Merlin Press, London, 1978); Pierre Barbéris, *Mythes balzaciens* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1972). Such approaches tend to explore Balzac’s realism in the light of Engels’s contention that Balzac went against his avowed legitimist sympathies and expose ‘l’inéluctabilité de la chute de ses aristocrates chéris’ (Friedrich Engels, ‘Lettre à Miss Harkness d’avril 1888’, in Karl Marx et Friedrich Engels, *Sur la littérature et l’art*, ed. by J. Fréville (Éditions sociales internationales, 1936), p.149). In this context, Balzac can be said to be violent partly because he writes against himself and partly because, in a novel like *Les Paysans*, he describes a society in crisis, on the verge of implosion. Marxist insights are, of course, not unconnected to renewed critical emphasis on money in Balzac – see Hélène Gomart, *Les Opérations financières dans le roman réaliste. Lectures de Balzac et de Zola* (Paris: Champion, 2004) – and to a growing interest in *Balzac matérialiste* among the Groupe international de recherches balzaciennes in 2007–2008. By linking in with more recent emphasis on literary aporias and *mises en abyme*, the Marxist idea of a self-contradictory Balzac has also had a fruitful career: see for example Franc Schuerewegen, *Balzac contre Balzac* (Paris: CDU/SEDES, 1990).



tancing effect in/of violence itself to produce a critique of the very violence which is the subject of so many novels of the *Comédie humaine*.

It follows from the above remarks that there are two inescapable aspects to violence in Balzac. The first is that violence is invariably inseparable from form; the second shows that this combination of violence and form is also self-critical – of both the violence and the form.<sup>21</sup> As a result, two introductory chapters will open the volume – one on the general and all-pervasive relation between violence and form in Balzac and the second showing how a critical, self-aware relationship between violence can be traced back to one of Balzac's earliest productions, *Sténie ou les Erreurs philosophiques*. It also follows from the above that violence is, emblematically, associated with particular periods in French history such as the Wars of Religion and the Revolution, Terror and Napoleonic Wars.<sup>22</sup> A second pair of chapters will, therefore, concentrate on *Sur Catherine de Médicis*, *Le Réquisitionnaire* and *Une ténébreuse affaire*. Throughout these chapters it will also be apparent that violence is frequently, and possibly therapeutically, worked on by memory.<sup>23</sup> Since, moreover, as the

- 21 On the links between violence and form, see Owen Heathcote 'The Form of Violence: Use and Abuse of Gender in French Literature and Film', *South Central Review*, 19.4–20.1 (Winter 2002–Spring 2003), 1–13, David Gascoigne's introduction to *Violent Histories. Violence, Culture and Identity in France from Surrealism to the Néo-polar* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007) and Anne-Marie Lefebvre, 'Balzac et la brutalité: de l'incompréhensible sacrifice à la révélation brutale', in *Brutalité et représentation*, ed. by Marie-Thérèse Mathet (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006), pp.107–116 (p.116): 'La brutalité semble [...] bien être, au moins pour Balzac, un horizon narratif, une donnée aussi fondamentale et aussi inaccessible que sa théorie de la volonté'.
- 22 On a possible link between Napoleon and Prometheus, see Dougherty, op. cit., p.22. In *L'Homme-Prométhée vainqueur au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006), Élise Radix finds a number of parallels between the trajectories of Prometheus and Napoleon (pp.51–78), not least that of exile on a rock (p.27; cf *Un drame au bord de la mer*). After noting that 'chez Balzac, Prométhée incarne aussi la souffrance profonde, sans fin' (p.40) Radix looks at a number of negative and positive Promethean characters in Balzac (pp.96–124).
- 23 On the redemptive power of memory in Balzac, see also Owen Heathcote, 'Images-fantômes: mémoire, mort et sublime chez Balzac', *AB 2004*, pp.183–201. Among recent work on Balzac and time/memory, see Nicole Mozet,

above references to Félix de Vandessesse's reworking of remembered trauma show, the working of violence through memory is achieved through writing, all of these works can, in their no doubt very different ways, be seen as contributions to the literature not just of violence but of remembered, actively reworked trauma. Whilst in the case of Félix this trauma is essentially individual, elsewhere the trauma is shared, whether with other individuals as in *Un drame au bord de la mer*, or with a whole period, as in *Les Chouans*, *Un épisode sous la Terreur* or *Une ténébreuse affaire*. As Nicole Mozet has written: 'Le roman balzacien semble s'être écrit à partir de la "catastrophe", mais contre elle et contre le romantisme de la ruine.'<sup>24</sup>

As Mozet's reference to the ruin shows, violence is in Balzac not just associated with time and history, but, at least equally, with space and place. In *Un épisode sous la terreur* the violence is, inescapably, associated with a dark and claustrophobic Paris, in *Une ténébreuse affaire* with the equally dark and labyrinthine forests of the Simeuse estates, and, in *Un drame au bord de la mer*, with the inhospitable coast-line of Brittany. In *Les Chouans*, too, regrettably not the subject of a chapter here, violence is also inseparable from a seemingly primitive, savage 'West' which, according to Claudie Bernard, offers 'comme un tout spécifique, comme une entité et une identité'.<sup>25</sup> After the introductory chapters on generalised violence and *Sténie*, and after chapters on the violences of history – the Wars of Religion and the Revolution and its aftermaths – a third pair of chapters will, therefore concentrate on the violences of space and place. This will begin with

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*Balzac et le temps* (Saint-Cyr-sur-Loire: Christian Pirot, 2005); Max Andréoli, 'La Comédie humaine: éléments d'une philosophie de la mémoire', *AB* 2006, pp.277–93, and the papers published on Balzac and time/memory in *AB* 2007. See also the fine article by Scott Sprenger linking pre- and post-Republican violence in *L'Auberge rouge*: 'Republican Violence, Old Regime Victims: Balzac's *L'Auberge rouge* as Cultural Anthropology', in *Victims and Victimization in French and Francophone Literature*, ed. by Buford Norman (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), pp.119–35.

24 Mozet, op. cit., p.211.

25 Claudie Bernard, *Le Chouan romanesque. Balzac, Barbey d'Aureville, Hugo* (Paris: PUF, 1989), p.74. The violence associated with the Breton-Norman countryside and coastline in a number of Balzac texts is evoked by Thierry Bodin in his introduction to *Le Réquisitionnaire* (*CH*, X, pp.1099–100).

an examination of the violence of Balzac's 'originary' space – Touraine –, already featured in *Sténie*. It will then move on to the violence associated with a mixture of the provincial and the urban in the Paris of *L'Envers de l'histoire contemporaine*. Throughout these texts, violence remains linked to earlier trauma, whether it is the memory of isolated or shared childhoods (the Touraine of *Sténie*) or of revolutionary or post-revolutionary violence (*L'Envers de l'histoire contemporaine*). Leading on, then, from the chapters on the violences of history, this section will therefore reflect further on the ways in which individual or group traumas can be exorcised in and through the *work-space* which is the combination of memory, place and art.

It is evident from the above that the violences of history and the violences of space/place are intimately interwoven in the novels of *La Comédie humaine*. At the same time, it is also evident that a third dimension is equally linked to both history and to space/place: sex, sexuality and gender. In the chapter on *Sur Catherine de Médicis* and *Le Réquisitionnaire*, the violences of history are shown to be inseparable from the roles of two women, Catherine de Médicis and Madame de Dey. The fact that Catherine and Madame de Dey are women, and mothers, enables them to intervene differently between the male antagonists, whether Catholics and Protestants or Royalists and Republicans, in the same way as, in *Une ténébreuse affaire*, the fact that Laurence de Saint-Cygne is also a woman enables her to intervene differently with Napoleon on the battlefield of Jéna. In all three of these texts, the female protagonists are associated with (male) violence whilst also, to a certain extent, *manoeuvring though violence*. The female protagonists are thus vehicles for violence whilst also, in their relative detachment, the means for appraising and *critiquing* violence. They are also, as in the case of Laurence de Saint-Cygne, the means for mourning history and its violence: 'Douce, indulgente, spirituelle, simple surtout, elle plaît aux âmes d'élite, elle les attire malgré son attitude empreinte de douleur ; [...] Sa vie, si douloureuse pendant sa jeunesse, est belle et sereine vers le soir' (*CH*, VIII, p.685). Not dissimilarly, in *L'Envers de l'histoire contemporaine*, another mother, Madame de la Chanterie, both embodies the violences of history and shows ways in which those violences may be controlled and exorcised: she forgives her former persecutor: 'Par Louis XIX et

Marie-Antoinette, que je vois sur leur échafaud, par madame Élisabeth, par ma fille, par la vôtre, par Jésus, je vous pardonne...' (*CH*, VIII, p.412). She thereby gestures, perhaps, to a way out of and beyond violence.

The violence that is embodied in a number of female protagonists can also be materialised in certain places and spaces, particularly perhaps when these spaces are themselves sexed or gendered female. Although this will be seen to apply, to a certain extent, to the spaces of *Une ténébreuse affaire* – and, indeed, to *Le Médecin de campagne* and *Le Curé de village* which will not, alas, be studied in this volume – the most striking space which combines violence and gender is, of course, Balzac's 'lieu originel' and, again according to Nicole Mozet, originary maternal space, Touraine.<sup>26</sup> As is shown in the chapter on Touraine, Touraine is, however, not merely maternal but is also, like the bouquets of Félix de Vandenesse, gathered in the Indre valley, provocatively amorous, even erotic: 'Aucune déclaration, nulle preuve de passion insensée n'eut de contagion plus violente que ces symphonies de fleurs' (*CH*, IX, p.1055). It is appropriate, then, that a second chapter in the gender section should treat the violences associated with the courtesans who, according to Albert Béguin, form one of the largest sub-groups of the *Comédie humaine* because 'la courtisane vit et meurt d'amour, elle donne l'exemple de l'infini dans la passion'.<sup>27</sup> In Balzac, moreover, prostitution is not just linked to a particular set of characters but to the act of writing itself, and, indeed to the act of publication and dissemination. Once again, then, violence is shown to be inseparable not only from sex and gender but from sex, gender, and the literary form.<sup>28</sup>

26 See for example Nicole Mozet, *La Ville de province dans l'œuvre de Balzac* (Paris: CDU/SEDES, 1982), p.91.

27 Albert Béguin, *Balzac visionnaire* (Paris: Albert Skira, 1946), p.152. I would like to thank Éric Jourdan for giving me his copy of this volume and thus reminding me of its continued interest for Balzac studies.

28 See for example Owen Heathcote, '(Auto-)portrait d'un auteur en courtisane: le travail du sexe et le sexe du travail dans les *Lettres à Madame Hanska*', in *Paratextes balzaciens. 'La Comédie humaine' en ses marges*, ed. by Roland Le Huenen and Andrew Oliver (Toronto: Centre d'Études du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle Joseph Sablé, 2007), pp.179–90.

At the same time as sex and violence in Balzac are associated through the representation of women, men too are frequently implicated in violence – and not just through the above-mentioned rival groups of, for example, Catholics and Protestants or Royalists and Republicans, nor even through their participation in violent fraternities such as the Treize, or the Chevaliers de la Désœuvrance in *La Rabouilleuse*. For if men congregate in violent fraternities it is, at least partly, because masculinity itself tends to be created and maintained in and through violence. Masculinity in Balzac is not monolithic, a simple ‘given’, but is itself subject to pressure and change. It is, as Margaret Waller and others have demonstrated, *in crisis*.<sup>29</sup> If, moreover, masculinity – and men – might split both within their fraternities (like the ‘frères ennemis’ that are the Bridaus and the Vandenesses) and within themselves (with the brothers symptomatic of a divided self), the same might apply to Balzac’s representation of sex and sexuality in general: the sexual splitting which conventionally distinguishes one sex from another might also apply *within* a given sex, not only calling that sex into violent question but showing that sex and violence are mutually self-creative and interdependent. The identity crisis which has been shown to apply to a variety of character-types in Balzac<sup>30</sup> can thus be shown to characterise that most seemingly fundamental of individual and social divisions – sex and sexuality – and, through sex and sexuality, violence becomes integral to Balzac’s representation of divided, fragmented human identities. The opening chapter in this section will, therefore, chart a variety of links between the representation of sexual difference and the representation of violence in Balzac. In this way it will both anticipate and complement the second gender chapter on the violence linking prostitution and literary production.

29 See Margaret Waller, *The Male Malady. Fictions of Impotence in the French Romantic Novel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993). See also Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Male Trouble. A Crisis in Representation* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997).

30 See for example *Balzac et la crise des identités*, ed. by Emmanuelle Cullmann and José-Luis Diaz (Saint-Cyr-sur-Loire: Christian Pirot, 2005).